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Cultural Studies with Communities in South Africa: Implications for Participatory Development Communication and Social Change Research

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Abstract: This article theorizes the role of local and indigenous culture in its intersection with development initiatives. It argues that Communication for Development and Social Change (CDSC), through a cultural studies framework, strengthens the potentiality of democratization and participation within community-based development and social change settings. We advocate that applied cultural studies can facilitate agency (through voice and self-representation) in social interventions. This is a cultural studies approach that has been recontextualised from the Birmingham origin as read through Marxist development studies, first adapted and mobilized during the anti-apartheid struggle in developing cultural strategy, and more recently with efforts to indigenise research practices with research participants in the southern Kalahari. We draw on an example of the community-owned, state-funded, and privately operated !Xaus Lodge cultural tourism asset. We illustrate how CDSC strategies, influenced by applied cultural studies, can work with an agentic imperative to effect development and mutual understanding in a defined geographical area, where multiple stakeholder agendas, cultural backgrounds, and ontologies are to be negotiated.

Keywords: agency; applied cultural studies; communication for development and social change; identity; negotiation of meaning; community participation; South Africa

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1. Introduction

In the fieldwork and scholarship of Communication for Development and Social Change (CDSC) at the Centre for Communication, Media and Society (CCMS), University of KwaZulu-Natal, we argue that 'theory is worth fighting for' (Hall 1992, p. 286). This exhortation works if theory furthers social strengthening and recognizes that nothing is ever static. As such, our research practice is informed by 'going on theorizing' rather than being 'interested in Theory' for theory's sake (Grossberg 1996, p. 150). The dynamic nature of local and indigenous culture and its intersection with development initiatives is evident in our case study: a community-owned, state-funded, and privately operated !Xaus Lodge, which is a cultural tourism asset in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, in southern Africa.

We argue that CDSC, through a cultural studies framework, strengthens the potential of democratization and participation within community-based development and social change settings. Our discussion draws on the Birmingham School that paved the way for cultural studies' critical engagement with articulations of power and resistance. It simultaneously interrupts this tradition to explain an (African-oriented) applied cultural studies that moves the researcher beyond the philosophical environment of academia towards applied research, to actively engage with communities and their real-life, ontological conditions and issues.

1.1. Cultural Studies Context

Cultural studies was initially developed in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Birmingham University) that was founded in 1964 by Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart. Drawing on various theoretical influences such as Marxism, constructivism, postructuralism, feminism, and critical race theory, it explored and theorized issues of identity and the processes of subject formation. The cultural practices associated with these processes include analyses of the politics of representation and power dynamics. The structural, discursive, and ideological forces that position people are examined in relation to how people participate in the construction of their everyday lives. These are the core issues with which we are also interested, especially in how people perform their agency, or capacity to act, as this autonomy is central to participatory CDSC.

Applied cultural studies enables agency (through voice and self-representation) in social interventions. Put differently, it could be considered cultural studies for social change. Our account of this applied cultural studies is illustrated via its adaptation and mobilization in two distinct South African settings and periods. Firstly, during the anti-apartheid struggle, cultural studies assisted with developing cultural and media resistance strategies that, along with social theory, were the basis of the anti-apartheid critique and praxis (see Tomaselli 2000). This was cultural studies recontextualized from the Birmingham origin as read through Marxist development studies (see Rodney 1972; Poulantzas 1975; Mattelart 1976) with practical dramaturgical applications (White 2009) and interventions by the then Centre for Culture, Communication and Media Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which worked with civil and social justice organizations in the 1980s. The application of engaged methods that inscribed the concerns of the struggling communities was the driving force of theory building.

Post-1994, in democratic South Africa, the Centre for Culture, Communication and Media Studies changed focus to how our research could positively impact development and social strengthening amongst marginalized communities, particularly in the southern Kalahari across South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia. Participatory development communication strategies were created alongside those we had previously established via applied cultural studies in the 1980s to examine how identity and development influence each other. Continuing the search for methodologies that inscribe the concerns of our local research participants, we adapted Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methodologies (Denzin et al. 2008) to sensitize our methods further to respect local ways of making sense and to understand the indeterminacy of sense-making to development encounters that include multiple stakeholders.

These contextual, theoretical, and methodological influences on our agentic, participatory approach to CDSC strategies are schematically presented in Figure 1 below.

1. 1960s Birmingham, UK, Cultural Studies—deconstruction, Marxist Development Studies.
2. 1980s–90s Anti-Apartheid struggle, South Africa, Cultural Studies—critique and praxis.
3. Post-democracy 1994, South Africa, Applied Cultural Studies—including Participatory Development Communication strategies.
4. Early 2000s Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methodologies, African-oriented applied cultural studies—embracing complexities, listening, and reflecting.

1.2. Objectives

Two bodies of knowledge, CDSC and cultural studies, have influenced our approach. We navigate the parameters of CDSC from top-down approaches that tend towards instrumentalist and interventionist communication, overlooking community concerns, to a discussion of contributions to the field that are useful in valorising community concerns. Cultural studies is then discussed, signalling its strengths and challenges to engender an agentic form of CDSC. While metropolitan theory is valid, adaptation to local contours must engage local theories dialectically (Tomaselli 2012). The origin and merits of applied cultural studies, influenced by African articulations of cultural studies, is then explained.

Our objective is to illustrate how CDSC strategies, influenced by indigenised applied cultural studies, can work with an agentic imperative to effect development and mutual understanding in a defined geographical area, where multiple stakeholder agendas, cultural backgrounds, and ontologies are to be negotiated. These negotiations were studied using the participatory action research (PAR) methodology adopted in the !Xaus Lodge study. Therefore, within this section, the methodological design and process are delineated in a specific sense, as opposed to the broader methodological commentary provided in the previous section.

The article concludes with thoughts on the benefit of applied cultural studies to CDSC in illuminating and acting on community concerns.

