

# Competing place narratives within a proposed co-management nature reserve in the former Transkei, South Africa



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# Conservation contested

- Co-management as transformation advocated as way to reconcile goals of conservation and development
  - Mixed success: local conflicts over resources and lack of local institutional capacity in wake of Apartheid
  - Need for deliberative ways to engage perceptions and values
  - Sense of place suggested as process for understanding contested visions of sustainability
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# Sense of place as a framework

(Stedman, Masterson, et al. submitted)

- Sense of place emerges from interactions with **biophysical** environment (Stedman 2003)
- But also produced and constrained in social realm
- Sense of place: **meanings and attachment** to a (Tuan 1977)
- Attachment– different effects on **actions**:
  - Support adaptation to environmental changes (Sampson & Goodrich, 2005; Marshall et al. 2012; Amundsen 2013; Quinn 2014)
  - Resistance to changes protect status quo... barrier to transformation? (Bonaiuto et al. 2002; Marshall et. al 2012)
- Fight for places attached – but form of engagement depends on **meaning** and if threatened (Stedman 2002)

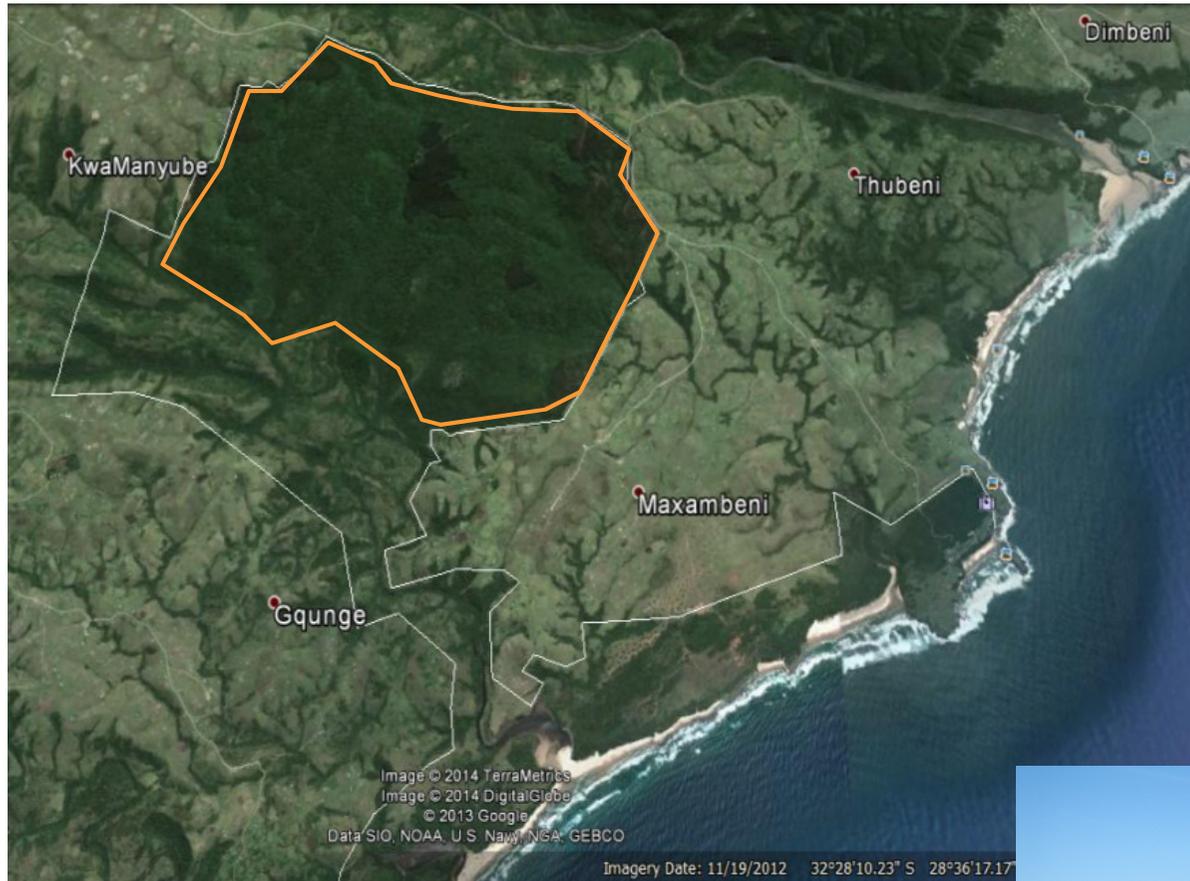


# Case Study: Mnquma Municipality, South Africa

- High levels of poverty – remittances
- Undeveloped, few job opportunities, migrant labour to cities (Cox et al. 2004; Todes et al. 2010).
- Field abandonment and decline of subsistence agriculture: deagrarianization (Bryceson, 2002)



