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Youth engagement with conservation: From global platforms to local landscapes

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Youth engagement with conservation: From global platforms to local landscapes

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Faculté des géosciences et de l'environnement,

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Professeure Marie-Elodie Perga

Image 1: A sunset view of Kruger National Park, South Africa. Photo Credit: Samantha S. Sithole (October 2022).

To my parents, Jonnah Sithole and Inviolata Tendai Sithole.

Shine on you crazy diamond!

Preface

"Youth? I am a youth too".

Growing up in a large family in Zimbabwe, my parents instilled in my siblings and me the importance of education and hard work to achieve independence in society. They emphasised that education is crucial for women to break societal expectations. Education provides us with the freedom to work and live wherever we choose, and I believed that after completing my first degree, the world would open up and I would easily find a job. However, being a foreign student in South Africa, I struggled to find full-time employment. This led me to pursue further studies and obtain Honours and Master's degrees from the University of Cape Town.

My Honours degree expanded my interest in governance and conservation issues. During this time, Professor Maano Ramutsindela, my supervisor, encouraged me to question the foundations of any governance structure and to look beyond what is being presented. His course on regionalism piqued my interest in how the legacies of colonialism in Africa have had a lasting impact on trade, economics, and politics through the creation of borders. He connected the boundaries created by colonisation and regionalism with conservation. Protected areas have established artificial boundaries such as green corridors and peace parks for animals to move and be protected. However, the source of this land and the displacement of people to create this extra space is not addressed. Furthermore, considering the historical racial and oppressive apartheid and colonial systems of governance in Eastern and Southern Africa, it is important to examine how these systems impact the communities living in and around protected areas. It prompted personal reflections on what land, conservation and current systems of governance meant for my relationship with nature. In Zimbabwe, the television and radio repeatedly broadcasted the phrase 'we are sons and daughters of the soil', implying a deep connection with the land, trees, and animals.

My master's journey enabled me to explore governance in the social context of the Kruger National Park under the supervision of Professor Frank Matose (co-supervisor of this thesis). One of my core memories is entering the Lowveld Bushbuckridge area with Professor Matose. We drove from Johannesburg to Mpumalanga, and after a six-hour drive, we got lost while looking for the Bed and Breakfast in the Hazyview area. The morning brought a fresh perspective. The owner of Gecko Lodge was interested to hear that I would be conducting

fieldwork in the communities around Kruger because he believed that poaching was becoming a significant problem. In 2016, rhino poaching became a national security issue, resulting in a militarised response from the South African government and private game reserves in the area. My research required me to live with the communities and understand their perspectives on rhinos, poaching, and conservation. Professor Matose reminded me of the importance of understanding the experiences of others. He encouraged me to consider the daily experiences of communities living near Kruger National Park and to appreciate the validity of each person's unique perspective. My time living with host families in Welverdiend and Justicia allowed me to broaden my understanding of my own privilege and the needs of others. The water shortages, lack of roads, and basic service delivery led me to question the intergenerational injustices that these families and their ancestors must have faced. These communities encountered physical and social barriers to conservation due to limited access to the park, which was further inhibited by anti-poaching efforts. The fence was actively policed by armed rangers, exacerbating the situation. Additionally, the anti-rhino poaching rhetoric perpetuated the injustices and lack of access. During my inquiry into the intergenerational effects of militarisation, I became interested in the youth. Would they demand land restitution? Were they involved in conservation efforts? What was their role in conservation, given the history?

The fieldwork forced me to pose these questions to myself as a youth and in conservation. What was my role? How would I want conservation to benefit me as an African? If youth aren't making the decisions for their future, who is? As such, the research presented in these pages began with curiosity and a sense of bewilderment about governance and the apparent absence of young people in positions of influence, with opportunities to lead and have their voices heard in decision-making spaces and policies. In 2015, South African news reported student protests across university campuses calling for the removal of Rhodes statues and for fees to reflect the social and structural inequalities faced by students in South Africa. This movement had a global impact and sparked discussions about decolonisation of social and political symbols and names that were previously considered part of history. In 2018, the news reported on the 'Fridays for Future' movement, which employed youth resistance as a political strategy to challenge climate change and the lack of action from powerful states and fossil fuel companies. The prominence of Greta Thunberg on television, speaking on behalf of youth and their future, raised questions about the voices of other young people and their opinions on climate change. This also highlighted the need to find youth voices in biodiversity protection and conservation. As a recent graduate and young African conservationist, I found myself without access to decision-

making spaces and unsure of how to find them. I held a master's degree from the University of Cape Town and had much to say about militarised conservation. However, I was uncertain about who to approach and whether anyone would be willing to listen to my musings and data from the Kruger National Park. Yet, leadership programmes, conferences, policy papers and organisational corporate social clauses spoke to youth as "the future" and "important". In 2019, I began exploring the role of youth in conservation after personal reflection. Who were all these organisations and people referring to if a graduate like myself had no access to these spaces, let alone the funding? If young people were involved in these spaces, how did they participate, and which positions did they hold at the decision-making and policy tables in conservation?

If I were not African, I wonder whether it would be clear to me that Africa is a place where the people do not need limp gifts of fish but sturdy fishing rods and fair access to the pond. I wonder whether I would realize that while African nations have a failure of leadership, they also have dynamic people with agency and voices.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Our 'Africa' Lenses (13 November 2006)

Abstract

From the bustling conference halls of the World Conservation Congress to the narrow roads of Kruger National Park, this thesis examines the role of youth in conservation governance. This multi-level study investigates how youth are defined and how youth are mobilised in conservation governance. It has two research objectives, firstly, to interrogate the perspectives of young people on conservation based on their mobilisation or self-mobilisation, and secondly, to examine how youth classifications influence their engagement with conservation. The analytical lens of 'youth studies' is utilised to investigate conservation, governance, and engagement from the youth perspective. Previous research in this field argues that the youth standpoint can help investigate what it means to be young in relation to various global and local phenomena. This research presents the experiences of youth from the Global South, with a particular focus on African youth. It asserts that youth is a discursive social construct with varying definitions depending on the defining organisation, state, policy, or actor. It argues that youth engagement is an approach that puts into practice the social construction of youth in conservation governance and practice from the global to local level. Qualitative methods were used to analyse data collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, an event ethnography and document analysis. The research findings demonstrate that the way in which young people are categorised in global narratives and frameworks affect their ability to participate in conservation efforts. The study suggests that governance interventions related to youth are influenced by how environmental organisations initially classify young people. Furthermore, the subjective experiences of youth highlight the intersections of gender, age, and culture, which present multiple challenges as well as opportunities for collaboration through peer-to-peer training, mentoring, and capacity building. Overall, opportunities for youth to navigate conservation governance are hindered by their unequal and stratified engagement at global, regional, and local levels. The perspectives of young people suggest that youth engagement should focus on fostering trust, yielding authority and respect in safe spaces in governance. This study goes on to suggest an adapted youth engagement model that emphasises the importance of moving beyond homogenised classifications of youth and embracing their diversity.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine le rôle des jeunes au sein de la gouvernance de la conservation, des salles de conférence animées du Congrès Mondial de la Nature aux routes étroites du Parc National Kruger. Elle explore, à plusieurs niveaux, comment les jeunes sont définis et comment ils sont mobilisés au sein de gouvernance de la conservation. L'étude menée comporte deux objectifs. Premièrement, il s'agit d'interroger les perspectives des jeunes concernant la conservation en fonction de leur mobilisation par d'autres acteurs ou de leur auto-mobilisation. Deuxièmement, il s'agit d'analyser comment les différentes manières de catégoriser les jeunes influencent leur engagement en faveur de la conservation. La perspective analytique des *youth studies* est mobilisée pour étudier la conservation, la gouvernance et l'engagement du point de vue des jeunes. Des recherches antérieures dans ce champ d'étude soutiennent que le point de vue des jeunes peut aider à étudier ce que signifie être jeune en lien avec divers phénomènes mondiaux et locaux. Cette recherche présente les expériences de jeunes du Sud global, en se focalisant plus spécifiquement sur la jeunesse africaine. Elle affirme que la jeunesse est une construction sociale discursive, dont les définitions varient en fonction de l'organisation, de l'État, de la politique ou de l'acteur qui la définit. Elle soutient que l'engagement des jeunes est une approche qui met en pratique la construction sociale de la jeunesse dans la gouvernance et la pratique de la conservation, du niveau mondial au niveau local. Cette étude repose sur une analyse qualitative de données collectées via des entretiens semi-structurés, des observations participantes, une ethnographie événementielle et une analyse documentaire. Les résultats de cette recherche démontrent que la manière dont les jeunes sont catégorisés dans les récits et les cadres de référence globaux affecte leur capacité à participer aux efforts de conservation. L'étude suggère que les interventions de gouvernance concernant la jeunesse sont influencées par la manière dont les organisations environnementales catégorisent initialement les jeunes. De plus, les expériences subjectives des jeunes mettent en évidence des intersections entre le genre, l'âge et la culture, ce qui révèle de multiples défis mais aussi des opportunités de collaboration par le biais de la formation entre pairs, du mentorat et du renforcement des capacités. Dans l'ensemble, les possibilités pour les jeunes de naviguer au sein de la gouvernance de la conservation sont entravées par leur engagement inégal et stratifié aux niveaux mondial, régional et local. Les perspectives des jeunes suggèrent que leur mobilisation devrait se concentrer sur la promotion de la confiance, la cession de l'autorité et sur le respect dans des espaces sûrs de gouvernance. Cette étude propose ensuite un modèle adapté

d'engagement des jeunes qui insiste sur l'importance de dépasser les classifications uniformisées des jeunes et d'embrasser leur diversité.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of acronyms

CBC Community Based Conservation
CBNRM Community Based Natural Resources Management
CITES Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wildlife Flora and Fauna
DFFE Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment
EM Programme Environmental Monitors Programme
GEF Global Environmental Facility
GEG Global Environmental Governance
GYBN Global Youth Biodiversity Network
IP Indigenous Peoples
IPS Intergenerational Partnerships for Sustainability
IUCN International Union for Conservation of Nature
IUCN GYS International Union for Conservation of Nature Global Youth Summit
IUCN WCC International Union for Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress
KNP Kruger National Park
LCA Leadership for Conservation in Africa
NGO Non-Governmental Organisation
PA Protected Areas
SAN Parks South African National Parks
SAWC Southern African Wildlife College
SDG Sustainable Developmental Goals
UN United Nations
UNEP United Nations Environmental Programme
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNCBD United Nations Convention on Biodiversity
UNICEF United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNFCCC United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WHO World Health Organisation
WWF World Wildlife Fund
YAC Youth Advisory Council

List of tables, figures, and images

	individuals. The diagram illustrates the four storylines related to the empirical chapters. The colours used in the diagram do not hold any additional significance.	
Figure 5	This diagram illustrates how motivational framing is informed by the various youth-centred storylines. The colours used in the diagram do not hold any additional significance.	194
Figure 6	The diagram is an illustration of time in relation to Youth transitions according to the ILO and the intensifying environmental issues (for example, climate change and biodiversity loss).	196
Figure 7	An adaptation of the 7-P Model intersecting with procedural, recognition, and distributive justice to analyse youth engagement (Thew et al, 2020; Thew et al, 2021). Figure generated by Samantha S. Sithole.	206
Image 1	A sunset view of Kruger National Park, South Africa. Photo Credit: Samantha S. Sithole (October 2022).	3
Image 2	Photo Credits : Camille Gilloots IUCN, Marseille, France (03/09/21).	72
Image 3	Moments before embarking on a game drive in the Kruger National Park from the Southern African Wildlife College, South Africa. (October 2022). Photo Credit: Amukelani Mashele.	98
Image 4	Belfast community. November 2020, Photo credit: Samantha S. Sithole.	142
Image 5	Elephants in the Kruger National Park, Sabie River. Picture taken along the R536 road opposite Belfast community. (December 2020) Photo credit: Samantha S. Sithole.	164
Image 6	Young man crossing the R536 Highway from the Sabie River to the Belfast community. (January 2021) Photo credit: Samantha S. Sithole 162	165
Image 7	Cresta's snack stall in the Belfast community. (January 2021) (Photo credit: Samantha S. Sithole). 166	169
Image 8	A multitude of young people (21-30 years old) from the communities neighbouring KNP at the SAWC gate, Mpumalanga, South Africa. They are responding to a call for field ranger pre-selection. Photo credit: Amukelani Mashele (12/03/24).	204

CHAPTER 1.

General Introduction

1. Introduction

Youth, young people, young professionals, young adults and often children are all included in youth definitions and classifications. With all the various connotations, and definitions, it is not surprising that identifying and defining youth is a complex endeavour. In addition to the challenge of identifying youth, this group is the subject of development agendas and is involved in environmental governance and policy to find solutions to the growing environmental threats posed by climate change and biodiversity loss. Despite global and local organisations and policies identifying youth as key stakeholders in decision-making and governance, they have rarely provided clear definitions of this group beyond age. Several organisations, such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the United Nations and its various subsidiaries, and the World Wildlife Fund, have programmes or policies to involve youth in conservation and climate change mitigation. It is important to note that youth, like women, local communities, and Indigenous Peoples, are not a homogeneous category, although youth are mobilised as such in these policies and actions. This thesis presents a multi-level study of how youth engage with conservation in governance through decision-making, leadership, and conservation work. It explores the experiences of youth from the Global South who are involved with conservation, from global conference halls to local communities. Presented in a hybrid format of a monographic and paper-based thesis, the study sought to ascertain who the youth are and how they engage in conservation and governance. The thesis recognises the different terms used to refer to young people and has chosen to use the term 'youth' to encompass the different terminologies for the purposes of this research.

1.1. Significance of study

Youth are often characterised as innovative, technologically savvy, and positioned within society as a demographic that can be mobilised for social change (Zeldin, 2004; Hart, 2008; van der Westhuizen, 2019; Mkhize et al., 2022). However, it is important to note that youth are also often described as marginalised and vulnerable, facing environmental challenges and livelihood insecurity due to unemployment and an uncertain future (Orsini, 2022; Nrkumah, 2021; Mkhize et al, 2022). These diverse portrayals of youth demanded a deeper exploration of how social constructions surrounding youth in governance and society influence their engagement in conservation governance at the local, regional, and global levels. Social constructions are clusters of cognitive images about a target group that are perpetuated by

attitudes and social policies (Collins and Mead, 2021). These constructions affect how these groups engage in political processes (Collins and Mead, 2021). The social constructions of youth in literature and in practice influence youth subjectivities.

Youth subjectivity is influenced by how they are classified by other actors, such as organisations, institutions, developmental and environmental programs. These classifications, in turn, impact how youth are positioned and mobilised, ultimately affecting how and where they are deployed in conservation and governance. Governance encompasses policy (intentions actioned with authority) and practice, which are human actions and behaviours that influence nature (Borrini-Feyerabend and Hill, 2015; Zhang et al., 2023). Conservation structures are the social frameworks within which actors operate in conservation practices and policy formation, and how their actions are limited or expanded (Kooiman, 2016). These include governance actions and approaches in line with cultural and technical agreements (Kooiman, 2016). When analysing governance, it is important to consider who wields the power, authority, and responsibility to make and implement decisions related to conservation, as these actions are based on patterns of interaction between people and the environment (Borrini-Feyerabend and Hill, 2015). This thesis adopts a framing of governance as interactions that influence behaviour and nature through policies and practices. The use of this framing allows for a comprehensive understanding of engagement.

For youth, governance interactions can be understood through engagement. Engagement refers to the active participation of citizens in shaping system norms, values, resources, and regulations that establish and comprise of the foundations of their respective society (Riemer et al, 2014). Engagement is a crucial theoretical concept because it describes how youth have been mobilised through meaningful and sustained participation in activities that promote active citizenship (Riemer et al, 2014). This is the case, for example, with conferences, volunteering, after-school and political activities, and engagement programmes (Riemer, et al, 2014). Consequently, this research followed this thread and sought to understand youth engagement in conferences such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress Forum, leadership positions and programmes, and in conservation employment and unemployment in the buffer zone of protected areas. Situating the focus of this research on youth requires an introduction to how the literature defines this demographic and its relation to conservation.

1.2.   Background to the study: Youth and conservation

Youth are denoted in literature, policy, and practice as children, young people, young adults, people in school, out of school and in a state of transition or "becoming" (Thieme, 2018; Salas and Sainz, 2019; Johansson and Herz, 2019). Youth policies often serve as an overarching framework of governmental and non-governmental activities directed towards youth (at, for and with them) according to dominant norms (Walther et al., 2019). Their involvement and engagement in the developmental, political, and environmental spheres has been earmarked as a key strategy to achieving sustainability and equity (Ojala, 2011; Zurba and Trimble, 2014; Riemer et al, 2014; Chen et al, 2018; van der Westhuizen, 2019; Mkhize et al, 2022; Orsini, 2022). Through policies, youth are addressed as a "resource for society that needs to be nourished" (Walther et al., 2019: 22). In the environmental sector, youth (the term and demographic grouping) are being mobilised and positioned in the literature and in practice, to overcome climate change and biodiversity loss, by providing innovative solutions to environmental issues (Andolina et al, 2002; Adler and Goggin, 2005; Riemer et al, 2014; Threadgold, 2011; Riemer et al, 2014; Han and Ahn, 2020; Yona et al, 2020; Thew et al, 2021).

However, youth mobilisation is not unique to the environmental sector. Historically, youth have been mobilised in times of conflict or political unrest, for example, youth were perceived as perpetrators of violence between 2003 and 2009 in the oil-rich Niger Delta by the state (Iwilade, 2019). In this context, the term "youth" was used to describe those who participated in and led violent conflict and so, Iwilade argues that "youth" connotes those who are "doing" rather than those who are "young" (2019: 87). Youth have been instrumental in shifting the balances of power by either supporting or challenging hegemonic power in instances such as the civil wars of Sierre Leone (1991 - 2002) and protest movements such as "Occupy Nigeria" (2012) (Iwilade, 2019). These examples illustrate the role youth have played to enact socio-political change. In the environmental sector, youth have mobilised through environmental movements and activism, most notably within climate change activism such as 'Fridays for Future' (Riemer et al, 2014; Threadgold, 2012; Riemer et al, 2014; Han and Ahn, 2020; Yona et al, 2020; Thew et al, 2021). Youth voices have echoed the need for urgent political, social, and industrial change to mitigate the impacts of climate change such as global warming, flooding, droughts, and the recent heat waves across Europe in the summer of 2023. However, within biodiversity protection and conservation, their engagement has not been equally acknowledged and investigated.

To fill this gap, this thesis discusses the role of youth in conservation. The thesis suggests that youth are often treated as a strategic tool in conservation efforts. They can be mobilised to achieve conservation interests and positioned as strategic actors but are often side-lined in decision-making. Additionally, they may be deployed in various levels of conservation governance structures. However, the interests of other more powerful actors often influence how, where, and when youth engage in conservation (Shackleton et al, 2023). Analysing youth can help to understand how current conservation practices, which are embedded in colonialism, affect youth given the unequal distribution of resources, land, access, and control over physical and social spaces, institutions and organisations that embody conservation. These spaces include protected areas (for example, Kruger National Park in South Africa) and organisations such as IUCN. The term youth is viscid as it embodies temporal identities (for example, they are the future), states of being and belonging, inequalities in engagement, opportunities, access, mobility and the precarity surrounding agency in culture, industry, and personhood (Cuervo and Miranda, 2019; Iwilade, 2019). Therefore, the thesis further posits that youth classifications could capitalise on youth agency as it influences their belonging and inclusion (Threadgold, 2019). Classifications in this context describe the social and cultural constructions that signify the meaning making processes of objects or groups of people or things (Collins and Mead, 2020).

The field of conservation offers a complex yet interesting lens from which to understand youth as the field represents problematic geopolitical relations between the Global North, and South. The 'Global South' was first coined in 1980 in the Brandt Commission report to identify countries that had failed to value their economies on high added values of manufacturing and overcoming poverty (Cuervo and Miranda, 2019). It is argued to be a problematic floating geographical concept which describes developing nations according to the negative aspects of "…colonialism and capitalism" in lieu of "a metaphor for resistance to overcome such suffering" resulting from marginalisation, oppression, and poverty (Cuervo and Miranda, 2019). A criticism of this term is necessary because it propagates narratives from an angle of comparison against the Global North's perceived progress and modernity (Cuervo and Miranda, 2019). Literary scholars, including Chimamanda N. Adichie, argue that African countries and people have agency and voices that are often overlooked in Global North conceptions of Africa (Adichie, 2010). To avoid the universalisation of youth in the Global North or South, this thesis seeks to unpack how "youth" as a term and social category have

been mobilised in environmental governance from the global to local level through conservation.

1.3.   Problem Statement and motivation for the study

The varying definitions of youth have structural implications because cultural and historical contexts shape youth identities and foster diversity rooted in gender and class, subsequently resulting in inequalities (Mwaura, 2017; Mkhize et al, 2022). These diverse factors that embody the youth implies that youth do not experience the world in the same way. For instance, environmental justice debates highlight that vulnerabilities are more prevalent with youth in the Global South because they are exposed to an array of socio-political factors such as unemployment or hindered access to technology, in addition to environmental crises such as living near protected areas or climate change related incidences (Mkhize et al, 2022). This further heightens the obscurity when defining youth. 'How' they are defined and 'who' defines them, highlights firstly, the inequalities between actors and stakeholders. Secondly, it illustrates the variations that exist within youth which offers a lens from which to view and interpret their behaviour, especially within the field of conservation (Kehily, 2013).

These structural implications are felt in how youth engage in conservation spaces, particularly in decision-making. Youth have not been clearly identified as a distinct voice in governance spaces resulting in an underestimation of their role as decision-makers to sustain conservation in the future (Chen et al, 2019). Yet, youth are mobilised as a tool for future decision-making as future leaders (Mkhize et al, 2022). Comparable to the mounting pressure of environmental issues being faced, youth and time are interrelated. As youth age, the environmental problems they are encountering will also continue to intensify even though they are expected to "act now" and form solutions for environmental issues such as climate change and biodiversity loss. Their ability to act now, is determined by the classifications discussed previously, with the environmental cost being passed to the younger and upcoming generation (Mkhize et al, 2020). In fact, sustainability governance highlights the burden of responsibility placed on youth due to spatial and temporal dimensions of the environmental problems being faced and this has translated into policy and practice. Martin et al (2020) argues that it is unfair to place the disproportionate burdens of environmental issues on marginalised groups. Youth are bearing the burden of responsibility for past actions and decisions, that are impacting the current environment and thus youth are expected to generate solutions for an uncertain future (eco

anxiety) (Mkhize et al, 2022). Eco-anxiety refers to the psychological consequences of climate related threats and disasters that have resulted in feelings of distress, worry and a variation of hopelessness particularly among young people (Brophy et al, 2023). Youth are argued to be undoubtedly more aware of the impacts of climate change and more vulnerable to its effects than adults or older generations. (Brophy et al, 2023). However, in the context of youth and conservation this thesis will discuss how they engage, the barriers that inhibit engagement in governance and the implications on youth.

1.4.   Research questions and objectives.

The objectives of this research are to:

i.   Understand how youth are classified in conservation and environmental governance.

ii.   Analyse youth engagement and the interactions that exist between youth and other stakeholders such as the state and environmental organisations from the global to local level.

iii.   Investigate the role that youth play in conservation from a global to local level.

Considering these objectives the overall research question that underpins this study is: **How are youth engaging with conservation structures at the global, regional, and local levels?** To support the question above a series of sub-research questions are posed to shape the focus of each of the case studies:

i.   How are youth engaging in global conservation governance processes?

Chapter 4 shows how youth engage with global conservation decision-making spaces through the example of the largest global non-governmental conservation organisation, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and its World Conservation Congress Forum.

ii.   What are the experiences of youth conservation leaders?

Chapter 5 takes a deeper dive by investigating the perspective of youth leaders and how leadership in conservation in the African context influences youth engagement. The Leadership

for Conservation in Africa and Southern African Wildlife College provides regional examples to understand how twenty youth actors from various African countries experience youth leadership in conservation. It delves into the experiences of youth who describe themselves as youth champions for conservation.

iii. How do youth experiences with employment and unemployment influence how they engage with conservation?

Chapter 6 lands on the local level of the Kruger National Park (KNP). The KNP provides an example of how black African youth engage with conservation when living and working within a protected area landscape shaped by conservation interests. It discusses the experiences of rural youth with employment and unemployment in the Greater KNP conservation landscape.

1.5. Thesis statement and research contribution

Youth should be given a chance to take an active part in the decision-making of local, national, and global levels.

- **Former United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon (2010)**

Utilising 'theory integration', this thesis has sought to contribute to the literature on Youth Studies, engagement, conservation, and governance. Theory integration involves integrating empirical phenomena with theoretical concepts. This process is not linear but rather a heuristic method for creatively and analytically pairing data with explanatory concepts (Gigerenzer, 2017). This thesis connects multiple theories that relate to and help understand youth engagement across multiple platforms and contexts by creating precise relations between the concepts and the phenomena surrounding youth in various conservation scenarios. It starts by situating the term "youth" in the context of the Youth Studies Framework (Chapter 2). Thereafter, it explores how youth as a term and as a social category is situated within the broader governance, engagement, and conservation debates (Chapter 3). Youth and their engagement within conservation discussions have become popular given that traditional practices have been criticised over the years for being exclusionary and embedded in colonial ideals and practices (Hart, 2008; Ansell et al, 2012; Columbia Global Policy Initiative, 2014; Zurba and Trimble, 2014). Environmental dialogues in critical geography and development

studies have cast the decolonial gaze on conservation methods, policies, and practices from the global to local level (Ogada, 2019; Dominguez and Louma, 2020; Krauss, 2021; Massarella et al, 2021; Mabele et al, 2022). Arguments of youth as the future of conservation and fundamental for sustainability have not only shone a spotlight on their role in establishing solutions but also begs the question, where have they been all along? Yet, there is lack of adequate literature that focuses on youth (specifically from the Global South) importance in the sustainability of conservation and a fundamental analysis on their role. The decolonial lens, in part, aids in analysing how social pressure places a moral obligation on conservation to recognise the historical legacy that created marginalised groups through the unequal distribution of resources and access to decision-making.

"Youth are not a monolith" (Melina Sakiyama, Chapter 4), yet literature and organisational policy define them as if they were. The Youth Studies framework examines youth through the perspectives of life transitions and culture. This approach helps to classify them based on indicators, definitions, and framings. The classifications of youth and the heterogeneity embodied in this social category are explored further in the literature review. In fact, youth are positioned as vulnerable and in need of empowerment on the one hand, while on the other, they are portrayed as essential stakeholders that need to be engaged with and deployed (Zeldin, 2004; Hart, 2008; van der Westhuizen, 2019; Mkhize et al, 2022; Orsini, 2022). By considering the two different positions, this thesis aims to understand how youth engage with conservation: firstly, through governance by environmental organisations on the global level within decision-making, secondly, through leadership at the regional level where youth occupy leadership roles in training programmes and conservation education, and lastly, through their engagement in conservation labour within protected areas that have a history of excluding and marginalising Indigenous people and local community participation.

Furthermore, this thesis situates youth in literature and practice, asking how youth have been described, defined, and classified in the literature to establish 'who they are' as a group. Secondly, this study aims to determine the extent and manner of youth involvement in governance, from the global to the local level. This contributes to the literature on Youth Studies and environmental governance by identifying the role and impact of youth in conservation efforts. This thesis suggests that engagement is a method used in conservation governance and practice to mobilise, position, and deploy youth. The thesis adopts the sociological perspective of Akin Iwilade that describes the term "youth" as a verb, connoting

"action, occurrence or state of being" and focuses on youth "doing" (Iwilade, 2019: 85). Understanding youth as verb as opposed to primarily a noun, illustrates how youth are not only defined based on their subjectivities but also through their ability to be used as a tool with the perceived expectation that this group is 'doing', 'becoming', 'transitioning' into adulthood and employment as a class of their own with the capacity for collective action (Standing, 2011; Iwilade, 2019; Johansson and Herz, 2019). The thesis will demonstrate the usage of the term 'youth' in policy and practice. It will examine the categorisation and description of youth, as well as their active involvement in conservation efforts and expression of interests. For the purposes of this research, the term youth will adopt the classification of age and will refer to those who are within the age bracket of 15 to 35 years. The African Youth Charter, the IUCN, and the South African National Youth Policy (2015-2020) all define youth as individuals aged between 15 and 35. These definitions will be discussed later. Those who are 15 and under, are regarded as children and those above the age of 35, are regarded as adults. Notwithstanding the various debates on the definition and classification of youth, the age bracket of 15 to 35 embodies the various ebbs and flows within the transitions of life. As such, this age bracket adequately reflects and represents the various experiences captured and reported on throughout this research. Therefore, in the discussion section (Chapter 7 and 8) at the end of the thesis, youth will be described in light of the experiences discussed in the empirical chapters beforehand (Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

This thesis aims to address the gap in conservation literature and practice regarding the positioning of youth. To achieve this, it utilises concepts of environmental governance to locate youth engagement in decision-making, leadership, and conservation labour to analyse conservation. In the next section, the research approach and questions will be outlined. This will help to situate how the research was developed and conducted.

1.6.   Conception of the research questions and research approach

The thesis adopted a 'glocal' (global + local) multi-level research approach to analyse youth in spaces of governance and conservation (Di Gregorio et al, 2019). This multi-level approach is best described through the interactive governance framework. Interactive governance is an analytical framework of cumulative governance "activities carried out by societal actors in response to public needs and visions" (Kooiman, 2016: 29). It involves the governance

arrangements of societal actors, institutions and principles that inform structures which enable or constrain the actions of these actors (Kooiman, 2016). Actors are described as a social unit (for example an individual or group, national and international bodies, or organisations) who "possess agency or power of action" (Kooiman, 2016: 29). The term 'structure' refers to the social frameworks in which actors operate and how their actions are limited or widened (for example culture, laws, agreements, material, and technical possibilities) (Kooiman, 2016). As such, the governing interactions inform how actors and structures interrelate in natural and social systems (Kooiman, 2016).

For example, stakeholder or actor engagement encompasses social systems such as citizen panels, citizen charters, interactive decision-making, and participation (Edelenbos et al, 2009). The systems are characterised by diversity (specific and varying qualities of actors), complexity (examination of the tensions and interdependencies), and scale (spatial, quantitative, or analytical dimensions – level is a unit of analysis) (Kooiman, 2016). Furthermore, the actors, structures, and systems interface at executive (national government), professional (policy-making and decision-making according to technocratic standards) and policy (democratic institutions such as existing policy and legislation in white paper) levels (Edelenbos et al, 2009).

Governing interactions involves both vertical and horizontal processes (Andonova et al, 2009). The participation of social units exists vertically through 'glocal' and transnational (across borders) or multilateral agreements that are diffused across levels of social organisations and multiple actors (Andonova et al, 2009). This is often associated with traditional top-down environmental policy implementation processes (Yi et al, 2019). Whereas, the horizontal processes include parallel brokerages, for example, between state actors. However, even within parallel interactions, power influences how agreements are made or how information is distributed (Yi et al, 2019). As such, the multi-level approach introduces politics of scale that question, for example, how environmental decisions are constructed, regulated, diffused, and contested between, among and across scales (Di Gregorio et al, 2019). Furthermore, it includes actors operating within, between and across these scales (Di Gregorio et al, 2019). Therefore, considering these aspects, the research approach endeavoured to situate how youth interact with different actors, organisations and policies in the conservation structures that exist at the global, regional, and local levels.

1.6.1. Research question 1: How are youth engaging in global conservation governance processes?

The first empirical chapter (Chapter 4) adopts the framework of environmental governance in relation to environmental justice by analysing the engagement of marginalised actors in decision-making on the global level. At the global level, governance incorporates the interaction between private and public actors, multiple regulations, exercise of authority in the pursuit of goals that function outside of traditional state parameters (Andonova et al, 2009). This involves co-governing interactions that encourage the distribution and mutual interdependence and communicate side-ways without a single actor dominating (Kooiman and Bavinck, 2013). This research question sought to situate youth within global conservation governance processes that occur through international organisations that facilitate decision-making and policy formulation at the global level. By probing whether youth as actors in global conservation governance have access to decision-making spaces, the chapter draws on the debates on youth engagement and environmental justice to show how power influences youth engagement. It focuses on IUCN and its world conservation congress forum, because it is the largest and leading global conservation organisation with regards to statutes and regulations that guide conservation policies from the global to local levels (IUCN, 2024).

1.6.2. Research Question 2: What are the experiences of youth conservation leaders?

Chapter 5 analyses how engagement programmes mobilise youth in conservation governance on a regional level, focusing on the concept of leadership. Regions are socially constructed geographical spaces, outlined by political boundaries in trade, economics, migration between states and regional organisations (for example, Southern African Development Community) (Haas, 2016). The interactive or environmental governance literatures often overlook the regional level of analysis (Balsiger and Vandeveer, 2012). In leadership, it is necessary to be aware of cultural differences and intercultural contexts, as environmental and conservation issues go beyond national and state borders (Straka et al., 2018). The scope of this chapter is based on two regional conservation organisations, the Southern African Wildlife College, and Leadership for Conservation in Africa, that operate in the context of Sub-Saharan and Southern Africa. It focuses on the experiences of youth in leadership, a widely utilised term and concept when addressing youth in the conservation space (Thew et al, 2021).

1.6.3. Research Question 3: How do youth experiences with employment and unemployment influence how they engage with conservation?

Chapter 6 applies the conservation labour framework to liminality at the local level. To implement the realities of public policy, both the local and regional levels are essential (Sellers and Kwak, 2011). The chapter discusses the experiences of youth in the local communities surrounding protected areas, with a specific focus on the Greater Kruger National Park (KNP) in South Africa. The challenges of conservation at the local level are examined, particularly in relation to a Global Environmental Facility programme aimed at alleviating poverty and unemployment in KNP's neighbouring communities. The chapter aims to demonstrate how youth are targeted and framed at the local level, using global policies for biodiversity protection and illegal wildlife trade. These policies are then implemented at the national level by state apparatus through funding and targeted youth policies aimed at reducing youth unemployment in the Bushbuckridge area of the Mpumalanga Province.

1.7.   Research methods

This section discusses the general research methods used to examine the broader thesis research question. Each empirical chapter, which may be part of a published or submitted manuscript, describes the methods, case studies, and research sites that informed that specific chapter. Therefore, there may be some repetition between the general methods and the methods section in each empirical chapter.

The thesis was developed using a qualitative case study design. Qualitative case studies require the examination of concepts and their meanings or interpretations in specific contexts of inquiry (Gammelgaard, 2017). Furthermore, qualitative case studies are scientific inquiry that requires the researcher(s) to make sense of the real world through storytelling (Gammelgaard, 2017). The case studies were informed by empirical data collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, document analysis, and ethnographic data on events, programmes, and research participants. The qualitative design was chosen because it allowed for the use of multiple data collection methods to gather various forms of data from actors and secondary sources. Each stage and level of research was conducted as an independent study. The organisations involved were informed and participated in interviews during the fieldwork. These case studies were used to construct narratives of youth involvement in conservation across the global, regional, and local levels and areas of governance. The thesis does not

compare the governance spaces of conferences, leadership, and conservation labour. Instead, it discusses the overlapping themes that emerged from the data on youth experiences. It discusses the global, regional, and local levels in relation to each other as they inform the interactive governance processes that influence youth interactions and identities in governance and conservation.