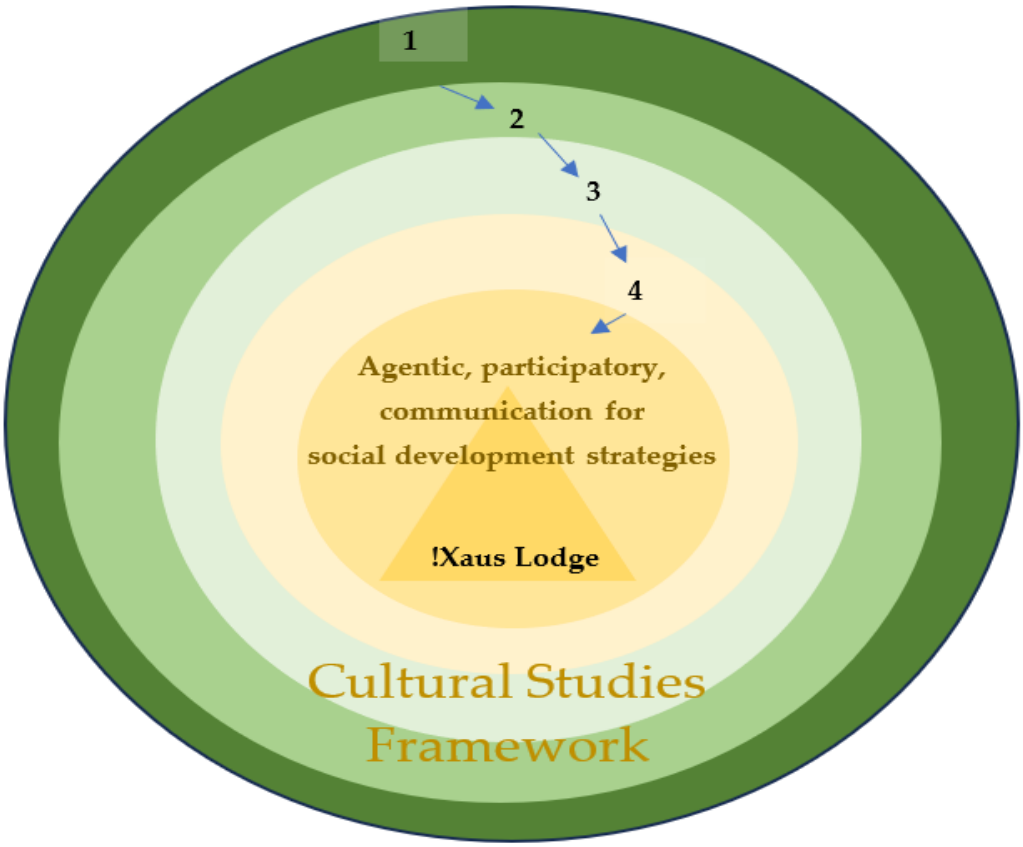

Figure 1. Development of an applied cultural studies framework and its relationship with CDSC research in South Africa: !Xaus Lodge case study.

2. Communication for Development and Social Change

Articulations of CDSC have shifted since its inception in the 1950s. The field is typically conceptualized and operationalized according to two main communication styles associated with two paradigms[1]. Firstly, top-down communication began in the modernization paradigm with the principal agenda of the exogenous introduction of technologies and innovations for economic growth (Lerner 1958; Schramm 1964; Rogers 1962), otherwise dubbed 'the dominant paradigm'. Secondly, dialogic communication is associated with the participatory paradigm that valorises interactive processes whereby beneficiaries actively participate in their own development and poverty reduction[2]. Each has its origins, associated global and local stakeholders, communication models, media use, and normative concepts and theories. Each paradigm theorizes and advocates a distinct form of development communication, yet approaches can straddle the paradigms in practice.

The article does not provide a dedicated section that covers the range of participation forms with which CDSC engages, as this has been well documented with its evolution

through many years of theoretical and empirical work. However, it does engage principles and practice of participation in relevant sections throughout the article.

The following discussion elucidates how agency and culture (and structure) are located in these CDSC approaches to communicating development for/with communities.

2.1. Locating Agency

The conceptualization of agency to which we subscribe is based on the capacity of people to order their world and to create, produce, and live according to one's meaning systems (Giddens 1984). It is the power to effectively define oneself instead of being defined by others (Voth 2001, p. 852). The exertion of agency requires engagement with determining structures, discourses, and prevailing conditions (Dutta 2011) in both symbolic and material terms. The symbolic takes the form of voice and self-representation in attaining material agency through economic empowerment or another form of social strengthening. Somewhat cautious of the 'Lerner-esque' agenda to replace, alter, or modify 'in the name of development', our work is guided by social justice and strengthening social and development initiatives to enhance the community's social fabric and capacities. "Social strengthening" may be a preferable term where 'change' is not the primary objective.

In the mobilization of participatory CDSC, agency ideally rests with community members who, in the name of self-determination, define their own goals based on their lived experiences and needs. This ownership fosters a sense of responsibility and commitment if coupled with building capacities, skills, and resources to achieve these goals effectively. Colin Sparks (2007) defines this CDSC approach as 'radical participation' to which Thomas Tufte (2017, p. 48) adds that it is a 'normative stand that argues clearly for a bottom-up perspective in pursuit of social justice and human rights in pro-poor communication'.

We subscribe to these ideas of agency as empowerment with the ultimate goal being social justice and strengthening, but we are also cognizant of its challenges (see Grant and Dicks 2014; Mazonde and Thomas 2007; Nicetic and van de Fliert 2014; Grant 2019; Manyozo 2017). There are also cases where 'participation' is simply part of the discourse and not a pragmatic aspect of the programme or where expectations for all stakeholders go unmet or were never ascertained in the first place.

The much-critiqued modernization paradigm lives on in the increasing neo-liberalization of development agendas and development resources founded on hierarchies of power, privilege, and knowledge production (Fanon 1967; Mbembe 2001; Dutta 2011, 2021). Although politically correct discourses are adopted in international and national policy, agency still rests with multinational funding bodies who often mobilize linear communication in not only setting the agenda but also in determining project objectives and accountability procedures, thus 'ordering the world' (Giddens 1984) for beneficiary communities (see, for example, Enghel and Noske-Turner 2018). The adoption of popular discourses (like participation, decolonization, etc.) without community engagement and action results in a 'diminishment of the complexity through which we might otherwise understand the world' (Chetty 2023, p. 386). Similarly, Tufte (2017, p. 124) warns that although the technicality associated with top-down strategic communication 'allows a highly systematic approach, and thus the ability to track observable outcomes. . .—it has difficulties capturing synergies, off-track outcomes, intangible change processes and longer-term outcomes beyond the planned period of monitoring'. We hope to demonstrate that it is from methodologies that embrace complexity and socio-cultural and political dynamics and the expression thereof that agency can start to take ground.