# Proposed Co-management Reserve



- Proposal – forest (Forestry dep) and some of surrounding grasslands (communal tenure)
- Project: co-management and half of profits; small entrepreneurial projects
- Fence and bring in game, and employ game guards

- Comanagement as a catalyst and amplifier for bringing attitudes into conversation



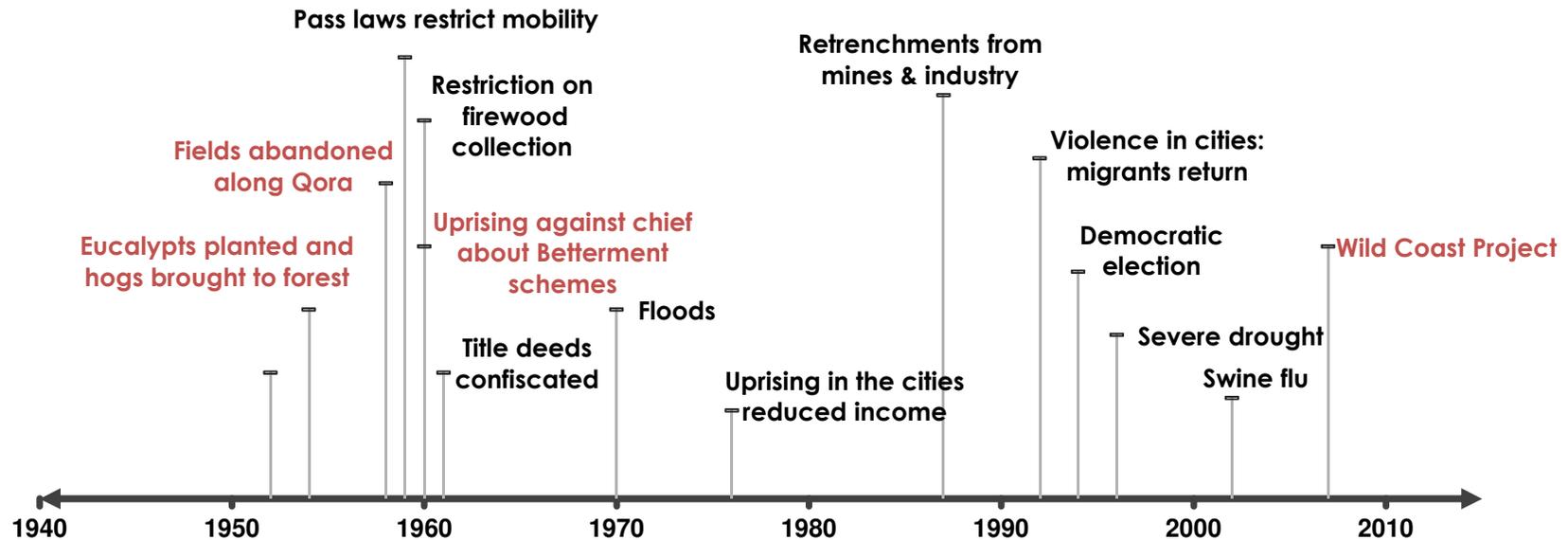
# Methods

- How is sense of place evoked in the stories and narratives told about the area and the negotiation of the project?
- Local history: participatory timeline construction
- 6 ecotopes defined by local users and ecological sampling
- Qualitative and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders
  - Uses and access
  - Place meanings (Stedman 2003)



Stakeholder group	Men	Women
ECTPA and Project Staff	4	0
Forestry department and rangers	4	1
Members of rural communities	13	6
<b>Total:</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>7</b>

# LOCAL HISTORY AND ECOLOGY



- Field abandonment – 1950s – 1980s
- Encroachment of *Acacias* into abandoned fields and succession to bush areas
- Strong discourse of forest decline (Berliner 2011)
- But also evidence of expansion of woodland areas – succession to forest (De Klerk 2007, Shackleton 2014)



# Ecotope Mosaic

1. Abandoned fields (*ifusi*)

2. *Acacia* dominated (*isinga*)