1.7.1. *Fieldwork and data collection*

The data collection process was iterative, consisting of multiple cycles of data collection, reflection, and analysis throughout the fieldwork periods. The thesis is based on fieldwork conducted in multiple locations including Switzerland, France, Botswana, and South Africa, as well as the virtual platform of Zoom. The author attended multiple conferences, meetings, workshops, and working groups in person and virtually to observe youth involvement in conservation, leadership, development, and trade across the African continent. The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in stages between November 2019 and April 2023 (Table 1). It began with the IUCN's Global Youth Summit Steering Committee and ended with the Leadership for Conservation in Africa's Council Meeting.

Table 1: An outline of the research activities conducted at the global, regional, and local levels.

Level of research intervention	Research activity	Research duration
Global	IUCN Global Youth Summit Coordinating/Steering Committee member	November 2019- February 2020
	IUCN Global Youth Summit over Zoom	April 2021
	Logistics and student coordinator for the UNIL Delegation to the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Marseille, France.	September 3 to September 6, 2021
	IUCN Session Rapporteur for the IUCN World Conservation Congress.	September 3 to September 6, 2021

	UNIL- IUCN de-briefing event of their experience at the IUCN World Conservation Congress.	October 2021
	Individual interviews Lausanne, Switzerland	May to July 2022
Regional	Business of Conservation Conference (BCC) Kigali, Rwanda	October 2019
	African Youth Free Trade Area Conference over Zoom	2021
	Southern Africa Global Youth Biodiversity Network Summit over Zoom	2021
	LCA Council Meetings in Botswana and in South Africa	April 2022 and April 2023
	Host and Facilitator of the Share Screen Africa (an LCA subsidiary) Rethinking Conservation Online Series	February to October 2022
	Advisory Council Member of the Share Screen Africa Advisory Council and currently the Acting Chairperson	2022- current
	Individual interviews in the SAWC in Kruger National Park, South Africa	August to October 2022
	Current Chairperson and member of the Leadership for Conservation in Africa Youth Advisory Council. Coordinated the establishment and write-up of the LCA – YAC Youth Prospectus which was adopted by the LCA Board in November 2023.	April 2023 - current
	Online interviews over Zoom with LCA participants and SAWC participants	November 2022 to November 2023

	Youth taskforce (African Region) Commission member for the Species Survival Commission of IUCN.	November 2023 - current
Local	Research in Belfast, Cork and Mkhulu communities neighbouring the Kruger National Park along R536 road	November 2020 to February 2021 and August 2022
	Individual interviews in the SAWC, Kruger National Park, South Africa	August to October 2022
	Community Practitioners Meeting, Wits Rural Facility, Mpumalanga, South Africa	October 2022

Follow-up interviews and meetings with participants were conducted until November 2023. Due to the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, multiple methods and platforms were used for data collection.

1.7.1.1. Participant observation

Participant observation is an important method in the triangulation of data because it captures a different dimension of the study. Participant observation is an unstructured method of studying people; the researcher must follow the schedules and activities of the informants, rather than adhering to a rigorous research schedule (Puri, 2011). This method involves documenting and studying people during social activities, such as conferences, sports, and work. It also includes an internal reflection of how the researcher feels during such events or activities (Puri, 2011). In this thesis, the researcher observed the activities of participants during fieldwork in the SAWC and participated in IUCN events, LCA Council Meetings, and working groups (Table 1). The researcher was part of the initial steering committee of the IUCN GYS from October 2019 – January 2020. Furthermore, the researcher was a volunteer at the WCC as a session rapporteur. This responsibility involved taking detailed notes of session themes, statements that stood out and interesting quotes or questions from the panel and those present. She helped organise a thirteen-student delegation from the University of Lausanne, attend and volunteer at the WCC as part of the UNIL-IUCN Partnership arrangement. This process involved selecting students and, grouping them as volunteers according to the needs of the IUCN organising teams. The students volunteered as session rapporteurs, VIP (Very Important People) assistants, pavilion, and technical assistants in

different areas of the event. Their insight was also helpful in gaining perspective on how youth can access, engage, and participate at an event where youth engagement is a priority. Furthermore, she is the current Chairperson of the LCA Youth Advisory Council. Her responsibilities include facilitation and chairing the monthly meetings and attending the LCA Board Meetings. The LCA Youth Advisory Council is currently strategising its activities with other youth organisations and universities in South Africa, Rwanda, Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya, and Zimbabwe.

1.7.1.2.   *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews are both a versatile and flexible tool where, "the rigidity of its structure can be varied depending on the study purpose and research questions" (Kallio et al, 2016: 2955). Furthermore, it allows the interviewer to improvise follow-up questions based on the participants responses and gives room for the participants individual verbal expressions (ibid). For it to be rigorous, an interview guide, based on previous knowledge on youth, conservation, and youth engagement, was necessary to explore the research area by collecting similar types of information from those interviewed (ibid). As such, this study employed Kallio et al's (2016) framework on interview guides, that aided in preparing guiding questions for the interviews. The interview guide was instrumental in structuring the questions. However, the questions guiding each interview was tailored to the participant and the flow of the discussion. The duration of interviews varied from thirty minutes and two hours and were conducted with participants who were regarded as youth across the various organisations and platforms. This thesis adopted the social category of youth as those between the ages of 15 to 35 years. In so doing, those 17 and below were excluded for ethical reasons which will be outlined in the ethical considerations section. The research participants included youth from the global south between 19 and 35 years. Other participants included staff or employees from IUCN, LCA, SAWC and community and traditional leaders in the communities surrounding the Kruger National Park. A total of 127 participants were interviewed (Table 2).

Table 2: List of each of the participants interviewed across the global, regional, and local levels.

Research Participants	Global	Regional	Local
Youth participants ages 20-35	25	20	46

Organisational staff/employees (IUCN; LCA; SAWC)	7	5	5
State/government employees	-	-	7
Tradition and community leaders	-	-	12

1.7.1.3. *Document Analysis*

Document analysis is an important method used in reviewing and evaluating grey literature and secondary data such as reports from IUCN, United Nations, World Wildlife Fund, Peace Parks Foundation, and the Global Environmental Facility on youth engagement from 1992 to 2023. Document analysis is described as the "systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents- both printed and electronic material" (Bowen, 2009: 27). It is useful when studying documents that require the examination and interpretation of texts and images recorded without the researcher's intervention, to gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). Twenty-nine documents from newspapers, organisational reports, employment certificates, youth strategy documents and policies were reviewed and analysed by "finding, selecting appraising (making sense of), and synthesising data contained in documents" for the purposes of "grouping information into major themes, categories…through content analysis" (Bowen, 2009: 28) (Table 3). Document analysis is important for data triangulation that aids in corroborating findings across data sets (ibid).

Table 3: Outlines the secondary data and grey literature used in this thesis.

Level	Organisation	Document title
Global	IUCN	1. IUCN -GYS Outcome Document (2021) 2. World Parks Congress: Young Professionals
	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs -SDG	3. World Youth Annual Reports (2003 – 2020)
	UN Convention on Biodiversity	4. Youth Voices Project 5. CBD in a Nutshell (2018) 6. Post 2020 Policy Work 7. *Guides for youth in biodiversity:*

		o Navigating International meetings (2002) o Ladder of youth participation o Youth guide to the Convention on Biodiversity (2013) o Guide for youth NGOs at United Nations meetings by the European Youth Forum (2008) 8. International Youth Statement on biodiversity (2010) 9. International Youth biodiversity accord (2009) 10. Go4BioDiv Youth Declaration (2008) 11. Youth Accord on Biodiversity (2005) 12. Youth Declaration to CBD COP-6 (2002) 13. GYBN Position Paper for CBD COP-11 (2012) 14. Go4BioDiv Youth Declaration on Conserving Coastal and Marine Biodiversity (2012)
	UN – Major groups for children and youth	15. UN Youth Strategy 16. Inter-agency network on youth development 17. World program of action for youth 18. ECOSOC Youth Forum 19. Envoy on youth
	International Labour Organisation	20. School to work transition survey. 21. Decent Jobs for Youth (2020)
Regional	African Union – Youth Development	22. African Youth Charter (2009)
	African Continental Free Trade Area	23. Making the AFCTA work for women and youth (2020)
	African Development Bank (AfDB)	24. Jobs for Youth Strategy Report (2016-2017)
		25. Jobs for Youth Strategy – Strategic document (2016- 2025)
Local	South African Department of Environmental Affairs	26. YES (Youth Environmental Service)
	South African Government - Youth Affairs	27. Youth Empowerment Post COVID19
	UNEP-GEF6 Project Report	28. Environmental Monitors Programme (2025)
	South African Wildlife college; WWF and Peace Parks Foundation	29. Environmental Monitors

1.7.1.4.   Event Ethnography

The event ethnographic method of data collection is described as "studying up" as it involves studying the often "difficult-to-access-elite" and highlights social inequalities and power dynamics of studying organisations (Nader, 1972). The elite in this case would be those affiliated with organisations such as IUCN who have a "disproportionate control over or access to a resource" (Stich and Colyar, 2013: 736). Although the GYS was held online because of the COVID19 pandemic, an event ethnography, coupled with participant observation, was the most suitable method because it provides "unique hubs where discourses, people, and things convene to test, stabilise, and reflect on their relationships, the value of things, framing of issues and their positions of power" (Schulte-Romer and Gesing, 2022: 4). Conferences and events are argued to be co-constructed environments where "event-specific methodological" challenges are raised (ibid). These spaces offer researchers the opportunity to meet and mingle with key stakeholders from various backgrounds and permits the "infrastructuring" of organised events to gain access to spaces that are most relevant or suitable for their research (ibid). Furthermore, the boundaries between merely observing to becoming a participant are fluid, and create situations where researchers are challenged to position themselves to share their interests and views (ibid).

When adding the virtual component to this methodology, Schulte-Romer and Gesing argue that "the role of technological infrastructure and mediation gains importance" because digital platforms facilitate exchanges and presentations between participants, within the virtual space (2022: 5). Virtual spaces are regarded as easier to attend, thereby narrowing the divide caused by resource-related inequalities because reaching these event spaces "no longer requires a physical presence" (Howlett, 2022: 12-13 in, Schulte-Romer and Gesing, 2022: 6). However, challenges of accessibility to digital technology raises further questions. Online or virtual events force the researcher to "infrastructure" their interactions and attendance based on the program or schedule provided because coincidental meetings or sightings do not happen with online events (ibid). However, participants in virtual spaces become easier to identify because of virtual nametags whilst on the other hand, interaction is and can be limited because facilitators have the power to mute and show other attendees or just the panel, based on pre-configurations (ibid). To answer the research question, the study used event ethnography and participant observation to collect data on youth engagement at IUCN GYS and WCC.

1.7.2. Data Analysis

This thesis has employed both content and thematic analysis to analyse the data collected. Qualitative content analysis involves the interpretation and categorisation of data based on themes, emotions, and subjective experiences (Stemler, 2015). It allows researchers to analyse data from multiple sources such as texts, visual stimuli, and audio data (Stemler, 2015). Additionally, thematic analysis was employed to further identify, analyse, and interpret patterns in collected data (Riger and Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). It is particularly useful for exploring behaviour and human experiences. It involves searching for recurring ideas in a data set (Riger and Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). Utilising thematic analysis, the researcher was able to gain a deeper understanding of the data in addition to identifying areas of significance to ultimately generate new insights and potentially, theories. It is also argued to provide a transparent, systematic, and replicable methodology that can be replicated, enhancing the rigor and credibility of the research findings (Riger and Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). Both the content and thematic analytical methods worked in a complimentary way to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multiple sources of data collected. Content analysis was used to analyse the reports, interview transcripts, press statement and online media posts to identify the topics and themes discussed in the data (Stemler, 2015). The thematic analysis was used to identify the underlying meaning, emotions and experiences associated with the topics and themes identified through content analysis.

Furthermore, a thematical review can be established though processes that are organised through narratives' (Jones et al, 2023). By collecting various narratives from youth in different spaces and governance processes in conservation, a narrative structure of storylines was established in each of the empirical chapters. Storylines draw from images, discussions, written and spoken language and symbols to justify or question ways of life (Jones et al, 2023). A multiplicity of actors including policy makers, politicians, teachers, parents, academics, community leaders have participated in re(producing) story lines about youth (Jones et al, 2023). Thus, through a thematic review of the narratives of the youth participants in this research study, story lines were identified from themes and then utilised to trace how youth as a social category are reproduced within environmental governance spaces and in the context of conservation.

The researcher utilised Atlas TI Software to organise and analyse data from documentary evidence and interviews through coding, data organisation, and visualisation. Coding is an analytical tool that is described as the process of categorising data to facilitate analysis (Gibbs, 2012). Deductive coding was utilised to systematically identify important moments that were rich in information, organise that data and derive themes from them (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Deductive coding facilitated the categorisation of uploaded data, identification of patterns, themes, and relationships between reports, press statements, interviews, and online posts. For example, the coding of the data used in Chapter 5 on youth and leadership was derived from identified common themes, which were colour coded according to participants' responses that were thematically similar. The colour red, for instance, was used for responses related to family perceptions about conservation careers. Secondly, the Atlas TI software offers a range of visualisation tools, such as network diagrams and cluster trees, which helped to understand the relationships between different pieces of data. Through coding, the generated themes can be identified, labelled, and sorted with other similar themes for analysis (Gibbs, 2012). Coding is elaborated in detail within the individual empirical chapters. For the overall discussion of the research analysis, three main coding branches emerged: youth classifications or definitions, methods of engagement and youth transitions. Sub-codes in each theme were identified and they were associated with similar themes regarding age, occupation, education, or exposure to nature. Through coding, themes such as youth classifications, access and youth engagement dynamics emerged from quotes and statements from the data in each of the empirical chapters.

1.7.3. Research limitations and unaddressed participants

Collecting multiple sources of data came with its challenges. The uncertainty surrounding the COVID19 pandemic affected the research and PhD timeline. Pre-pandemic, the research was designed to solely focus on fieldwork in the Bushbuckridge area in Mpumalanga, South Africa. However, because of border closures, the uncertainty of international travel and the restrictions of COVID19 regulations in different countries, fieldwork was postponed by 4 months. The delay, plus the uncertainty of travel and related restrictions, resulted in the modification of the research focus and methods because the field site in South Africa could not be accessed. The changes included conducting an event ethnography at the IUCN WCC and GYS which was also postponed from June 2020 to January 2021, and was later postponed to September 2021

because of COVID19. The changes resulted in me conducting the event ethnography at the GYS in April 2021 and then at the WCC in September 2021.

Conducting interviews and an event ethnography on a virtual platform was challenging because it was difficult to see and access participants. The lack of physical interaction resulted in impersonal interviews at the start that gradually improved as the GYS progressed. This however, made it difficult for those interviewed at the beginning, to trust me and participate in the process openly and freely. Furthermore, there was a lengthy waiting period between the WCC in September 2021 and the publication of the Youth Strategy (later published in September of 2022). Therefore, analysis of data could not be completed without this document and that had a domino effect on when the paper (Chapter 4) could be completed.

Additionally, the research covered multiple sites and participants who contributed immensely to the research. However, due to ethical considerations, it was not possible to include children and youth under 18 years old. Furthermore, the experiences of environmental monitors in their villages or communities could not be covered due to a medical emergency during the fieldwork in October 2022, and as a result, interviews had to be conducted virtually. Furthermore, this study primarily focused on the experiences of youth participants from countries in the Global South, particularly Africa. However, the global chapter on IUCN briefly mentions some experiences from South American youth, without addressing them at the same length or breadth as those from Africa. Additionally, it has not addressed youth from Asia and the Global North. Moreover, the research was unable to engage with donors, funders, and philanthropists in the conservation sector who fund youth-based programmes and scholarships. Finally, the research focused primarily on youth who engage with conservation in the spaces provided through these organisations to capture their experiences. There are several other conferences and youth-based programmes that may be considered for future research.

1.7.4. *Ethical considerations*

This thesis acknowledges the significance of ethical considerations in qualitative research to safeguard the participants involved in this study (Arifin, 2018). During the interviews, the research participants were informed of the research objective, which was to contribute to this doctoral research. The information provided to participants included the position of the researcher as a student at the University of Lausanne and a Zimbabwean national. Participants

were informed that the interviews and observations would be kept confidential and would only be used for the purpose of writing this thesis and related scholarly outputs. To ensure the protection of the participants, the researcher reflected on how the information presented in this thesis may cause future harm to them. The youth participants are either associated with or work for the UNIL, IUCN, LCA, and SAWC. To address concerns about participant vulnerability resulting from discussions about their organisations, anonymity will be ensured for all research participants. Pseudonyms or codes will be used for identification purposes to safeguard their identities. These codes are further elaborated in each empirical chapter.

Furthermore, the participants were asked for their voluntary and free consent to participate in the data collection processes. All participants provided verbal consent. During interviews the research participants were informed of their right to refuse or stop the interviews at any point during the data collection process. Additionally, when conducting interviews, explicit consent was obtained from each participant to record the conversation. For those who declined recording, detailed notes were taken. During fieldwork in Bushbuckridge, South Africa, the research assistant, Lambert Simango, accompanied the researcher and assisted in arranging meetings with community and traditional leaders while adhering to all relevant protocols and practices. Furthermore, this research did not use any confidential information from the LCA Council Meetings or Board meetings.

Lastly, the ethics surrounding youth participants had to be considered when designing the research approach. In qualitative research, issues of informed consent, privacy, vulnerability, and potential psychological harm are often at the heart of ethical concerns about interviewing or observing children. To prioritise the well-being of children and uphold ethical research practices, it was decided not to interview or observe children and youth under the age of 18. Although individuals under the age of 18 are important to the discussion on youth, collecting data from them would have been challenging due to the multiple sites, countries, and platforms involved, as well as the various ethical protocols and regulations associated with minors in each country and across platforms.

1.7.5. Research positionality

This brief section is written in the first person to capture the experience of conducting the research from the perspective of a young person studying young people. As a qualitative

researcher, I considered it important to reflect on my research processes to understand how my role and relationships with the research context, participants and data may have shaped the research outcomes (Koch, 2022). The process of understanding my positionality involves critically reflecting on my personal experience as a young African female investigating youth in conservation governance spaces. I considered myself as a subject of my own research and endeavoured to immerse myself in the research spaces as a young person and a researcher. These two roles allowed me to both observe and participate in the discussions and activities of my participants. This allowed me to experience the opportunities and challenges faced by my participants. Throughout my research and data collection periods, I embodied the duality of researcher and participant. I have briefly outlined my positionality in this regard.

Conducting fieldwork in multiple sites was an exciting opportunity to explore youth involvement in conservation using various methods. It became evident that funding played a significant role in this area. To attend the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Marseille, funding was organised by my supervisor Gretchen Walters and Antoine Guisan through the UNIL Faculty of Geosciences and Environment, Faculty of Medicine and Biology, the International Relations office, and the IUCN-UNIL partnership. This enabled a delegation of thirteen students to attend the WCC. Apart from three students who were either IUCN Commission members or under the age of 24 and therefore offered a discount, the other ten students and I had to volunteer to compensate for the WCC full registration cost (see Summary Report of the UNIL Delegation to WCC in Annex 2). As a volunteer session rapporteur at the WCC, I conducted interviews with participants to gain insight into the proceedings and the perspectives of youth participants who were involved as speakers or attendees. I also gained an internal understanding of the WCC proceedings. Furthermore, I gained insight from my fellow UNIL delegates. Being a student at UNIL was beneficial as it provided me with access to conduct research through the IUCN-UNIL partnership. In addition, because of my interviews, I was invited to become a member of the IUCN Youth Taskforce for Eastern and Southern Africa for the Species Survival Commission.

In addition, my research facilitated my involvement with the LCA through their weekly Unlocking Nature webinars. I co-hosted and facilitated the Unlocking Nature weekly talks in 2021 and the Rethinking Conservation monthly seminar series in 2022. I am also currently the Chair of the Youth Advisory Council and a member of the Share Screen Africa Advisory Board. As a youth leader, I was invited to attend the annual Council Meetings in Botswana and

South Africa in 2022 and 2023. Attending these meetings and sitting on the Youth Advisory Council has been a rewarding experience. The LCA provided youth leaders with access to social networks, mentorship, and skills development regarding organisational etiquette and protocol. Interactions with the LCA have been both as a recipient of knowledge, skills, and resources and as a researcher. With the help and insight of some members of the Youth Advisory Council, I have reflected on my experiences and how to effectively engage with other youth in universities and youth organisations across the continent. As part of this process, we collectively formulated the LCA Youth Prospectus, a strategy document outlining the responsibilities and roles of youth leaders in relation to the broader LCA Organisation (See Annex 2). Lastly, conducting research and writing about youth leadership while closely associated with the LCA proved to be a challenging task. It was often difficult to maintain objectivity and separate my role as a youth leader from that of an impartial researcher.

Conducting fieldwork in Bushbuckridge, South Africa was a challenging yet rewarding experience. Due to water shortages and safety concerns regarding gender-based violence and COVID-19, it was difficult to find suitable accommodation near the research participants. As a result, my research assistant, Lambert Simango, and I had to drive long distances to visit the participants. Lambert assumed several roles during the fieldwork. Besides assisting in accessing the research sites, his presence as a male figure provided me with a sense of security against the possibility of gender-based violence as a single woman. In addition, my networks in the LCA facilitated the solution to the accommodation challenge by connecting me with a key informant at the SAWC. This connection enabled me to secure accommodation at a location frequently visited by youth from surrounding communities for conservation training and capacity building. Living on campus with my participants provided me with valuable insight into their experiences at and with SAWC, as well as their experiences with conservation in the villages. In addition, I established valuable friendships with the participants, whom I am still in contact with today. This has enabled me to maintain communication with my research participants and request follow-up interviews for clarification when necessary.

1.8. Thesis outline and paper contributions

This chapter has introduced the aim of the thesis, the research questions and the methods used to collect and analyse the data that will be presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. This chapter has shown that the research focuses on youth as a lens to understand governance, conservation, and

engagement. In the following chapter (Chapter 2), the thesis will discuss the theoretical framework of Youth Studies that underpins this research. Situating the concept of youth in the broader Youth Studies literature exposes the debates, the benefits, and limitations of applying youth to global and local phenomena such as conservation practices. Having situated the Youth Studies debates, the thesis then traces youth in the environmental governance, conservation, and engagement literature in Chapter 3, as these concepts underpin the empirical chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6). Chapter 3 anchors the thesis by presenting the core concepts that have been identified to address the objectives of this research and where youth have emerged as important stakeholders and actors (youth engagement, youth in governance and youth in biodiversity conservation). Chapters 2 and 3 are therefore a prelude to the three empirical chapters.

The thesis then segues into the three empirical case studies that have built and informed this thesis. As highlighted earlier, it will begin with the case study of IUCN and the discussion on youth engagement in global conservation governance. IUCN provides a lens into global level youth engagement with conservation. Secondly, it will delve into the regional level of leadership positions and strategies of youth in Leadership for Conservation in Africa organisation and the Southern African Wildlife College. This case study is inclusive of youth experiences from southern, and east Africa in the context of engaging with leadership frameworks. Lastly, it will discuss local level experiences of youth in conservation labour though employment and unemployment. It draws on the concept of liminality to discuss youth experiences in the communities neighbouring the Kruger National Park, South Africa. It draws on youth experiences from the Belfast community and youth employed in the Environmental Monitors Programme of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF-6). Thereafter, the thesis will discuss and analyse each of the empirical chapters in relation to the concepts presented and will draw how youth engagement in conservation has been inhibited or encouraged in governance approaches. It will end with the conclusion which summarises the contributions of the overall study and outlines future research prospects from angles, questions or themes that were not fully explored.

Lastly, this doctoral research will be published in journal articles and book chapters (Table 4). Each of the empirical chapters stand as an independent contribution that have been accepted, are under review, or will be submitted for peer reviewed publication. Additionally, during the

Doctorate programme, the author has made non-thesis contributions that were published in peer-reviewed journals and magazines.

Table 4: Outlines chapter contributions for publication in peer reviewed journals and books. Furthermore, it outlines non-thesis contributions the author has made to peer reviewed journal articles and non-academic works throughout the course of her doctoral research.

Paper and book contributions from this thesis	Contribution of authors						Status
	Conception	Fieldwork	Analysis	Writing	Editing	Supervision	
Sithole, S.S., Walters, G.M, Mbatha P, and Matose, F. Youth engagement in global conservation governance *Journal of Conservation Biology*	SS, GW	SS	SS, GW, PM, FM	SS	SS, GW, PM, FM	GW, FM	Accepted
Sithole, S.S., Walters, G.M, Sithole, M.D. and Matose, F. Youth leadership in conservation governance.	SS	SS	SS	SS	SS, GW, MD	GW, FM	Not yet submitted
Sithole, S.S, Walters, G.M, Matose, F and Simango, L. Youth, and conservation in the Greater Kruger National Park landscape *Book Publication: Bristol University Press*	SS	SS, LS	SS	SS	SS, GW, FM	GW, FM	Submitted (under 2nd round of reviews)
Additional publications							
Sithole, S. S., Fernandes, M., Hymas, O., Sharma, K., & Walters, G. (2021). Stuck in the Colonial Past? Perpetuating Racist, Environmental Myths of Kenya in a Swiss Zoo. Anthropological Journal of European Cultures, 30(2), 95-111.	SS, GW, OH	SS, GW, OH, MF	SS, GW, OH, MF, KS	SS, GW, OH, MF, KS	SS, GW, OH, MF, KS	GW, OH	Published: September 2021

Citation							
Shackleton, R. T., Walters, G., Bluwstein, J., Djoudi, H., Fritz, L., Lafaye de Micheaux, F., ... & Kull, C. A. (2023). Navigating power in conservation. *Conservation science and practice*, *5*(3), e12877.	RS, CK, GW	All authors		RS		RS, CK, GW	Published: January 2023
Zhang, Y., West, P., Thakholi, L., Suryawanshi, K., Supuma, M., Straub, D., ... & Agyei, F. K. (2023). Governance and conservation effectiveness in protected areas and indigenous and locally managed areas. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, *48*, 559-588.	PW, DB	All authors	PW, DB	All authors	PW, DB	PW, DB	Published: November 2023
Sithole, S.S, Walters, G.M and Hymas, O. (2023). Indigenous peoples and local communities' perspectives represented in exhibits. WAZA News Magazine. Issue number 4. 2023.	SS, GW, OH	SS, GW	SS, GW, OH	SS	SS, GW, OH	SS, GW, OH	Published: December 2023
Walters, G.M, S.S. Sithole and Hymas, O. (2024). Zoos and aquariums are changing how they engage with indigenous peoples and local communities WAZA News Magazine. Issue number 1. 2024.	GW, SS, OH	SS, GW	GW, SS, OH	GW	GW, SS, OH	SS, GW, OH	Published: **March, 2024**

CHAPTER 2.

Youth: A Theoretical Lens

2. Introduction

This chapter introduces Youth Studies as a lens through which concepts such as governance and conservation can be analysed and critiqued. As a conceptual lens, Youth Studies assists in interrogating the policies, beliefs and behaviours that have shaped and continue to shape how youth are classified and positioned in global and local events. In this light, this chapter seeks to anchor youth as a concept and a lens to understand how youth emerge in conservation, governance, and engagement which will be discussed in the chapter to follow (Chapter 3).

Youth Studies is an inter-disciplinary framework that comprises multiple viewpoints that originate from the field of sociology (Woodman and Bennett, 2015). It also draws from various fields, including education, anthropology, history, human geography, cultural studies, and media studies. It provides an objective opportunity to map the intersection of local and global phenomena related to youth identities (Woodman and Bennet, 2015). The Youth Studies lens aims to gain a holistic understanding of what it means to be young (Wood, 2017). This includes how youth are formed, researched, reported, and represented, as well as how they negotiate and navigate the intersections that contribute to their identities (McLeod, 2009). The next section discusses how the Youth Studies concept and youth debates have developed.

2.2. Culture and Transitions: the 'twin tracks' of Youth Studies

Historically, Youth Studies have taken two perspectives in youth research known as the 'twin tracks': transitions and culture (Cohen, 2003; Woodman and Bennett, 2015; Wood, 2017). Transitions have focused on the processes leading to adulthood such as completing education or training and entering the labour economy (Kehily, 2013; Woodman and Bennett, 2015). Transitions help to identify the inequalities embedded in the processes and patterns of youth development whilst the cultural perspective focuses on social identities or sub-cultures used to relate to youth or their behaviour (e.g. trends in music, fashion, language) (Woodman and Bennett, 2015). Drawing on anthropological methods such as ethnographies, cultural researchers seek to understand the meaning of experiences and events for youth to reflect on their resistance or rebellion to the social norms and how these have shaped their collective identity (ibid). However, these twin-tracks have caused division in Youth Studies because scholars tend to rely on a single track resulting in limitations in obtaining holistic views of

youth (Woods, 2017). As such, scholars have sought to bridge this divide using complimentary concepts, such as citizenship theory and the concept of liminality (Wood, 2017; Tomlinson, 2023). This thesis aims to examine the experience of youth utilising a combination of the transitional and cultural lens.

Youth Studies using the cultural lens focus on youth as a social identity (Bennet, 2007). Social identities are embedded in discursive constructs in which identity is embedded in processes that describe and can shape individual and collective behaviour (Bennet, 2007; Shackleton et al, 2023). Discursive constructs can be more easily understood in the context of discursive power. Discursive power is present in social relationships and is exerted through knowledge and prevailing ideas that govern individuals and spaces by influencing human and non-human behaviour and life itself (Carpenter, 2020). Within sociology, Giddens described it as "what to do; how to act; who to be?" (Giddens, 1991: 70 in Bennet, 2007: 24). In this regard, youth identities are recognised as a modernist social category following the socio-economic changes post Second World War (Bennet, 2007). The socio-economic changes resulted in an increase in spending power among the younger demographic. As a result, consumer products were targeted towards youth, giving them an independent status as a social group (Bennet, 2007). In fact, youth or youthfulness was associated with consumerism as the term became linked to lifestyle preferences such as anti-ageing products, super foods, cosmetics and health and wellness (Bennet, 2007). Thus, there was a gradual weakening of the association of youth as 'young' to middle-aged sensibilities of aging. As such, aging was regarded as the process of managing reflexive negotiations of the surface-body and its presentation (Bennet, 2007). In this context, youth identities were framed according to societal changes.

The social constructions of youth embody the premise of youth transitions. With transitions the human body was associated with a project that could only be completed once certain life choices (for example, being a parent) (Bennet, 2007) have been made. Scholars in Youth Studies have drawn on the transitional experience of youth because it maps the processes youth embody and undergo to attain normative markers underpinned through a series of steps into an economically independent adulthood (Cuervo and Wyn, 2014; Wood, 2017; Thieme, 2018; Tomlinson, 2023). Therefore, youth identities are intricately linked within youth transitions because the notions of self are rooted in attaining adulthood and adult responsibilities using social and economic markers.

Traditional transitions research adopts a futuristic focus on 'becoming' which may overlook the current states of youth or their present and everyday relationships with time and space (Wood, 2017). This thesis partners the transitional perspectives by utilising Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner's liminality theory. Relating youth transitions with liminality reveals some of the processes embedded in youth 'being' (Turner, 1967; Turner, 2017; Tomlinson, 2023). Embedded in African ritualistic practices, youth 'being' is explained as a form of existence and is defined between two points in time and space referred to as a 'betweenness' or the 'threshold' (Tomlinson, 2023: 3). According to the concept of liminality, an individual in transition occupies a space that is not marked by a defined social role or identity; it is a transient space between previous and future states of being (ibid). These transient spaces are embodied internally within youth themselves in addition to externally, encompassing the spaces in which they occupy. Internally, it would be described by their transition from childhood to adulthood (Kehily, 2013). Van Gennep explored two types of liminality or rites of passage: from one status to another and one season to another (Varvarousis, 2020). While an entire group or individual can be involved in the rites that mark the change of status, the rites that mark a change from one season to another are temporal.

For Van Gennep, liminality could help explain all transitions in the societies he observed (Varvarousis, 2020). Thus, liminality may help understand youth transitional experiences because the concept grasps how individuals or groups "live on through the uncertainties of the in-between" (Varvarousis, 2020: 502). For example, the process of completing formal education and seeking employment could be used to capture transitional experiences (Kehily, 2013). Liminality helps tease out "the unsettledness, the anxiety, the hope" in addition to the subject's "transitional identities, shaken subjects that are capable of thinking and acting in unauthorised, unexpected and potentially innovative ways" (Varvarousis, 2020: 502). Liminality assists in understanding youth beyond the often-misused social category. Depending on political interests, theoretical perspectives and research methodologies, youth is a term that can have different meanings (Threadgold, 2019). Therefore, investigating the different tracks of Youth Studies allows scholars to critically engage with other concepts such as justice, governance, engagement, employment, labour, or leadership to understand how youth are positioned across different discursive and ontological spaces (Threadgold, 2019). Although, the discussions in this thesis do not directly relate to the social movements within Youth Studies, it acknowledges the importance especially regarding youth-centred resistance

movements such as Fridays for Future in the climate change arena or the Arab Spring in the political and social arenas.

Youth Studies provide an understanding of youth as a social construct, encompassing ideals, identities, behaviours, and practices (Mhlongo, 2016; Iwilade, 2022). For example, social scientists, and politicians and business actors co-create heuristic identities of youth depending on their interests or orientations towards youth (Threadgold, 2019). As such, youth as a social group can have different meanings to different groups. For example:

> … 'youth' has been embraced by powerful forces to do specific ideological work…This is valuable conceptual analysis of youth, which draws on a selection of data, media, institutions and the like… this thing we call 'youth' is quite different, even though we are concerned with the same social problems (Threadgold, 2019: 690).

However, the Youth Studies track of transitions present a linear and individualistic presentation of order thus failing to recognise the fluidity and complexity in the lives of young people (Wood, 2017). The transitional lens presupposes the existence of accessible housing and waged labour, which are not always readily available (Wood, 2017). In other instances, youth remain in formal education for longer and thus are delayed from achieving these markers. Thus, more recent transition arguments contend against youth transitional perspectives that are adult-centric notions of politics and success which inadequately capture the complexity and heterogeneity of youth identities (McLeod, 2009; Wood, 2017). The use of a transitional perspective, with a focus on liminality, allows for a comprehensive understanding of youth experiences. This perspective considers not only individual factors, but also external influences, such as the impact of local and global phenomena.

Therefore, what are the implications of global and local phenomena on Youth Studies? As a lens that seeks to understand youth experiences, realities, and identities, it is important to acknowledge global and local undertakings, such as culture, economic processes, environmental agendas, or policies (McLeod, 2009). In fact, global debates such as "youth in crisis", "youth at risk", "youth as the future" not only situate youth subjectivities in relation to global events, but also illustrate how youth are defined or evaluated using a collective identity.