Barriers to agency are not only exogenous but can also be community gatekeepers, gender norms, and traditional practices that deny the broader community the agency to speak for themselves and identify solutions (see Gumede et al. 2023). These internal contexts deny the democratic culture that Carpentier et al. (2019, p. 23) argue is imperative for an 'inherently ethical' form of participation.

This article presents our applied cultural studies-influenced CDSC approach, which lends itself to redressing this denial of agency. However, first, it explores what is meant

by culture, which Dutta (2011, p. 8) argues is instructive to explore in its intersection with structure to understand the conditions for marginality and the opportunities for agency.

2.2. Culture and Structure

In early mid-twentieth century development communication interventions, local culture (and associated forms of indigenous knowledge and language) was initially denigrated as superstition that impeded the success of development programmes in the Global South. Within the more recent participatory policy and approaches, culture is seen as an enabler in understanding the development context and how cultural beliefs, knowledge, and expressions can facilitate development and social change. Our approach recognizes this latter imperative. Culture is both material (expressed in the form of artefacts, traditional dress, etc.) and intangible (in the form of practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills), and it is dynamic, responding to the environment, interaction with other peoples, and social phenomena. Development and social strengthening initiatives require methodologies that recognize this transience to avoid the pitfalls of essentialist and homogenising assumptions when working with communities, as we demonstrate in the last section of this article.

Culture, therefore, also entails the frameworks of meaning-making and interpretation in local and global contexts that are in flux (see Dutta 2011). Similarly, foregrounding the interrelationship between 'culture' and 'structure', Jan Servaes (2020, p. 8) explains that cultures can be defined as social settings where a particular reference framework has taken concrete form or been institutionalised. It orients and structures the interaction and communication of people within this historical context. The classic distinction between structure and culture as an empirical duality becomes meaningless. All structures are cultural products, and all cultures give structure to them. This intrinsic bond with a society in which actions are full of value makes all social facts cultural goods. Understanding these social facts can be facilitated through participatory communication strategies that seek to explore local communicative ecologies as linked to forms of culture (Williams 1961, p. 62).

2.3. Interdisciplinarity

Over twenty years ago, Wilkins and Mody (2001) recognized that development communication scholarship was advancing beyond its economic development theory and media effects theory to consider the value of social theory, political, economic inquiry, and cultural studies. They argued that the inclusion of this interdisciplinarity is necessary to reshape development communication 'to consider the importance of political-economic conditions, organizational contexts, communication processes, and more in the process of social change' (Wilkins and Mody 2001, p. 386). This observation is extended below by accounting for how cultural studies, as rearticulated in the South African context, joined with Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methods, can inscribe the concerns and voices of community partners and address the complexity of the development encounter into both operationalizing development and writing/theorizing about it, where agency is afforded to and enacted by multiple stakeholders.

3. Cultural Studies: Indigenised and Applied

This section introduces the theoretical agenda of early cultural studies, including what we find helpful and what has been adapted to create (African-oriented) applied cultural studies methodologically grounded in Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methodologies. Threaded in the discussion are points of connection with CDSC to illuminate how cultural studies may benefit CDSC in grappling with and theorizing the development encounter.

3.1. Cultural Studies: Exporting Concepts

The Birmingham School paved the way for cultural studies' critical engagement with articulations of power centred on issues of representation (Hall 1980a, 1980b, 1993, 2013; Hall et al. 1978; Hoggart 1957; Williams 1961, 1977). It is difficult to provide a composite

list of cultural studies principles and protocols that could be beneficial to CDSC, as cultural studies is far-reaching, being noted as an 'inter-discipline' (Ang 2013) with the capacity to 'export' concepts and theories to other disciplines (Lowe 2023, p. 110). This article highlights concepts that have been useful 'exports' in our CDSC fieldwork and scholarship.

Cultural studies is currently at risk to succumbing to neoliberal academia's demanding audit culture, retreating into an ivory tower, instead of engaging at the coal face to 'benefit multiple publics or facilitate knowledge transfer beyond the academy' (Lowe 2023, p. 110). The key to avoid this lack of praxis is the mobilization of research methodologies that facilitate the engagement of issues affecting on-the-ground communities and the wider public, simultaneously aware of the promise of classic cultural studies to critically examine the intersections of the global and local (see Striphas 2019). John Lowe (2023) particularly highlights the value of Raymond Williams' (1977) cultural materialism and the concept of 'structures of feeling', to be elaborated on in the !Xaus Lodge discussion below.

Wright and Maton (2004, p. 78) remind us that 'cultural studies grew out of a search for approaches to literary texts in adult education classes that were more relevant to the histories, concerns and perspectives of working-class students' (Wright and Maton 2004, p. 76). As a foundational influence on participatory communication for social change, Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy is similar in that, based on conscientization, education/development should restore to people the right to produce knowledge based on their lived experience, values, and local knowledge. Our approach, discussed below, is explained through this agentic imperative.

3.2. Embracing the Complexities of Cultural/Communicative Sites

We welcome a Gramscian approach that 'rejects reductionism in favour of an understanding of complexity in unity or unity through complexity' (Hall 2016, p. 185), engaging the autonomy and specificity of development (and political) struggles and the groups that engage in them. We therefore embrace a cultural studies understanding of culture as a site of negotiation (Hall 1980a). In the context of a community-based development initiative, for example, different stakeholders bring with them varying epistemological and ontological frameworks that need to be brought into conversation in order to communicate expectations and plans and to implement suitable processes. These fluctuating frameworks of meaning-making (see also Dutta 2011 discussed above) need to be studied and written into the academic and development record if CDSC is going to live up to Servaes's (2020, p. 12) definition as 'the nurturing of knowledge aimed at creating a consensus for action that takes into account the interests, needs and capacities of all concerned'.

While Birmingham may have provided the basic template from the historical experience of England, similar theories, but often different emancipatory strategies, emerged in different parts of the world. Latin American cultural studies (García-Canclini 1995; Martín-Barbero 1993, 2006) also influence our class-based analyses of social movements and cultural dynamics to investigate the transformations of social (and development) experience. As struggles played out, however, these relations adapted, changed, and often, as Fanon warned, resulted in new repressive hegemonies.