3. Indigenous forest (*ihlathi lesiXhosa*)



4. Plantations



# Three Place Narratives

1.  
Hope and  
development



Community  
members involved  
in project

2.  
Threat and  
protection



Community forest rangers,  
forestry dep &  
Conservation managers

3.  
Exclusion and  
encroachment



Community  
members esp.  
successful farmers

Support nature reserve proposal

Against nature reserve  
proposal

# Narrative 1: hope and development

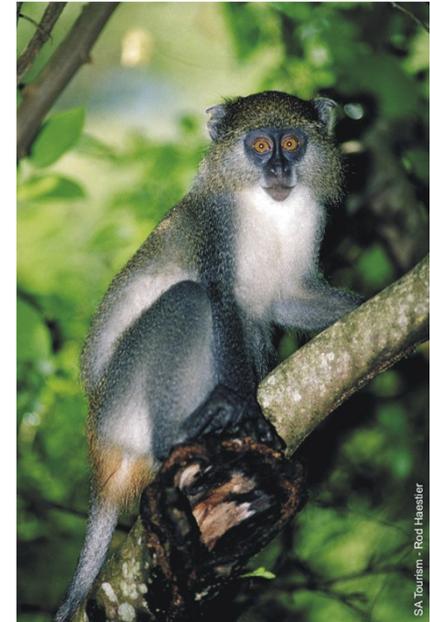
- Who?
  - Community representative committee and project staff
- Project: potential for community income & development through forest guard employment, ecotourism, entrepreneurial projects, and sale of wood from plantations
- Meanings:
  - indigenous forest and plantations as development – income from buffalo and tourism
  - Social place: Gathering site for entrepreneurial activities
  - Emphasize encroachment: old fields beyond hope of cultivation so should be used for community good instead of ‘clinging to the past’



Support nature reserve proposal

## Narrative 2. Protect biodiversity against threat

- Who?
  - Forestry & conservation officials & rangers
- Project: conservation of threatened forest, comanagement and community buy-in. Financial viability contingent on importing TB-free buffalo.
- Meanings:
  - Forest is biodiversity **'refuge'**, and needs to be **'cleaned'** of invasive species
    - Community uses but protect against illegal harvesting
  - Abandoned fields as habitat for large game (no use to the community)
  - Areas of bush and *Acacia* important for connectivity/biodiversity corridors



Support nature reserve proposal

## Narrative 3. Exclusion and encroachment

- Who? Group of community members
- Project: Appropriation of forest and surrounding grassland for government. Fencing forest for large dangerous game.
- Place meanings:
  - Plantations as white man's forest that encroached into the fields – historical exclusion
  - Encroachment of forest species into farmland on edges – declining grazing resources
  - Old fields – family responsibility and cultural identity – still want to farm
  - Cultural importance of forest – medicinal plants, rituals, wood for construction



*“That red soil is the fertile one, it is now full of bluegum. The cattle used to graze there, and their fathers harvested a lot from that soil, very good produce. But they were misled to give up such fertile soil for trees. Our fathers were cheated. And we won't stand for that.”*



Do not support nature reserve proposal

# Not all meanings are equal...

*“Before I worked in the forest, I was unaware of how important it was...”*  
-Ranger, age 33

- Agendas behind narratives of:
  - forest as threatened biodiversity imposed by scientific narrative
  - Bush encroachment into fields vs. forest regrowth and connectivity
- Narratives include elements of discrediting other place meanings and understandings
  - Any cultural attachment to the old abandoned fields, viewed as ‘backwards’, selfish and sentimental, being in an old Apartheid mindset. Accused of ulterior motives



# Conclusion

- Historical context and ecology matter for meanings
- Narratives mobilize competing place meanings – have power
- Sense of place as approach to ask whose meanings and visions are favoured?
- Plurality of meanings in transformation initiatives- how can multiple place meanings can co-exist?
- Potential for sense of place in building consensus?
- Shared meanings that not emphasized –Tranquility, spiritual rejuvenation, escape
- Transparent and respectful dialogue to identify shared values and concerns (Chapin and Knapp 2015)
- Better engagement with senses of place can potentially provide a bridge between conservation, agriculture, and cultural values and improve the governance of multifunctionality in landscape.

*“It’s one of the things I enjoy doing. If I have nothing to do and things are lousy at home, I’ll just take a walk to the forest...I come back so relaxed...I go home, comforted.”*

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Thank you!