2.3. Defining youth through transitions

Youth are a heterogenous demographic category characterised by means of social, cultural, and political groupings. There is no single definition nor is there consensus on how to classify youth. Development geographers and anthropologists classify youth from the global South according to their precarity resulting from their uncertain futures (Thieme, 2018). They have been historically mobilised for the benefit of the labour economy, in conflict and for political interests (Thieme, 2018; Iwilade, 2019; Cuervo and Miranda, 2019). Youth engagement within environmental governance frameworks is complex because even though youth are not homogenous, they are categorised as if they are. For example, the use if definite social categories (notably age) shape their definition. Such definitions influence perceptions of youth as both problematic and vulnerable, while excluding the intersections of culture, race, gender, and class that would highlight the underlying complexity and diversity (Zeldin, 2004; Ansell et al, 2012).

This thesis therefore uses the concept of transitions in Youth Studies to explore the definition of youth and its implications. The life-stage of youth is dissociated with adulthood because it is coupled with the childhood and adolescent stage (Kehily, 2013) with the life-stage often being correlated with a "period dependency and, subordination" (Durham, 2007: 115;). The symbolic dimensions of personhood and agency and how they are identified thus characterise 'youth' (Durham, 2007). The life-stages can include the "…universal life course" of "infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth and adulthood" (Figure 1) (Durham, 2007:115). The United Nations (UN) classifies youth as those between the ages of 15 to 24, whereas World Health Organisation places them between 19 to 34 whilst IUCN and the African Youth Charter classify them between 15 and 35 years (Nrkumah, 2021).
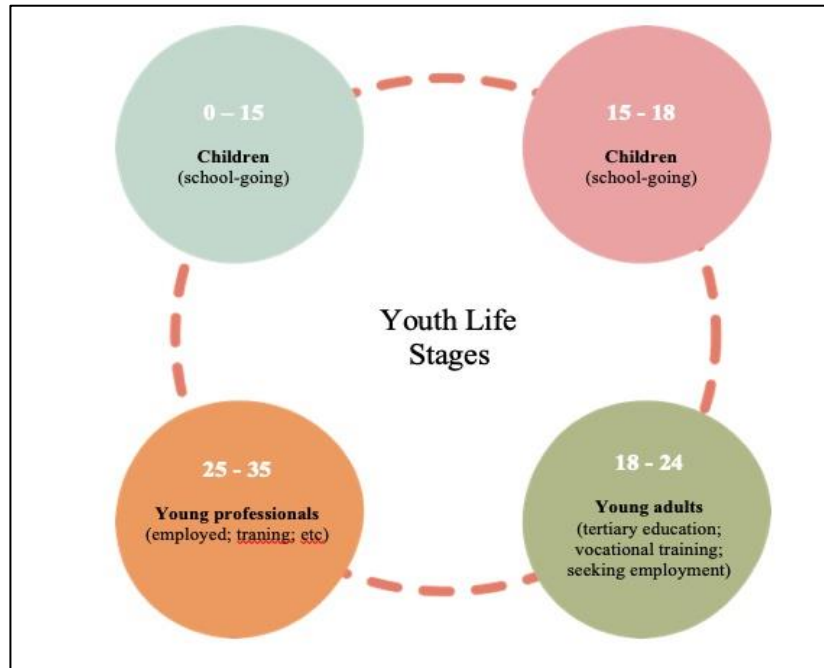
Figure 1: Youth Transition illustration adapted from the International Labour Organisation (2019). It illustrates the life stages of youth based on their ages.

Primarily utilising age as an indicator to define youth highlights complexities that may arise when engaging youth in governance. In doing so, the United Nations is inadvertently excluding those within the following 10-year period (25-35) which may have implications when youth seek funding or employment opportunities. The International Labour Organisation notes that these stages are fluid and although they are categorised according to age, youth are constantly in a state of transition and can occupy any of these stages (which may overlap) at various phases of life and depending on circumstances (ILO, 2019, Figure 1). The "age group" of the youth has dominated global and national youth policies using two lenses. Youth are either classified as radical or as a group to be recruited (Carpenter and Mojab, 2017). Firstly, as radicals, they are technologically prepared to engage in the digital revolution, culturally ready to absorb and propagate ideas and have an enormous appetite to consume commodities (Carpenter and Mojab, 2017: 2). Secondly, as a group to be enlisted, they are considered as a "force to be recruited, organised, mobilised, trained or skilled by the state" (ibid). This duality highlights the issues of simply defining youth without carefully analysing the social institutions or spaces or social processes that represent their experiences (Carpenter and Mojab, 2017).

However, some societies, cultures and often individuals do not associate age-related life stages with youth (Durham, 2007). For example, Bishop (2013) explains that youth in rural areas are disproportionately exposed to cultural and social inequalities that separate them from their

urban counterparts in the United States. These inequalities result in rural youth being understood through an at-risk and deficit lens thereby shaping their identity based on their context (Bishop, 2013). In fact, there is no consensus on the age that would classify an individual as a 'youth', yet several organisations use this as a primary indicator when defining them. As such, organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2019) challenge this by propagating that youth are constantly in a state of transition from childhood to adolescent to adult. This process is described as 'becoming' and constantly in transition to a destination that is not clearly defined but is determined by social-cultural determinants such as what one achieves, parenthood and employment (Cuervo and Miranda, 2019), such as the social and cultural connotations linked to "manhood" in the African context. The social-cultural determinants of marital status or parenthood can disqualify 'age' as an indicator for the identification of youth (Mwaura, 2017). Mwaura (2017: 345) demonstrates that culturally, for African youth, "adulthood is marked by fulfilment of certain obligations…providing for oneself and extended family, marrying, and contributing to society". Similarly, 'manhood' (linked to adulthood) in local South African traditions, denotes what Mwaura describes above in addition to circumcision in male initiation 'coming of age' ceremonies in some *Xhosa, Zulu* and *Venda* communities (Kumalo and Gama, 2018). This begs the question: would the connotation of manhood inhibit or encourage young men (described as youth because of age) from identifying as youth or from engaging with youth-targeted programs?

Importantly, youth are defined and demarcated differently, and this is highly dependent on which society is defining the term or group (Durham, 2007). Yet, the dominant indicator of age overlooks several other factors that differentiates youth and may exclude certain groups within youth, from engaging in conservation and decision-making. As such, the external constructions of identity, formulated by those with power (for example, fixed cultural norms, institutions, and governments) has a direct impact on which and how youth can engage (Buckingham, 2008). The literature therefore conceptualises youth beyond age in the following four ways. Firstly, 'youth' is not a static term or group. It is socially constructed and defined in multiple ways and contested within literature. Secondly, 'youth' is influenced by a variety of factors such as culture, gender, and context specific dynamics (Iwilade, 2019; Cuervo and Miranda, 2019). Thirdly, 'youth' is a characterised as "modern invention…resulting from an extension of the period of transition that lasts from the end of compulsory schooling to entry into waged labour…" and varies between different social groups and cultural contexts (Buckingham, 2008: 4). Lastly, as a group, youth are constantly being socially constructed

according to securitisation policies that define them as a risk, versus the social policies that define them as particular "subjects that are knowledgeable workers and virtuous engaged moral citizens" (Carpenter and Mojab, 2017: 1).

Fundamentally, as a concept, 'youth' is an embodiment of classifications, practices and transitions stemming from the perspectives of politicians, researchers, and other actors, which in turn influence youth policies (Ansel et al, 2012: 44; Carpenter and Mojab, 2017; Iwilade, 2019). As a political category, youth are classified as those who are deployed at historical moments when the reordering of cultural norms is necessary and key to the reproduction of capitalist social relations (Carpenter and Mojab, 2017). For example, the identity of the youth in tackling developmental issues is argued to be largely political because they are mobilised, positioned, and deployed as human capital that can assist in building the economy (Zimmerman, 2007). For example, youth within Africa are identified according to the unemployment crisis versus the swelling youth population. Ackah-Baidoo (2016) argues that policymakers' response to the unprecedented youth unemployment level is a consequence of the nation-states failure to engage youth and recognise their needs. This is partly because donor agencies (for example, World Bank and the UN) label youth unemployment as the most multifaceted and pressing developmental problem that Africa faces (Ackah-Biadoo 2016). As such, Carpenter and Mojab (2017: 1) also state that the youth are constantly facing "social, political and material crisis and are uniquely positioned within the nexus of politics, economics, material and social insecurity".

2.4. Temporal implications on youth definitions

Time is a crucial aspect embedded in youth definitions especially within decision-making and governance where its parameters are implicitly (climate crisis demands we act today for the benefit of future generations) and explicitly applied when establishing regulations or calls to action such as the Sustainable Developmental Goals 2030 (time-limits and deadlines for action). There is an implicit referral to the present and the future when denoting youth. The tension of time and youth is expressed in liminality; for instance, the processes within work to school transitions is experienced when youth must negotiate their present realities with future orientations such as job prospects, housing, and salaries (Tomlinson, 2023). These temporal implications are also felt with employment. Yet, Bornemann and Strassheim (2019) argue that the implication of time is rarely considered in decision-making for sustainability; for example,

youth engagement is necessary for sustainability governance, but this is heavily influenced by how they are defined.

As mentioned previously, youth classifications are often related to temporal classification such as age. For example, within policies, youth may be described as the "future generation", "future" and "younger generations". Sustainability governance highlights the burden of responsibility placed on youth due to spatial and temporal dimensions of the environmental problems being faced. Within conservation discussions about sustainability and strategies to overcome environmental challenges, youth are often described as future leaders. The sentiments that youth are bearing the burden of responsibility for past actions and decisions that are impacting the current environment and thus, youth (described as "future leaders") need to generate solutions for an uncertain future (eco anxiety) (Mkhize et al., 2022). Instead, the actions are not prioritised to combat the issue promptly but are pushed to the future. As such, youth and time are interrelated and as youth age, the environmental problems they are encountering also intensify.

2.5.   Limitations of Youth Studies

Youth Studies aims to position young people in the context of global and local phenomena through academic analysis (McLeod, 2009). This requires avoiding biases resulting from the dispositions and perspectives produced within what Pierre Bourdieu describes as the 'collective unconscious' of the academic field (McLeod, 2009: 271). McLeod (2009) argues that the collective unconscious is a perspective without history that accumulates practices and habits of academics that cannot be reduced to individuals. For instance, Walther et al. (2019) suggest that combining children and youth in the context of participation creates a confusing hybrid category of youth. Within the youth age bracket there is often an overlap between children and youth. Childhood is a stage during which individuals are not entitled to participate fully in formal legal and political processes reserved for adults, such as voting which may be in some countries from the age of 18 (Walther et al., 2019). Definitions, however, label youth from the age of 15. Using Youth Studies to comprehend youth experiences can be complicated due to these subtleties. Therefore, it is crucial to question the concept of youth by asking: to whom are they referring?

Furthermore, Youth Studies are historically rooted in Western or global North based research (Cooper et al., 2019). The theories may contain contextual assumptions that conflict with the realities faced by youth in the global South. It is worth noting that 90% of the global youth population resides in Africa, Asia, and South America, yet much of the literature is generated from the Global North (Cooper et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important to consider the experiences of youth in the context of their transitions and cultures. For instance, in the Global South, regions and people have been impacted by the inequalities resulting from colonialism (Cooper et al., 2019). This includes unequal wealth distribution, resource extraction, modernisation, economic development, and race, which in turn affect poverty levels, unemployment, violence, conflict, and educational attainment. Cooper, Swartz, and Mahali in South Africa investigate whether researchers view the purpose of their work as seeking radical change or maintaining the status quo. Youth Studies researchers in the global South often encounter rampant inequalities in townships and rural areas, making their contributions more urgent (Cooper et al. 2019: 30). The research of meta-concepts such as youth is complicated by global North-South dynamics. It is crucial to consider the local and temporal specificities that inform or relate to global and abstract notions adopted across various local (national) contexts (McLeod, 2009).

Nonetheless, it is important to note that global and local conceptions do not always interact, and global ideas do not necessarily dominate local youth cultures. Furthermore, these conceptions do not exist as exclusive spatial relations (McLeod, 2009). The aim of this thesis is to recognise the flow of knowledge and experiences between global to local spaces. The classifications of youth between the global and local often present a utopian sense of open possibilities in various forms of romanticised youth identities (McLeod, 2009). For example, the 2018 United Nations Youth Declaration titled 'We the Future' aimed to unite the voices of the youth to find global solutions to worldwide problems: it called on states, governments, and all individuals to respect, consider, and ensure access to education, among other recommendations, for youth (UN NGO, 2018: 3). This thesis aims to contribute to Youth Studies by conceptualising the perspectives of young people from the Global South in the environmental sphere of conservation in various governance positions and spaces.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Youth Studies can enable scholars to reflect objectively on the constructs and claims related to youth. This reflexivity provides an opportunity to focus on the dualities that the concepts of youth offer. Furthermore, the chapter introduced Youth Studies as a critical approach that surpasses traditional methods, which frequently disregard the agency of youth. It considers how societal factors influence young people's ability to engage in governance. As this chapter has shown, youth are both a social category and a state of being and are heterogenous and cannot easily be categorised. Through Youth Studies and liminality, youth are influenced by social identities and internal processes of transition that impact their state of becoming and social positions. Therefore, this thesis engages with these debates to interrogate youth experiences in the context of conservation.

The following chapter examines the role of youth in environmental governance, conservation, and engagement literature. Considering the debates presented in Youth Studies, this study questions the conceptual framing of youth and their classification based on age in governance. This will help to clarify the position of youth as a social category in policy and governance for conservation.

CHAPTER 3.

Exploring Youth in Conservation, Governance and Engagement Literatures

3. Introduction

After a discussion of youth as a concept and social category in the Youth Studies literature, this chapter will now locate the emergence of youth in the debates that have informed the empirical chapters of this research. The purpose of this chapter is to review the debates surrounding youth in the literature on environmental governance, conservation, and engagement. This chapter examines the literature on engagement in governance to understand how different groups, including individuals, organisations, communities, and states, engage in conservation decision-making and implementation. This chapter will first introduce the concepts of governance and conservation in relation to youth and then discusses youth engagement.

3.1. Situating youth in environmental governance, conservation, and engagement literature

It is important to begin by discussing the debates surrounding conservation and governance. Governance will be discussed in the context of environmental governance to encompass the various processes of decision-making, knowledge creation and dissemination and policy in the conservation domain. These processes are cross-cutting and involve a myriad of actors from the global, regional, and local levels. Governance is defined by Bornemann and Strassheim (2019: 1003) as "all attempts of organising collective action to reach common goals, such as sustainability" or conservation. Simply put, governance is understanding who is engaged in decision-making, concerning what topic, and through what means. Environmental governance involves a "set of regulatory processes, mechanisms and organisations through which political actors influence environmental actions and outcomes" (Lemos and Agrawal, 2006: 298). The processes and political actors in governance include environmental NGO's (non-governmental organisations), international accords, national policies, and legislation and (but not limited to), transnational institutions (Lemos and Agrawal, 2006). Environmental governance may also include a multiplicity of knowledge and ideas contributed by various actors. For example, the influence of socially constructed scientific and traditional knowledge systems on ideas, objectives and strategies that guide environmental policies (Blaikie, 1995).

In conservation, 'natural protectionists' advocate for 'people -free' protected areas which are rooted in scientific biological knowledge (Terborgh and Peres, 2017; Armitage et al 2020: 2). This view of 'untouched nature' results in policies and practices that legitimised the forced

removal and disenfranchisement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities from decision-making and access to natural resources surrounding protected areas (Armitage et al 2020: 2). At its advent, conservation was designed using the Western view of nature as being separate from people. Together with the fences and fines approach, these dominant ideas of conservation influenced the creation of national parks or conservancies in the Global South, that were established to keep animals in and humans out (Dowie and Nov, 2009; Robbins and Doolittle, 2012; Duffy et al, 2019; Domínguez and Luoma, 2020).

Conservation is widely defined as the scientific study of nature and Earth's biodiversity with the purpose to protect species and ecosystems from extinction or erosion (Songorwa et al, 2000; Magome and Murombedzi, 2003; Robbins and Doolittle, 2012; Duffy et al, 2019; Domínguez and Luoma, 2020; Ramutsindela et al, 2022). Among critical conservation scholars, biodiversity protection is viewed as an exclusionary practice that advocated for the pristine, untouched wilderness that was devoid of human influence (Adam and Hulme, 2001; Ramutsindela, 2008; Kepe, 2009; Songorwa et al, 2000; Magome and Murombedzi, 2003; Robbins and Doolittle, 2012; Duffy et al, 2019; Domínguez and Luoma, 2020; Thakholi, 2021; Ramutsindela et al, 2022). Furthermore, the British model, which considered national parks or protected areas as requiring intensive management, also influenced the structure of national parks (Hutton et al, 2005). Protected areas were established as a colonial project in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1890s, perpetuating the narrative of the significance of the aesthetic value and uniqueness of wildlife (Hutton et al, 2005). Thereafter, the post-colonial state was regarded as the legal owner of these protected areas whilst native groups or Indigenous Peoples were seen as incapable of being effective stewards of natural resources (Songorwa et al, 2000; Ramutsindela, 2008; Ramutsindela et al, 2022).

However, more recent geopolitical frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), have challenged these scientific understandings of the environment that once dictated decision-making (Pascual, 2023). Conservation has been, and continues to be, dominated by the natural sciences, but there is an increase in interdisciplinary and human-centred conservation research and interventions, particularly with the social sciences (Bennet and Roth, 2019). Policy processes have had to contend with social phenomena, cultural contexts, and traditional knowledge to provide solutions to local challenges (Domínguez and Luoma, 2020). This approach is described as an interactionist way of understanding society and the environment

and has been more recently classified as decolonising conservation (Blaikie, 1995; Dominguez and Louma, 2020). As such, various knowledge structures, which include ideas and beliefs, continue to inform conservation and its governance.

Environmental governance goes further to explain the allocation of resources and ascribes responsibility and authority to actors to make decisions for conservation outcomes (Lemos and Agrawal, 2006; Mbatha, 2022). In fact, concepts such as power help to understand the interactions between conservation actions, decisions and the relationships between different actors and ideas (Shackleton et al., 2023). For example, the struggle between marine protected areas, controlled by the state, and small-scale fishing communities along the South African coast, who have customary rights to access the sea, is an apt illustration of this point (Mbatha, 2022). Historically, rural coastal communities have been custodians of marine resources, however, plural governance systems undermine rural community customary laws, resulting in contestation over the access and use of coastal spaces and as such has been described as a 'wicked problem' (Mbatha, 2022). This illustrates the top-down relationship between the state and locals, where regulations are often forced onto communities without their consent or input (Dowie and Nov, 2009; Mbatha, 2022). Local communities may feel compelled to operate outside the conservation framework to maintain or preserve their livelihood practices (often perceived as poaching), and as such are portrayed as working against the conservation practices that the state and environmental agencies are trying to uphold. The effects of forced displacement have been felt not only in and around protected areas, but also in governance and decision-making spaces, thereby shaping the asymmetrical power relations between the various stakeholders with an interest in the biodiversity resource (Igoe and Brockington, 2006; Tauli-Corpuz et al, 2020).

For instance, access to decision-making determines how actors behave and how youth for example, participate in governance and are engaged. The concept of marginalisation presupposes the inclusion or exclusion of people or objects from systems and the environment (Moller, 2000). When discussing youth, the terms inclusion, exclusion, and marginalisation are often used to describe their position in society and environmental governance, particularly in relation to participation (van der Westhuizen, 2021). Therefore, the involvement or non-involvement, attachment or non-attachment of individuals or groups in relation to subsystems of society can be analysed through the concepts of inclusion and exclusion (Moller, 2000). According to Moller (2000), marginality refers to a stage or space between exclusion and

inclusion, where individuals who desire and have the capacity to fulfil societal norms lack the opportunities to engage. These positions and actions are often enacted through youth policies, which are based on inequalities between young people and other actors such as the state or environmental organisations (Walther et al., 2019). Youth policies reflect how societies deal with youth through designed organisational frameworks, both governmental and non-governmental, that mobilise activities on, for and with youth according to Walther and co-authors,

> This means, the way in which young people are addressed and link their selves with the community by engaging voluntarily for the 'common good' and by subjecting themselves to the knowledge order of individualised societies, depends on the dominant discourse and images of youth in a given situation (2019: 22).

For example, Djibouti recognises youth in their environmental law (Law no. 51/AN/09/6èm) yet, the Djiboutian government noted that it is struggling to effectively employ strategies that encourage individuals to act more positively towards environmental activities (Aden, 2022). The government faced challenges engaging youth because they perceive youth to be apathetic towards political and environmental activities (Aden, 2022). However, youth engagement with the environment was hampered by lack of interaction of youth with their respective public authority and the lack of training and skills development to manage environmental challenges in Djibouti (Aden, 2022). For the youth in El Salvador, the state of marginality has resulted in their limited employability and exacerbated their social depravation as their access to income streams are blocked (Salas and Sainz, 2019). As such they live under typologies created from social, symbolic, and spatial boundaries which exclude them from socially interacting with the broader society (Salas and Sainz, 2019).

Furthermore, the interaction of actors, ideas, and beliefs in conservation within environmental governance extend to and highlights the detailed network of decision-making from the global to local levels, specifically between the Global North and South (Song et al, 2013). Assessing the Global North-South relations reveals how some global goals for protecting high-biodiversity areas are not always matched by realistic assessments of their political and human cost on the grassroots level (Armitage et al, 2020). For example, the Post 2020 Biodiversity Framework which governs human-environment interactions is argued to impact domestic policy on individual actions especially within the Global South (Armitage et al, 2020). These

global instruments are argued to offer a 'one size fits all' approach that does not offer effective strategies for implementation in nations with weaker monitoring and evaluation measures to assess the impact on the local level (Armitage et al, 2020). More recently, Buscher and co-authors (2022) have argued that fortress conservation will continue to be perpetuated in the Global South with the acceptance of global frameworks such as the 30X30 or Half Earth policies, which advocate setting aside thirty percent to half of the Earth's landmass for conservation. On the other hand, the IUCN World Commission of Protected Areas has established working groups to ensure the local implementation of Other Effective Area-based Measures (OECMs) under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in countries which include South Africa (Marnewick et al, 2021). These measures are considered more inclusive governance pathways because they move beyond strict protected area models and recognise that conservation can be conducted by other actors. South Africa provides an example of a country that has conducted a thorough national review of potential OECMs for systematic biodiversity planning on the national level (Marnewick et al., 2021).

These examples illustrate the interconnectedness between global policies and local realities in conservation. Furthermore, they illustrate the inequality between different actors, particularly how actors such as communities and youth have had less authority and legitimacy in decision-making concerning conservation and protected areas. Therefore, this begs the question, how are actors, such as youth, interacting with other actors in conservation? This study seeks to understand in what way environmental governance influences marginalised groups in conservation and through decision-making. Although global frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals or the Global Biodiversity Framework, have placed importance on previously marginalised or disenfranchised groups, how are these groups (particularly youth) engaging in environmental governance in decision-making spaces? As such, to identify how youth can be involved, the literature on engagement is reviewed next.

3.2. Governance interactions through engagement

This section will discuss how youth have emerged in the engagement literature. The concept of engagement is a central focus of this thesis. Engagement helps locate how youth are mobilised and organise in conservation and environmental governance. Governance interactions refer to "the willingness or ability of actors to participate" (Kooiman and Bavinck, 2013: 20). The empirical data shows how youth engage with conservation and environmental

governance at different scales and interactions. Engagement is therefore briefly introduced and further discussed in the context of youth in order to set the scene for the empirical chapters presented later. It is important to note that the thesis adopts the concept of engagement over participation because engagement (although similar) addresses broader interactions between different systems (for example, the environment and the economy) and individuals or communities who are aware of how they can influence and create change within governing structures (for example, leadership positions) or from the outside (for example, activism, voting, raising awareness and protesting) (Riemer et al., 2014).

Engaged citizens are broadly described as individuals who are aware of their rights and responsibilities in society and actively participate in shaping the system norms, resources, regulations, and operations that comprise the foundation of their respective society (Riemer et al., 2014). Within political thought, engagement is defined according to political involvement in public affairs (Adler and Goggin, 2005). Environmental issues and actions are, on occasion, politicised by state and non-state actors. For example, social movements against climate change and challenging governments to act, through movements such as the 'Fridays for future' which was started by Greta Thunberg. Public engagement is described as individual or collective action or "work that is done publicly and benefits the public and is done in concert with others… and involves active participation and leadership in public life" to address issues of public concern (for example, climate change) (Adler and Goggin, 2005 :238-239). It is further described in relation to social change which involves the process of an active citizen participating in community life to shape the future, and so refers to the agency of an actor or collective to address social issues (Adler and Goggin, 2005).

Engagement also presupposes a space from which actors must interact and participate. Youth engagement and participation is often directed towards public spaces which are described in social theory as social spaces or the "space for human actions in society" (Walther et al, 2019: 22). Youth involvement in social spaces means that they interact, learn, and form their identities through their relationships with physical and symbolic environments (Walther et al, 2019). This process involves adapting to the behaviours and skills required in those spaces, and sometimes reshaping them to fit their needs. However, the extent to which they can engage in this process depends on access and inequality, which are influenced by inclusive policies. These policies may include or exclude individuals based on whether youth conform to established norms (Walther et al, 2019).

Attempts to explore youth engagement in the Global South was considerably constrained by much of the literature originating from and about the Global North, for example the mobilisation of youth in global climate politics with most examples citing Greta Thunberg from Sweden (Han and Ahn, 2020). Literature has noted that international organisations, such as the United Nations and IUCN, have begun to mobilise youth to combat climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation (Thew et al., 2021; Zurba et al., 2023). As such, engagement is a lens from which to see how actors are mobilised, positioned, and deployed to achieve certain outcomes and interests.

Furthermore, the concept of engagement may help identify the inequalities between youth and other actors. Youth have been described as marginalised in conservation and natural resources governance (Zurba and Trimble, 2014). Marginalised groups or people are defined as those who are "pushed or pulled away into marginality and further into exclusion" (Moller, 2000: 9). In this sense, youth engagement in environmental governance is regarded as an environmental justice issue (van der Westhuizen, 2019; Mkhize et al, 2022). The way in which actors, such as youth, engage with and are engaged in conservation can perpetuate the inequalities that exist between them and other actors. As such, the methods in which disenfranchised or marginalised actors are involved in governance can highlight the asymmetrical power relations between them. For example, within plural governance systems of the marine protected areas off the coast of South Africa, communities that have been disenfranchised due to inhibited access to the ocean and certain marine resources, are forced to adapt with their customary practices in these protected areas in ways that continue to perpetuate inequalities between them, the state and the private sector (Mbatha, 2022). This example illustrates the importance of who sets the political and environmental agendas to steer and enforce decision on resource access and control. While participation processes may have the best of intentions, they are embedded in power; for example, through 'shallow participation', powerful stakeholders may drive processes that encourage participation while retaining decision-making power and so reinforce existing power dynamics, while underlying structural power remains unchecked (Shackleton et al, 2023). This literature review does not explore the concept of environmental justice; however, it will be introduced in Chapter 4 and will guide some of the discussions in the empirical chapters to follow.

Engagement is shaped through the interaction of various actors and policies especially concerning youth. For instance, youth engagement can be characterised through approaches such as programmes (for example, education and leadership), conferences, volunteering for environmental organisations, after school activities and political activities that encourage participation that integrates individual or community development (Riemer et al., 2014). For youth, engagement would involve action that is targeted at solutions in the form of shared decision-making with adults by defining environmental problems and causes and envisioning possible solutions (ibid). For example, in the context of engagement, youth are sometimes identified as leaders and are characterised by positive attitudes towards nature, positive environmental behaviours and some involvement in leadership activities (Riemer et al., 2014). Identifying youth as leaders is an engagement mechanism through which other actors, such as environmental organisations, recognise youth to involve them in decision-making or in the environmental arena (Riemer et al., 2014). Therefore, strategic approaches such as leadership programmes or conferences, define and mobilise youth to engage in environmental decision-making and implementation. For example, in Target 3 of the Montreal-Kunming Global Biodiversity Framework, youth and women are identified as necessary to achieve the 30X30 target of area-based conservation. The empirical chapters address youth engagement in the various contexts of conservation including leadership. Chapter 5 delves deeper into youth leadership and engagement in conservation governance.

Youth engagement within environmental governance frameworks is complex because even though youth are not homogenous, they are categorised as if they are. For example, the use of social categories (notably age) shapes their definition. Such definitions influence perceptions of youth as both problematic and vulnerable, while excluding the intersections of culture, race, gender, and class that would highlight the underlying complexity and diversity (Zeldin, 2004; Ansell et al, 2012). Furthermore, youth are characterised by means of social, cultural, and political groupings. Development geographers and anthropologists classify youth from the Global South according to their precarity resulting from their uncertain futures (Thieme, 2018). For example, they have been historically mobilised for the benefit of the labour economy, in conflict and for political interests (Thieme, 2018; Iwilade, 2019; Cuervo and Miranda, 2019). As such, 'youth' as a concept and a group provide a lens from which to understand how conservation and environmental governance relate to less powerful and marginalised groups. Moreover, youth offer an opportunity to understand how descriptions or classifications in policy influence behaviour and access to decision-making spaces in conservation and other

industries. Lastly, youth offer a glimpse into how a demographic group can be mobilised as a tool, an asset, or a resource to achieve certain outcomes (Aden, 2022). Chapters 4, 5 and 6 illustrate how youth were mobilised or self-mobilise in conferences, in leadership and through conservation labour to achieve conservation outcomes. Therefore, how youth have been described, characterised, or classified in environmental and developmental policy and governance influences how they can engage.

3.3. Conclusion

This literature review has discussed environmental governance and engagement to question how youth are mobilised and situated in the literature surrounding conservation. This thesis investigates and mobilises the concept of environmental governance, with a focus on the role of conservation. It examines the various platforms, actors, and arrangements involved in conservation and how they contribute to environmental governance. Through this analysis, the thesis highlights the importance of marginalized youth in decision-making spaces and how their interactions can influence outcomes. Chapters 2 and 3 have provided context for youth within societal and environmental governance dynamics, conservation, and engagement. Conservation, which spans global to local levels, shapes governance processes through policies and frameworks. The thesis suggests that the exclusion of youth in decision-making is partly due to the types of interventions of engagement that are used to classify youth and how they are included in conservation. These interventions can be informed by youth policies, development and leadership programmes, and global framings of youth. The following chapters that present the empirical evidence based on the experiences of youth with conservation from the global to local level, will discuss the debates surrounding youth engagement utilising case studies of the IUCN, the United Nations Environmental Programme, the Leadership for Conservation in Africa, and the Southern African Wildlife College. The chapters will consider whether youth are tools to achieve conservation outcomes that are determined by other stakeholders and actors; whether youth perpetuate the status-quo in conservation or are transforming it; or whether youth are seen as future leaders rather than current contributors (Hart, 2008).

CHAPTER 4.

Youth engagement in global conservation governance

4. The global level

Image 2 : Photo credits: Camille Gilloots IUCN, Marseille, France (03/09/21)

This chapter is an independent contribution to this thesis and has been accepted for publication in the Journal of Conservation Biology as a contribution to their special issue for new voices in conservation. This chapter was developed amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the closure of borders and cancellation of flights, I worked with the IUCN's Global Youth Summit's Steering Committee to develop strategies for a virtual conference for youth worldwide. The chapter presents the experiences of youth in governance and decision-making at the global level of the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Marseille, France, in September 2021. This chapter presents the role of youth in conservation governance through conferences, specifically focusing on their participation in the World Conservation Congress Forum. It explores how IUCN frames youth involvement and how they navigated the decision-making processes of the Forum. It challenges the social category of youth as presented by IUCN and offers suggestions from the youth participants.

Title: Youth engagement in global conservation governance

4.1. Abstract

Youth are increasingly recognised for their important role in shaping environmental decisions surrounding conservation. Youth are often described as 'future' leaders rather than 'current' contributors, and are often economically, politically, and procedurally excluded from environmental governance spaces. This positions youth at the nexus of being characterised as important participants in decision-making, yet as recent environmental justice literature argues, they are typically marginalised from active engagement due to structural barriers in environmental governance. The recent publication of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Youth Strategy 2022-2030 has brought prominent environmental organisations into the debate. The IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC) presents a useful example from which to understand how youth access and participate in decision-making at the highest level of governance in a prominent global conservation organisation. Decisions are influenced, deliberated, and made through the passing of Resolutions and Recommendations at the IUCN WCC Forum and Members Assembly. The Forum influences how issues are perceived and deliberated at the Members Assembly. Event ethnography and participant observation methods were used to study the WCC Forum in Marseille, France (2021), revealing the geopolitical intricacies of power and the underlying inequalities at the root of youth engagement, or lack thereof. The paper argues that when youth are mobilised in meta-level decision-making spaces, youth engagement is stratified and unequal for the following reasons. The IUCN slogan of *One Nature, One Future!* implies solidarity and unanimity with the environment and other people. However, youth narratives show that "youth are not a monolith", tokenism should be challenged, and youth have agency but require support. This paper therefore situates youth engagement in decision-making through the perspective of environmental organisations as a contribution to environmental governance and youth literature.

Key words: Youth; youth engagement; global environmental governance; environmental justice; conservation

4.2. Introduction

Growing environmental concerns, including climate change and biodiversity loss, has placed importance on multiple-actor solutions with youth at the forefront of growing global environmental activism. The most prominent example is the climate change movement with protests such as the 'Fridays for the Future', spearheaded by Greta Thunberg from Sweden. The active involvement of youth in environmental activism is visible and has reverberated around the world (Han and Ahn, 2020; Thew et al, 2021; Yona et al, 2020). However, similar representations of youth leadership appear to be absent in conservation. To fill this gap, IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) recently launched the IUCN Youth Strategy 2022-2030 for "meaningful youth engagement …to join efforts in reversing biodiversity loss, conserving nature and managing natural resources" (2022: II). Leading up to this Strategy, youth engagement was a recurring theme across different platforms at IUCN's World Conservation Congress (WCC) in September 2021. Notably, at the Opening Ceremony where Hollywood actor, Harrison Ford spoke about the inclusion of youth in decision-making,

> *Reinforcements are on the way; [referring to youth] they are sitting in lecture halls now, venturing into the field for the very first time, writing theses; they're leading marches, organising communities; they're learning to turn passion into progress, potential into power; but **they're not here yet**. In a few years they will be here, in rooms like this, and the world will be better off for it…*

Ironically, as we see later, youth were present at the IUCN Congress, but not actually present in the same room as Harrison Ford and other Very Important People. This quote illustrates two points typical of youth in conservation. Firstly, youth who should be engaging in processes of environmental decision-making are not visible in high-level decision-making and policy-influencing spaces. Secondly, youth are simultaneously seen as future problem solvers and as present-day actors necessary for achieve sustainability, and addressing climate change and biodiversity loss (Walker, 2016).

This paper discusses the processes in which youth are actively engaged in environmental decision-making in conservation. Similar to other studies (Thew et al 2021; 2022) of youth participation at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC), this study focuses on the IUCN WCC Forum held in Marseille, France in 2021.