3.3. Cultural Studies in Southern Africa

African variants of cultural studies are seldom acknowledged, except by those within or from the continent (Falkof 2023; Wright and Maton 2004; Nuttall 2006; Tomaselli and Wright 2008; Wright and Xiao 2020). With its emergence in the late 1970s, we were asking the same questions as British cultural studies, deriving from our different and respective class struggles, each engaging with material issues and addressing issues of democratization. British cultural studies examined the big picture in developing theories of resistance and domination out of Western epistemological histories.

During apartheid, our ground-up theory of resistance responded to requests from real communities under siege (*UmAfrika*, End Conscription Campaign, the Catholic Bishops Conference and Westville Residents Support Group), looking to establish partnerships

to address local and, sometimes, national oppressions (see Tomaselli et al. 1987). Where the early Birmingham researchers considered themselves as the organic theory-building intellectuals, we considered ourselves as the Gramscian technical intellectuals, the CDSC pragmatists bringing the ideas and tactics of our community participants to the surface, into a dialogue with theory and policy making.

When Birmingham cultural studies became practical and community-based, it lost its theoretical legitimacy, and the Centre was closed—no matter the good work being done at small-scale levels within the city. Its declining publication output was foolishly interpreted by academic auditors as an indicator of failure rather than of increasing community relevance. The Centre for Culture, Communication and Media Studies managed to avoid that trap by theorizing our community-orientated interventions as discussed below.

In an editorial for a special issue on African cultural studies, Tomaselli and Wright (2008, p. 173) explain:

> Our preference is for a transnational cultural studies. . .The reality, however, is that cultural studies has evolved and continues to evolve primarily along regional lines and however uncomfortable that might make some of us, there is no way to put the genie of say British cultural studies back in the bottle of cultural studies history. Thus, there are national versions of cultural studies in a few countries (e.g., one can discern different kinds of South African cultural studies) as well as a much looser discursive formation that can be labelled African cultural studies.

However, the form of cultural studies we discuss in this article does not signify its relevance only within Africa's borders, this is why a preferable description is applied cultural studies, which locates agency with the local research participants with whom we research and who are often stakeholders in development initiatives.

3.4. Applied Cultural Studies and Rethinking Indigeneity

Our commitment to public engagement continued into post-1994 South Africa once apartheid ended. The political advent of democracy did not wipe away the historical, political, racial, ethnic, and cultural tensions, nor the structural inequalities and abject poverty faced by most of the population. These tensions and hardships needed examination to facilitate social cohesion and strategies to assist sustainability for the many development initiatives catalysed by the new African National Congress (ANC) liberation government. Cultural studies allowed us to 'venture beyond the constraining modes of racialised cultural history, to view culture as a shifting, fluid and central element of an attempted national identity that is wildly contested and wildly diverse. . . [It offered] the potential to think our way through and past those tensions by understanding the sedimented structures of power that keep them afloat' (Falkof 2023, pp. 19–20). This 'thinking and doing' governed the longstanding Rethinking Indigeneity project led by Keyan Tomaselli. The project adopts an inclusive and relational approach where research blends international and African intellectual work that is held in conversation with indigenous realities and knowledge. It grapples with how indigenous knowledge sovereignty wrestles with the ubiquitous condition of 'coloniality' given the structural demands of globalization: first, with the colonial as much as the postcolonial periods; and second, within the interdependence of the metropoles and peripheries, first and third worlds, examining extractive versus participatory, and empowering research (see Sehume 2020).

The Rethinking Indigeneity project's inception in 1995 is marked by studies of representation with an interest in media-induced tourism resulting from films that traded in cultural myths, such as Jamie Uy's *Gods Must be Crazy* (1980). The project then evolved to phases that deconstructed and questioned the constructedness of the representation process by speaking with the people who performed in these films and cultural tourism ventures. We navigated our way to methods as we engaged the unexpected and attempted to make sense of what we observed, identifying issues from the field. From 2003, one such issue was 'development'.

'From Observation to Development', a Rethinking Indigeneity project phase, actively sought to identify ways in which we could make our research useful to local research participants. In 1999, the ‡Khomani San, residing in the Northern Cape of South Africa, were successful in their land claim and had also been the recipients of substantial international and national funding, as well as media attention. Yet they remained poverty-stricken, living on the margins of mainstream society in a community fraught with tension. Much of this tension stemmed from the processes of the land claim that sought to authenticate claimants based on whether they could prove 'real San identity'. Studies within the Rethinking Indigeneity project, therefore, examined this relationship between identity and development, seeking to include in the academic and public records contemporary contextual experiences of their conditions of existence to supplement/speak to/subvert received knowledge (in the form of government reports and conceptual development models).

3.5. Applied Cultural Studies, Participatory Action Research, Listening, and Reflexivity

We mobilized participatory development communication in these 'development-oriented phases' both in the fieldwork and as part of the guiding conceptual framework.

Methodology is the linking thread that integrates the Rethinking Indigeneity project's topics of development, public health communication, livelihoods, indigeneity, cultural tourism, identity, and representation. Broadly, the studies employ Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methodologies that advocates all inquiry as both political and moral. It uses methods critically for explicit social justice purposes. 'It values the transformative power of Indigenous, subjugated knowledge. . .and it seeks forms of praxis and inquiry that are emancipatory and empowering' (Denzin et al. 2008, p. 2). Beyond this humanizing impetus, we needed methods that allowed us to examine the complexity of emergent transcultural identities of Indigenous and local communities who juggle the pre-modern, modern, and post-postmodern epochs.

Our methods are, in the first instance, all premised on *listening*, and this is achieved via techniques such as in-depth interviews that allow for the emergence of 'development narratives' that champion storytelling to foreground the fluidity of identity and agency in local participants to speak to their own conditions and solutions. The Rethinking Indigeneity project's recognition of the richness of co-constructed knowledge grew into various studies that adopted creative methodologies that mobilize self-reflection, dialogue, and multivocality to explore a variety of development and social strengthening subject matter (see Dyll 2020). For example, community health concerns and solutions through the creation of bodymaps and grassroots comics as subject-generated media to illustrate what community partners identify as pressing issues, instead of having their needs and wants prescribed by outside experts (Grant and Dicks 2014), and local interpretation of material culture through walking methodologies and photovoice (see Lange et al. 2013; Mbili 2024). Photovoice also emphasizes self-representation as community partners take an active stance in representing their own development issues, or in supplementing (and perhaps disrupting) received knowledge through the inclusion of their own interpretation of their heritage.