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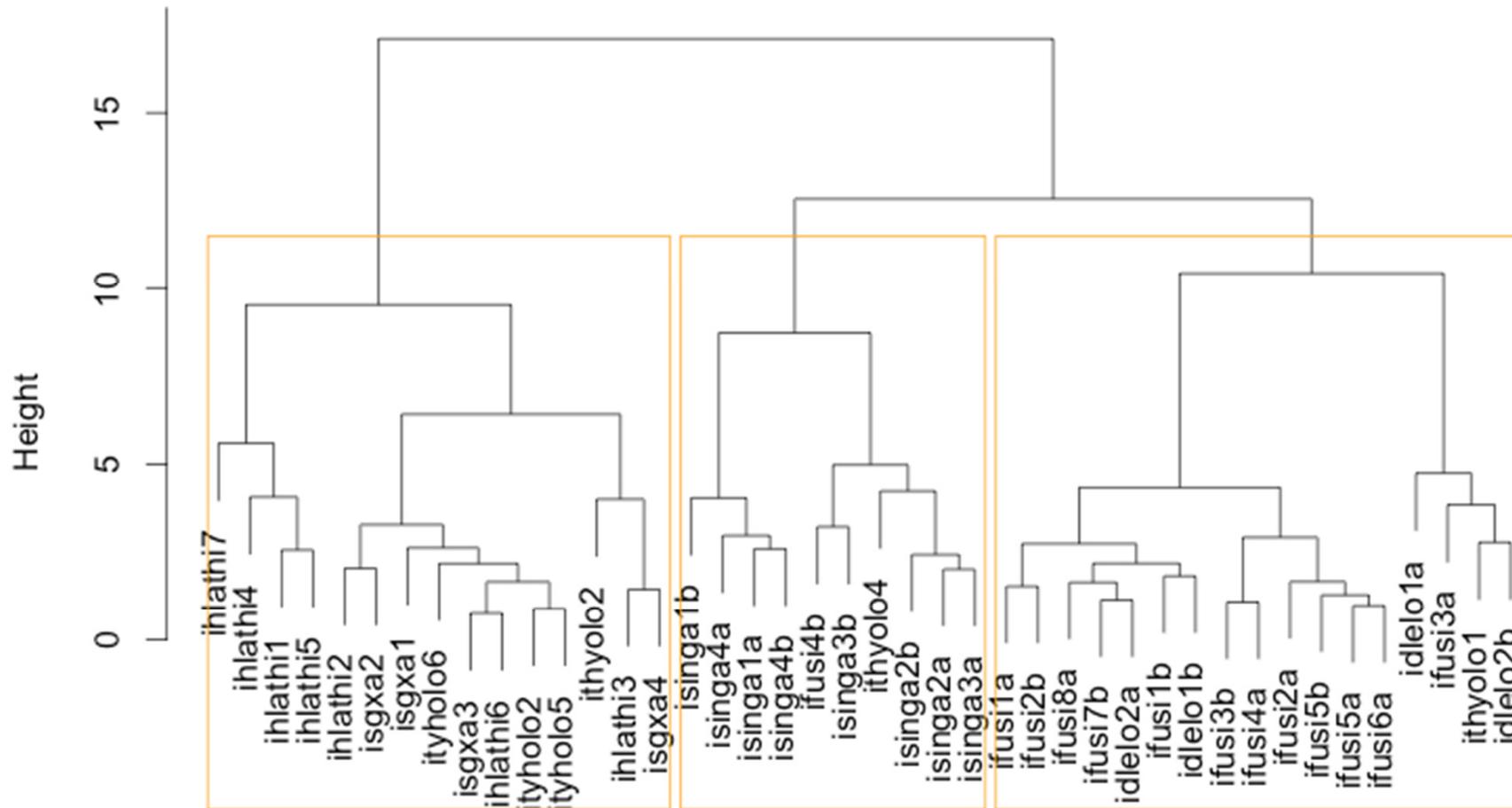
**MISTRA**  
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analysis

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# From landscape units to ecotopes



Forests and bush areas

All of the Acacia dominated 'isinga'

Abandoned fields and unploughed grazing lands

# Results: Ecotopes

	Ecotope	Description	Access and use
1	Abandoned fields ( <i>Ifusi</i> )	Once ploughed, abandoned 10- 50 yrs	Communal tenure, family de facto ownership. Any grazing permitted.
2	Acacia dominated <i>Isinga</i> :	Dense <i>Acacia karroo</i> , mostly abandoned fields.	Communal tenure. Grazing and firewood collection.
3	<i>Ityholo</i> Thick bush	Dense bush especially in valleys, with some hardwood species.	'Headman's forest' but not enforced. Collection of firewood, branches for cattle kraals, medicinal plants. Site for rituals.
4	<i>Ihlathi lesiXhosa</i> : Indigenous forest	Indigenous forest; old, tall forest, and includes culturally important and threatened <i>Millitia grandis</i> (Umzimbeet) and <i>Ptaeroxylon obliquum</i> (Sneezewood) trees.	Forestry department. With permit limited collection of firewood and cultural or medicinal species. Illegal harvesting. Site for rituals.
5	<i>Isixa</i> : Coastal forest	Coastal forest, especially including Milkwood species	Communal tenure. Some firewood collection, but far from homesteads.
6	<i>Ihlathi abelungu</i> <i>Eucalyptus</i> plantations	Stands of <i>Eucalyptus cloeizana</i> and <i>E. grandis</i> , planted since 30's	Forestry Department. Harvest of poles for a small fee
7	<i>Idlelo</i> Grazing land	Grazing lands (mostly on unploughed soil).	Used for grazing and are open access for smaller and less important medicinal plants.