This research follows the evaluation of the Intergenerational Partnership for Sustainability (IPS), a review of IUCN's internal youth engagement processes and the publication of the IUCN Youth Strategy 2022-2030. This paper situates youth engagement within the global environmental governance (GEG) literature. It focuses on how youth are described as marginalised and vulnerable in the environmental justice literature yet are mobilised in the governance literature to promote sustainability and create solutions to existing environmental problems. This paper combines these schools of thought by demonstrating that youth engagement at the WCC Forum is siloed and stratified. Furthermore, the homogeneous classifications of youth create structural inequalities that undermine the ability of youth to engage in GEG.

4.3. Background

Various global environmental organisations have gradually mainstreamed youth participation into decision-making processes; for example, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) – COP (Conference of Parties) 15 Youth Summit in 2022; the UNFCCC YOUNGO (youth NGO) international network; and the United Nations Development Program Youth Global Program for Sustainable Development and Peace to address the climate crisis. This movement toward youth inclusion was spurred by the recognition that youth must be empowered to lead climate action, moving beyond being merely tokenistic (Nrkumah, 2021; UNDP, 2022). While climate change issues are important to assess and understand youth engagement within GEG, biodiversity protection and conservation, while equally important, has not received the same level of research and engagement. While prominent youth actors such as Greta Thunberg are associated with climate change activism, the youth actors speaking out in conservation and biodiversity loss remain less known. For example, Indigenous youth activists are arguably marginalised by existing colonial power structures (Grosse and Mark, 2020). For example, Josefa Cariño Tauli, an Ibaloi-Kankanaey Igorot indigenous youth environmental activist from the Philippines and Policy Co-coordinator, Global Youth Biodiversity Network, stated at the CBD COP 15, 2021, "I speak to you today as young person…in a space that makes big decisions about our future but remains out of reach for…people who are most affected." Despite years of environmental activism, Indigenous youth conservation activists do not receive equal media coverage (Grosse and Mark, 2020: 148). Similarly, scholars of Youth Studies and environmental governance have largely focused on youth from the Global North

engaging with NGOs about climate change (Ojala, 2011; Threadgold, 2011; Riemer et al, 2014; Han and Ahn, 2020; Yona et al, 2020; Thew et al, 2021).

Conservation requires coordination and agreement between a variety of actors or stakeholders to achieve environmental sustainability (MacDonald, 2010). Despite recognising the importance of youth involvement in conservation, they are traditionally underrepresented in decision-making (Narksompong and Limjirkan, 2015). Zurba and Trimble argue a gap exists between youth and natural resource governance because "resource management is inter-generationally blind" (2014: 79). The absence of youth involvement in decision-making has been labelled as an environmental justice issue (van der Westhuizen, 2019; Mkhize et al, 2022) with environmental justice being concerned with environmental degradation, structural inequalities, resource access and wellbeing (van der Westhuizen, 2019). The World Health Organisation has identified youth as being at risk of marginalisation because they are less likely to participate in governance and decision-making due to economic, political, and procedural barriers (WHO, 2019 in van der Westhuizen, 2019; Columbia Global Policy Initiative, 2014).

Youth engagement involves active and sustained participation in community activities, extending beyond individual involvement and encompassing areas that historically have had low youth engagement, such as decision-making, sports, and schools (Rose-Krasnor, 2009; Riemer et al, 2014; UNDP, 2022: 6). Engagement is a multi-dimensional concept which goes beyond the behavioural dimension of participation to emotional responses, knowledge, and behaviours associated with participation (Rose-Krasnor, 2009).

Returning to Harrison Ford's quote, it aptly addresses Zurba and coauthor's (2020) argument that intergenerational partnership in substantive decision-making has not materialised because youth remain marginalised in GEG. Labelling youth as important actors in decision-making is crucial because their exclusion in policy processes can have long-term consequences for conservation sustainability (Riemer et al, 2014). Yet, youth are still in the "classroom" and "are not here yet" at the decision-making table. The political framing of youth as "future leaders" rather than "current contributors" further shapes policy from "defining youth as a potential asset, to a potential societal problem" depending on their present and future needs (Zeldin, 2004:75; Hart, 2008). The challenge is that youth have become politicised, and so their participation is often tokenized or 'window-dressed' according to political interests (Ansell et

al, 2012). This highlights the asymmetrical power relations and begs the question: how have GEG NGOs involved young people in their environmental decision-making processes?

4.4. Literature Review

An intersection of literature on GEG and environmental justice is necessary to understand how youth as key contributors are (i) positioned in governance and, (ii) are disproportionately affected by environmental issues (Riemer et al, 2014).

4.4.1. Global environmental governance

Lemos and Agrawal (2006: 298) define environmental governance as a "set of regulatory processes, mechanisms and organisations through which political actors influence environmental actions and outcomes". Environmental governance is enacted through environmental NGO's (such as IUCN), international accords, national policies, and legislation and (but not limited to), transnational institutions (Lemos and Agrawal, 2006). Environmental NGOs have the decision-making power to influence how natural resources are distributed, consumed, protected, and accessed (Duffy, 2014). At the global scale, governance is the interplay of formal and informal arrangements amongst multiple actors (Duffy, 2014). Within International Political Economy, resource governance is described as a neoliberal project aimed at restructuring global politics by asking "what is to be governed (and what is not), who governs and who is governed, how do they govern, on whose behalf, and with what implications" (Duffy, 2013:224).

GEG considers underlying interests and ideas that influence how public and private actors, such as NGOs and organized social groups, engage in conservation governance and practice at the meta-level (MacDonald, 2010). Organized social groups may promote ideological perspectives, elaborated through coordinated processes emerging from historical contexts (MacDonald, 2010). These ideals may be implemented through NGOs and non-binding instruments, such as the '30 x 30' Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) adopted in December 2022 (Montreal), which advocates for setting aside 30% of land to conserve biodiversity by 2030 (Walker, 2016; Buscher et al, 2017; Butler, 2023).

Decision-making is part of the performative process of policy formation and implementation (ESCAP U, 2009). It operationalises governance through deliberation processes (Allan and

Hadden, 2014; Kwon, 2019). NGOs are deliberative actors who use power to persuade other actors to adopt the interests of the NGO through 'framing' and 'meaning making' (Kwon, 2019; Allan and Hadden, 2014). This process is rooted within the NGO's formal (e.g., WCC Member's Assembly) and informal structures (for example, WCC Forum and GYS) to make and implement decisions (ESCAP U, 2009). These interactions expose the asymmetries in power between actors that exist within these decision-making spaces. The underlying formal and informal structures that help to select participating actors may ultimately exclude some groups (Song et al, 2013). NGOs such as IUCN already possess global legitimacy within conservation processes, for example, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. It is the coordinated agreement of 'relevant' actors, stakeholders or partners that underpins the framing and meaning-making of these environmental standards, which are then implemented from the global policy-regulatory level to the grassroots (MacDonald, 2010). As a global NGO, IUCN facilitates discussions and debates amongst a wide range of environmental stakeholders and actors at the global level in the quadrennial WCC. Depending on the interests at stake and the decision to be taken, it can therefore position certain actors or groups within the decision-making processes.

4.4.2. Environmental Justice

Environmental justice emerged from the United States in the 1970-80s and describes "the unequal distribution of environmental costs, benefits and associated well-being outcomes and seeks to understand proximate and underlying drivers of inequality" (Martin et al, 2020:20). Scholarship has divided it into three criteria. Environmental justice places youth at the crux of environmental vulnerability due to the unjust burden of responsibility for past and current environmental problems that will impact their uncertain future (Mkhize et al, 2022). It calls on youth to be active stakeholders, whilst also highlighting the challenges they face in being positioned as marginalised and vulnerable. The environmental justice literature highlights the power dynamics of decision-making, particularly in relation to marginalised actors. Environmental justice helps evaluate the position of youth by discussing "the unequal distribution of environmental costs, benefits and associated welfare outcomes, and seeks to understand the proximate and underlying drivers of inequalities" (Martin et al, 2020:20). For instance, youth (e.g. Indigenous peoples and women) are disproportionately affected by environmental issues because "…future generations will be even more exposed to the consequences of irresponsible attitudes and behaviours towards nature" (van der Westhuizen,

2021: 2). Therefore, within environmental justice, youth who remain marginalised in GEG need partners to establish environmental solutions (van der Westhuizen, 2021).

Within environmental justice, recognition and participation intersect whereby recognition addresses diverse identities, cultures, knowledges as an important step to gaining access to decision-making processes (Thew et al, 2021). According to Thew et al, "participation will increase recognition…" and involves the active contribution of actors (2021: 3). Youth actors should therefore be actively involved in decision-making processes in order to have their ideas and voices heard and considered. However, youth recognition is incumbent on whether they are classified as vulnerable and need of empowerment or whether they are viewed as change agents within organisations and spaces of power (Ojala, 2011; Orsini, 2022). Youth Studies and environmental justice literature perpetuate this narrative by oscillating the classification of youth from strong, mobilised actors to weak, passive recipients of aid or empowerment programmes (Ojala, 2011; Zurba and Trimble, 2014; Orsini, 2022). This in turn influences their positionality. The empowerment narrative sees youth as beneficiaries who need to be educated and trained, rather than simultaneously partnering with them as independent political actors with agency (Orsini, 2022). Engagement in this regard is based on the agency of active participation in public life, and secondly, the way in which state and non-state actors (in this case, NGOs) actively involve youth in their governance structures (Andolina et al, 2002; Adler and Goggin, 2005; Riemer et al, 2014). However, this varies according to the geopolitical context. The majority of the studies conducted focus on examples from the Global North (Threadgold, 2011; Riemer et al, 2014; Han and Ahn, 2020; Yona et al, 2020; Thew et al, 2021).

With regards to global climate policy, 'Fridays for the Future' mobilised youth to demand immediate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions as a matter of urgency for current and future generations (Han and Ahn, 2020). However, youth agency in this regard, homogenised youth actors and merged youth climate action to this movement with literature often citing the example of Greta Thunberg (Han and Ahn, 2020; Grosse and Mark, 2020; Yona et al, 2020; Thew et al, 2020; Thew et al, 2021; Orsini, 2022). This reliance on 'Fridays for Future' addresses environmental justice and interactive governance, raising the question: which youth voices are positioned to be recognised and heard? (Song et al, 2013). These questions are important because the allocation of resources, including funding and media attention, are based on the dominant narratives produced by actors with access to spaces of power. Furthermore,

socio-political constructions of youth that situate them as subjects rather than political actors, are then reproduced in conferences and conventions, where youth can be disconnected from their agency, affecting engagement (Orsini, 2022: 4). These narratives are then amplified in policy formation and implementation and the literature.

Therefore, promoting youth engagement within spaces of power including the WCC of IUCN or the UNFCCC, situates them as legitimate, essential actors (Thew et al, 2021). For example, the Rio Conference of 1992 emphasized the need to focus on youth to combat the climate crisis. The 2003 World Parks Congress-Durban called on youth engagement within biodiversity conservation, however, without consistent documentation of their roles. As such, engagement in the sphere of conservation necessitates mobilising youth. In April 2021, IUCN held the inaugural Global Youth Summit (GYS), followed by another GYS at the World Conservation Congress in 2021, attracting youth activists, practitioners, and organisations. In both global events, youth were called to voice their experiences and provide solutions as part of the 'One Nature, One Future' approach. Discussing the experiences of youth and how they navigated the decision-making spaces of the WCC Forum is key to conceptualising youth engagement with global NGO's.

4.5. Situating IUCN in global environmental governance

Established in 1948, IUCN is described as the world's largest conservation organisation with over 1,400-member organisations from over 160 countries (IUCN, 2023; Zurba et al, 2020). It is a membership-based union of government, civil society organisations and Indigenous people's groups that unite to advance sustainable development whilst focusing on IUCN's mission (IUCN, 2023). It is the "global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it" and has the world's most diverse environmental network (UNEP, 2023). IUCN has the Observer status at the UN General Assembly enabling it to "deliver the policy perspectives of its Members at the highest internal level of diplomacy" (IUCN, 2018: 3). IUCN is comprised of (i) the WCC, (ii) the Secretariat, (iii) the Council, (iv) the national and regional committees and members and, (v) eight Commissions (IUCN Statutes, 2022). Along with the Council, the WCC is considered as the highest organ of the IUCN and is a component of decision-making with its members (IUCN Statutes, 2022).

With a headquarters located in Switzerland, IUCN is a neutral space that seeks to influence the actions of state and non-state actors (e.g. businesses, scientists and, Indigenous Peoples) by providing information, advice and building partnerships, rather than mobilising the public to support conservation (IUCN, 2023). Member organisations are part of the democratic process of discussing and approving Resolutions and Recommendations at the WCC Member's Assembly which may influence the global conservation agenda (UNEP, 2023). This includes authoritative reports, standards and guidelines that inform and support global policy such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Resolutions are aimed at IUCN and Recommendations are directed towards other agencies and a global audience (IUCN, 2018). Such multilateral agreements influence the governance of conservation from global policies to national regulations and laws that influence terrestrial and aquatic conservation efforts. As the largest global conservation NGO, IUCN is therefore a dominant and crucial global actor that has power to influence conservation engagement across sectors, regions, and demographics.

The WCC is envisioned by IUCN as a centre for the promotion of broad-based participation in environmental governance (Fletcher, 2014; Adeyeye et al, 2019). It aims to foster a space where a variety of actors from different backgrounds assemble to deliberate on the responsibilities and the benefits of environmental protection (Fletcher, 2014; Adeyeye et al, 2019). The WCC consists of two components: The Forum and the Member's Assembly. The Forum includes high-level panels, debates, training workshops, interactive sessions and press releases which are open to all WCC participants (Adeyeye et al, 2019). Conversely, the Member's Assembly "is the governance body of IUCN" which permits only IUCN members to deliberate and vote on strategies for the next quadrennial (it can be observed by non-members) (Adeyeye et al, 2019). This research did not focus on the decision-making of the Members Assembly, but rather how youth engage in the Forum, which has an influence on policy processes.

Decisions that have influenced how IUCN engages with youth have been previously decided at earlier WCCs where strategies such as IPS (Intergenerational Partnerships for Sustainability) were adopted (Resolution WCC-2008-Res-098) and has influenced the Youth Strategy that was launched in September of 2022. However, the IPS was not formally institutionalised, A qualitative methodological approach was used to follow these advancements.

4.6. Methods

IUCN is the chosen case study for this paper because it is a global conservation NGO that has actively included youth in its global events and more recently, its organisational framework (IUCN Youth Strategy, 2022). This research aimed to understand how IUCN engages with youth at the 2021 WCC. This research is an independent study and was not conducted in partnership with IUCN, although they were made aware of it, and solicited for and participated in interviews. Qualitative design methods were used to collect and analyse data from multiple sources from January 2020 to September 2022. Primary data was collected through 32 semi-structured interviews, event ethnography, and participant observation at the WCC in Marseille, France (Brosius and Campbell, 2010; Dumoulin, 2021). Secondary data was collected from IUCN reports, documents, and publications (a comprehensive list of the primary and secondary data is provided in a table in the Annex 1-additional information). The period of 2008 -2012 was selected for this study because, supporting documentation from an internal IUCN Review on youth engagement and Intergenerational Partnership for Sustainability (IPS), begun in 2008. This review provides a comprehensive background to IUCN and the internal processes surrounding youth engagement. This paper pivots from the internal youth engagement process by further assessing how external youth actors engaged with IUCN, given the call for youth engagement was communicated to a global audience and, is not unique to IUCN but is recognised in other governance and leadership discourses.

Research was conducted from January 2020 until the publication of the IUCN Youth Strategy 2022-2030 with youth aged between 18 -35 years. Data was collected following the progression of youth engagement in IUCN as illustrated in Figure 2 and the first author attended both the GYS in April 2021 (virtually) and the WCC in September 2021 (in-person), and the second author attended the WCC. Interviews aided in understanding individual experiences with the process of establishing and implementing a youth strategy at an organisational level and, further provided insight on how external actors connected with IUCN, perceived the development. Secondly, incorporating previous knowledge on youth in conservation and the historical and structural factors that have influenced conservation approaches, was useful when formulating guiding questions. IUCN participants were interviewed through semi-structured interviews to assess the process from which youth engagement was proposed and established in the organisation.

Conferences and events are co-constructed environments where "event-specific methodological" challenges are raised (Schulte-Romer and Gesing, 2022: 4). These spaces offer an opportunity for researchers to meet and mingle with key stakeholders from various backgrounds (Schulte-Romer and Gesing, 2022:4). The first author was a member of the initial steering committee for the IUCN Global Youth Summit from October 2019 to January 2020. Furthermore, she volunteered as a session rapporteur at the World Conservation Congress, documenting session themes, notable statements, and impactful quotes or questions from the panel and audience. Data analysis included content and thematic analysis (Stemler, 2015). Using Atlas TI software, primary and secondary data were organized and coded to categorise, identify patterns and relationships between different data sources.

4.7. Results

4.7.1. Situating youth engagement at the WCC

IUCN has endeavoured to engage with youth for nearly 20 years through the WCC Resolutions and Recommendations (2003-2022) (outlined in Figure 2 and Table 5).
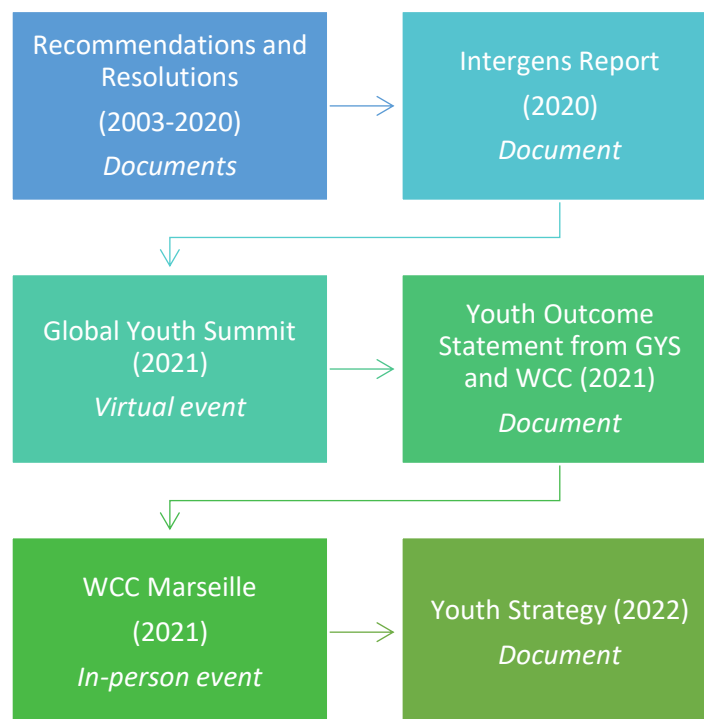
Figure 2: Documents and events that informed the development of the Youth strategy.

Table 5: List of WCC Resolutions that are related to youth or youth engagement from 2003-2020/21.

Year	Location	Resolution code	Description
2003	Durban, South Africa World Parks Congress	Outcome 6 (Durban Action Plan)	Younger generations are empowered in relation to protected areas
2004	Bangkok, Thailand	WCC-2004-Res-029	Capacity building of young professionals within the Union
2008	Barcelona, Spain	WCC-2008-Res-098	Intergenerational partnerships fostering ethical leadership for a just, sustainable and peaceful world
2012	Jeju, Korea	WCC-2012-Res-008	Increasing youth engagement and intergenerational partnership across and through the Union
2016	Hawaii, USA	WCC-2016-Res-085	Connecting people with nature globally
2020	Marseille, France	WCC-2020-Res-062 WCC-2020-Res-046	Role of children and youth in conservation Creation of Ombudsperson for Future Generations

Their youth engagement model for decision-making is currently and primarily focused on youth who are members of IUCN Commissions and are working in the Secretariat even though during the period of research, the 'One Nature, one future: Together we can!' call to action, affirmed IUCN's commitment to engage with all youth. Prior to the GYS and the WCC, the Intergenerational Partnership for Sustainability Review, written by the Intergens (Youth and intergenerational research, impact, and action) group, identified the call for youth engagement at the 5th IUCN World Parks Congress in Durban, South Africa (2003) as a defining moment (Zurba et al., 2020). This call encouraged young Commission members to achieve intergenerational connections across IUCN and gave official recognition to young leaders (Zurba et al, 2020).

The Intergens Report is an evaluation for assessing the feasibility of implementing youth engagement in a large NGO: it questioned the lack of youth within IUCN's existing internal governance and decision-making framework. As such, it proposed IPS as a necessary tool to include youth through intergenerational dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge sharing (Zurba

et al, 2021). Furthermore, it recommended a Youth Endowment Fund for "sustained financial backing for the implementation of youth engagement and the IPS mandate" from IUCN (IUCN, 2021: 4). However, this was denied by IUCN leadership (Director and the six Commission Chairs) and instead, was opened to its partners for consideration (IUCN, 2021).

The Intergens Report highlighted the structural challenges associated with the prolonged democratic processes and consultations of a large NGO. For example, the Reviews recommendations were not implemented in their entirety because it was not explicitly isolating youth as individual actors within IUCN (Internal Participant 1, 23/06/2022). It required youth to engage with the guidance or mentorship of an "adult" internal members or employees through the "buddy" system (Internal Participant 1, 23/06/2022; Zurba et al, 2020). The complexity stemmed from differentiating between those in the youth bracket (as mentees) versus those outside of it: "how do you tell someone they are not a youth?" (Internal Participant 1, 23/06/2022). As a result, the Heritage, Culture and Youth team was established within the IUCN Secretariat in 2021 and a separate Youth Strategy was established (Internal Participant 1, 23/06/2022). The components of IPS were thus merged with the first IUCN Global Youth Summit and the development of the Youth Strategy.

The Youth Strategy was established by youth within IUCN in consultation with youth-led organisations (e.g. GBYN, YOUNGO, UNEP) and contained suggestions from the Output Statement of the GYS (April 2021) to ensure they reflected the broad perspectives of youth in conservation (IUCN Youth Strategy, 2022). Finalised in May 2022, the Strategy responds to the three themes identified in this study and explored below through establishing ways for youth to engage with IUCN's decision-making structures. These infrastructures include the Youth Advisory Committee (which incorporates the Commissions and Secretariat) and increased job prospects (IUCN Youth Strategy, 2022: 5). Its aims to entrench youth "perspectives, inclusion and empowerment in all parts and all levels of the Union" through intergenerational collaboration (IUCN Youth Strategy, 2022: 1). Utilising age as the key determinant, the Strategy refers to "youth" aged between 15-24 and "young professionals" aged between 18-35 (IUCN Youth Strategy, 2022). Its guiding principles aim to increase diverse voices and perspectives (for example, gender, race, context, and disabilities). It positions youth as leaders who can champion initiatives and influence decision-making processes to overcome tokenism. However, the Action Framework and specific short-term priority actions only facilitate effective and sustained youth participation and cross-

generational collaboration at all levels *within* IUCN (IUCN Youth Strategy, 2022). Although the GYS and the WCC opened engagement to youth external to IUCN, youth activists and practitioners were concerned that IUCN is negating the environmental justice issues youth face in their daily experiences. The following results will present the experiences of youth at the WCC Forum considering three themes that emerged from youth participant narratives at the WCC: 1) Challenging tokenism, 2) "Youth are not a monolith", and 3) Youth have agency but require support.

4.7.2. Challenging tokenism

The WCC saw a myriad of actors (e.g. economic and political executives and environmental practitioners) descend on Marseille, France in 2021. In light of the COVID19 pandemic, the WCC Manifesto promoted "One Nature, One Future" by committing to the post-2020 biodiversity goals, mitigating climate change, supporting the 30x30 Global Biodiversity Framework and encouraging stronger partnerships among stakeholders, especially youth. Key events included the official opening ceremony and the on-site GYS.

The GYS saw youth activists and leaders discussing environmental issues and solutions. A product of GYS was the Output Statement that showed how youth have been mobilised globally. Its highlighted youth agency in policy making and challenged tokenism by urging decision makers to actively engage with the youth through providing financial means, capacity building and, digital technologies to create more inclusive spaces for marginalised groups. Furthermore, youth described themselves as capable leaders who are already spearheading innovative initiatives that are tackling climate change and biodiversity loss through community work. The Output Statement (2021) crystalised the needs of youth by capturing their challenges whilst advocating for transformative solutions generated from their local contexts. It argued that Indigenous peoples and knowledge have solutions to threatened nature, and that their experiences (historical and contemporary) need to be at the forefront of decision-making agendas that affect people who cannot attend such meetings. It showed that an intersectionality of various spheres (social, cultural, economic) in society and age groups, is essential for sustainability. This was an important moment for youth engagement in global environmental governance and highlighted a need for more initiatives promoting intergenerational dialogue at both international policy and local level.

By contrast, the WCC was opened by an exclusive panel of world leaders from politics, finance, and other industries (Table 6), while excluding youth leaders. It was a visible representation of how influential and important IUCN is in geopolitics and GEG.

Table 6: In attendance at the High-level Panels for the Official Opening Ceremony of the WCC 2021 on 03/09/02.

Name	Industry Title
President Emmanuel Macron	President of the French Republic
His Excellency, Mr. Mahamdou Issoufou	Former President of Niger
Mr. Frans Timmermans	Vice President of the European Commission
Madame Christine Lagarde	European Central Bank President
Mr. Gilbert Fossoun Houngbo	President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development
Madame Barbara Pompili	French Minister for the Ecological Transition
Mr. Sebastiao Salgado	Brazilian social documentary photographer and photojournalist
Kyriakos Mitsotakis	Prime Minister of Greece
Charles Michel	President of the European Council
Harrison Ford	Conservation International and Hollywood Actor

However, the High-Level Panel lacked representation from Indigenous Peoples, local community leaders and youth, the very groups identified in environmental governance and justice literature as marginalised and vulnerable. Instead, it was a closed event where only

invited guests, delegates, VIPs and VVIPs (a person of very high status or rank) could enter. Harrison Ford's speech aptly spoke to this lack of representation: "*... they're not here yet...*".

The youth who participated in the Official Opening Ceremony were featured as visual entertainment, as dancers. This called into question the purpose of having a separate GYS. The separate organisation of these two prominent events shows that the proposal for intergenerational dialogue (between youth and world leaders) in the Output Statement and the Intergens Report was not fully translated into practice on the opening day of the WCC Forum. The GYS was arguably siloed, depriving youth of the opportunity for dialogue between world leaders and youth leaders. The Princess, Laurentien, of the Netherlands stated the following at the GYS, "*...I'm incredibly restless…I'm not sure **who** I should be talking to. Should I talk to the young people or the empty tables of the Presidents, Ministers; where are they?*"

Although she is not a youth actor, her question demonstrates that there was a stratified engagement, which could be seen as tokenistic. External Participant 6, a VIP volunteer (09/2022) noting the absence of Indigenous peoples and youth, interestingly pointed out, "…we know that these people (VIP) are, at least, as effective as any development bank for conserving nature, (but) we may (need to) think about who are the true Very Important People (VIP) in conservation's world?*"

In addition, Hindou O. Ibrahim, an Indigenous youth activist from Chad, stated that youth were overlooked when it came to discussions at the high- level panel of the opening ceremony and questioned IUCN's target audience at the WCC. She noted (referring to the opening ceremony during her speech at a high-level session) "*…They talk about how important we are, but we are not at the table with them.*"

Interestingly, the GYS discussions that preceded the opening ceremony emphasised the importance of youth "investing in their own future" and the need for intergenerational cooperation and dialogue between leaders, decision-makers and youth actors (IUCN WCC, 2021). The siloed GYS and opening ceremony contradict the "One Nature, One Future! Together we can!" approach, which called on all WCC participants and partners to work with youth as "leaders of conservation, not victims" (IUCN WCC, 2021). A primary theme of the GYS was "youths' active engagement" to avoid being dismissed through tokenism by powerful actors. Youth speakers at the GYS pled for global leaders to "act now" to mitigate the effects

of continued biodiversity loss and climate change. Brighton Kaoma (21/04/06), a Zambian social entrepreneur, stressed that tokenistic engagement by global leaders is an obstacle to finding sustainable solutions: "Global leaders, we are tired of your reactions and words, we need you to act now! If you can't act, allow the young people to lead!"

The call to "act now" was a sentiment shared by most speakers and youth participants. The importance of intergenerational dialogue was raised in the Output Statement but was lost in the selection of the high-level panel for the opening ceremony. Youth participants could have contributed by representing the youth experience, as outlined in the Output Statement, to the High-Level Panel and to the international media present.

4.7.3. "Youth are not a monolith".

In youth-centred sessions on governance and activism, panel discussants actively shared their experiences and concerns. The youth participants found the sessions to be interdisciplinary (including representatives from business, academia, and activism) and provocative. The youth challenged the decision-makers present to be more proactive and inclusive. For example, utilising bottom-up approaches such as storytelling to raise awareness on biodiversity loss. Through storytelling, local conservation actions could highlight everyday cultural practices, making approaches more bottom-up rather than primarily policy-driven. At the panel discussion "Youth Voices for Nature and People" (21/09/07), GYBN and UNESCO discussed the importance of a unified vision to communicate the common feelings of youth. They argued that honest conversations about the environmental crisis must involve cross-cutting political, moral, social and environmental issues. Pravalli Vangeti (UNESCO) said that communication that breaks down the silos of top-down policymaking is key to empowering youth. Through bottom-up education initiatives that combine traditional knowledge with modern technologies (social media), youth narratives can be amplified.

However, in a panel interview with youth activists, Melina Sakiyama (GBYN-Brazil) and Nisreen Elsiam (UNESCO-Sudan) (21/09/07) noted that the experience of youth activists in the Global North differs from that of youth activists in the Global South. They highlighted that IUCN's location in the Global North affects the agenda of WCC events. This leads to inequalities, for example in the protection of environmental activists: "Why does the media focus on some and not others?" Their concern for environmental activists in Sudan or Brazil

stems from the "deadly" and " gruesome struggle" such actors face in the fight for justice (environmental defenders are often killed). They explained that European activism is "white collar" and "civilised", whereas in the Global South "you are defending your life as well as the environment". Both activists agreed that spaces like the WCC do not discuss these "inconvenient truths".

Moreover, External Participant 10 (21/09/07), a youth activist from Kenya, faces barriers to project funding and access to basic services that hinder her work. In Kenya, she works with young women from rural areas who face food insecurity due to drought and human-wildlife conflict. Similarly, External Participant 11 (05/09/21) from Zimbabwe stated that the WCC should also reflect the "human aspect" of conservation work, along with policy (cultural sensitivities of rural youth and their experiences). In Zimbabwe, youth are interested in biodiversity conservation in communities bordering national parks, but the youth lack basic resources such as running water and are more concerned with "passing their exams" in school. Education makes them aware of animals and human-wildlife conflict, but their basic needs come first. He also expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to travel for the WCC. Youth his age face challenges in securing meaningful employment, which hinders their ability to express their passion for the environment and attend events outside the country. According to External Participant 6, "I came here through my organisation, and I hope to be able to meet other people to share my experiences with…"

Youth participants from the Global South were aware of the structural barriers that have hindered, and may continue to hinder, their ability to access international events. Firstly, they pointed out that the WCC is mainly hosted in the Global North and therefore resources are focused on those who can afford to attend. This is problematic because it further entrenches environmental inequalities, especially when it comes to discussing solutions. IUCN has the power and capacity to host the WCC with prominent figures in attendance. Youth participants expressed concern that the WCC is a privileged environment to make decisions on behalf of youth around the world. The inequalities in access to the WCC were based on location (France) and the cost of registration. The IUCN registration fee alone is a barrier to access. Youth participants (aged 15-24) paid 200 Euros to register, even though their youth, young adult, or young professional category extended to 35 years. This meant that other youth participants over the age of 24 (considered as young people) paid either the Commission member fee of 780 Euros or the full registration fee of 1200 Euros. The registration fee reflects existing

structural inequalities. Like others, external participant 6 (21/05/09) participated through his organisation, which covered the costs. For many youths in the Global South and North, such fees put attendance out of reach.

Interviewees noted the need to recognise that engagement at the WCC has not been inclusive or meaningful due to the lack of adequate youth representation who are or will be affected by decisions taken at the WCC Assembly. As such, "youth are not a monolith" and neither are their experiences (Melina Sakiyama, 2021) or their ability to participate in global fora.

4.7.4. Youth have agency but require support

The results showed that one of the main barriers to engagement is funding. Participants noted that funding is highly politicised. It is often based on English language skills and the ability to properly synthesise the needs, actions, and outcomes of those applying. This insight emerged from the rural-urban experience: rural youth may lack access to technology and ability to effectively express their concerns, but their needs matter. Decisions are therefore focused on the experiences of youth (mainly from the Global North - Canada, USA, and Europe) and their ideas and solutions, to the exclusion of those who are not part of the GYS and WCC forum. Secondly, participants emphasised that their diversity should be recognised by creating spaces of engagement and secondly in designing policies. They pointed out that youth "have a lot to say and are frustrated" and "need safe spaces" to share their experiences and ideas without fear of losing access to future opportunities and jobs.

Melina Sakiyama (GBYN-Brazil) and Nisreen Elsiam (UNESCO-Sudan) (07/09/21) noted that the work of environmental activists has been severely affected by COVID19. Melina stated that "hope is limitless, but it cannot feed anyone" as she explained the difficulty of achieving goals at the grassroots level. They noted that a generational gap between those in power and the youth exists due to the "difference in thinking and ideas". Through their experiences, they noted that youth are expected to have hope, but they suffer from depression and environmental insecurity due to low wages and marginalisation. In addition, Melvin Flores from the Global Youth Statements on Nature Based Solutions panel (05/09/21) said that different cultures and ethnic groups need their traditional knowledge to be recognised in education systems. He explained that "in Guatemala, 21 Indigenous communities have lived with the forests for many years, and they get medicines... (yet) they are willing to learn from us". The recognition of

Indigenous knowledge and its role in conservation practices that have protected forests and lands for centuries needs to be considered. Therefore, using environmental education, powerful actors should work closely with youth to disseminate information, communicate, and consult standards for awareness raising that reflect traditional knowledge of the local environment.

The findings show that IUCN recognised the need for global youth engagement by hosting the GYS virtually (April 2021) and in-person at the WCC (September 2021). This created opportunities for some youth participants to voice their opinions and concerns for conservation in sessions and events throughout the WCC Forum, but barriers to participation remain.

4.8. Discussion

"One Nature", the WCC theme, addressed how the world's population shares the planet's biodiversity and finite resources. "One Future", was the call to action for participants to secure the future by working together. IUCN is a prominent geopolitical actor with the power to set new standards and practices in motion. Practices such as youth engagement have been demonstrated by IUCN through (i) the implementation of processes in its internal governance structures (Commissions and Secretariat), (ii) the creation of spaces for engagement through both the GYS and the WCC Forum (2021), and (iii) the articulation of youth concerns and expectations in the Output Statement and the Youth Strategy 2020-2030. However, youth engagement in the WCC Forum, a space that influences decision-making, revealed barriers to youth engagement at the global level.