Secondly, the methodologies employed in the Rethinking Indigeneity project are often *reflexive* and, at times autoethnographic, where our positionalities as researchers are engaged (see Lange 2003). Analysing the encounter between the researcher and researched is the crux of this reflection, and it facilitates the process of listening and learning, firmly entrenched in Freire's (1970) conscientization from which we draw. Because applied cultural studies and participatory CDSC engage with material issues, findings are often incorporated in public policy and programme designs with implications for the public/communities (see Lowe 2023, p. 113). It is, therefore, our responsibility to reflexively interrogate our knowledge production and document how local research partners challenge the usual Researcher/Researched relations. It enables researchers/development practitioners to self-reflexively interrogate and modify their own assumptions and practices in adapting to the needs and expectations of their research participants/intended beneficiaries, and

to record their understandings of how they fit into, accept, shape, or resist, determining processes and structures. 'This contributes to a type of reflexive Indigenous ethnography where members of a community may interpret their own cultures through those who have the means to get the information "out there"—the researchers who reflexively analyse these nuances in the field, putting theory to the test' (Tomaselli et al. 2008, p. 364).

4. !Xaus Lodge: CDSC and Applied Cultural Studies in Action

The next phase of the Rethinking Indigeneity project centred on the establishment of !Xaus Lodge, concretizing the exploration of identity, development, and political economy into a single case study. It investigated how different stakeholders and their associated power mechanisms facilitated or hindered the development of the community-owned lodge. Integral to this was the examination of multiple stakeholders' expectations, agendas, and belief systems, in both their convergences and divergences, that resulted in a model to guide the partnership. Participatory action research was applied to shape business decisions to recover the failing state-development project that had been dumped on two different rurally remote communities. The remainder of the article reflects on the study of !Xaus Lodge that theoretically and methodologically illustrates the merging of participatory development communication with cultural studies concepts, resulting in the praxis of facilitating the negotiations involved in the establishment of a government-built, community-owned, and privately operated tourism asset.

4.1. !Xaus Lodge, Tourism, and Development

!Xaus is a state-sponsored and privately-operated tourism lodge located on the South African side of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park on land restituted to the community owners in the successful 1999 land claim. Built by the Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism, the co-owners are the ǂKhomani San and Mier[3] communities, who reside close to the Park's border, and the operator is Transfrontier Parks Destinations.

Tourism-as-development literature warn of the limited economic impacts of tourism development under conditions of dependence where there is a lack of community involvement (Rogerson and Visser 2004). The restituted land in and outside the Park became riddled with rotting tourism-oriented infrastructure and ventures or torn apart for firewood or the like. Similarly, the lodge had been built, but there was no buy-in by the community partners who reported that they had not been consulted by the government.

In 2007, Transfrontier Parks Destinations signed the contract with the lodge's Joint Management Board[4] and set out to make it a viable economic asset, as well as to create employment and a space for cultural expression, with the inclusion of cultural tourism elements decided on by the ǂKhomani and Mier.

4.2. Experiential Situated Knowledge

Local knowledge is often overlooked in the development encounter, or if sought, it is quantified in such a way that is unrecognizable to local participants. Apart from economic participation, there are often challenges in establishing a mutual understanding in the many layers of development partnerships. In the context of !Xaus, this was between the community, government, and private operator, as well as between the two different owner groups. Different epistemological and ontological frameworks were brought to the partnership: (1) situated knowledge regarding local circumstances and belief systems; (2) the operator's commercial and management imperative; and (3) the state's timebound development agenda.

As researchers, we were aware of the indeterminacy of translation and associated power relations in how these different forms of knowledge were both encoded and decoded (Hall 1993) by their respective constituencies. Hence, each of the partner's expectations of the Lodge (both the sacred and profane) needed to be understood by all. 'Lived experience' communicated to us via development agendas, economic planning, stories, and dreams were thus analysed. This experiential situated knowledge is often distilled from, and

innately connected, to land. Development happens on land through it being changed, planted, harvested, bulldozed, and built up, and land is inextricably linked to identity. The land–identity nexus, in simple terms, speaks about indigenous socioeconomic rights, or the lack thereof. The integration between nature, culture, and development was, therefore, considered in our conversations with the different partners and the analysis.

4.3. Longitudinal Participatory Action Research and 'Structures of Feeling'

In terms of research methodology, the study of !Xaus adopted a longitudinal participatory action research design. Known to both the operator and the ǂKhomani, we were invited to examine and shape the establishment and management processes involved in transforming a failed poverty alleviation-built tourism asset into a commercial product with a range of benefits for the community owners (see Dyll-Myklebust 2012). Between 2007 and 2012, we conducted a series of field trips to the lodge site and surrounding areas where the community owners resided. The longitudinal design enabled the examination of !Xaus as a 'pre-tourist site' in relation to its operational stage. 'Before' was studied in relation to 'after', and the processes involved between the two phases were studied and shaped via participatory action research in relation to the lodge partners' objectives and needs.

Data collection during this episodic immersion was based on participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Participant observation occurred over two phases, firstly during the stakeholder meetings and training sessions of the establishment phase, and secondly over the management, day-to-day activities/work and marketing of the operational phase. We observed and subsequently analysed the communicative practices between the lodge management, staff (who were also the owners) and guests. We assumed the role of observer-as-participant in that we declared ourselves as researchers but participated in, for example, meetings, trainings, guided walks with ǂKhomani, and guests, game drives, and the traditionally inspired meals made by the Mier staff.

Our coding was structured according to the type of interaction, stakeholders involved, what was said, how it was said, reasons provided for certain requests, and beliefs and actions taken. This method was useful in gathering data on the use of structure and agency at the lodge, deliberately noting communicative practices that were open, participatory, and horizontal on the one hand, and those that were more controlled and managed hierarchically. Instances of communication as a process of convergence and divergence (Kincaid 2002) were coded in terms of how the multiple stakeholders interpreted a specific issue.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives from each of the stakeholder groups[5] based on purposive, opportunistic sampling due to their affiliation or knowledge of !Xaus Lodge, which grew through snowball sampling, resulting in approximately twenty interviews. In the establishment phase, the interviews were conducted in Andriesvale where the stakeholder meetings took place, as well as where ǂKhomani crafters (interested in relocating to !Xaus Lodge) sold their craft on the side of the road, and Rietfontein, where the Mier Municipal building is located. The interviews during the operational phases primarily took place at the lodge site, as and when it was convenient for the lodge staff (management, Mier and ǂKhomani) and the guests. In the establishment phase, all stakeholders were asked to share their experience/knowledge of why and how the lodge was constructed (including power dynamics at play), their expectations for the type of tourism and activities to be offered, economic potential, and their preferred forms of communication. Once operational, they were asked about their experience in their roles and responsibilities associated with the lodge, challenges, opportunities, communicative practices that were working and those that were not, and their vision for the future (individually and the lodge).

For the action research process, observations and interpretations garnered from previous fieldtrips were included in subsequent semi-structured interview questions so as to build on a comprehensive understanding of a pertinent issue and establish a course of action for communication to facilitate convergence, should divergence remain on that issue.

Not only were co-constructed communicative solutions for lodge operations offered as part of the action research process, but the research undertook what was dubbed action marketing research (Dyll-Myklebust and Finlay 2012).

Data were collected via a semiotic and reception analysis of the lodge's marketing materials to advise on the lodge's strategic positioning in relation to issues of identity and representation. The semiotic analysis revealed the lodge operator's cultural assumptions and marketing strategy. The reception analysis was mobilized via three techniques: (1) three focus groups drawn from the !Xaus target market (held off site), (2) lodge guests were provided with a copy of the promotion materials and a questionnaire that they could complete in their own time during their stay, and (3) Mier and ǂKhomani staffers were interviewed. The questions centred on the veracity of the marketing material in relation to the actual lodge experiences and what participants perceived to be miscommunicated as well as entirely missing from the material. The encoded/decoded similarities and divergences were compared. The divergences were discussed with the lodge partners, and solutions were found to address them. This culminated in an informational booklet provided in the Xaus chalets from 2009 detailing the background and purpose of the lodge. The website and the brochure were later revised, and guests were, thus, provided with a more nuanced understanding of the environment and community through the community owner's input on self-representation.

All interviewees were provided with and signed an informed consent form explaining the study objectives, what would be asked of them in the interview, that they could withdraw at any time, and that they could choose to remain anonymous. Many of the participants responded that they wanted their names included 'to be written into the record'. Interviews resulted in the collection of evolving 'development narratives' (see Dyll-Myklebust 2014) that often took the form of stories imbued with structures of feeling.

Williams' 'structures of feeling' is a cultural studies concept that is often applied in representational culture and analysis, such as literature and film. However, it can also be a useful guiding idea in a development encounter. This is particularly so when a goal is to identify the development concerns, expectations, preferred processes, and vision of the future of a development initiative by multiple stakeholders, where there could likely be contested narratives and (mis)understandings resulting from historical injustice. This was the case at !Xaus. Often, the meanings of the present were based on the past, for both the official narratives and interpretations (SANParks, Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism) and those of the local and lived interpretations by stakeholders not aligned to the dominant discourses (the Mier, the ǂKhomani). What is also useful about the concept is the value in going beyond intellectualist accounts of meaning-making, which obscures much of what the public perceives and experiences. Development research in local settings should consider not only the profane but also the sacred and the spiritual (see Smith 2008).

4.4. Intersection of Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis intersected as the analysis was initiated from the start of the longitudinal study to direct the next phase of data collection (interview and observations). Systematically conducting the analysis as data are collected boosts participatory action research's effectiveness as it guides the researcher toward examining the avenues of understanding, making it a method of discovery that grounds theory in reality (Corbin and Strauss 1990).

The data were analysed and problematised with reference to participatory development communication, as well as pro-poor tourism principles and practices. The business negotiations, structural decisions, and symbolic considerations in establishing !Xaus Lodge were analysed vis-à-vis Kincaid and Figueroa's (2009) Communication for Participatory Development model because it acknowledges the importance of dialogue and collective action as well as the reality of conflict, power relations, and different styles of leadership between stakeholders in initiating development. However, we did not seek to insert the data into each of the phases of the Communication for Participatory Development model

(Kincaid and Figueroa 2009) to present a 'neat story'. Instead, we used it as a guide that we also problematized and adapted to factors found in the !Xaus context. Based on the findings, we developed a generalized Public–Private–Community Partnership development communication model that is sensitive to multiple ontologies.

4.5. Articulating a Development Initiative as a Site of Negotiation

The Public–Private–Community Partnership model presents the ways in which a development culture is a site of negotiation of meaning (Hall 1980a). Ideally, it is a 'site of convergent interests' (Hall 1980a, p. 59). But how does one achieve this convergence in a development initiative characterised by multiple stakeholder interests? A starting point is to conduct research that foregrounds articulations of histories and expectations associated with power. 'Articulation' as a cultural studies concept is a useful guide as it reminds us that 'the whole [. . .] is formed by a complex structure, displayed by differences and similarities operating under a power structured relationship, that is subject to change with changes in the structure of social formation' (Hall 1980b, pp. 325–26)[6]. Including the stakeholder's negotiation of interpretation champions multivocality in the mutual goal of establishing an economically viable tourism asset. Grounded in the reality of tension, the Public–Private–Community Partnership model accounts for the ways in which discrepancies and divergences may emerge between and amongst the stakeholders and how participatory forms of communication and praxis can be used to facilitate convergence so that the development process may continue to the point of becoming operational. It also accounts for processes once a tourism asset is operational, for example, deciding on the forms of marketing communication and the inclusion of local businesses to encourage economically beneficial multiplier effects to the wider community (see Dyll-Myklebust 2012). It, therefore, aligns with Tufte's (2017, p. 148) call for communication in organizations and institutions that do not only valorise the need for precise texts and emphasis on simple and understandable messages, but to also offer 'space for negotiation of the message' that increases 'interactivity and dialogic processes'.

The model also looks to the future: for example, the bricolage of meanings assigned by each stakeholder in the phase named 'value for continual improvement'. The model looks to set up a lodge to the point where there is value for continual improvement, 'understood as the transformation of a community into a "learning organization" that continuously seeks ways to advance' (Kincaid and Figueroa 2009, p. 1320). Maintaining stable operations requires further dialogue, negotiations, strategic communication, and dedication to an adaptive management approach that embraces multiple values and expectations. This idea aligns with Hall's (2016, p. 122) cultural studies notion of contingency, 'which requires us to think the contingent, non-necessary connections between and among different social practices and social groups'. This is possible in that we are evolving beings, dealing with contradictory identities, constructed and reconstructed in multiple ways from varied sources, discourses, and places that may or may not intersect. There is no point at which one arrives at a stable final destination, where there could be 'solace of closure' (see Hall and Grossberg 2019) because 'around us history is constantly breaking in unpredictable ways' (Hall 1991, p. 43).