The environmental justice literature reveals complex dynamics that highlight power asymmetries through youth justice claims-making. Youth justice claims-making is described as the articulation of youth experiences and needs through the claiming of organisational resources, and in return the organisation (the more powerful actor) either endorses or rejects it (Thew et al., 2020). Under the guise of 'One Nature, One Future', justice claims were made in both GYS because youth actors needed the WCC Assembly and the IUCN Council (2021) to endorse the proposals made. Youth engagement in this regard refers to their position of self-mobilisation and having power to negotiate with justice claims-making or being mobilised and having to negotiate for power. As such, youth engagement addresses the subjectivities and positionalities of youth in the GEG. In the conservation arena of the WCC Forum, the youth narratives showed that activist work is being done, albeit in localised clusters at the individual

and organisational level. Furthermore, these experiences were voiced both in the GYS and through the Output Statement,

The GYS Output Statement and the Intergens Report strongly recommended intergenerational partnerships and dialogue. The global youth voices represented in the Output Statement were not shared with the High-level Panel's political and economic leaders. Mobilising youth from across the world firstly involves NGO's recognising the importance of including marginalised groups in key governance spaces. The narratives in this study highlighted that youth participants face different challenges to engagement, as power dynamics need to be addressed to strengthen intergenerational dialogues and partnerships. Ideas and knowledge structures are based on assigned meanings and interpretations of issues; for example, Nature Based Solutions for Indigenous Peoples versus policymakers (Taylor, 2000). This social constructionist perspective is rooted in traditional top-down flows of information (Taylor, 2000). Environmental justice challenges these constructions and encourages dialogue through avenues such as intergenerational knowledge sharing. The Official Opening Ceremony was a prime opportunity to implement IPS on a global platform through IUCN. The experiences of activists promoting justice in countries such as Brazil for example, were described as "deadly" and European activism as "civilised". These diverse youth experiences in biodiversity protection need to be amplified in high-level spaces to raise awareness.

As alluded to earlier, the WCC strengthens the integration between the private sector and conservation in relation to neoliberal modes of environmental governance (Brockington et al, 2008; MacDonald, 2010; Buscher et al, 2012; Fletcher, 2014). This highlights the asymmetrical power dynamics that exist in governance between actors, with the WCC Forum focusing on political and business interests, as highlighted at the Opening Ceremony (Shackleton et al, 2022). Although participation processes may have the best intentions, they are embedded in power (Carpenter, 2020). For instance, through "shallow participation" powerful stakeholders may drive processes that foster participation whilst retaining the decision-making power (Shackleton et al, 2022: 11). This may reinforce existing power dynamics especially when underlying structural power remains unchecked (Shackleton et al, 2022). For example, although the slogan *One Nature, One Future!* may encourage unity, it does not adequately address the underlying inequalities affecting youth and other marginalised groups in these decision-making platforms. Youth experiences with conservation are not homogenous and

Orsini (2022: 29) rightfully states, "there is no 'global youth' but a diversity of youth actors in global politics".

In addition, IUCN's internal youth engagement process aims to adapt governance structures to include youth voices in key components of the Union (e.g. Secretariat and Council). This process was a joint effort amongst Members (voting on Resolutions and Recommendations), the Secretariat (internal survey and discussions) and the Council. It also included obtaining input from youth at the GYS (April 2021). This process resulted in an Output Statement that informed the Youth Strategy. However, this output primarily applies to youth within IUCN and does not address engagement in decision-making for those outside of IUCN. As highlighted above, external youth engagement is based on collaboration and partnership through intergenerational dialogue at events and involvement in meaningful roles (IUCN Youth Strategy, 2022). While the focus was on unity in experience and action under *One Nature One Future,* youth engagement at the WCC also highlighted the underlying inequalities that affect who can afford to be at the table.

Youth interactions revealed that IUCN has visible, formalised structures that indirectly act as gatekeepers to engagement and result in unequal access to spaces of power. For youth who face an intersection of socio-economic challenges in their daily lives (e.g. unemployment), the IUCN access policy, embedded in the cost of registration, is a visible barrier to engagement. Access to the WCC limits participants from the Global South who face physical and material barriers due to high registration costs. Furthermore, the WCC promotes traditional and elite power structures that are embedded in an event landscape fostered in a corporate environment (George and Reed, 2017). Traditional and narrow governance structures are maintained to obtain funding or appease donors (corporate strategies) (George and Reed, 2017). Thus, one youth participant rightly asked, "Who are the real very important people in the world of conservation?" In addition, hosting a separate GYS, where an alternative opening ceremony invited global leaders, ended up 'siloing' youth engagement with a result of youth 'preaching to the choir' and empty tables.

The IPS initiative (Zurba et al. 2021) creates a realistic starting point for international NGOs to recognise and represent youth on an equitable basis, using a sustainable approach. It would be idealistic to expect IUCN to shift its focus from business and state partners to primarily associating with actors such as youth and Indigenous peoples. Instead, through the IPS or an

amended version, IUCN can create safe engagement spaces with global leaders, fostering dialogues with youth to transform their ideas and solutions into policy. Within this multi-stakeholder approach of intergenerational dialogue, those with power (in business and politics) can discuss sustainable solutions to context-specific environmental issues being faced by youth. IUCN has the geopolitical power and influence to bring together actors in a collaborative platform for dialogue. This can be described as the "Safe Spaces" approach to IPS, which would allow youth the opportunity to voice concerns, frustrations, and challenges without fear of repercussions from the leaders present. In the context of environmental justice, youth disproportionately affected by the unequal distribution of environmental costs could expect action-oriented responses and support that acknowledges and addresses their diverse identities, cultures, and experiences. Orsini (2022) therefore suggests that youth self-mobilise and express their innovative and cross-cutting demands (bridging environmental ambitions, accountability, and human rights) should be encouraged at global events such as the WCC. This mobilisation will help ensure that youth become even more visible, especially where protecting and conserving biodiversity is concerned, both in the literature and in policy.

4.9.   Conclusion

In conclusion, conservation governance has been criticised because of its exclusionary approaches (Techera, 2008; Buscher and Ramutsindela, 2016; Brockington and Wilkie, 2015). This has led to decades of disenfranchisement of marginalised groups such as local communities and Indigenous peoples from their natural resources and decision-making, and more recently, youth. Environmental justice calls for the recognition and inclusion of these marginalised groups in decision-making processes (Boon, 2010). For youth, engagement not only depends on motivating decision-makers to be inclusive, but also on creating structural mechanisms to enable participation, where space is created and social recognition is granted (Yohalem and Martin, 2007). This chapter utilised the example of IUCN's WCC Forum to assess how youth engage with international NGOs within decision-making processes. This chapter discussed the various challenges that youth face in navigating spaces of power and highlighted the need to go beyond talking about engagement through One Nature, One Future, to recognising diversity by creating seats at the table at a global level. The chapter showed that although youth engagement is recognised by global conservation actors such as IUCN, it is stratified and can be viewed as tokenistic due to the underlying inequalities resulting from the access to decision-making spaces and resources controlled by powerful actors.

The Youth Studies framework provided a lens through which to understand and interrogate how 'youth' as a term and as a social category experiences conservation governance at a global level, using the IUCN case study. This global perspective highlights the inequalities in decision-making processes when youth, as a social group, interact with powerful organisations. The term 'youth' is often used as a homogenous category, overlooking the complexities of underlying youth identities. By offering a perspective on the individual experiences of youth in a global collective decision-making environment, with a particular focus on youth from the Global South, this chapter contributes to the transition lens of the Youth Studies literature. These experiences challenge the global framing of youth as a collective category. In line with environmental justice literature, the experiences of individual participants informed how their realities at the local level influenced their engagement at the global level in conferences such as the WCC.

The thesis will now shift its focus to the regional level of conservation governance, specifically the experiences of youth in leadership positions in conservation organisations in Eastern and Southern Africa. Chapter 5 will now discuss leadership as a strategy for youth engagement in conservation.

CHAPTER 5.

Youth leadership in regional conservation governance

5. The regional level

Image 3*: Moments before embarking on a game drive in the Kruger National Park from the Southern African Wildlife College, South Africa. (October 2022). Photo Credit: Amukelani Mashele.*

Transitioning from a global perspective on youth engagement to the regional or continental level in Africa requires a brief acknowledgement of the continent's geopolitical position. Africa is diverse in terms of history, culture, language, religion, and racial groups that constitute the continent. Geopolitically, African nations are in the Global South. This is argued to have negative implications for the bargaining power of the continent, regional blocs, and individual countries on the global stage regarding policies in economics, trade, environmental issues, conflict, and migration, among others (Carmody, 2013). The geopolitical position of the continent has also influenced the community and individual level, where global developmental, health, education, and environmental policies are targeted towards women, children, and youth. The interactive governance framework effectively describes the interaction between global policies and local actors. In the mid-2000s, for example, Peace Parks emerged as a conservation approach in southern Africa to stimulate local development and alleviate poverty and were promoted as a "global solution" for protecting biodiversity across borders (Thakholi et al, 2024: 3). More recently, global policies such as Sustainable Development Goals, 30 X 30, and Nature-based Solutions, which focus on conservation through protected areas and carbon sinks, are targeted at the African continent due to its vast land and ocean reserves. Additionally, developmental, and environmental policies are increasingly targeting the youth population in Africa, due to its rapid population growth (Thieme, 2018; Strong and Kelly, 2022).

According to the African Youth Charter, youth are defined as individuals aged between 15 and 35 years old. The Charter outlines the responsibility of African states (in Article, 11, 15 and 19) to provide young people with equal access to decent and fair employment, a clean and healthy environment which they can influence through conservation and environmental policy, and the opportunity to participate in all aspects of society. States must promote the active participation of youth through advocacy, peer education, training, and financial and technical assistance[1]. In fact, an important aspect of youth engagement in policy and governance, is leadership. Although, the African Youth Charter does not specify youth participation in leadership, the growing literature and attention in environmental and developmental policy necessitate the need for further attention. The direction of the thesis will therefore flow into the African context of youth engagement with particular focus on leadership in conservation governance within conservation organisations.

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[1] Please see pdf extension for more information:
Chrome extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7789-treaty-0033_-_african_youth_charter_e.pdf.

Title: Youth leadership in regional conservation governance

5.1. Abstract

Leadership and environmental governance literature do not provide substantial insights into youth leadership in conservation, yet it is a strategy that political, developmental, and environmental organisations have utilised when engaging youth. Youth leadership is viewed as vital in achieving a sustainable future. Prominent and visible examples in the mass media are youth engaged in resistance movements through climate activism and in the literature, youth leadership development programmes. In practice youth are described as youth champions and changemakers by environmental organisations such as IUCN and WWF. However, there has been little attention in the leadership and environmental governance literature to the prominence, visibility, and perspectives of youth as leaders. This chapter fills this gap by providing a youth perspective on leadership in conservation, based on empirical data from twenty youth leaders in eastern and southern Africa. The chapter discusses how these youth leaders engage with conservation through the 'leader' framework at the regional organisational level. The perspectives of the youth leaders emphasise that power is embedded in the way youth and leadership are utilised to achieve the developmental agenda, which is based on tapping into the potential of Africa's expanding youth population. The youth experiences reveal what motivated them to work in conservation, the skills, and capacities they needed to fulfil their roles and the challenges they face in leadership. When discussed in relation to existing leadership literature, the chapter shows that youth leadership attributes in conservation are based on the participant's (a) an understanding of how nature functions, (b) self-awareness, and (c) involvement in environmental work through activism, awareness raising, and education. Furthermore, the chapter places importance on power in understanding youth engagement in relation to adult leaders and powerful interests. There is a need for adult leaders to yield authority and responsibility through trust, respect, and collaboration with youth in conservation governance.

Key words: youth, leadership, youth engagement, conservation, governance

5.2.   Introduction

Youth leadership is viewed as vital in achieving a sustainable future (Reuter et al, 2020; Shahzad, 2023). Youth leaders are described as individuals who are agents of change and value nature with a passion for environmental issues and seek to educate and create a better future for all (Dietz et al, 2004; Riemer et al, 2016; IUCN, 2022; WWF, 2021; Peace Parks Foundation, 2022). Through environmental movements and social media, young, charismatic, and influential environmental activists have amplified youth voices in environmental governance, for example, 'YouLead' Africa or the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN). These prominent youth actors are actively challenging the behaviour of states and organisations towards environmental matters by advocating for radical change in behaviour[2] (Thew et al, 2021; Orsini, 2022). Furthermore, there is recognition of 'youth leaders' within the environmental policy and activism domains; for example, Greta Thunberg and Vanessa Nakate, who have challenged big corporations and governments for their roles in exacerbating the climate crisis.

The youth-centred focus in governance dates to 1985, the International Youth Year of Participation, Development and Peace marked by the UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (Nicu, 1985). The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) was adopted in 1995 to address the challenges facing young people in the next millennium. In 2003, the General Assembly reaffirmed its commitment to youth by adopting resolution 58/133, reaffirming the importance of youth participation at all levels, and in 2009, by resolution 64/134, the General Assembly proclaimed the International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding through Resolution 64/134. The World Parks Congress in Durban, 2003, urged youth engagement in biodiversity conservation. Currently, youth engagement structures in conservation are visible in organisations such as IUCN and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), which describe youth as 'changemakers' and 'champions', respectively (Riemer et al, 2014). In fact, youth mainstreaming and intergenerational partnerships have paved the way for youth to take on leadership roles within environmental governance (Zurba et al, 2023). In addition, sustainability is at the forefront of international policies, including the 2022 Kunming and Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which focuses on a just transition to inclusive conservation for women, youth and the disabled (Target 22, GBF) (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2023).

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[2] YouLead Africa: https://www.youlead.africa/ and GBYN: https://www.gybn.org/

On a regional level in Africa, the Leadership for Conservation in Africa has developed a youth engagement strategy called 'rejuvenation'. This strategy aims to revitalise organisational decision-making, education, and awareness initiatives by delivering conservation education material to young participants across the African continent via their Share Screen Africa platform. Secondly, the organisation established a Youth Advisory Council to promote youth leadership. Similarly, the Southern African Wildlife College in Kruger National Park, South Africa, focuses on training and promoting young leaders in conservation. In addition, the research facility employs young professionals in conservation training and education.

Environmental governance literature has noted the visible presence of youth in international governance spaces specifically around climate activism and politics (Orsini and Kang, 2023; Zurba et al, 2023). However, little attention has been paid in the academic literature to youth prominence and visibility as individual political actors and, in this case, as leaders (Orsini and Kang, 2023). Leadership and environmental governance literatures do not yet provide substantial insights into youth leadership in conservation despite it being a strategy that political, developmental, and environmental organisations have utilised when engaging youth (Benedikter et al, 2020). A broad conceptualisation of leadership on the individual level encompasses a variety of stakeholders including entrepreneurs, champions and brokers associated with roles and actions that influence environmental outcomes (Evans et al, 2015).

The term youth is a social construct with no consensus on the definition; it is denoted as a stage of development and transition characterised by a process of integrating past experiences and current ideals into an evolving realisation of self and identity (Igwe and Usoro, 2021). In practice, youth who are described as changemakers or champions offer a more 'professionalised' and 'entrepreneurial' leadership perspective on their agency in mitigating biodiversity loss and climate change (Dietz et al, 2004). Thus, the concept of 'youth leadership' could provide a strategic method through which programmes, organisations and global narratives identify and label youth actors in environmental governance and policy arenas.

The research question that guides this chapter is: **what are the experiences of youth conservation leaders**? To answer this question, the wider leadership literature will be explored to outline the characteristics and experiences involved in being labelled a leader, champion or changemaker (Arnold et al, 2009; Riemer and Dittmer, 2016; Paulo, 2023). Thereafter, utilising

the narratives of twenty youth actors working in conservation organisations in Southern and Eastern Africa, this chapter aims to situate youth leadership in the broader conservation governance and leadership literature. It will fill the literature gap by providing a youth perspective to leadership from empirical data by discussing how these youth actors have previously or are currently engaging with conservation at the regional organisational level. Drawing on these youth narratives the chapter finds that youth leadership in conservation is based on the individual's (a) an understanding of how nature functions, (b) self-awareness, and (c) involvement in environmental work through activism, awareness raising and education. These attributes are fostered through mentorship, trust, respect, collaboration with others and support (financial and social).

5.3. Situating (youth) leadership in the environmental governance and leadership literatures

Leadership is a crosscutting concept that transcends the global, regional, and local levels of governance and engagement between state, non-state and individual actors. It is a concept that spans various fields of study and is operationalised based on the context or group being described. Within the field of International Relations, leadership refers to individuals who endeavour to solve or bypass societal issues by pursuing a collective goal over self-interest (Young, 1991 in Liefferink et al, 2023). The same authors argue that environmental leadership is focused on the Global North even though there is a slow shift to widen the scope to Global South actors at all levels of engagement. On the individual level, environmental leadership is often associated with 'pioneering', where an actor can lead the way to a more sustainable future and to the improvement of the common good, without necessarily having to attract followers (Liefferink et al, 2023). This chapter focuses primarily on the individual level of leadership.

The youth development literature identifies three pathways that have been proven to provide youth with opportunities for progressive leadership opportunities: (i) youth philanthropy, (ii) evaluation and action research, and (iii) policy and advocacy (Libby et al, 2006). Firstly, youth philanthropy involves youth receiving training and support to make decisions and lead projects, from design to implementation and grant seeking with the support of adult allies (Libby et al, 2006). For instance, entrepreneurial leaders recognise social problems by using commercial principles to organise, create and bring about social change through innovative ideas (Evans et

al, 2015). The IUCN Youth Changemakers programme encompasses this model. At the 2023 IUCN Leaders Forum, eight Youth Changemakers showcased their innovative ideas and solutions to environmental issues in their communities; they presented these concepts to an audience of business executives, investors and environmental experts who were ready to offer advice and financial support for their ground-breaking ideas (IUCN Leaders Forum, 2023).

Second, youth-led evaluation and action research refers to training and supporting young people in designing and conducting research to inform their work, be it developing education, advocating policy, or making recommendations (Libby et al, 2006). The process awards youth with credibility when offering recommendations and making demands to decision-makers (Libby et al, 2006). For example, the GYBN utilised their youth network of experts and activists to engage with decision-makers and leaders in various forums such as the IUCN World Conservation Congress (2021) and the IUCN Leaders Forum (2023). Within climate politics, youth activists are regarded as prominent figures in leading social movements to achieve reduced greenhouse gas emissions (e.g. Fridays for Future). This example relates to the third pathway, which is policy advocacy (Libby et al, 2006). However, the literature surrounding youth engagement often focuses on the climate change space and prominent Global North centred actors such as Greta Thunberg omitting actors in the Global South (Thew et al, 2021; Orsini and Kang, 2023).

At the same time, youth have been absent in the adult-focused leadership literature (MacNiel, 2006). When discussing youth and leadership, the literature often concentrates on youth engagement and leadership programmes, but less so on youth in leadership positions within decision-making and policy spaces (Bourassa, 2017). This approach focuses on how organisations engage with youth, rather than drawing on their experiences. Leadership programmes are processes that foster engagement by developing leadership attributes amongst participants (Riemer et al, 2014; Bourassa, 2017). For example, MacNiel (2006) states that Youth Leadership Development (YLD) is a method in which programmes and organisations develop 'ability' as opposed to 'authority' (which is the focus of adult leadership development). Ability implies the need for skills, knowledge and talent through education and programmes (to be discussed in the section to follow) whilst authority seeks to foster influence, a voice and decision-making power (MacNeil, 2006). Arguably, being a member of some leadership programmes fosters authority as well, where peers are influential decision-makers. Leadership

programmes also foster collaborative power across institutions and individuals of influence (ibid).

Furthermore, some studies have focused on personal characteristics or attributes, while others have focused on actions and processes (Libby et al, 2006). In practice, communities often neglect developing youth leadership potential where youth development and leadership efforts are kept separate from community development (Mortensen et al, 2014). This is based on how youth are perceived within these decision-making and leadership spaces. For example, youth are either denoted as 'disruptors' or 'heroes' when being mobilised for social or (in this case) environmental change (Iwilade, 2019). Either perception will influence how youth are positioned and the policy interventions utilised to include them in leadership, decision-making and implementation of strategies. Additionally, leadership is not limited to the future, yet the leadership development opportunities prepare youth for future leadership roles rather than helping them lead as current young leaders (Harrison et al, 2016; Beukes, 2021). This may result in limited opportunities for youth to become change agents in their communities resulting in a shortage of youth leaders across various sectors (Mortensen et al, 2014). If the conservation sector wishes to attract youth and engage with them in significant roles in governance, there is a need to understand their experiences within leadership roles and what it means to them (Mortensen et al, 2014).

Youth leadership is a process whereby young people are coached or trained in programmes or education, while developing attributes that make an individual or position suitable for a leadership role (Riemer at et al, 2014; Hickman et al, 2016; Webb et al, 2022). Often, youth selected for such programmes already show a track record in leadership and programmes may play a role in advancing their leadership aspirations through the power of networks and the credibility that comes with being an alumnus of prominent programmes. However, it is argued that there is a discrepancy between youth leadership education and experiences of youth in leadership (Klau, 2006; Mortensen et al, 2014). For instance, the leadership literature differentiates authority and leadership when conceptualising youth experiences (Klau, 2006). Authority refers to a formal position or appointment with power and may result in the exercise of leadership, leading or being a leader (e.g. being a student body president) (Klau, 2006). Whereas, leadership is a broader concept that can encompass several attributes and processes when pertaining to youth actors. It is therefore important to understand how youth engagement processes cater to leadership and the components associated with it.

5.3.1. Youth engagement through leadership

Hickman and co-authors (2016) describe youth leadership through the lens of engagement and the need to operationalise it in various cultural contexts. This process involves fully engaged citizens who are motivated by a desire to create transformative environmental change within the social, cultural, and political systems (society's foundational norms, functions, and regulations) and their communities (Riemer et al, 2013). For this study, the term 'servant leader' has been chosen to describe leadership in relation to youth in conservation. The 'servant leader' model refers to youth leadership because it describes "someone who makes decisions that enhance the entire group or organisation… with values of fairness, integrity and dependability" (Libby et al, 2006: 18). These active citizens engage in two types of environmental action: participatory actions and leadership which "seeks to solve root causes of a problem while influencing and engaging others" (Hickman et al, 2016: 167). Utilising a theory of engagement based on Youth Leading Environmental Change (YLEC), Hickman and co-authors contend that effective youth engagement in environmental action involves the following attributes: (i) comprehension, (ii) motivation, (iii) skills, (iv) self-efficacy, and (v) opportunity (Hickman et al, 2019: 168). Similarly, the servant leader model integrates such individual characteristics with collective processes such as aligning personal environmental actions with the collective cultural beliefs and identity of local communities or Indigenous peoples (Libby et al, 2006; Pascual et al, 2023). Therefore, by working within or outside of organisations and systems, these processes and supporting attributes enable youth as individuals to act and make effective change (Libby et al, 2006).

Youth are argued to be desirable actors for community environmental action because they are a "powerful force for creating change due to their optimism and fresh perspectives" (Hickman et al, 2016: 168). Iwilade's (2019) angle of youth as 'doing things' as opposed to merely 'being something' can be applied here. Historically, youth have been the drivers and leaders of socio-cultural shifts through political movements such as the Arab Spring that reverberated across North Africa and parts of the Middle East (2010 – 2012). In addition, the 'Fridays for Future' climate movement mobilises youth actors and positions them as key citizens and drivers for environmental action and change (Thew et al, 2021). Youth leaders are expected to possess certain characteristics that are essential for effective leadership. For instance, Arnold and co-authors (2009) propose that positive environmental attitudes and behaviours can be translated

into leadership activities across various domains, such as volunteering. Individual characteristics would include spending time in the natural environment with parents and peers or having negative experiences with environmental degradation. Similarly, leaders should have the ability to motivate some change in human behaviour, be effective at a policy level and have a commitment to social justice, which is supported by personal reputation (Evans et al, 2015). The leadership literature affirms that young people are aware of the problems facing their communities and yet, have important and often ignored insights into changes and solutions (Mortensen et al, 2014). It is also argued that young people are more willing to take risks and tackle problems than adults (ibid). As such, youth are strategically positioned to create and lead environmental change (Riemer et al, 2014). Meanwhile, Hickman and co-authors (2016) posit that youth need to be emotionally aware, understand the complexities associated with environmental issues, and have self-awareness and motivation. Finally, Webb and colleagues (2022) highlight the importance of stakeholder engagement, trust, vision, individual champions, and excellence in internal attributes as key leadership qualities. There are three principal leadership descriptions and corresponding components highlighted in the literature (Table 7).

Table 7: leadership descriptions and attributes outlined in the literature.

Authors (Reference)	Description of Leadership	Components/Attributes
Dietz et al (2004)	The ability to influence others. Conservation leaders were seen as people with a clear vision of a large-scale action plan. They possess the interpersonal skills necessary to garner support within and outside their organisation. They have a realistic view of what can and cannot be accomplished, and they strike compromise as necessary to keep the organisation moving forward.	Early childhood exposure to nature; exposed to diverse cultures in their youth; having role models or mentors; academic programmes and opportunities to interact with local conservation leaders, professionals, and jobs; interdisciplinary training.
MacNeil (2006)	A rational process combining ability with authority to positively influence and impact diverse individuals, organisations, and communities.	Ability: knowledge, skills, and talents (youth) Authority: voice, influence, and decision-making power (adults).

Riemer & Dittmer (2016).	Environmental action. Equipping people to become effective social agents and leading environmental change.	Emphasis on environmental change on a societal level rather than personal.

The theory of environmentality likens action to agency where Agrawal (2005) describes the creation of environmental subjects. The concept of youth leadership as 'servants' raises questions about whether young people must conform to specific characteristics to be considered leaders, similar to Agrawal's subjects. For example, does the framing of leadership create a group of young 'leaders' who are entrepreneurial or charismatic? These individuals may have a prominent role in global platforms and be articulate about broader issues, however, may not be effective in more localised circles. The categorisation can lead to an elite and exclusionary process to youth engagement in leadership. Thus, the manner in which leadership literature outlines the key attributes for youth and leadership can be related to Agrawal's theory of subject formation in environmental governance.

5.3.2. *Youth, leadership and environmentality*

Environmentality was developed from Foucault's theory of governmentality. In governmentality, governing institutions exercise technologies of power as powerful intervention tools that "determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends of domination" (Foucault, 1988: 18). Governmentality encompasses a meeting point of technologies of self and power, referred to as "technologies of domination" (Foucault, 1988). Foucault's work on technologies of power is embedded in his arguments on technologies of self in contemporary governmentality (Skinner, 2013). The 'practices of self' that operate through human subjectivities involve internalising "what the subject must be, to what condition he is subject, what status he must have, what position he must occupy in reality or in the imaginary... in order to become a legitimate subject of this or that kind of knowledge" (Skinner, 2013: 908). For instance, in the applications of Foucault's theory, it is argued that the relationship between an organisation and its employees is embedded in power relations exercised through (among other things) employee rules, codes of conduct and management expectations of employees. This organisational culture creates an environment that seeks to assimilate employees' subjectivities to the organisation's goals and the constitution of the organisation's identities (Skinner, 2013). However, technologies of power and of self, omit the possibility of an active subject and instead propose subjugation of passive victims. Foucauldian

governmentality describes multiple and ever-shifting power relations, which are often exercised through discourses of knowledge, such as corporate strategies. These strategies are comprised of constructed truths that define behaviour and "constitute or re-constitute employee subjectivity" (Skinner, 2013: 909). Similarly, Agrawal describes environmentality as the "examining of emerging technologies of environmental governance and their relationship with the changes in human subjectivities in politics, institutions and, identity" (2005: 5). In environmentality, "new environmental subjects" have positions that emerge as a result of their involvement in struggles over resources in relation to new institutions and changing self-interests and notions of self (Agrawal, 2005: 5). The "notions of self" refers to subjectivity and identity whereas the "changing self-interests" refer to the position of institutions, their interests, and their power over subjects (ibid). These two positions influence the 'government of the environment' that includes an interconnected relationship between the state, market, and community (Lemos and Agrawal, 2006). Youth "notions of self" (identity and subjectivity) in conservation are strongly influenced by who and how they are classified or defined, as noted in previous chapters. At the core, subject formation requires a change in behaviour, practice, and values for conservation outcomes (Agrawal, 2005). These conservation outcomes are determined by powerful actors who influence decision-making and participation in governance processes. Environmentality and subject formation can be viewed as a result of environmental governance and the undercurrents of power that determine how and which actors can engage in governance.

Reverting to engagement in environmental actions, specific intentional and sustainable practices include individual-level changes (e.g. recycling) or larger movements such as leading protests in civic action (Riemer et al, 2014). These larger movements involve influencing peers, family members and communities with knowledge of the environmental issues being faced and actions needed to address them (Riemer et al, 2014). For example, the theory of engagement "assumes the presence of enabling factors" that include attributes outlined by Hickman and co-authors (comprehension, skills, motivation, and self-efficacy) (Hickman et al, 2014: 168). These attributes must be developed through opportunities that provide youth with experience and practice (Remier et al, 2014). The various often overlapping components or attributes for leadership outlined in Table 7, are rooted in action through the servitude of the servant leader in conservation.

Thus, youth leadership can be viewed in two ways under Environmentality. First, youth must embody the behaviours and knowledge of the programmes (e.g. mentors or role models, organisations, or clubs) in order to fully engage in environmental action. Second, youth must then dispense those learnt practices and behaviours to their families, peers, and communities, as exemplars or leaders themselves. Environmental actions and practices are therefore embedded in embodied youth behavioural ideals that reflect environmental practices, demands and commitments for change and sustainability (Lemos and Agrawal, 2006; Colapietro, 2004). In this way, youth engagement through environmental conferences, programmes, organisations, and clubs helps to identify and shape personal traits or characteristics that would befit a young leader. Furthermore, through conferences, youth are better able to improve their social relationships and raise awareness on issues that are important to their community (Harrison et al, 2016). Engaging with these spaces fosters development in (i) comprehension of environmental issues such as biodiversity loss; (ii) motivation and passion, (iii) acquiring and developing hard and soft skills to do the work needed which would increase, (iv) self-belief in their capacity, (v) seeking opportunities that would help them develop and participate in finding solutions (Hickman et al, 2016: 168). This development builds on self-awareness and relational values for nature (Pascual et al, 2023). For example, relational values are related to *Ubuntu*[3] in southern Africa where Indigenous and local knowledge are underpinned by the beliefs and philosophies of cultural and spiritual values (Mawere, 2014; Pascual et al, 2023).

Environmental organisations and clubs are important in facilitating social connections, guidance and support that encourages long-term engagement (Hickman et al, 2016). However, these programmes and spaces can be negative because powerful practitioners may project their own beliefs (creation of subjects) of what youth may need and how they need to behave (Klaus, 2006). These facilitators of engagement potentially create an environment in which youth can inherit and imitate organisational or club behaviours that are in line with environmental actions of those in authority. Youth actors would have to adopt and embody certain ideals and practices when in leadership positions that are facilitated by programmes or organisations (Shackleton et al, 2023). Therefore, through subject formation practices, certain attributes are nurtured in spaces that facilitate youth development through leadership and conservation practices.

5.3.3. *Situating youth leadership in Southern Africa*

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[3] Originating from the South Africa Zulu language, Ubuntu can be translated to "I am because you are".

Youth leadership in the African context is critical because growing environmental challenges, such as climate change (droughts, flooding and increasing prevalence of diseases like malaria), will affect the growing youth population most (Buekes, 2021). Youth actors can meaningfully contribute to finding solutions if they are presented with opportunities that help them understand their role and the challenges ahead of them within environmental governance (Buekes, 2021). Development geographers classify youth from the Global South according to their precarity resulting from their uncertain futures (Thieme, 2018). Similarly, the Youth Studies literature problematises leadership development by arguing that the need for youth leadership development (YLD) stems from a deficit model of youth, positioning them as incomplete, vulnerable and a problem to fix (MacNeil, 2006). Furthermore, 'leadership' situates youth as resources and human capital to be exploited by organisations and their communities because they offer unique, fresh perspectives and ideas (ibid). Indeed, there is a substantial global investment of financial resources in youth leadership from within and outside Africa, based on the perspective of reforming Africa's existing and aging leadership (Strong and Kelly, 2022), including, for example, the Young Leaders African Initiative, the African Leadership University, and the African Leadership Academy. YLD either seeks to intervene by providing guidance for risky behaviour amongst youth or seeks to provide preventative measures through opportunities that discourage youth from engaging in risky behaviours (ibid). It can be argued that how youth are classified within the policy and governance arenas influences how they are engaged with because organisations and states can operationalise the youth to suit their interests (Igwe and Usoro, 2021).

Within the African context, youth form the largest demographic and are growing in size. Africa is said to have the youngest population of 200 million between the ages of 15-24, with 60% of Africa's youth population is facing unemployment, which is worsened by the lack of access to quality education (Benedikter et al, 2020). Additionally, environmental challenges such as drought, water shortages, and food insecurity exacerbate the situation (Benedikter et al, 2020). From a developmental perspective, African youth are being engaged with from a place of deficiency and vulnerability with a need to be empowered (Orsini, 2022). YLD is viewed as a positive initiative as it seeks to provide youth with supportive relationships, mentoring and opportunities to make valuable contributions to their communities; as such, YLD could be viewed as an investment in human capital and the harnessing of latent potential in the growing youth population (Benedikter et al, 2020). In the context of conservation governance, the

environmental justice literature positions youth as marginalised from key environmental decision-making spaces, with youth bearing an unfair burden and responsibility for the well-being of an uncertain environmental future (van der Westheizen, 2019; Nrkhuma, 2021; Mkhize et al, 2022; Orsini, 2022). Youth voices are often muted in environmental governance spaces due to barriers such as access to decision-making spaces and the lack of capacity (Benedikter et al, 2020). Several studies have been conducted on the leadership of African youth and their contribution to development, however, there is an absence of literature on youth leadership in the African conservation sector (Karanja, 2013; Gichuki, 2014; Iya, 2014; Strong and Kelly, 2022).

Thus, there is a need to understand how the developmental agenda of youth empowerment through leadership, is reflected within the conservation space. Funding policies spearheaded by organisations such as the World Bank classify African youth as being simultaneously a 'ticking time bomb' as well as 'agents of change' (Strong and Kelly, 2022). In conservation, Fred Swaniker, founder of the African Leadership University, advocates for the inclusion of younger, talented Africans to bring African perspectives to the conservation agenda (Butler, 2019). This is necessary because African communities often fail to take ownership of wildlife resources and there is a need to transform conservation into a 'high-growth market' (Butler, 2019). As business, environmental, and socio-political interests focus on environmental-related challenges such as biodiversity loss, youth inclusion has increasingly become a priority due to the bulging youth population and its underdeveloped potential. As such, leadership is a popular method to engage youth in the development and conservation arena. Considering these debates in the literature, this chapter will now proceed to discuss the methods used to collect data from twenty young participants, thereafter, their experiences within positions of leadership in the conservation arena, will be presented.

5.4. Methods

This chapter integrates qualitative methods of in-depth interviews and participant observation to understand the experiences of youth in leadership positions in two conservation organisations in Africa: The Leadership for Conservation in Africa (LCA) and the Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC).