The Public–Private–Community Partnership model indicates that success in CDSC should not only be determined by a venture becoming commercially viable, but also by its capacity to stimulate socio-economic empowerment, build local social and entrepreneurial skills, and champion local people and strategies that consider local landscapes, metaphors, and stories. Our findings revealed the centrality of local cosmology in understanding a development initiative. This cosmology signifies the fluidity of the Northern Cape people's identity in merging traditional San spirituality (which combines indigenous and Western beliefs), Khoe and Nama beliefs, as well as structured Western religion (see Lange and Dyll-Myklebust 2015).

Once Transfrontier Parks Destinations became involved in the lodge establishment; the structures of feeling evoked in the interviews with community owners articulated the

lodge as a symbol of reconciling past conflict amongst SANParks and the two communities. A creator god within San cosmology is Kaggen who holds shamanistic associations. 'It is said that Mantis could become any animal he wanted, but most of all he liked becoming an eland bull' (Leeming [1937] 2010, p. 75). Interviewees referred to Kaggen/Mantis or 'the spirit' giving its blessing to the lodge development as a form of 'redemption'. Belinda Kruiper, of Khoisan descent, who married into the ǂKhomani explained that

> The people see it as a good opportunity, and by the end of it they want to see a healthy thing running for the community. . ..When we go to scout and recce the lodge, the animals acknowledge us. . ..When we left and Hannes Steinkamp stayed behind as one of the Mier guys to look after the lodge for that week he came back straight to my house and said: *Daar's 'n eland-bul wat hier loop en hier is nie spore nie. Die eland loop en as ek op sy spoor gaan is daar nie. Hier's groot goed aan die gebeur*[7]. So there's spiritual eland that's moving and in the Bushman lore the eland is the most sacred animal and it's the bull. So it seems like in the ancestral body they are blessing all of this (interview, 22 August 2007).

Expressions of and connections with spirituality are part of one's identity, which must be considered when entering into a development initiative. And what about the profane?

4.6. Negotiation Between Economic Structure and Participatory Agency

Capitalism is often spurned as it is deemed to be imperialist and exploitative. But to avoid 'Ag shame tourism'[8] (O'Leary 2011), it is advisable to not represent community partners as victims but rather for them to be part of social entrepreneurship and as viable land investors by including their objectives, employment, and entrepreneurial activities. Jessica Noske-Turner (2023, p. 46) 'proposes communication for social *changemaking* as a term that captures the emergence of a "new spirit" in MCDSC[9], whereby popularized discourses such as "creative capitalism" and "enlightened capitalism" are absorbed and proposed as an ideal mechanism for social change within this field'. This spirit could be facilitated by the Public–Private–Community Partnership model. As changemakers in becoming entrepreneurial-minded in a development initiative, social entrepreneurship confers agency in certain contexts, involving 'an intrinsic justification that a capitalist spirit should be put to work for social purposes and that this represents a common good for development' (Noske-Turner 2023, p. 49).

As the second analytical framework that informed the model, pro-poor tourism is a poverty reduction approach that calls for the use of industry to generate sustainable development for local communities involved in tourism development projects by including them in the design and implementation of these projects (see Ashley et al. 2001). Pro-poor tourism acknowledges that participation alone is insufficient, and the approach offers practical solutions to the seeming contradiction between structure (working within established frameworks) and agency (allowing communities to determine their destinies). Communities should participate within the structures provided by the business sector for the benefit of all parties rather than simply receiving benefits (Ashley and Haysom 2006; Wang 2001).

Where are agency and empowerment in this process?

4.7. Forms of Empowerment in the Public–Private–Community Partnership Model

Empowerment can take on different forms within a project: first, as a process suggesting that actions, activities, or structures may be empowering; secondly, as an outcome whereby such processes result in a degree of empowered (Perkins and Zimmerman 1995). A distinction between empowering processes and outcomes is critical to ascertain the type of empowerment involved within a development project. Empowerment as a process is frequently seen in community-based tourism-as-development initiatives whereby community members drive the development. However, community-based tourism ventures are seldom commercially viable since they do not have the skills and resources that a private

operator can bring to a partnership (Rogerson and Visser 2004; Wang 2001). Thus, economic empowerment as an outcome is seldom realised.

Two forms of empowerment are evident in the Public–Private–Community Partnership model. These are first empowerment-as-a-process whereby all partners enter dialogue to discuss issues and provide feedback. Further, all partners are treated as experts in one area or another—if not business skills, then with regards to local knowledge. Lastly opportunities for training and skills development are provided. The second form of empowerment is outcomes-based. This takes the form of economic empowerment, leading marginalised communities to participate in the modern economy. This dual form of agency was commended by Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism's Senior Manager Johann van Schalkwyk (23 March 2019), who, many years after !Xaus became operational, noted in a letter to us:

> Your research on !Xaus Lodge serves as a constant reminder to the Department to ensure that we properly analyse community expectations and how they negotiate the processes involved in establishing and operating commercial tourism development projects. . . .Through your writings we are sensitised to pitfalls of lodge/accommodation development in communities such as Mier, the Richtersveld and Riemvasmaak where such development initiatives and interventions may have an impact on the community identity . . .[It] also sensitised us to not do tourism development in such a manner that it limits other economic opportunities presented to communities, as they strive to optimise the use of the reclaimed land to ensure their sustainability and prosperity.

The Public–Private–Community Partnership model has also been adapted to other Transfrontier Parks Destinations projects, most of which are linked to similarly ill-advised provincial poverty alleviation projects. These tracking case studies endorse a development model that works when local owner-communities are effectively integrated into the model's operations and where the multiplier effects can be directly measured not only in terms of symbolic and participatory value but also in terms of financial returns to the geographical communities they are intended to benefit (see Sathiyah 2013; Sheik 2014; Tomaselli 2017, https://www.tfpd.co.za).

The different sites at which the Researching Indigeneity project applied the model in working with Transfrontier Parks Destinations and local stakeholders all attest to the workability of CDSC when linked to cultural studies analytical frameworks, measurably benefiting local people who are often the owners of these ventures. Instead of seeing such projects as top-down exploitation, we strive to provide a new lens that reveals how ground-up participation in public-private partnerships can address poverty, isolation, and alienation. The model brings about a change in relationships of power and brings local organizations into the negotiation, planning, and benefits through self-representation.