Firstly, participant observation was utilised in the LCA organisation from June 2021 to the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) meeting in February 2024. I began as a facilitator of the LCA weekly webinars, Youth Talks in Unlocking Nature and thereafter, volunteered as facilitator of the Share Screen Africa (a subsidiary of the LCA) Rethinking Conservation Webinar Series throughout 2022. I attended the LCA Council Meetings of 2022 in Botswana and 2023 in South Africa. In both, I participated as a young leader of the LCA Council with 11 other youth leaders between the ages of 20 and 36. Thereafter, I was appointed as a member of the Share Screen Africa Advisory Board (currently the Acting Chairperson) and appointed as the Chairperson of the LCA's YAC, established at the 2023 Council Meeting. My colleagues and I developed the LCA Youth Strategy that was adopted by the LCA Board in November 2023. Together with these experiences in leadership positions in the LCA, I interviewed YAC members to gain insight on their experiences as youth leaders in LCA.

Applying participant observation as an insider in qualitative research requires a reflexive methodological approach of positionality. The 'self' is a central component of research as data collection often faces the tensions of intersubjective elements, personal characteristics, and positionality (Adu-Ampong and Adams, 2020). Thus, when conducting research in familiar spaces such as home country, villages, communities or with kin, one is confronted with the dynamics of being a researcher and insider (Adu-Ampong and Adams, 2020). Reflexivity is described as a deconstructive undertaking that encourages researchers to locate intersections between themselves and the text, the 'other', and the world in a bid to recognise particularities in their research (e.g. biases) (ibid). In this context my position in the LCA represented an insider-outsider dynamic as a newly appointed youth leader, researching youth in conservation and being formally associated with the organisation. Therefore, I recognise and acknowledge my positionality in being involved and embedded in the LCA organisation. I acknowledge the challenges of conducting research in an organisation where social relations have been established with the LCA members who are also participants in this research. Nonetheless, the research conducted with LCA is an important perspective to understanding youth leadership in an African context.

Secondly, participant observation and in-depth interviews were conducted with youth who work in leadership positions at the SAWC in the Kruger National Park (KNP) in South Africa. This fieldwork was conducted (in-person and virtually) from August 2022 to March of 2023 at the SAWC and follow up interviews were conducted until November 2023. The interviews

were a component of fieldwork conducted to understand youth experiences and roles with conservation in the Greater KNP. Thus, youth from surrounding communities and those working in conservation as Environmental Monitors were also interviewed during this time. For this chapter, the narratives of SAWC youth facilitators who are regarded as leaders of conservation in their spheres of influence were used. Their experiences will help situate the experiences of youth leadership in administering training and education in and around a protected area that is riddled with complexity due the contestation surrounding conservation. The results were analysed using thematic analysis. Themes were systematically derived from the data using deductive coding.

The results presented will focus on the narratives of the youth participants. All youth participants are coded using pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity. Utilising thematic analysis, the narratives were coded according to the questions asked and then later themes were teased out from the data. The participants' experiences are thematically presented and expressed through deep narratives, using direct quotes. Personal narratives that include direct quotes enhance and articulate the truths and identities of the participants, while providing context-rich descriptions (Baú, 2016). As such, this chapter endeavoured to articulate the experiences of the youth leaders through their personal accounts and the use of direct quotes. Following from the example of Dietz et al (2004), the questions posed established thematic points of departure for understanding:

(i)   What motivated their involvement in conservation?
(ii)   How do they perceive their roles in conservation?
(iii)   Youth strategies for conservation based on lessons learnt.
(iv)   Youth experiences as conservation professionals and challenges.
(v)   Self-efficacy and self-reflection.
(vi)   Do youth call it leadership?

To answer the research question, the following section will firstly situate the LCA and SAWC as environmental organisations that work with youth regionally. Situating these organisations is important because it will help contextualise how the youth participants experience leadership. Thereafter, it will present the findings from the data collected. The narratives will be presented through storytelling and the use of direct quotes from interviews, to capture and explore the participants' childhood experiences with the natural environment, their involvement

in conservation efforts, their aspirations, and the challenges they encounter while occupying these positions (Jones et al, 2023).

5.4.1. The Youth participants

The chapter focuses on the experiences of youth leaders on the regional African level. Through purposive sampling youth participants involved in and positioned in leadership in conservation were selected. Also described as subjective or selective sampling, purposive sampling relies on the judgement of the researcher to select and investigate a relatively small group of people or pieces of data (Rai and Thapa, 2015). The research participants were selected because of their association with either the SAWC or the LCA. The participants in the research are of African descent and between the ages of 20 and 35. Those associated with SAWC are South African and are involved in conservation as trainers, educators, teachers, and students. However, they are placed in positions of leadership that has a regional southern African reach. They are all black in race and from middle income socio-economic backgrounds and comprise both male and female participants.

Those from the LCA are from Eastern and Southern Africa (Kenya, Malawi, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Africa). This sample also consisted of both male and female participants from middle income socio-economic backgrounds. The racial component of this sample is diverse (mixed, white, Indian, and black). The names of all the participants have been anonymised utilising pseudonyms to protect their identities.

5.4.2. LCA and SAWC involvement with youth

The Leadership for Conservation in Africa (LCA) and the Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC) are two organisations that engage youth within conservation through decision making and implementation (education and awareness). Both organisations work within conservation at the regional level in Africa.

5.4.2.1. LCA and youth leadership

Established in South Africa, the LCA was founded by Chris Marais and other partners (including the South African National Parks, IUCN, and Gold Fields) in the Pafuri Game Reserve in Kruger National Park in 2006. It seeks to 'positively influence, accelerate and bring

about the protection of biodiversity, focussing on rainforests and selected ecosystems in sub-Saharan Africa' using a business approach to initiate conservation-led socio-economic development in Africa (Chris Marais, CEO of LCA). The organisational impact areas include: 1) conservation through multi-stakeholder engagement; 2) virtual conservation education through Share Screen Africa (SSA); 3) the Sabine Plattner African Charities (SPAC) Edu-Conservation in six African countries.

The LCA describes youth engagement as 'rejuvenation' and 'futuring'. It has established engagement structures through delivering conservation education material to youth participants across the African continent on their SSA platform and through the creation and implementation of a YAC within the organisation. The 11 youth leaders (including the author) participated in workshops prior to the LCA Council meetings in 2022 and 2023. They workshopped ideas and strategies to develop a leadership curriculum or programme. The LCA considered the input of the youth leaders to be valuable because the face of conservation is changing from a primarily white and aging population to one that is young and more representative of Indigenous knowledge and expertise. As such, these ideas would help the LCA bridge the divide of what youth are looking for in leadership development training in conservation versus what is currently being offered. Within these workshops' youth participants shared and discussed their experiences with conservation and ideas of how they believed leaders in conservation should navigate their various goals and targets whilst sharing responsibility and knowledge dissemination. Through 'futuring' training, the youth participants were coached on how to navigate decision-making for sustainability because "we don't know where we'll be (in the future) but we still need to make informed decisions" (LCA Council Member, Chobe, 2022). As such, the youth participants were asked to consider what conservation meant to each of them and what component they felt was missing from their formal education.

More recently, the youth leaders developed the Youth Prospectus, a strategic document that provides an overview of the functions of the LCA YAC, in line with the objectives, values and founding principles of the LCA (YAC 'Youth Prospectus' available in Annex 2). The author chaired these discussions and coordinated efforts to formulate the strategy document, which was then presented to the LCA Board in June 2023 and November 2023, where it was adopted.

5.4.2.2. SAWC and youth leadership

The SAWC was established in 1996 on land owned by WWF in the KNP, South Africa. It became operational in 1997 with the support of stakeholders from within South Africa and across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (Wildlife College, 2023). It was established to "strengthen the training of protected area managers for challenges arising within the sector" with the vision to become "a regionally recognised centre of specialisation in conservation education, training and skills development"[4] (Southern African Wildlife College, n.d.). SAWC provides a holistic approach to conservation training that incorporates online, in-class and practical field training within the KNP in their learning by doing approach. In partnership with GEF6, SANParks, WWF and Peace Parks Foundation, SAWC involves targeted communities to engage in training, capacity building and development. Some of the courses provided in the Department of Community Development and Youth Access helps surrounding community participants develop sustainable and good governance practices through their Rural Initiative for a Sustainable Environment (RISE) unit (Southern Africa Wildlife College, 2023). With courses such as Global Environment Facility (GEF) 6 Leading Hearts and Environmental Monitors training, participants are asked to reflect on their role as leaders in their community and conservation. Natural Resource Management diploma seeks to accelerate the journey of the participating students towards "professional conservation management by providing inclusive and applied thought leadership and context driven education with a global reach" (Southern African Wildlife College, 2023). Given SAWC's focus on training and education in conservation, this chapter sought to understand the experiences of SAWC's youth stakeholders as facilitators of training, project coordination and management, and as leaders in their communities and in conservation.

5.5. The experiences of youth in positions of leadership in conservation

It was important to present the accounts of youth from both organisations as both groups offer different perspectives on their work. They describe themselves as young professionals committed to conservation and motivated to succeed. These experiences, although not explicitly relating to leadership, address the challenges of navigating professional spaces whilst also seeking personal development or growth in conservation. Importantly, these findings do not compare the experiences of participants between the two organisations. Rather, they aim

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[4] https://wildlifecollege.org.za/our-values/ : February 2024.

to comprehend the role of youth in leadership across various scales and positions in the African conservation sector. The following themes were teased out from the data:

(i) "A journey of curiosity to passion" in conservation.

(ii) The skills and capacities needed to be positioned to lead.

(iii) Challenges and lessons learnt of being a young leader.

5.5.1. The youth: "A journey of curiosity to passion" in conservation

Zayah grew up in the rural areas of an East African country. As a child she was exposed to wildlife in her community through her local church (November 2023). Nikelwa, in rural South Africa was introduced to the vastness of biodiversity through her parents visiting the Kruger National Park (November 2022). They were both fortunate enough to develop a deep connection with the natural environment through safari drives, and this exposure instilled in them a gentleness and care for plants and animals. Zayah recalled that her affinity to biodiversity and conservation was "a journey of curiosity to passion!" (November 2023). Being raised in a pastoralist community, she was acutely aware of the environmental challenges being faced by her family and community in agriculture and conservation. However, she learnt about the formal concept of conservation during her bachelor's degree and in her current job.

> …the effects of climate change had become more than just a distant concern. Pasture became a precious commodity, contested fiercely by both pastoralists and wildlife. The struggle for survival transcended the natural order, leading to conflicts. The realisation dawned that conservation wasn't just an academic pursuit; it was a calling born out of necessity a voice for conservation, promoting environmentally friendly methods that could lessen environmental stress and promote harmony between human needs and the natural world.
>
> (Zayah, November 2023)

On the other hand, Naledi's experiences with studying in the environmental sciences and volunteering, enriched her experience with nature. However, this led to feelings of despondency as she recalled that,

there was always a small doubt in the back of my mind as to whether I was cut out for the lifestyle, as it can be incredibly disheartening work. I realised that being on the educational, motivational, knowledge-giving and inspiring side of the conservation field is where I'm meant to be.

(Naledi, November 2023)

The gravity of biodiversity loss and the impact of issues such as pollution and less rainfall, was affecting her community negatively. Similarly, Nikelwa was motivated to pursue conservation work in her community because of the growing rate of teenage pregnancy. She quickly realised young girls lacked quality education. Nikelwa's love for the environment, brought by her exposure as a young child, coupled with her passion for youth in her community, led her to establish a programme that would allow children and youth to partake in after school environmental activities. Furthermore, through her programme, she learnt that some young girls were raped, and some were taken advantage of by older men because they came from disadvantaged families. As such, through introducing the local youth to responsible citizen engagement through environmental work (e.g. reducing pollution), the young girls were empowered to focus on bettering their lives by taking care of the environment and educating their parents. In fact, Nikelwa realised that being near a national park gave her and the youth in her community "life" and "purpose" because environmental work raised the voices of youth. She states, "the people that are living around need to understand and take charge. The youth can empower other people to look after the environment so that they can look after it for the future" (November 2022).

Zayah, Nikelwa and Naledi each realised that they needed to be 'champions' for the environment and for their communities through environmental education. For each of them, their passion was consolidated when they went on to study conservation in their bachelor's and master's degrees. They were able to put their academic knowledge into practice in their local contexts. Nikelwa continues to champion environmental education in her community by aligning with the needs of youth whilst also endeavouring to change the stigma about rural life, that "life begins in Jo'burg[5] and not in our rural homes". Nikelwa strongly stated;

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[5] Jo'burg is officially known as the city of Johannesburg in South Africa.

> …I understand that people need money, but besides money, we have to look after our environment. We have to look after nature. And if we all move to the city, who's going to do it? And the issues of rhino poaching that affected us the past years, if we're not around, it means now we will be having the big fight.
>
> (Nikelwa, November 2022)

Ruvarashe entered the conservation industry without any formal training or exposure to natural spaces unlike Naledi, Zayah and Nikelwa. She began her career in the corporate sector in South Africa and was exposed to nature through volunteering with a local pilot project in wildlife conservation. She received rigorous training as a guide for "dangerous game" (wild animals), which included handling a rifle (November 2022). For Ruvarashe, gender plays a substantial role. Her passion was invigorated because she found herself in male dominated conservation spaces and this made her keen to learn more. She fondly stated that her biggest motivation was the reaction she got from her students who expected all their trainers to be men. She stated that students are often surprised by her display of courage, strength, and authority, particularly during the week-long excursions in the national park. She is responsible for her student's well-being during the training and has to exercise calmness when they encounter dangerous wildlife like buffalo or elephants. However, Ruvarashe's work is removed from her personal life because the nature of her work requires that she live apart from her family and community. She lamented that it is difficult to explain what her work entails (the highs, challenges, and frustrations) and motivate her family and community about biodiversity and conservation.

> …the sad part about our work is that you get to travel, you go work in a different province, in a different place, far from where you come from. And the people you live with, right? Don't even know what you're involved in…nobody cares about nature back home, you know? So, I feel it shouldn't be an institutional role … our role in preservation shouldn't just be linked to the institution that we work with, or we work for. But it's also... the work that we do outside… (linked) with our family as well…
>
> (Ruvarashe, December 2022).

Unlike Naledi, Zayah and Nikelwa, Ruvarashe's work and passion for the environment is separate from her family because conservation work often requires remote workspaces in national parks. Similarly, Dadi and Akira stated that they were the only people involved with

conservation work in their families and prior to working with the LCA and SAWC, they were not considering careers in conservation work (December 2022; November 2023). Akira stated that "I didn't know that there were careers in conservation. You can be an ecologist; you can be a wetland specialist…I didn't know that" (November 2023). Similarly, Dadi stated:

> I grew up not having like enough knowledge…about conservation, about wild animals… I grew up in the village where our parents or our grandparent used to say that like, being in conservation, you have to be a maid or you have to be a white person, having those kinds of like perception. So, for me (being in conservation), it was like a calling… I can't say like, okay, this is more like a job, it's a lifestyle, this is what I love doing. I love that, yeah. I wouldn't wanna be anywhere else… I like where I am now.
>
> (Dadi, December 2022)

Both women indicated there was a scarcity of information available on paid conservation work that could potentially lead to a career, as opposed to an abundance of data on volunteering (usually unpaid). Moreover, they initially held the belief that conservation professions were exclusively for white individuals, unless they (as black people) pursued low-level roles (housekeeping and maintenance). As such, their motivation for conservation work was fuelled by their passion to break the racial stereotypes held by their communities. Dadi, Akira and Ruvarashe agreed that their distant communities are now being positively impacted by at least one individual who is employed to work directly with the wildlife and receives a salary and recognition for their work.

Their narratives tell a story of the importance of exposure to the natural environment to induce a passion and motivation for biodiversity protection and the environment. The narratives also shed led on the perceptions about race and conservation careers. This will be important when discussing the personal attributes associated with youth leadership.

5.5.2. *The skills and capacities needed to be positioned to lead*

The youth participants are engaged in conservation at various levels and with various roles. For example, one participant is a veterinary surgeon, another is a journalist, while another is a photographer. Each of the roles and positions they occupy in their respective professions

identifies them in some way as experts in conservation. Each of the following sub-categories explain how occupying these roles has given them the skills and capacity needed for their roles in conservation.

5.5.2.1.   *"Learning by doing": Leadership roles and responsibilities*

The participants highlighted that at the start of their jobs, they lacked information on the intricacies of the environmental issues their communities were facing. Further research was needed for each of them to adequately know their roles and understand how to effectively occupy and fulfil them.

> Youth looking to get involved with conservation organisations…(should) 'learn by doing', explore what they are passionate about educate themselves about the specific environmental issues they are passionate about. This can involve reading books, attending workshops, and following reputable sources of information. Seek mentorship with like-minded individuals and lastly not to fear to start what they believe in!
>
> (Naledi, November 2023)

Nikelwa stated that she needed to do a lot of research about young girls and teenage pregnancy, working with the community clinics to understand the extent and the causes. With that information in hand, she was then able to strategise what measures were needed to help the young girls. For example, mentorship and after school activities gave the young girls commitment to an environmental cause that was welcoming, fun, collaborative and meaningful. Her programme then grew to include all youth (young boys and girls) from her community and beyond. As the youth in her programme grow to graduate out of high school, they too become assistant leaders and mentors to the younger members (e.g. helping with compiling applications for university and bursaries) and the community. Similarly, Ruvarashe likens her role with her students to that of a parent; "I'm their mother regardless of their age" (December 2022). She explained that she had assumed this parental role in order to ensure her students knew she was in control in the natural surroundings (wild animals in the bush) that were very unpredictable. She asserted that any sense of panic on her part would trigger similar reactions from others. Like a conscientious mother safeguarding her children from harm and ensuring their safety, she adopted a pragmatic, quick-thinking strategy to avert grave danger to

students faced with animals like lions, buffaloes, or elephants. As such, she likened her students to her own children.

In Akira's work of reducing the rate of illegal wildlife trade and addressing human-wildlife conflict, she had to learn to manage community expectations. The communities she works with experience loss of livestock and property due to wildlife that breaches the fence and enters their farms. Her role is to speak to community representatives and denote their issues as "their voice" when leopards or lions ravage their livelihoods. Although the communities have valid concerns, she must manage their legitimate cases by facilitating discussions and dialogues with community representatives and leaders about the responsibilities of the national park versus compensation. She learnt to communicate that her role is not to provide funding but to rather train and advise the representatives and leaders on how to manage the conflict when it arises and reduce illegal wildlife trade and related activities with their communities.

Fayyadh grew up in a rural South African community and believes his role is to push for community-led conservation. He believes he can achieve this through land claims and encouraging the youth in his community to be enterprising through learning a trade, starting a business, or increasing their technological skills in computer literacy. The relationship his community has with conservation, non-governmental organisations and the national park, is contentious because of the high levels of unemployment and lack of service delivery in the area. As a result, he and other youth in the community established a youth centre that trains youth in computer literacy and sports in an effort to empower them. This centre further mobilises the youth to get accustomed to taking care of their environment by being responsible stewards. For instance, the youth carry out fence patrols to minimise cases of livestock theft as well as prevent road accidents caused by wandering livestock. His work with the community and youth has resulted in him being labelled a "youth champion" because his efforts have yielded tangible results (Fayyadh, September 2022). He describes himself as a "visionary and a leader" because he is paving the way for other youth from his community to become employable within the field conservation and beyond by affording youth basic training opportunities in writing and management. Ayanda on the other hand, has managed to integrate his profession in journalism with his passion for nature and conservation. His academic background and current profession have offered him a unique perspective and opportunity to voice issues in nature through storytelling. Photography and storytelling work together to capture and communicate issues to a wider audience. Through his work in journalism, he has

been able to incorporate that passion into communicating environmental issues from a youth perspective.

5.5.2.2. *Mentorship and opportunities that foster leadership*

Having a reliable mentor in both an individual and organisation was a prominent theme in the data. The participants highlighted the significance of having an experienced individual within their field serving as a mentor, role model and supporter, providing valuable advice and guidance as required. For instance, the participants engaged with the LCA reported that a member of the Council, who recognised their potential and enthusiasm for conservation, had recommended each of them as young leaders to the LCA. Through these recommendations, each of the LCA youth actors were incorporated in the LCA as Council Members in 2022. One of the main structures and governance components highlighted by the YAC in the Youth Prospectus (Appendix 2) that they compiled, was the need for mentorship. This appointed mentor would provide guidance and advice to the YAC on the operation of the Council and other related matters. Participants reported that mentoring relationships are beneficial for skills development and offering guidance. Some mentors intentionally place their young mentees in spaces, such as the LCA, that support skills development and facilitate opportunities. One participant excitedly pointed out that,

> …after seeing my passion (my mentor) recommended me to join the young adults (of LCA). The LCA has had a very big impact in my life career wise…during the LCA council meeting, I have met people who have motivated me a lot and guided me through my career.
>
> (Nolwazi, November 2023)

Moreover, the participants reported that YAC members were given the chance to take psychometric assessments through the LCA. These tests allowed them to recognise their skills and how they related to their personal strengths, which in turn helped steer their conservation career paths. Furthermore, the YAC members will get an opportunity to attend the LCA Board Meetings in order to learn about the organisational procedures, etiquette and culture. The Chairperson of the YAC attended three meetings of the LCA Board in 2023 and 2024, which allowed her to observe the proceedings and report on the activities of the YAC. The focus was on the development and enactment of the Youth Prospectus. The Chairperson subsequently

relayed her experience and provided feedback from the LCA Board to YAC members, with the aim of sharing lessons learnt. Such opportunities have helped build operational skills and confidence amongst the youth as young leaders. Similarly, Ruvarashe stated that her mentor was strategic in helping her discover her career path. She states;

> …He is the best thing that has ever happened in my career path cause where I don't find strength in myself, he gives me strength. Sometimes I feel I look down on myself. Sometimes I just have those weak moments where I feel like I'm unable to do it because I'm a female, but he always pushes me…whether he says it nicely or in a rough way, he's going to show me that tough love as a dad, as a brother, as a mentor and more especially as a leader, not as a boss…I think that's how I got here (Ruvarashe, December, 2022).

Ruvarashe's mentor provided her with a three-month assignment as a conservation educator in a Middle Eastern nation. During her deployment, she had the chance to train professionals on the appropriate care and management of wild animals. On the other hand, Fayyadh mentors' youth in his community. He expressed concern over the restricted prospects for young people and professionals residing in rural communities within the field of conservation. It is believed that young, black individuals from rural communities are expected to volunteer or work for minimal pay due to their perceived lack of skills and capacity. However, they have no choice but to accept such opportunities as they are scarce. The opportunities that come with remuneration are reserved for those who are educated. He further stated,

> … look at the ways the (black) communities (in South Africa) are living. Look at the lack of opportunities, the lack of access… there could be other ways to protect the environment that aren't conservation, but it is the dominant idea in this area. How can we fully expect youth to lead if we are not being included or taking up influential roles, or have access to comfort and benefits?
>
> (Fayyadh, September 2022)

As such, he has endeavoured to train and mentor youth from his community through the youth centre to try and fill this gap.

5.5.2.3.   *Leadership through collaboration and storytelling*

The participants outlined a few lessons learnt based on their experiences. These experiences highlighted the effectiveness of engagement strategies that involved collaborating and storytelling. Engaging youth in conservation was seen as critical through collaborations with different stakeholders, including communities, schools, parents, donors, and organisations. Nikelwa noted that the young people who participate in her programme are required to wear a uniform to promote uniformity of appearance, regardless of the social challenges that they may encounter in their communities. She collaborates with the parents of the children, providing them with information about environmental activities. She found that the parents were enthusiastic about this opportunity, as they did not have a chance to "learn through play" when they were younger. Furthermore, she was required to secure the approval of the traditional authorities to enable unrestricted interaction with the local community members and schools. These interactions enhanced her capabilities and developed her negotiation skills, in addition to providing visibility and credibility to her work and programme. Moreover, she collaborated with nearby clinics to obtain insight into adolescent pregnancies and keep statistics up to date.

Additionally, Akira explained that her role as a youth leader is to work with communities by raising awareness of the organisation's work-related concerns, while understanding the community's perspectives and challenges to foster partnerships. She stated that the challenge arises when the organisation seeks to meet targets by merely ticking boxes as opposed to being impactful and effective. She stated:

> … (communities are) critical stakeholders in the processes as a leader. We are all leaders in our own rights. You are a leader in one way or the other. You have influence, you have the power, you can make decisions, you can change the narrative. So now you also link the leadership training into the reduction of illegal wildlife trade because the assumption is that if I train you as youth and as a community champion, you will go out there and even train more people. So, we are actually training the trainer. You go out there, you train more people, you sensitize more people; you raise awareness in that way, you change people's attitudes, right?
>
> (Akira, November 2022).

Akira stressed the importance of partnering with communities utilising sensitivity, honesty and investing time to carefully understand and discuss the historical and current issues they are facing. The communities she works with express anger and frustration due to land issues (being forcibly removed from land for the creation of the national park) which resulted in the communities being separated from nature. As such, representation (seeing black individuals in conservation spaces) is important because:

> if you are white and you want to talk to the community you really have to understand these people first, you know? Because there will always be that attitude that we are different and in as much as we try to shy away from the fact that we are different… and we come from different walks of lives (sic) and our situations and circumstances are different. There're also historical issues in that.
>
> (Akira, November 2022).

Effective communication, representation and avoiding over-promising and under-delivering are therefore essential measures for managing expectations as a leader working with communities. Moreover, storytelling is another method of engagement that was highlighted in the data. Participants emphasised that young people are effective in conveying information through storytelling on platforms like social media due to their passion and ability to persuade others to collaborate with them. Youth actors with a background in conservation are important to help drive the change by partnering with youth and people outside of conservation sphere because, as Chiyani tell us,

> lasting change begins with those who don't necessarily have a background in conservation. This is the majority, and it is here where I believe the greatest impact can be had. If you have everyone singing from the same hymn sheet, regardless of type of career, then that filters across in so many ways and to harder to reach spaces.
>
> (November 2023)

Furthermore, storytelling is a form of collaboration because sharing experiences builds trust. Chiyani further stated that in organisations, the older generation and adult leaders need to,

> …trust the youth and yield (authority). Let us try and make mistakes or fail. We will not learn and rise up (sic) to the occasion if people are still holding on and

not delegating. TRUST and YIELD. . . as long as the mistakes don't cost too much! Don't just recruit young people to tick boxes and fill quotas. Give us a real chance and a real seat at the table. Yes, it can be earned but let us rise to the occasion to avoid window dressing or Tokenism.

<p align="right">(November 2023)</p>

Ayanda stated that the tension between the older generation and youth could be dealt with by sharing their experiences through stories. He noted that "the role of the youth is firstly going to be firefighters and first aiders, helping to recover the damage that has already been done, and prevent further damage" (November 2023). As such, the skills and capacities needed for youth to lead involve building trust through collaborative processes such as storytelling, mentoring and learning through experiences.

5.5.3. *Challenges and lessons learnt from being a young leader*

This section outlines the challenges faced by young leaders, including the stigma surrounding conservation work for young Africans, navigating transitional periods, the intersection of gender with age, and managing expectations.

5.5.3.1. *Lack of information and stigma of conservation work*

The youth participants stated that they need to connect and communicate conservation work more effectively to broader audiences, their communities, and families. It was emphasised that communities must have a better understanding of the issues to be motivated to take action against biodiversity loss and climate change. Chiyani added that access to "information is the starting point of that. I am aware there is limitless academic information on these environmental issues but what about the non-academic audiences" (November 2023)? Furthermore, there is a lack of access to information about the variety of careers and work involved in conservation. Akira lamented that her family for instance,

> don't understand; they don't know that there is finance, there's marketing, there's like a lot of other departments in conservation. So, lack of information is a challenge… let's take like our parents' beliefs, they were teachers etc and they expect you to follow that…

This lack of information has also impacted retention rates amongst youth who are recruited by the leaders in rural communities. Nikelwa reported that she attempts to encourage the youth in her programme to consider careers in conservation in her community, however, there is a strong pull for them to leave and focus on other fields of study such as law or medicine, creating a vacuum due to the stigma that says "conservation work doesn't pay", and so outweighing the passion and motivation for environmental work in their rural communities. Similarly, Naledi stated that,

> the challenge of trying to change the attitudes of people towards conservation that cannot afford the luxury of conservation… a large percentage of the population in (an East African country) are living in poverty and are simply unable to consider protecting wildlife and the environment when they themselves are living day to day.
>
> (November 2023)

She and the others strongly believed that conservation cannot be successful without considering and addressing some of the challenges discussed here.

5.5.3.2. *Youth and life transitions*

The stigma surrounding conservation careers may also stem from young people's desire to secure well paid, respectable jobs that can support them and their families. Dadi firmly stated that "…it's not easy to tell a parent that I'm going to do like wildlife photography. They're like, what the hell is that? Are you going to make money? What is that? They say you have to be a teacher so that we know you have like an income and money" (December 2023). This is further aggravated by the multiple responsibilities' youth have within their personal lives as they work towards higher education, career goals and starting families. The lack of a full commitment to conservation is brought by the challenges of "balancing my current job and timelines in developing the strategies in conservation as a leader" (Ayanda, November 2023).

> It is difficult to maintain the strength and courage to continue pursuing my passion, even when things seem very hopeless. In conservation you are constantly faced with setbacks and bad news and it can be difficult to maintain hope when it seems that nothing can be done.

The participants pointed out that being positioned as a young leader in organisations can be challenging when there is a lack of stability in their personal lives as it "becomes very difficult to balance things" (Nolwazi, November 2023). Nolwazi and Ayanda stated that school emerged to be one of the constraints that had restricted them from fully participating in some beneficial activities in their organisations. This led to a minimum involvement and made them feel disconnected from their colleagues and the conservation work.

5.5.3.3. *Age and gender in conservation leadership*

The challenges of transitioning between school, career and fulfilling the obligations of leadership are exacerbated when physical attributes such as age and gender become a hinderance. The female participants alluded to the difficulties of fulfilling their responsibilities when older, male counterparts undermine their authority and position because they are young women. These accounts will be presented in full quotes to place emphasis on their experiences.

Nikelwa

" the major challenge that I faced working in the community structures or the schools is these spaces are dominated by men; when they see a woman…yeah…they want to take advantage of you or try to overpower you…Like they want things to be done their way… or no way…it was like, some they would try to bully me because I'm a woman and I look younger than my age; the other challenges that I faced was gaining trust and being discredited because I'm a female…I work with community structures, I work with traditional healers, I work with traditional authorities; they say to me 'you are a woman…who are you (questioning her authority)? … And you face that a lot, plus intimidation…they try to intimidate you. And you have to rise in all that. And you have to maintain professionalism. And you're like, look guys, I wanna work with you here, please work with me. You know? So, these are some of the challenges that we face. And some of the challenges that I face is trying to maintain this relationship that's because we build relationships and start working with these people. So, we get a lot of resistance and it's a challenge. People don't want to be part of the process, and these are people you really need to work with".

Ruvarashe

"They say, 'She won't be able to do this because she's a woman! She's not strong enough. She's a woman!' You know, such things. I think that's the biggest challenge that I've ever had to deal with. And having to prove myself, I believe that I'm actually very capable of doing something because I'm good at doing it… not doing something because I want to prove someone. That just kills my whole vibe. I don't want to, like, I'm doing it because I want to prove to Sam now. Do you understand me? But when I'm doing it, because I know how to do it, I excel. So, my biggest challenges has been having a group of maybe 30 to 40 men, grown up men, and me standing in front of them and having to be their trainer. And when I speak of trainer, I'm not only speaking of being in class, and teaching about conservation ethics, guidance, map reading or anything. I'm also speaking about physical fitness. Because if you speak about physical fitness, they'll be like, oh, 'she's a woman, she won't be able to do this'. So, in most cases, I live a life of proving myself until I prove myself. Then they see that I actually mean business. Cause before I do, they look down on me like, oh no, she won't be able to do it. Until I do it, that's where they see that. I actually know how to do it. I'm not asking them to do something that I myself cannot do it".

Dadi

"Being a female that has to train grown up men. And more especially if it's African men. And African men have got this thing of, a woman won't tell me, you know? So, if you have to call out orders, and remember we give out paramilitary training. We don't give instructions; we give out commands. So, if I give a command, I'll make them to execute. Some will ask you why, and you can't do that. So here, we live by the rule of saying 'you (need to) comply'. 'You don't ask why, you just comply!' That's it. If you don't comply, you'll have to grow wings and fly. I'm just making an example. So also, as well, where you'll have a person, questioning your intelligence and such things, but we conquer, we still, yeah, we conquer".

"So, internally, because you're young, you're ambitious, you're driven, you want to be there, you want to be involved, say, you have this, you're eager, you're willing. You tend to threaten people in that space. You come across as someone who wants to be better than them. And I experienced that when I was an intern with the… (national department in South Africa) …I guess it's a thing with government departments, but I wanna work with government because I feel that's where we can make a difference as young people. I... encountered a lot of that, the way people feel that you want to take their positions…So that was a challenge and I had to navigate through that space, and I had to tell myself, you know what, I want to learn. This is my first professional job and I have to, I want to gain this experience. I don't want to miss out on anything, you know. So, you try and you have to work with these people saying, how do you work with people who don't want to work with you? You know, so it was a challenge".

(December 2022)

The discussion centred around the challenges faced by young women in leadership positions while fulfilling their professional obligations. They often encounter resistance from older men in conservation spaces. However, they remain motivated to assert their authority and position as leaders. The young women spoke from a position of both vulnerability and authority. Nikelwa, Ruvarashe, Dadi and Akira have highlighted their experiences as young, black women who face resistance through bullying and having their capabilities questioned. Their experiences as young conservation leaders can inform debates on the intersections of gender and age in leadership, Youth Studies, and governance literature.

5.5.3.4. *Managing the expectations of ourselves and others*

Lastly, conservation work can be disheartening and cumbersome because of the variety of issues that the participants face with their communities. For instance, Fayyadh and Nikelwa mentioned that although they are passionate about conservation and have tried to share their passion with the youth in their communities, the communities are facing a myriad of socio-economic challenges. This makes the work difficult because they not only have to manage the expectations of their trainees about what the youth programmes and centres can offer, but they have to manage their own. They both stated that they have to have clear goals and outputs within their strategies so as to be able to achieve small targets within their work as leaders.

This is achieved through close collaboration with leaders in the communities as well as a relationship based on open communication and trust with the youth that follow them. Similarly, Akira struggled to manage the expectations of the community representatives she previously worked with. This resulted in her having feelings of despondency because she faced difficulty in addressing the challenges of community representatives versus the objectives of her role and the funding assigned to the project. As such, she emphasised the importance of working with the relevant stakeholders in the communities who she believes are the people who see the values in the work being done and can effectively communicate it to their neighbours. In light of the above, the participants strongly suggested that all leaders need to practice self-awareness so as to manage their mental health and wellbeing.