5. In Closing: How Can Applied Cultural Studies Positively Influence Participatory CDSC?

All too often, development projects assume context and set agendas without consideration of local knowledge and practices. As an export discipline, cultural studies, coupled with Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methodologies, can bolster our understanding of the constructions of identity and meaning-making in development. In this way, applied cultural studies can positively influence CDSC's practice and theorizing of public engagement and understanding of the relationship between identity and development.

CDSC, as a practice and field of study, is tactical and praxis-based. Its impacts are measurable. Participatory CDSC, if operationalized in democratizing contexts, can be sensitive to community needs and empower both in its processes and results. Cultural studies theories can assist in further lodging agency with communities if we allow the theory to adapt to the material conditions faced by researchers/development practitioners and the communities with whom they work. We provide an example of how this worked during apartheid South Africa and the start of what could be termed African cultural

studies. However, it is not only applicable within Africa's borders, so a preferable term is applied cultural studies.

Cultural studies provides the affirmative intellectual tools to engage and manoeuvre through the inherited contradictions faced in varying development circumstances and initiatives. The article demonstrates this through the !Xaus Lodge participatory action research study that was informed by cultural studies concepts. Culture as a site of negotiation relies on structures of feeling in understanding how the past plays a significant role in the present, and in how stakeholders may voice their resistance to or expectations of a development initiative. The constructedness of communication and the fact that each stakeholder encodes and decodes development messages/agendas/plans encourages careful consideration of how different stakeholders approach an initiative with their frameworks of knowledge and belief systems. The theory and method of articulation is useful in understanding a social formation (as would be seen in multiple stakeholder development initiatives) 'without falling into the twin traps of reductionism and essentialism' (Slack 1996, p. 112).

Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methodologies provides the practical tools. Overlapping with participatory communication, this methodology's moral, political, and humanizing impetus provides the actual strategies to facilitate development and social strengthening at local levels, premised on listening and the co-construction of knowledge with communities through creative methods (such as grassroots comics, storytelling, photovoice, and bodymapping).

The praxis continues in our adaptation of cultural studies and Critical Indigenous Qualitative Methodologies, in adopting reflexivity in several ways: first, our responses to emergent issues; secondly, in the interrogation of our positionality in the development/research encounter; and thirdly, in our theoretical flexibility whereby the received theories by which we are guided may be called into question once faced with realities on the ground.

Hall's observation is that theorizing should be about 'wrestling with angels' as context is paramount and not about the purity of theoretical positions (Hall 1992, p. 280). We are all subjects of determining structures that must be constantly navigated to secure the best options under conditions not necessarily of our own making. A reflexive praxis can help.

The demands of neoliberalizing academia are noted as pushing cultural studies back into the ivory tower. However, this would be a loss. While it has arguably failed to impact society in any measurable way, applied cultural studies can make significant impact with utility for disciplines that are already praxis-based, as it adds to the equation the ideas and language to address development problems with its 'stress on the importance of the symbolic dimensions in producing current power structures and identifications' (Lehtonen 2016, p. 216). Cultural studies concepts can add to a grammar of communication that 'caters for communication principles that open rather than close dialogues; that generate questions and reflection rather than answers and clarity, and that mobilize and engage rather than satisfy and comfort' (Tufte 2017, p. 149).

While the structures, and those who manage them, may be determining, they are constantly being changed, resisted, appropriated, and overturned. The residual, even contending discourses within them, can be negotiated and rearticulated by ordinary people to their benefit. The mechanisms enabling change draw on the grounded strategies of social strengthening provided by CDSC, amongst others. These rely on tactical partnerships between diverse collaborating agencies working within affirmative theories such as those proffered by applied cultural studies that identify resistance and change as a principle of history.

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Notes

1 A third significant paradigm is the neo-Marxist dependency/disassociation paradigm (Baran 1967; Gunder 1967, 1998; Dussel 1998; Wallerstein 1974), but due to space limits and the purpose of this article we limit ourselves to discuss the two most distinct modes.

2 See (Jacobson 2003; Freire 1970; Dagron 2001; Harris and Baú 2014; Manyozo 2023; Melkote and Steeves 2001; Lie 2003; Quarry and Ramirez 2009; Servaes and Malikhao 2020; Tacchi and Lennie 2014; Thomas and van de Fliert 2014; Waisbord 2014; Wilkins et al. 2014). Along with its earlier appearances as "another development" as articulated by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation in the late 1970s, and the "multiplicity paradigm" in the 1990s (Servaes 1989, 1995).

3 The Mier are Khoe descendants who identify as a 'coloured' community. 'Coloured' is a disputed term in South Africa. "It emerged early in colonial history to identify people of mixed European and African ancestry. Later it emerged as a specific cultural and linguistic identity that is dominant in the Western Cape Province" (Crawhall 2001, p. 28).

4 A Joint Management Board was established with the principal parties: the ǂKhomani Communal Property Association acting on behalf of ǂKhomani community, the Mier Local Municipality acting on behalf of the Mier community, and South African National Parks (SANParks).

5 Community representatives in the ≠Khomani CPA and the Mier Municipality as well as members of the broader communities not necessarily participating at !Xaus Lodge, such as the crafters in Andriesvale; the !Xaus Lodge operator and manager; SANParks; local development agencies such as the Northern Cape Economic Development Agency, SASI, and the tourists at !Xaus Lodge.

6 Jennifer Slack (1996, p. 112) explores "articulation" as working on three levels: "Epistemologically articulation is a way of thinking the structures of what we know as a play of correspondences, non-correspondences and contradictions as fragments in the constitutions of what we take to be unities. Politically, articulation is way of foregrounding the structure and play of power that entail in relations of domination and subordination. Strategically articulation provides a mechanism for shaping intervention within a particular social formation, conjuncture or context". All these levels are discussed in this article and are critical in the planning and analysis of participatory development.

7 The following is the English translation of the Afrikaans sentence included in the direct quote: "There's an eland bull walking about, but there are not tracks. The eland walks and when I go on its trail, there are no tracks. There are big things happening".

8 "Ag" is an Afrikaans expression that translates to "Oh my" in English. The term "Ag shame" typically conveys pity/sympathy/cuteness.

9 Media and communication for development and social change.

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