The experiences presented in the results section took the reader on the journey of how the youth participants have navigated their roles in leadership. This section begins with a depiction of the experiences that have consolidated the youth participants enthusiasm and drive for the natural environment. This was followed by a discussion of the skills and abilities required for leadership, emphasising the value of learning through experience, the guidance of mentors, and the importance of collaboration and partnership. It concludes with a look at what obstacles these young leaders faced and what lessons were learnt. In an attempt to identify gaps and contribute to existing discussions and debates, these experiences are examined in the context of the leadership literature in the final section.

5.6.   Discussion

The youth experiences presented in the previous section spoke to the role of youth leaders in conservation and the power dynamics experienced with the intersections of gender, age and race. This discussion will focus on situating youth leaders in conservation, and leadership.

5.6.1. *The role of youth leaders in conservation*

The results show that youth leadership attributes in conservation are based on the participant's (a) an understanding of how nature functions, (b) self-awareness, and (c) involvement in environmental work through activism, awareness raising and/or education. The experiences shared by the youth actors tell a story that highlights the importance of action in understanding the roles youth leaders play in various conservation spaces. The participant's experiences illustrate the importance of having a passion and motivation for nature which contributes to

their understanding of the interconnected intrinsic relationships and functions in nature (Pascual et al, 2023). Their early exposure to nature motivated some of them to pursue careers in conservation, leading to influential positions that have contributed to positive social change in their communities. This aligns with Dietz et al (2004) and Arnold et al (2009) arguments that early childhood exposure to nature, spending time outdoors with parents and peers, or experiencing the negative impact of environmental destruction are important factors for developing conservation leadership skills. The skills were exemplified through their efforts to tackle social and environmental challenges in their local communities and workplaces by taking proactive steps to resolve them. Firstly, the data indicated that the youth participants were given opportunities to take on leadership roles by identifying community issues and taking appropriate action. The youth expressed that a desire for conservation and community involvement was necessary. For example, it has motivated individuals like Naledi to facilitate extra-curricular youth initiatives. Naledi utilised her love for nature to tackle the social problems with teenage girls in her community. Her leadership is experienced by various stakeholders such as the children, their parents and community leaders (for example, traditional authorities). Through her work, she is able to meet social needs whilst simultaneously educating and advocating for natures well-being (Pascual et al, 2023).

Some environmental organisations utilise descriptions such as champions, change agents or makers and leaders to discuss youth in various of forms of leadership. These classifications position youth as leaders in decision-making spaces such as the IUCN and WWF and are a method used to engage youth. Nevertheless, the youth narratives presented in this chapter shed light on how youth have established themselves as leaders in conservation spaces. The narratives showed that youth self-described as champions, "visionaries" and leaders. The servant leader frame aptly addresses these experiences because servant leaders make decisions that positively enhance the group with fairness and integrity (Libby et al, 2006; Hickman et al, 2016). For youth, this was achieved through the "learning by doing" approach, which entailed immersing oneself in the community's needs to educate, motivate and promote action to enhance environmental and community welfare. This was accomplished through collaborative projects with relevant community stakeholders aimed at reducing illegal wildlife trade, teenage pregnancy, and increasing capacity through active learning. The leadership attributes highlighted were sensitivity to local issues, building trust and respect and encouraging storytelling through collaboration. Collaboration is a crucial element as the youth participants

emphasised that working together with these stakeholders enhanced their credibility and visibility in the work they were conducting.

The data also shed light on the impact of societal norms and expectations placed on youth, such as becoming an adult. For instance, youth must navigate their careers with family and societal expectations of gaining meaningful employment, earning a decent wage and supporting their families. This is compounded with the challenges they face in conservation. For instance, for the female participants some of the challenges included working within the conservation sector where older men dominate the conservation decision making spaces in organisations and in the communities (James et al, 2021). A study of women in conservation in Nigeria found that African women are often perceived as helpers as opposed to an important economic contributor within conservation activities (Raimi et al, 2019). Furthermore, the viewpoint of women is oftentimes omitted from data considerations partly resulting from the methods in which data is collected (Raimi et al, 2019). In fact, in Sub Saharan Africa women perform important functions in conservation and agriculture yet there has been little opportunity afforded to them to make the necessary contributions to developmental and conservation policies from the local level (Raimi et al, 2019). In the context of this study, considering the position of young female conservationists in leadership surfaced some the tensions highlighted by Raimi and others.

The intersection of gender and age was outlined by the challenges faced by the female participants when leading as young women in conservation. Women are argued to traditionally occupy interpretive and communicative roles such as administration work and housekeeping, rather than taking riskier and leadership-oriented roles in conservation (James et al, 2021). However, the experiences of the female participants challenged these stereotypes and went further to understanding the roles of young female conservation professionals in the field, as trainers and educators. As such, the power dynamics experienced by the young female actors are aptly illustrated by the intersection of gendered social relations with being young (age). Their experiences highlighted a need for courage, firmness, and determination to navigate social spaces that may disqualify youth as competent leaders. As young female leaders, they are forced to demonstrate strength and stamina in order to gain respect and credibility when working with older men in conservation decision-making spaces. In essence, they have to embody characteristics that are traditionally associated with men, in order to be respected.

Gender-based societal norms are rooted in often patriarchal ideals that exclude women from decision-making spaces or leadership roles that allow them to directly address men (James et al, 2021). These gendered dynamics often inhibit women's contributions, access, and power (James et al, 2021). The presence of women in conservation whether it is in leadership or at the front desk has been argued to be accompanied by questions about marriage, children, and fulfilling household obligations from male counterparts (Raimi et al, 2019). For young female participants, these questions are further accompanied by derogatory statements about their authority, knowledge, and ability to fulfil their roles. Although these experiences are not unique to conservation, the intersection with age creates an additional barrier for engagement in youth work which they needed to skilfully navigate and overcome. As a result, some female participants embodied maternal roles to shift the power dynamics. For example, Ruvarashe described herself as the "mother". Mothers in the African context are influential in society as they are respected, revered, honoured, and admired (Chege, 2022). In fact, motherhood is argued to be a symbol of leadership (Chege, 2022). By embodying the maternal attributes such as care and discipline, mothers are able to exude their authority within a family (Chege, 2022). For Ruvarashe, the role of maternal leadership arguably provided her with the ability to teach, manage, and discipline her students. This, in turn, gained the respect of her students, akin to that of a mother. Therefore, female participants had to be intentional about their leadership roles by embracing their positions of authority, which allowed them to address students and communities as leaders.

5.6.2. *Youth and leadership: If youth are leading, who is following?*

The literature underlined that youth programmes such as Youth Leadership Development (YLD) cultivate youth attributes through facilitated processes of leadership training (MacNiel, 2006; Riemer et al, 2014; Bourassa, 2017). The descriptions of youth leadership were often based on the adult leadership literature and were based on fostering ability instead of authority (MacNiel, 2006; Riemer et al, 2014; Bourassa, 2017). However, Zurba and Trimble (2014: 79) argue that a gap exists between youth engagement and natural resource governance because "resource management is inter-generationally blind". Engagement requires both motivation from youth and structural changes such as opportunities for participation that create space and social validation (Yohalem and Martin, 2007). The data presented in this chapter showed that leadership opportunities for youth are fostered through recognition and collaboration which speak to environmental justice in environmental governance. Recognition justice overlaps with

participation where recognition addresses diverse identities, cultures, knowledges as an important step to gaining access to decision-making processes (Thew et al, 2021). For instance, the youth participants alluded to the need for trust and respect when partnering with organisations or 'adult leaders' by distributing power in order to yield authority and responsibility to youth. Trust, respect, and authority were highlighted as necessary components for engagement in order to avoid window dressing the involvement of youth in decision making. These results relate to discussions in the literature on environmental justice approaches for youth recognition and participation in decision-making (van der Westheizen, 2019; Thew et al, 2021).

Although the data showed that youth participants have the motivation and agency to fulfil their roles in conservation work as leaders, they still needed support and guidance (mentorship and collaboration) to overcome challenges. A prominent theme in the data was having a trusted mentor, both individually and within an organisation. Participants emphasised the importance of having someone experienced in their field to provide valuable advice when needed. Furthermore, partnering with community stakeholders, other youth and organisations is important in sharing experiences and building networks through story telling. Story telling can be achieved using various forms of media such as photography. The participants stated that youth are accustomed to using social media and this is an effective method utilised to share stories about conservation and their work to their families and wider audiences (Fernandez et al, 2018). The emphasis was placed on reshaping the stigma and misconceptions surrounding conservation careers. The experiences of the young leaders underlined their desire to inspire their families, communities, and adult peers, which requires the presence of authority in their roles. This could be achieved by communicating with broader audiences using various methods to educate on the conservation and the environment. For example, Fayyadh made efforts to introduce youth in his community to literacy programmes and conservation initiatives in the community youth centre or Akira mentioning the need for relevant stakeholders to see the value in their roles and work.

Based on these results, applying the theory of environmentality is fitting in the context of leadership and youth as it adequately accounts for their position in relation to other actors (Agrawal, 2005). This chapter utilises the concept of 'subject formation' as a means of understanding how leaders influence the behaviour of others through effective leadership techniques (Agrawal, 2005). The young participants exemplify the process of transformation

(subject formation) in terms of how they perceive their communities, their work and those they lead in relation to conservation. For example, they seek to educate and influence other stakeholders and their families about their work in conservation through collaboration and storytelling. The youth participants identified themselves as conservation leaders and through collaborative approaches have sought to form alliances with other stakeholders to train, educate and hopefully influence recipients with positive ideas and practices about the natural environment using a variety of means or approaches. They utilise their experiences and knowledge to educate children, other youth, parents and community leaders on conservation issues and strategies. They embody the archetypical youth leader who seeks to influence behaviour through their power to distribute knowledge and information about conservation in order to change behaviour (servant leader) (Riemer et al, 2014). This is possible because with stakeholders, like other youth and children, the youth leaders are positioned as educators or instructors.

On the other hand, the youth experiences are at the receiving end as the subjects. In order to fulfil their roles, the youth need to gain authority, trust and respect from those in more powerful positions (organisations and adult leaders). The technologies of power and of the self are enacted through the organisational cultures and objectives that guide their description of a leader (Skinner, 2013). The data showed that the youth had to embody certain leadership attributes to gain credibility and visibility. For example, Akira learned to manage the expectations of the community to gain their trust and demonstrate her capability as an effective leader. In this scenario, behaviour is influenced by both parties as Akira had to subsume her role to accommodate the needs of her stakeholders and gain trust. For the youth leaders in conservation governance, they had to acquire knowledge and training in order to be positioned as leaders. However, the female participants experienced challenges in male-dominated spaces. Their narratives showed that, in response to challenges to their ability to lead, they had embodied their position of authority in conservation.

As such, youth leadership should go beyond programmes and processes that build leadership competencies to approaches that facilitate roles that allow youth to exercise their authority and build their capacity. Each of the participants had a measure of authority because they had to educate and train other youth and stakeholders on conservation issues such as human-wildlife conflict and working with dangerous wildlife. For the participants, leadership is a continuous process in their professional positions which is however inhibited by individuals or spaces that

perceive their age or gender as a barrier. Due to the fact that they have deliverables in their projects, the participants have had to navigate these challenges by yielding their authority to avoid conflict and to manage expectations. As leaders, they are cognisant of their position with other adult leaders and the asymmetrical power relations between them. For instance, the data showed that youth who work in communities face a variety of barriers due to their age and gender. In traditional leadership structures, female participants have to work harder to access spaces of decision making and gain the respect of the stakeholders. The youth participants demonstrated their skills and abilities in leadership. Therefore, achieving power distribution from adult leaders to the youth can be attained through respect, yielding authority, and trust in leadership. This could enhance the experience and influence of youth leaders in conservation governance spaces.

5.7. Conclusions

This chapter emphasised the significance of gaining the perspective of youth leaders in conservation. The literature outlined various forms of leadership in order to situate youth leadership in environmental governance and on the African context, highlighting various definitions of youth leadership which were centred in youth leadership programmes and processes. However, the literature did not explicitly draw the definitions from the experiences of youth in positions of leadership in conservation and environmental governance. This chapter has filled that gap by exploring the narratives of twenty youth leaders who have worked with the SAWC and LCA in Eastern and Southern Africa.

This chapter has argued that youth leaders in conservation desire to have respect, trust and authority from powerful stakeholders such as adult leaders and organisations in conservation governance. The youth experiences highlighted the need for more collaboration through storytelling, mentorship and the recognition of youth needs such as support and opportunities. Furthermore, the intersectionality of gender and age was expressed through the experiences of young, female leaders. The inequalities between youth and other stakeholders were apparent even when the youth operated as leaders and held positions of power as instructors and educators. Therefore, this chapter has shown that youth leadership is an approach in which youth participate in conservation efforts with the support of environmental organisations and their own agency. As such, youth experiences are necessary when designing leadership roles in conservation because of the opportunities, challenges, and barriers they face. In this context,

young people are both agents and subjects of conservation through leadership. The fact that young people are subjects of conservation does not negate the agency they exhibit through their passion, the authority they exude in their positions, or how they have negotiated challenges. Instead, their agency is highlighted in how they purposefully adopt the roles they assume to advance conservation in their communities through training and education. Participants, including Nikelwa, are using conservation to meet the needs of youth in their community. This chapter contributes to the Youth Studies literature by challenging the definition of leadership in the 'adult-centred' literature through the experiences of Nikelwa and the other participants, highlighting what it entails to be young in conservation leadership.

This chapter has contextualised the experiences of African youth within the wider literature on leadership and engagement. The lens of youth experiences is used to gain insight into how youth leadership frameworks are applied in practice. Using the Youth Studies perspective of transitions and classification of youth, this chapter investigated leadership in conservation to address what it means to be young in conservation leadership. Moreover, it has highlighted the challenges faced by young leaders at the regional African level and suggests collaborative approaches. The following chapter discusses the experiences of youth from the Belfast community and those employed in the UNEP GEF6 Environmental Monitors programme in the Greater Kruger National Park landscape at the local and grassroots level. The experiences of youth at the local level will present youth in the context of conservation employment and unemployment in a protected area landscape.

CHAPTER 6.

Youth and conservation in the Greater Kruger National Park landscape

6. The local level

Image 4: Belfast community. November 2020, Photo credit: Samantha S. Sithole.

As these pages change from regional to the local level, it is important to reflect on where the story of youth and conservation in this thesis started. The thesis presents youth as both a social category and a concept or term. In Youth Studies, youth as a concept is argued to be useful in understanding global to local phenomena. Therefore, this thesis sought to share the experiences of youth in relation to engagement with conservation and governance whilst considering the global, regional and local levels. The global section in Chapter 4 presented the experiences of youth from the global south who participated in the World Conservation Congress Forum (WCC). The experiences of young people illustrate the inequalities in accessing decision-making spaces and the challenges that arise when referring to youth as a homogenous group in governance. These experiences align with those of young conservation leaders at the regional level. Chapter 5 provided a youth perspective on leadership in programmes and positions. By examining the intersection of youth identity and gender, youth leaders have drawn attention to some of the inequalities that hinder meaningful engagement. Similar to the youth at the WCC, the youth leaders also desired safe spaces where authority, respect, and trust were upheld. Chapter 6 will land on the local level of the Greater Kruger National Park Landscape, where the historical context of conservation influences how youth are engaging with conservation. This chapter has been submitted as a contribution to a book on youth, transitions and social justice and is currently under revision after the first round of reviews. It offers a deep dive into how youth classifications influence youth identities with labour through employment and unemployment in conservation.

Title: Youth and conservation in the Greater Kruger National Park landscape

6.1. Abstract

Youth are important stakeholders in addressing environmental issues, especially in global biodiversity protection and conservation. In South Africa, youth unemployment has had a significant impact on those living in rural areas. The Kruger National Park (KNP) offers a local perspective on how conservation work affects youth involvement in conservation efforts in the Greater Kruger National Park area. This chapter focuses on the perspectives of unemployed youth living in Belfast and those who work and reside in surrounding communities as environmental monitors. Data was collected through in-depth and semi-structured interviews conducted between November 2020 and January 2023 to understand the lived experiences of individuals aged 20-35. These lived experiences speak to the Youth Studies literature on transitions and the anthropological theory of liminality. Youth experience a protracted liminal phase due to the persistent "un(der)employment" resulting from limited job opportunities' (in but not limited to conservation) and the lack of service delivery in the Belfast community. Whilst youth employed in the UNEP GEF-6 Environmental Monitors Programme also experience protracted liminality due to the historical nature of conservation labour in the KNP.

Key words: youth, youth engagement, liminality, unemployment, labour, conservation

6.2. Introduction

We are in the community of Belfast in the province of Mpumalanga in South Africa with Thakalani, a young man aged 35 from Belfast and a member of the Belfast Youth with a Vision Forum. It was a hot day, and the shade of the tree provided a comfortable place for our conversation. It also offered a glimpse into the lives of youth in Belfast as they passed by (Image 4). Thakalani, in talking about local youth tells me (first author) the following,

> I stand here (by the tree) and wait for the others to join so that my friends and I can go around and speak with the youth. It's our meeting spot. I am passionate about my community and the youth here… and so, we start here and walk around the village to meet with the youth and end at the soccer field. The youth are our (Belfast) future. If they do not progress the community dies! (November 2020).

Thakalani said that if we sat by the tree for a few hours, we would see a lot of young people passing by on their way to football matches, going to town, coming home from school, or collecting water from the Sabie River. For him, youth in the community were struggling to meet their material needs and as a result, they are faced with deeper challenges, such as alcohol abuse. He attributes these challenges to a lack of employment opportunities with the Kruger National Park (KNP). He and the other youths from the Belfast Youth with a Vision Forum recognised that the younger generation were the future of the community and needed to be mentored and given jobs.

Thakalani's perspective provides a starting point for this chapter to explore youth experiences with conservation within the rural communities that neighbour the KNP. Drawing on the narratives and experiences of Thakalani and others, this chapter will present the dual experiences of youth living and informally employed in the Belfast community and youth on fixed-term employment as environmental monitors in the KNP. The youth in the Belfast community and those in the UNEP GEF-6 (United Nations Environmental Programme, Global Environment Facility) Environmental Monitors Programme (hereafter EM Programme) are in a protracted transition to adulthood which may be attributed to how labour is subsumed in the Greater KNP landscape. Their perspectives about unemployment, underemployment and temporary employment in conservation will contribute to the labour literature and related

conservation studies, which are summarised in the next section. While the concept of youth is fluid and not easily defined, for the purposes of this chapter, youth are described as black youth from the study communities between the ages of 15 and 35 who are in a transition or liminal phase between childhood and adulthood and entry into wage labour (ILO, 2019; Thieme, 2018).

Situating youth in the context of employment and labour is important because youth in South Africa are consistently described as in a state of crisis or a ticking time-bomb, due to the increasing rates of unemployment and their inability to enter the labour market (National Research Foundation, 2022; Padayachee and Koobair, 2023; Statista, 2023; Matschke, 2023). In short, labour is described as a social dependency in which workers, rather than consuming what they produce, are consuming what is produced by others in a process that is facilitated and enforced by the power of monetary wages (Dinterstein and Near, 2002). This has manifested in KNP conservation landscape, where rural youth from the surrounding communities are faced with impoverished conditions, lack of adequate service delivery and a low standard of education (Wilkinson, et al, 2017). The youth from Belfast provide experiences of youth working in the communities at the periphery of conservation. Whereas the environmental monitors provide the experiences of youth who live in communities along the KNP fence whilst also working within the KNP as stewards of conservation. The dual lens of these two groups of youth helps to situate how youth navigate the uncertainties of unemployment in the context of conservation near the KNP.

This chapter asks, **how do youth experiences with employment and unemployment influence how they engage with conservation?** To frame this inquiry, the chapter begins by contextualising the status of youth within the broader context of unemployment in South Africa. It then delves into the theoretical framework of youth and liminality, highlighting the transitional nature of their social position. The chapter then examines the concept of labour in relation to employment, establishing a basic understanding of the labour dynamics prevalent among youth. In its final section, the chapter analyses the experiences of youth from the Belfast community and participants in the EM Programme. This approach situates the research at a grassroots level and provides insights into the lived experiences of youth actively engaged in a landscape historically and economically shaped by conservation practices. The findings will highlight that youth participants from Belfast aspired to work in conservation in the hope of a better life through employment in the KNP. The experiences of the environmental monitors,

on the other hand, paint a picture of what it is like for young people to work in conservation on a temporary contract basis.

6.3.   Situating youth and unemployment in South Africa

Youth unemployment is a systemic problem across the African continent, with a growing youth population (Valoyi and Taku, 2017). Unemployment is an integral part of socio-economic development, highlighting a challenge in society caused by those who are able to work and are actively looking for work, but are unable to find employment (Valoyi and Taku, 2017). By contrast, underemployment, describes a situation where those who do find work, do so for a shorter period than normal (Valoyi and Taku, 2017).

Under the apartheid state, people of colour (including black, Indian and coloured) were deliberately excluded from opportunities in employment, land and business ownership (Valoyi and Taku, 2017), including in conservation spaces, such as protected areas. Conservation was shaped by the effects of colonialism and apartheid, which marginalised Indigenous and local communities by restricting their access to decision-making bodies, natural resources and ancestral lands set aside for conservation (Ramutsindela, 2008; Kepe, 2009; Duffy et al, 2019; Domínguez and Luoma, 2020; Thakholi, 2021; Ramutsindela et al, 2022; Thakholi et al, 2024). This in turn contributed to the unequal distribution of wealth between black communities and private landowners in conservation landscapes (Thakholi, 2021; Thakholi et al, 2024). As a result, Buscher, Koot and Thakholi have determined that the social and labour relations that embody the conservation sector are "fossilized because they have been preserved along very specific racial and gendered ways" (2022:3). If that is the case, what becomes of the youth who endeavour to enter the labour market in conservation?

On 16 June 2022, South Africa celebrated Youth Day under the theme 'The Year of Charlotte Mannya Maxeke: Growing Youth Employment for an Inclusive and Transformed Society' (National Research Foundation, 2022). Charlotte Maxeke, the first black woman to graduate from university, dedicated her time to sharing her knowledge and empowering children by building a school in Evaton, South Africa (Wilson, 2021). The theme recognised that today's youth face different challenges than their predecessors. Their main concerns revolve around issues of unemployment, poverty, and inequality (National Research Foundation, 2022). The persistently high youth unemployment rate is one of the greatest socio-economic challenges

facing South Africa (Wilkinson et al., 2017). Between 2021 and 2022, the youth unemployment rate rose from 46.3% to 49.86 (STATS SA, 2021; Statista, 2023). The high rate of youth unemployment is attributed to the education system's failure to provide basic skills, such as numeracy and literacy, required by employers (Wilkinson et., al, 2017). The unemployment rate is based on the those currently not working but actively looking for work and excludes the economically inactive population (long term unemployed and full-time students) (Statista, 2023). As a result, youth must wait longer for employment opportunities (National Research Foundation, 2022). Therefore, more than half of all youth in South Africa live in income poverty due to unemployment (de Lannoy et al., 2018).

Historically, youth in South Africa have played a significant role in socio-political movements and societal transformations. For instance, the Soweto Youth Uprising on June 16, 1976, was an anti-apartheid movement protesting the compulsory insertion of Afrikaans as languages of instruction in the school curriculum (SAHO, 2023). More recently, in 2015, the Rhodes Must Fall student movement emerged, which later evolved into other sub-movements such as Fees Must Fall (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Based on decolonial thought, these movements challenged the symbolism of Cecil Rhodes, who was responsible for material dispossession, enslavement, oppression, and the inequalities that continue to affect South Africa today (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). According to Mhlongo (2016), the youth were identified as the leaders of these protests, as they aimed to bring about socio-political change within both the university system and the national government. In fact, as the youth population continues to grow beyond 10 million, they are regarded as a key resource with the potential to transform the economy (Padayachee and Koobair, 2023). In these cases, South African youth used protest action as a means of expressing their grievances against socio-political issues, which had a positive domino effect and resulted in some change (Valoyi and Taku, 2017). However, youth are increasingly disenfranchised and often discouraged as they are forced to accept poorly paid, labour-intensive, or unproductive occupations (Padayachee and Koobair, 2023).

The African Youth Charter and the South African National Youth Policy (2015-2020) define youth as individuals between the ages of 15 and 35. The National Youth Policy further sub-categorises youth due to their varying needs, life stages, and interests (Mhlongo, 2018). Youth are described according to their 'temporalities of doing' in post-violent and conflict contexts in Africa (Iwilade, 2022). Youth temporality is directly related to their age. In fact, these temporal or chronological definitions are associated with periods of transition (Thieme, 2018;

Iwilade, 2019). Youth are positioned as a verb, denoting that the temporal dimensions of youth are linked to their ability to 'do' and 'become' (Iwilade, 2019). As youth 'do' and 'become' they are also aging within their transitions. Transition is structured by differences in class, gender, and ethnicity, as such, it may be prolonged due to the delayed ability to achieve indicators associated with adulthood (Thieme, 2018; Iwilade, 2019) such as marriage, children, self-autonomy and being able to provide for oneself and family (Mwaura, 2017). As youth aspire and work to achieve certain indicators associated with adulthood, they are placed in the obscurity of "waithood". The waithood or transition is embodied by youth having to "emerge" into adulthood (Johansson and Herz, 2019: 39). For youth in South Africa, this prolonged transition period, is attributed to lengthy periods of income poverty and discouragement due to lack of access to decent employment or jobs (Padayachee and Koobair, 2023). The voices of marginalised youth are often excluded from decision-making processes regarding unemployment (Matschke, 2023). The youth who are disproportionately affected are black, female and those living in rural areas (Wilkinson et., al, 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to base the literature on employment in conservation on the notion of labour. Additionally, the following section will elucidate the concepts of transitions and waithood through the theoretical framework of liminality.

6.4. Debates surrounding labour, liminality and youth

6.4.1. Labour

Labour cannot be understood without looking at the growth of social class and capitalism. It involves processes such as the social relations of the work environment, the labour market and the work involved when employment commences. For the purposes of understanding labour and applying it to youth and conservation, each of these components will be discussed briefly.

Labour studies in South Africa emerged during the transition from non-industrial to an industrial society under sociology with Karl Marx terming this the 'hidden abode of production' (Webster, 1991). It began with a focus on mostly white workers in the Witwatersrand, later focusing on black workers (Webster, 1991). Through "cultural Taylorism" black workers were studied in order to ascertain the differences between African and Western cultures regarding the problems that affect worker productivity (Webster, 1991). These early studies negated the presence of class cleavages and by the early seventies, the use

of class analysis emphasised the crucial role apartheid played in capitalist development and employer complicity, for example, the "abseentism, sabotage, high labour turnover, motivation and industrial conflict" (Webster, 1991:52). Richard Turner's (a political philosopher and activist) work placed emphasis on participatory democracy and black workers in the economy (ibid). This was based on his belief that black workers, through collective action organisations such as trade unions, could exercise a form of control and influence change in South Africa (ibid).

Marx took it a step further and attributed Fordism to the manner in which workers are organised in the labour process (Webster, 1991). The crowded assembly lines of manufacturing operations homogenised the workers and was favourable for building industrial unions (Webster, 1991). In South Africa, a caricature of Fordism emerged where "mass production was introduced but whites monopolised the skilled and supervisory positions in the labour process" (Webster, 1991: 55). The wages of white workers increased, allowing for mass consumerism of housing and locally produced goods, in contrast to black workers who were excluded from the standards of mass consumerism that would later be applied to Indian and coloured communities (Webster, 1991). This birthed and slowly created class rifts based on racial lines within the South African society.

The labour market is described as a relationship between the person who wants to work and the prospective employer (Fevre, 1992). Thomas Hardy compares it to a hiring fair consisting of five stages: (i) workers informing employers of their availability, (ii) employers informing workers of available jobs, (iii) screening to assess worker suitability, (iv) screening of the employer to assess employment benefits such as remuneration, and (v) offers to buy and sell labour (Fevre, 1992). This chapter focuses on the fifth element. Labour is given social and institutional recognition by the reward of a wage (Dinerstein and Neary, 2002), affecting social relations and identity, and defining human life (Dinerstein and Neary, 2002). Thus, on the individual level, the absence of capitalistic work results in "human misery" (Dinerstein and Neary, 2002: 10). This resulted in lack of a job (unemployment), absence of accommodation (homelessness) and the lack of human integration (loneliness) (ibid). For example, for black workers under apartheid, their low wages inhibited their purchasing power and ability to climb the social class hierarchy like their white counterparts (Fevre, 1992).

Moreover, labour goes beyond a means to sustain life to encompassing an economic, social, personal and psychological dimensions (du Toit, 2003) and is linked to social status or class (Thompson and Smith, 2009). The psychological dimension relates to earning a wage as an essential source of identity, influencing self-worth and self-esteem (ibid). The economic function involves earning a wage or reward from work-related activities (selling labour in return for payment) or engaging in activities that are rewarded in ways that meet and sustain basic needs (du Toit, 2003; Thompson and Smith, 2009). The social dimensions include correlation between work and its ability to influence how and where the workers live (du Toit, 2003; Thompson and Smith, 2009). The psychological dimension relates to earning a wage as an essential source of identity, influencing self-worth and self-esteem (ibid). Labour and wages are thus related. Marx stipulated that capital and wage-labour (price of labour) are both "perverted forms of social reproduction" (Bonefeld, 2002: 78). Capital is a product of social relations between commodity (as money) and labour which is transformed into capital because the worker, who is compelled to sell their labour as a commodity to the owner in return for money or a wage (Bonefeld, 2002). In the conservation space, this manifests as "workers involved in the production of conservation spaces and commodities" in what is labelled as conservation labour (Thakholi, 2021: 2).

6.4.2. *Labour in conservation and youth in South Africa*

Youth unemployment was a major talking point in the National Development Plan - Vision 2030, where youth development (providing space, opportunities, and support to youth) was identified as a strategy to address the crisis (Phokontsi, 2021). Previous attempts by the National Foundations Dialogue Initiative have provided insights into how to give youth a voice but have not resulted in concrete interventions that could have contributed to finding a solution (Matschke, 2023).

In the rural context, youth in South Africa face greater employment uncertainties because job prospects are best placed in urban areas such as the Western Cape and are worst in rural areas such as the Eastern Cape (Matschke, 2023). This chapter focuses on youth in the rural areas of the Mpumalanga province where the KNP is located. Over 70% of the population in the Mpumalanga province are under the age of 35 (Wilkinson, et al, 2017). The youth unemployment rate is approximately 60% and is further exacerbated by low education and scarce water resources amongst other socio-political factors enveloping the communal poverty-

stricken area (Buscher et., al, 2022). In rural contexts, it is difficult for youth to find work because economic growth is slow and sectors that are growing rapidly may require workers with higher skills than those that youth may graduate with (Wilkinson, et al, 2017). In Mpumalanga, youth reported the three most common inhibitors for employment are "the lack of skills, lack of information on job openings and an overall lack of jobs" (Wilkinson, et al, 2017: 27). The most frequently cited occupations for youth varied by gender, between construction work for men and domestic work or hair braiding for women (Wilkinson, et al, 2017: 27). Young women were reported to have a more difficult time entering the labour market because of domestic care work such as taking care of young children and household responsibilities (Wilkinson, et al, 2017).

Conservation labour considers the intersection of precarious labour with the service-based economy of conservation (Niemark et al, 2020; Thakholi, 2021). Conservation mobilises community labour in the formation of conservation spaces and products, such as the tangible production of tourism experiences (e.g. wildlife safaris) (Ramutsindela, 2015; Thakholi, 2021). For example, the wildlife-based economy is established when labour supports increased productivity and efficiency of natural resources, reduces pollution, improves environmental risk management, and invests in maintaining the stability of ecosystems (Aceleanu et al, 2015). Capital interests are the catalyst for this phenomenon, which occurs by losing land to conservation, leading to lost livelihoods, and ultimately forcing local peasants to sell their labour to these economic sectors (Ramustindela, 2015).

As such, the South African conservation landscape is an example of this. It is shaped by the effects of colonialism and apartheid, which marginalised Indigenous and local communities by restricting their access to decision-making bodies, natural resources and ancestral lands set aside for conservation (Ramutsindela, 2008; Kepe, 2009; Duffy et al, 2019; Domínguez and Luoma, 2020; Thakholi, 2021; Ramutsindela et al, 2022). The social reproduction of black conservation labourers in the private game reserves in the KNP consequently reproduces intergenerational injustices (Thakholi, 2021). This social reproduction manifests itself in gendered-class relations for conservation labourers and their families. For instance, the reproductive care work in homes is left to women to maintain the conservation mode of production (Thakholi, 2021). Conservation labour mirrors forced, cheap labour systems in other capitalist extractive industries in South Africa, exploiting workers through wages, housing and food (Smidt, 2022). These social and gendered dynamics subsequently reproduce

the inequalities seen during apartheid with migrant labour in the mining industry (Thakholi, 2021; Smidt, 2022). In fact, the contribution of black labour was erased in the creation of the conservation landscape and was relegated to a supporting and 'almost invisible role', despite the high social and personal cost (Smidt, 2022). However, recent scholarship has argued that the presence and representation of black people in conservation and the KNP has been overlooked (2020). Dlamini suggests that the nuances of how black communities made their presence felt in and around KNP, are largely missing from the conservation literature (2020). Through the lens of histories of presence, Dlamini states that KNP and the transboundary green corridor should be viewed beyond conservation labour to one of black "possession and ambivalence" (Dlamini, 2020:25). Although these arguments are opposing views, they highlight the contested landscape that the KNP has maintained. This has prompted further reflection on youth and conservation in this landscape. The question becomes: how, then, does conservation labour contribute to youth-related liminality?

6.4.3. Liminality and youth unemployment

The social constructivist view of youth embodies the political, economic, and social dynamics that impact the lives of youth and how they are perceived (Mhlongo, 2016). For instance, in many traditional African societies, becoming an adult was reserved for men with relative wealth and social status, while all others remained minors, no matter how old they were (Mhlongo, 2016). The social constructivist view of youth embodies the political, economic, and social dynamics that impact the lives of youth and how they are perceived (Mhlongo, 2016). Furthermore, it incorporates the cleavages that influence youth transitions in South Africa (ibid). Unemployment is also a nexus of the political, economic, and social dynamics because it prolongs youth waithood (ibid). For instance, youth are argued to disassociate themselves from political activities if they cannot provide for their families due to the negative impact on their confidence and willingness to participate in public life (ibid). As such, waithood and liminality are related concepts that will help further explain youth in unemployment.

The liminal phase is described by anthropologists Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner as a rite of passage "which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age" (Turner, 2017: 359). van Gennep suggests that 'rites of passage' or transitions are characterised by three phases: separation, the margin or limen (Latin for threshold) and aggregation (Turner, 2017; Wood, 2017; Tomlinson, 2023). Liminal is an ambiguous phase that has attributes of the

past and coming phase; as such, the bodies or entities in the liminal evade classification that are normally prescribed in a fixed cultural space, state, or position (Turner, 2017; Wood, 2017; Tomlinson, 2023). The separation phase is characterised by symbolic behaviours and attributes embodied by the subject that exhibit the transition of shedding of the previous phase (from an earlier fixed point) to entering the liminal phase (ibid). The (re)aggregation phase is where the passage from the liminal phase ends and the subject enters a new stable state where they have different rights, obligations that are structured and clearly defined (Turner, 2017). Youth Studies describes this liminal phase or threshold as the transition. Accordingly, the social category of youth can be described as a process of becoming, encompasses an ambiguous phase where classifications are fluid and "are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial" (Turner, 2017: 359). As liminal subjects, youth are expressed through rich symbolism in many societies that ritualise social and cultural transitions (Turner, 2017). In this way, liminality is compared to a significant and powerful transitional period that transforms the entity (Turner, 2017). This is because the entities in transition are postured to be reshaped or redesigned and endowed with knowledge or power to enable them to cope with their new position in life (Turner, 2017; Wood, 2017). For example, young men who undergo male circumcision or ritual initiation – coming of age- ceremonies in some South African kinfolks such as the *Venda* and *Xhosa* people. Therefore, liminality is likened or described as a human experience (Szakolczia, 2009). For example, for children and youth transitions, becoming an adult involves going through a series of crucial experiences where the subject must understand how to become an adult and "actually do so" (Szakolczia, 2009: 147).

However, if the liminal phase is prolonged, waithood occurs. In Youth Studies, waithood refers to youth in a prolonged state of transition due to social, political, and economic factors that inhibit them from achieving the social status or markers associated with adulthood in their contexts and cultures (Thieme, 2018). For instance, the search for employment in this context can be perceived as a rite of passage where the youth are liminal subjects and unemployment plays a crucial role in how and when youth will proceed to the (re)aggregation phase and take on their new adult positions. Perhaps, like Turner and Van Gennep's examples of ritual ceremonies, the search for employment involves a "death" of childhood dependency and requires the subject to exhibit agency and skills that will show them as responsible to their potential employer.

Yet, South African youth from disadvantaged backgrounds face skills shortages and lack of adequate education (National Research Foundation, 2022). Unemployment is therefore a double-edged sword for youth. Firstly, unemployment can be understood as a rite of passage that provides youth with an opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to enter the labour market (e.g. understanding labour market needs and job requirements), motivating youth acquire education or essential skills. On the other hand, unemployment prolongs the youth 'liminal' phase because unemployed youth in South Africa lack opportunities to acquire the skills that would help them cross the threshold to become adults. Thus, by not acquiring the necessary knowledge and power to take up the new life position associated with adulthood, such as entering the labour market, the liminal stage is prolonged.

The literatures on youth unemployment, liminality and labour converge on the periphery of the KNP. Liminality helps to understand the processes by which youth either transition into adulthood or are suspended in the liminal phase due to external social and economic factors. Labour systematically explains the relationship of the worker to employment and capital production of commodities, in this case conservation and tourism related activities. Labour outlines the economic, psychological, and social relationships for an individual in relation to employment. Understanding these dense concepts in their entirety will be important in analysing youth experiences of unemployment and conservation. The chapter will now discuss the methods used to collect data in the community of Belfast and with the environmental monitors.

6.5. Methods

Data collection was conducted using the qualitative case study approach (Seale 2004: 36). Qualitative research illuminates the behaviour of individuals or groups of people and their environment that cannot be described numerically (Jackson and Drummond, 2007). Data collection was conducted in the Bushbuckridge area next to the Kruger National Park, in the Mpumalanga Province, South Africa with youth between the ages of 20 and 35.

Fieldwork was conducted in stages between November 2020 and January 2023. During this period, in-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted with youth and community leaders in the communities of Cork, Belfast, and Mukhulu from November 2020 to February 2021. Additionally, the research involved in-depth and semi-structured interviews, as well as

participant observation, at the Southern African Wildlife College from August 2022 to mid-October 2022. Interviews were conducted via ZOOM and WhatsApp Video between November 2022 and January 2023. Follow-up conversations with key informants were held until December 2023. Overall, 43 interviews were conducted and contributed to empirical data presented in the results section of this chapter.

Informants included youth participants, community and traditional leaders and South African National Parks (SAN Park) staff or officials. The research participants include youth from surrounding communities, who attended courses and training at Southern African Wildlife College during this period. This sample includes 24 Environmental Monitors, 5 SAN Parks employees and 10 community leaders (Table 8).

Table 8: An outline of the participant profiles who were interviewed.

Sample Profile	Sample description	Participants interviewed
Youth from the Belfast community	- Youth between the ages of 20 and 35 at the time of data collection - participants include those who lived in Belfast at time of data collection	10
Environnemental Monitors (coded utilising pyseudonyms)	Youth who are on a fixed-term contract as conservation stewards in the UNEP GEF-6 Environmental Monitors Programme	24
South African National Park (SAN Parks) Officials (coded SAN Parks Official 1 etc.)	Participants include: - 3 Rangers - 2 Directors from Hoedspruit	5

Belfast Community and traditional leaders (coded Belfast community leader/traditional leader)	Participants include 4 Belfast community leaders at the time of data collection.	4
Additional Interviews		
Youth from Cork and Mkhulu	Participants include youth between the ages of 20 – 35 from both communities. Interviews were conducted in both communities.	12
Southern African Wildlife College Staff and Associates	Participants included: Guides Researchers Students Staff Community Liaison officers	13

The environmental monitors are made up of 24 young people from communities in the northern and southern clusters of the KNP. The group comprises of 15 male and 9 female participants, aged between 21 and 36. One participant joined the programme at the age of 35 and was 36 at the time of the interviews. All the participants reside in villages near the KNP fence. The themes derived from the data were informed by the additional youth narratives. Out of the 24 youth participants, 10 were parents to one or more children.

Data collection observed ethical concerns to protect the integrity of all participants by representing their stories and experiences as accurately as possible. All participants names were anonymised with the use of pseudonyms or codes to protect participant identities. Thematic analysis was utilised to extract the overarching themes from the data gathered (Stemler, 2015).

6.5.1. The Study Sites:

(i)　　The Greater Kruger National Park social landscape

The KNP is in the Northeast provinces of Mpumalanga and Limpopo with over two million people living adjacent to the popular tourist destination (Figure 3) (Thakholi, 2021). It is the flagship protected area of SAN Parks and is described as a global example of advanced environmental management techniques and policies (SAN PARKS, 2023). It is a part of the Greater Limpopo Trans-Frontier Conservation area together with Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe and Limpopo National Park in Mozambique (Figure 3). Established in 1898, it covers over 4% of the country's land mass and protects over 700 species of flora, over 1900 species of fauna and is home to over 250 cultural heritage sites (Hayward 2020). The KNP has a budget of ZAR 1 billion ($ 52, 821, 900), with 80% of its revenue generated from tourism (Hayward, 2020).
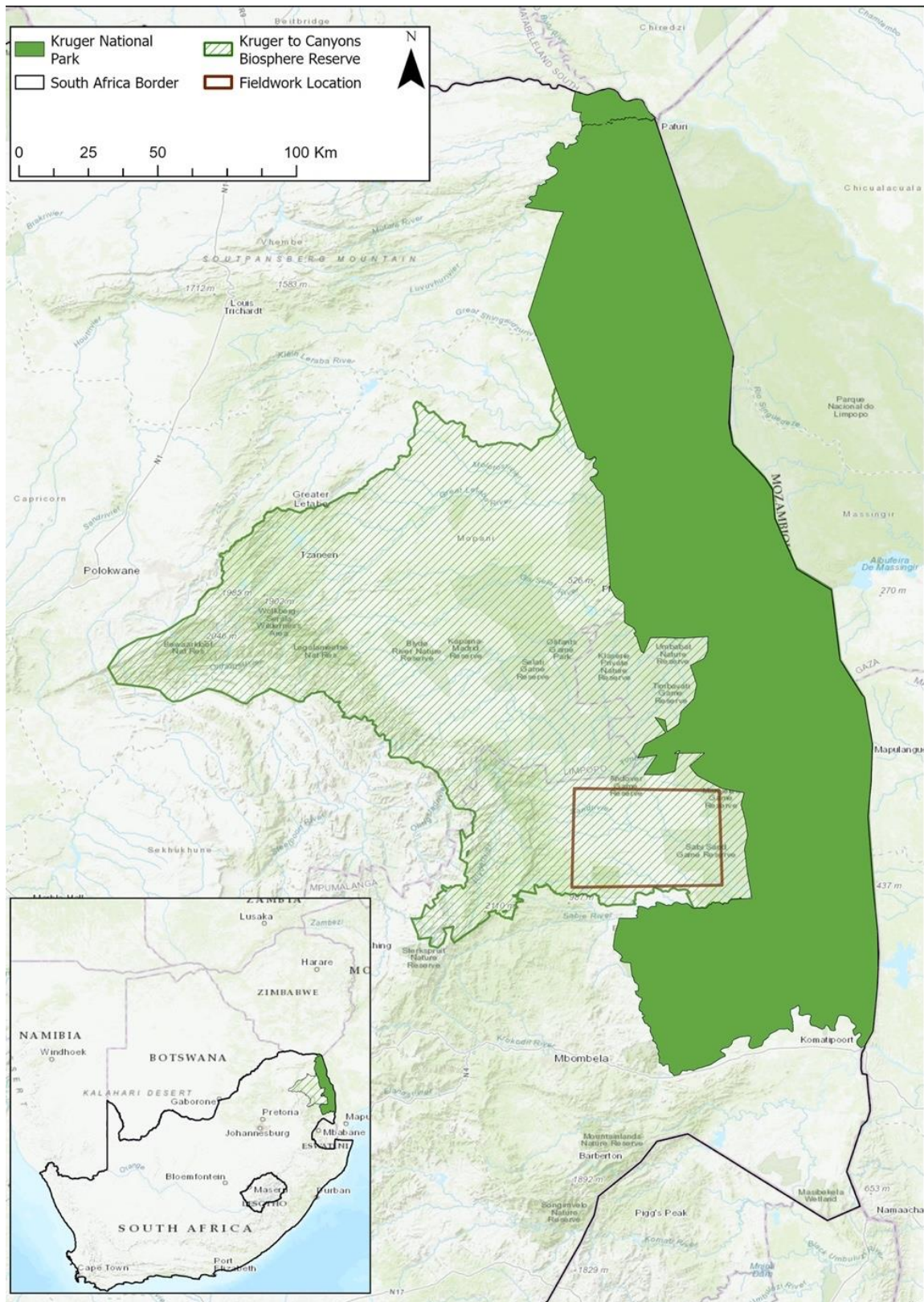
Figure 3: Map of Kruger National Park located in South Africa and the fieldwork location. Map created by Julia Walker. Spatial reference: WGS 1984. Sources: Kruger National Park (UNEP-WCMC, 2023), Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Reserve (Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, 2023), South Africa Border (South African Municipal Demarcation Board, 2018) & Basemap (ESRI, 2023).

Indigenous and local communities were forcibly removed from their ancestral land to establish the protected areas across Sub-Saharan Africa and this violent act, reverberated into how conservation was enacted in these rural communities and is visible in the current socio-ecological landscape (Kepe, 2009). The historical landscape of the Lowveld was shaped by the systematic forced removal of black people from their land and the prohibition on buying or owning property outside the homelands (Land Act 1913, Thakholi, 2021). The homelands were areas reserved exclusively for non-white inhabitants between the East and Northern Drakensburg mountains and the KNP (Thakholi, 2021). These areas were unfit for human habitation due to the prevalence of malaria and lack of adequate access to water (Thakholi, 2021). This is where communities such as Belfast are presently located in the Bushbuckridge municipality. With over 2 million inhabitants, Bushbuckridge is a sprawling settlement, densely populated in some areas and deeply rural in others (Stefan and Bernstein, 2017). The KNP's proximity to Bushbuckridge is regarded as the only real economic advantage because it attracts tourists to local petrol stations, craft markets and shops (Stefan and Bernstein, 2017).

SAN Parks reports that they have a responsibility to neighbouring communities given the history and so implement sustainable conservation based on socially relevant and acceptable, economically viable and ecologically sound engagement measures (Community Practitioners Meeting, 2022). SAN Parks in partnership with non-governmental organisations community-based initiatives, target schools and youth to raise environmental awareness whilst educating the younger generation about conservation. The school-based initiatives target children and youth, to encourage learners to take care of their immediate environment by for example, promoting action which involves exposing the learners to park environments, and encouraging them to interact with their own environments, argued to be overused or polluted (Community Practitioners Meeting, 2022).

(ii) The Belfast Community

Located in the Lowveld of Mpumalanga Province's Bushbuckridge Local Municipality, Belfast is a community near the Paul Kruger Gate of KNP. It is adjacent to the Sabie River. Belfast and its neighbouring villages are described as former Bantustans, historically underdeveloped and still experiencing the lack of basic services such as access to water and road infrastructure (Wilkensen, et., al, 2017). As a result, in March of 2021, Belfast residents protested along the nearby R536 highway, demanding a road network linking Belfast to its

neighbouring communities (SABC News, 2021). Their method of protesting on the road connecting tourists to the KNP is to get the local government to pay attention to their needs.

(iii)   The Project: The UNEP GEF-6 Environmental Monitors Programme

The UNEP GEF-6 Environmental Monitors Programme (hereafter referred to as the EM Programme) was selected because it primarily targets community members under the age of 35 (the category of youth as defined by the South African National Youth Policy). The Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Environment (DFFE) of South Africa has integrated the EM Programme to support conservation functions in parks, integrated zones, provincial nature reserves and private nature reserves as part of the Expanded Public Works Programme (SAN Parks official 3, 13/10/22). The EM Programme contributes to conservation management in all national parks by providing ranger, administrative and research support services (SAN Parks official 3, 13/10/22). DFFE targets matric graduates within the youth bracket (18-35) to become environmental monitors for biodiversity protection (SAN Parks official 3, 13/10/22). The DFFE seeks to employ local community members on a three to four-year contractual basis as a community development approach to reduce unemployment and to increase the integrity of biodiversity protection (SAN Parks official 3, 13/10/22). Within the KNP, the DFFE employs environmental monitors through the Kruger to Canyon (K2C) Programme and the GEF 6 Programme in partnership with SAWC.

The EM Programme is part of a larger UNEP GEF-6project entitled *Strengthening Institutions, Information Management and Monitoring to reduce the rate of Illegal Wildlife Trade in South Africa* which is implemented by the DFFE, SAN Parks and the World Wildlife Fund. The overall project has a national scope with a budget of $ 4,886,009 (ZAR 92,432,541[i]). The initial project duration was 60 months but was extended by 18 months. The start of project implementation began on 26 February 2019 and is expected to end on 31 December 2025. The project report did not specify the exact budget allocated to the EM Programme. However, according to Vacancy: Job adverts for environmental monitors dated November 2023, environmental monitors are paid a daily wage rate of ZAR 208/day ($ 10.98 [ii]) for a 22-day monthly cycle (ZAR 4,576/ month or $ 244.29). The requirements include proficiency in computer literacy, good communication skills (written and verbal), completed Grade 12 (National Qualifications Framework level 4) and must be in good physical health. Although there is no national age requirement for the environmental monitors, recruiters prefer those aged 35 and younger (SAN Parks official 1, 15/09/22). In addition, environmental monitors

are hired on a fixed-term contract and are required to work 8 hours per day for 5 days a week (Section 2, sub-section 2.4) (SAN Parks Employee Contract, November 2023).

Temporary employees are not eligible for the company pension fund, medical aid scheme, company student or study bursaries, loan schemes, or the free or subsidised holiday benefits reserved for permanent employees (Sections 7-10, sub-section 2.4) (SAN Parks Employee Contract, November 2023). Additionally, SAN Parks is not required to provide notice when terminating the contract of an environmental monitor, who also does not receive severance pay as a fixed-term employee. Finally, environmental monitors are prohibited from engaging in any other work or business while employed as fixed-term employees of SAN Parks (SAN Parks Employee Contract, November 2023).

This chapter focuses on Component 3 of the GEF- 6 project, which pertains to the environmental monitors in the KNP. The funding cycle for the EM Programme was initially from February of 2021 to June 2022 and was granted an extension from July 2022 until July 2025. The facilitating agents and coordinators are the Southern African Wildlife College, SAN Parks, the Peace Parks Foundation, and the World Wildlife Fund. In 2021, 198 environmental monitors were trained with 76 recruited and appointed in the KNP Fence Stewardship Programme. However, 74 were reappointed from July 2022 until the end of the extension period in July of 2025 to patrol about 400km of the KNP fence (Peace Parks Foundation, 2022). Component 3 of the project indicates that community strengthening, and capacity building was to be implemented in three clusters in the western border of the KNP (UNEP GEF-6, 2022). The primary aim was to decrease the illegal trade of wildlife (targeting rhino and elephant) by providing community-level socio-economic development support through the environmental monitors (UNEP GEF-6, 2022). Environmental monitors are selected based on their proximity to the KNP or private reserves. The environmental monitors originate from the southern, central, and northern community clusters of the KNP. The Rural Initiatives for a Sustainable Environment (RISE) unit trains environmental monitors in leadership, environmental and conservation knowledge to build capacity. The individuals recruited and appointed in the KNP fence stewardship programme are community-based and have specific roles and responsibilities based on their training in fence maintenance, dangerous animal awareness, poison awareness, restorative justice, human trafficking, human-wildlife conflict, removing snares, data collection, invasive plant species, and first aid (UNEP GEF-6, 2022). (UNEP GEF-6, 2022; WWF, 2022). Environmental monitors serve as a link between KNP and the

surrounding communities for monitoring and curbing illicit wildlife activity (poaching) and reducing human-wildlife conflict. They also act as community representatives and stewards for biodiversity protection to improve community perceptions of protected areas and wildlife (UNEP GEF-6, 2022). The SAWC has trained 76 environmental monitors (SAWC, 2022). During the fieldwork period in 2022, 34 were trained at SAWC, of which 24 were interviewed.

Environmental monitors play a crucial role in the implementation of conservation. They are strategically placed to maintain both the physical and social fabric of conservation in the communities. Described as 'Youth in Action' by the Peace Parks Foundation, the EM Programme seeks to create 'Youth Champions' in communities who understand the value of natural assets and the important role they play in the Greater KNP landscape (Peace Parks Foundation, 2021). WWF and the Peace Parks Foundation align this initiative with Sustainable Development Goals 1, 12, 13, and 15, which address poverty, responsible consumption and production, climate action, and life on land.

The following section will present the results from youth participants in Belfast community and thereafter, those participating in the UNEP GEF-6 EM Programme.

6.6. Results

6.6.1. Youth and conservation in the community of Belfast

Thakalani (member of Belfast Youth with a Vision Forum and 35 years old) had wanted to be a teacher and he believed that he would have been able to do more for the children and youth in his community if they had a better relationship with SAN Parks. Thakalani and his friends expressed interest to seek funding from SAN Parks and the local government of Mpumalanga to build a library and community centre. The facility they hoped to create would be accessible to everyone and equipped with air conditioning and books. Their inspiration comes from nearby villages that have Digital Learning Campuses. He believed having access to learning material and digital resources like computers, would encourage the youth in the village to gain skills that would help their job searches. He believed that because Belfast was a neighbour of the KNP, SAN Parks and the local government had a responsibility to his community. At the tree by the petrol station, Thakalani expressed frustration with the way the youth he mentors

through the Belfast Youth with a Vision Forum, were losing hope of working. When asked what he meant by "work", he stated that

> I wish they could get skills or training to get jobs in Skukuza (a rest camp within the KNP). Some of the people here are cleaners, guides and rangers in Skukuza and they are better off. I am a teacher because I got higher education to be a teacher. The other youth might not have this option because they are taking care of other children at home or don't have money, so, they are forced to work in the village."

He mentioned that those who have completed high school and were unemployed were slowly starting to engage with alcohol and drugs. As such, Thakalani and his friends would use COVID19 awareness (washing hands) to speak to youth in schools about their futures. Thakalani stated that when discussing jobs with his secondary school class, many of them aspired to leave Belfast and settle in Johannesburg where South African celebrities lived lavishly. However, he lamented that the youth had expectations that were misplaced because in his opinion, "…they (youth) should be working to make this village similar to Sandton (a wealthy business district in Johannesburg) and if everyone leaves who will stay and build. The youth are the future of this community!"

Speaking to Thakalani prefaced some of the challenges that youth were experiencing in Belfast. The account raises several questions, including: what activities do youth partake in daily that they consider to be work? Are these activities related to conservation? What is their understanding of conservation? The following narratives describe the experiences of youth who are unemployed and looking for work, interacting with the KNP, and protesting for the provision of basic services (such as road and water).

6.6.1.1. Fetching water

Image 5: Elephants in the Kruger National Park, Sabie River. Picture taken along the R536 road opposite Belfast community. Photo credit: Samantha S. Sithole

As we stood along the R536 road near Belfast we marvelled at the elephants that were grazing and drinking water from the Sabie River near the KNP fence (Image 5). When the photo was taken, Milton warned us not to stand too close to the fence. He said, "if the rangers see you too close with that camera, they may think that you are looking for rhino" (R536, November 2020). A young man (Image 6) then caught our attention as he crossed the road with the bucket. It was clear he had been in the KNP by the Sabie River. "He was probably doing laundry by the river," Milton explained as the photo was taken. His statements warranted further explanation because it was dangerous to stand by the fence because the SAN Parks rangers were clamping down on poachers and would therefore view us with suspicion. Yet, the young man was able to go into the KNP and use the Sabie River to do laundry in full view of the Rangers whilst being exposed to wild animals such as snakes, crocodiles, lions and elephants. Milton explained, "Belfast experiences water shortages. If we use our household water from the community borehole to do laundry, it means we must fetch water many times a week. Many people prefer to just come and use the river even when it is dangerous for us" (R536, November 2020).

Image 6: Young man crossing the R536 Highway from the Sabie River to the Belfast community. Photo credit: Samantha S. Sithole.

Milton was raised in Belfast but was originally from Cork, a neighbouring village. He grew up with two younger sisters who relied on him for money. He was 22 and unemployed but hopeful that he would become a KNP ranger in the future. He had visited Skukuza a few times in primary school. A friend of his mother was a chef in KNP, and he believed she would be able to help him get a position for training because "she knows someone in Skukuza" (Belfast, November 2020). He spent his day with friends playing cards or soccer or would go to Mkhulu to "hustle". He would also spend mornings or early evenings fetching water from the borehole located about 2 km from his family home. The home was adorned with buckets and containers. He and his sisters were tasked with fetching water, doing laundry, cooking, and cleaning the home. Milton went to the Sabie River once a week, explaining,

> Sometimes, a few of us go to wash and come back quickly… we know a few people who have been caught by rangers and harassed. This is because we are young and because of COVID19, they think we want to poach for money. We just want water. It's dry here (Belfast, November 2020).

Similarly, Desmond (29 years old), a member of the Belfast Youth with a Vision Forum, mentioned that his home was water scarce and that he relied on the community borehole. Like Milton, Desmond was looking for a job in the KNP as a guide or ranger. He explained that he was aware that the Southern African Wildlife College had courses for rangers and guides, however, it was very difficult to get accepted. He believed that because Belfast was so far away from the college (over 100km and a 2-hour drive over potholed roads), the training

advertisements were failing to reach Belfast and the surrounding communities. He believed that getting a job in KNP was a result of having "connections" (Belfast, November 2020). While waiting to hear if his college application was successful, Desmond worked in construction (earning between \$10/day – \$13.19/day). Prior to this point, he had already submitted two unsuccessful applications. He stated that the construction work was very exhausting especially due to the heat in October and November. He needed water every day in the evening to wash off the dirt, soot and sweat from carrying bricks and moving material around the construction site. He said,

> I wonder how the people (SAN Parks) at Skukuza expect us to save water, wash our hands because of COVID19 and also bath when they know there is no water here… it is affecting us negatively, because instead of looking for jobs, we have to fetch water or go to the river. I don't have time to do that because the work on site is all day and I am tired when I come home.

Desmond therefore believed that with a job in KNP, he would be better off. Both Milton and Desmond believed that employees inside the KNP (rangers, guides etc) had ample water. The rangers, guides, and additional staff (maintenance, housekeeping, chefs) were required to work in 21-day work cycles, where they were required to stay within the premises of the private reserve that employed them. This meant they had access to the resources on site, including clean, running water.

Like Milton and Desmond, Sizwe lived with his parents in Belfast at the age of 23. He lamented that "23 was too old to be living with family" (December 2020). Sizwe wanted to be a pilot. He recalled seeing helicopters flying over the villages from time to time and this ignited his passion for aviation. Sizwe was fiery during interviews and believed that his friends needed to "go to Jo'burg, get rich and come back and build hotels for the tourists that pass by going to Skukuza" (December 2020). He was self-employed, tutoring students at school and charged a fee based on the student's ability to pay. Sizwe was attending the Ehlanzeni TVET College but was in Belfast because of COVID19. Sizwe believed that staying with his parents when he should have a job was regressive. He said that "I have to do my own thing, I can't belong to my parents", because he believed the village was a "dead end" for youth. He stated that those employed in the KNP "can't build big houses or drive nice cars because they earn too little. "For youth like us, working in nature doesn't pay." When probed what he meant by "youth like us" he stated that,

> … there are no leaders here who can show us they benefited from the park (KNP). Tourism pays those people who sell crafts or who work in the Skukuza. They get tips (from tourists). Us, black people from the villages have to work very hard to make it in tourism with Kruger. The (private) reserves are (well) maintained; tourists don't even know we are here. They can't even come here because there are no nice roads. They come to see animals and leave. (Belfast, December 2020).

In a separate interview, a community leader from Belfast echoed the sentiments of Sizwe. He stated that "the youth in the village were strong and energetic and they are wasting that energy in construction or fetching water." He argued that the KNP has a role to play in enhancing the lives of the communities. The Belfast Community Leader 1 lamented that the youth in his community had diplomas, grade 12 and some had degrees. Yet, the KNP was not able to absorb them into tourism jobs. He stated that due to COVID19 poaching was reported to be on the rise (at the time of interviews). He stated that the anti-poaching units in KNP thought it was the youth due to the high unemployment rates:

> At the end of the day, you see someone washing clothes in the river and they (rangers) think they are poaching but they (SAN Parks or Skukuza or local government) don't give them jobs or access to clean water… yet Skukuza is so close to here… that's why people end up '*Toy-Toying*' (protesting). Because, if we block Skukuza road (R536) it is a big disturbance to them (KNP or Skukuza or SAN Parks) (Belfast, January 2021)

The access to clean water was a theme that ran across all the interviews in Belfast. According to the respondents, their options for accessing clean water were limited. The Sabie River was a point of contention due to the dangerous conditions posed by wild animals, and KNP regulations that discourage unsanctioned entry into the park. However, it was a central point of discussion and opened avenues for understanding how youth reconcile their daily needs with living conditions in Belfast against the backdrop of nature conservation.

6.6.1.2.   *We don't call it conservation in our language*

Cresta (24 years old at the time of interviews) had studied tourism management at the Ehlanzeni TVET College but found herself without a job due to the industry shutdowns during the COVID19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, she had worked as an administration assistant at a reception in one of the private game reserves for 6 months. She enjoyed her job because she was able to meet tourists and could help her parents by supplementing some of the household

expenses. However, at the time of the interview, she was out of work and worried that she would not find another job. During her time at home, she was selling snacks near her family home in order to make some money. The uncertainty brought on by the pandemic reminded her of the difficulties of being 'underemployed' in Belfast. She stated that she felt responsible for her younger siblings and providing for their basic needs (snacks and uniforms for school). However, working informally and having to hustle for ZAR 50/day (USD 2.64/day) from selling snacks, undermined her ability to support her parents. Whilst at home, every morning, she was tasked with the responsibility of cleaning, cooking, and looking after her siblings. In the afternoon, when the heat of the day had subsided, she would then start selling snacks near her family home. This meant that she could not look for a job nor seek further education because her parents relied on her physical and financial support. Cresta expressed that her tourism diploma was her key to work in Skukuza. She described Skukuza as her "dream job". She elaborated by stating,

> Working in Skukuza would be nice because it's nearby and I will get to see animals all the time. I can get in the park as staff. I will belong. I studied tourism so I can work in Skukuza. The game reserve was hard because I had to do a lot of work until late at night. With this diploma I will be in the park and make money. It is better than sitting here (at her stall) (Image 7). (January, Belfast, 2021).

Image 7: Cresta's snack stall in the Belfast community. (January 2021) (Photo credit: Samantha S Sithole).

Cresta believed that taking care of nature and practicing conservation at home, will help her when she starts working. She described conservation as protecting biodiversity like plants and trees and not poaching. When asked if she grew up knowing it as 'conservation', she reminisced that the word was taught to her in primary school, however, "we don't call it conservation in our language, we just grew up knowing nature needs protecting".

Similar to Cresta, other respondents expressed that they had been exposed to the theories and practices of conservation when environmental organisations came to the schools to educate students on biodiversity protection and sustainability. These included deforestation, water safety and usage, animal awareness and pollution (amongst others). However, the concepts they were taught in class were often difficult to implement in their households. For example, Jabu (23 years old at the time of interviews) stated the following:

> Having grown up in that village, even if that organization had not approached us, we were always faced with those questions of conservation. But the school, they teach us about conservation. But you go back home and there's no electricity, there's no paraffin. You going and cutting wood to cook or you go home with empty hands… (January, Hazyview, 2021).

Jabu (originally from Belfast) was living in Belfast and working in Hazyview. He commuted to work daily using public transport. He believed in protecting biodiversity; however, he didn't agree with how the community was obligated to practice conservation as neighbours of KNP. He stated that there was conflict between the KNP and the community because wild animals such as leopards or cheetah would enter the village and kill livestock. He stated that, "the animals cross the R536, into the village and this causes trouble between people and the animal. "But we can't kill the animals, we have to wait for SAN Parks to come and fetch it; …but if we cross over to wash our clothes in Sabie, it is a problem" (January, Hazyview, 2021). He mentioned that his "desk-mate" during secondary school was killed by an 8-foot crocodile and that crocodile attacks were a common occurrence[6]. He continued by saying,

> The questions come because people live in poverty in the villages and there are water shortages, so it means we need to go to Sabie for all our water needs; we fish there, we drink water... so far us thinking of conservation is a daily question… people are interested in conservation but at their own terms. Coming to Hazyview I see the leafy suburbs and trees and tarred roads; why can't I have that too? (January, Hazyview, 2021).

Jabu stated that in secondary school he was made the ambassador for conservation with the responsibility to encourage his friends and neighbours to stop polluting. Through conservation education, he learnt the formal names of conservation activities such as deforestation. However, unlike in Skukuza, the communities do not have physical ways to implement conservation. For example, the availability of multiple dustbins for collecting and recycling waste around the village. As such, most households buried or burnt their household waste to permanently dispose of it. The infrastructure in the village did not encourage conservation behaviour, although he and other students saw the value of respecting the environment. This led him to re-emphasise the issue of service delivery between the villages, local government, and SAN Parks. Jabu stated, "there is no town planning, to account for that kind of behaviour" (protecting or conserving the environment). Jabu's sentiments were echoed by most participants during interviews. They were disgruntled with the lack of service delivery, particularly water and electricity, which was heightened during the COVID19 pandemic and

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[6] Examples of previous crocodile attacks in the Sabie River (KNP):
- Report on SABC News, South Africa. Belfast residents forced to fetch water from crocodile infested river. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3ve-tceiBg&ab_channel=SABCNews (3 March 2016).
- IOL NEWS. Crocodile kills teen in Kruger National Park. (30 September, 2003).

the need to sanitise and wash hands. As such, the participant's accounts of their experiences living in Belfast will end with this quote from Jabu:

> So…there is the tarred R536 road for people (tourists) who have money to go in (Paul Kruger gate, KNP), enjoy the wildlife that we are supposed to be part of protecting. And they're going to drink clean water. They're going to live comfortably. They are in those spaces because they have money. But our villages, along the road that goes to those fancy sort of wildlife spaces, don't have access to those kinds of resources. So, I mean, there's a question of what kind of attitude do we then expect the youth to uphold?

The youth narratives presented in this section represent the views of individuals regarding their experiences as youth living in the Belfast community. The service delivery challenges especially regarding water, were a dominant theme amongst the youth participants. This not only impacted their daily activities but also posed a physical risk to their safety when accessing the Sabie River. In addition, searching for employment in the KNP was a recurring point in the discussions. The participants' perceptions of conservation and employment were shaped by the proximity of Skukuza to the village and their daily living conditions. They had prior knowledge of biodiversity conservation methods from school lessons and accessing the Sabie River. However, they also aspired for an improved quality of life through conservation employment. Furthermore, the participants linked the protection of biodiversity to their living conditions in Belfast and their desire for conservation work opportunities at stations such as Skukuza in the KNP.

In fact, the lack of service delivery and necessities described by youth in Belfast were highlighted in the Community Practitioners Meeting at the Wits Rural Facility in October of 2022. Local non-governmental organisations, SAN Parks and other conservation stakeholders such as World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) and USAID (United States Agency for International Development) reported on the "impoverished conditions" in the communities bordering the KNP on its western boundary (Community Practitioners Meeting, 2022). The projects that were presented identified the importance of engaging youth from the communities in the stakeholder engagement processes because "youth are necessary for change" since "conservation is changing" (Community Practitioners Meeting, 2022). Poverty was reported as the largest impediment to community participation by SAN Parks as "community values differ depending on needs" (Community Practitioners Meeting, 2022). Youth from the communities for instance, are said to be conservation "role players" and custodians by SAN

Parks and the Peace Parks Foundation. Therefore, they noted that youth should be engaged in conservation activities (Community Practitioners Meeting, 2022). However, there is a perception that youth are not interested in conservation due to unemployment and its related challenges, as well as youth underrepresentation in community forums due to social issues such as lack of recognition of their contributions (Community Practitioners Meeting, 2022). Thus, the work of Conservation South Africa's Scouts Programme and the GEF-6 environmental monitors were praised because these projects were actively engaging youth in conservation activities. In the following section, the experiences of the environmental monitors will be presented in order to situate how youth experience employment in conservation within KNP.

6.6.2. *Youth and conservation in the Environmental Monitors Programme*

The environmental monitors support Section rangers through fence patrols both inside and outside of KNP, reporting and removing snares, reporting, and repairing damaged fences, reporting illegal objects found along the fence. Furthermore, they were tasked with community engagement as conservation stewards. These responsibilities were related to their fence management and patrols as well as conservation related activities in their respective communities. These include (but are not limited to) attending community meetings, speaking to the Induna (community leader), and reporting human-wildlife conflicts caused by cattle entering the park or wildlife leaving the park through a damaged section of the fence. Community engagement is meant to improve community perceptions of the KNP and wildlife. As such, the overall mandate of the environmental monitors is to strengthen information management and monitoring to reduce unemployment and illegal wildlife trade within and around the KNP (Peace Parks Foundation, 2021).

6.6.2.1. *Patrolling the fence and community strengthening*

The interviews sought to establish an understanding of the daily activities of environmental monitors and the challenges they face in fulfilling their duties as youth. The participants stated that they are an unarmed support system to the rangers whose patrols cover distances between 5 km and 10 km daily. They patrol both sides of the fence, within the KNP and within the communities to reduce rhino poaching related activities. This often involves interacting with dangerous wildlife such as elephants and snakes. During their training, they were referred to as custodians of nature or conservation by the programme facilitator (October 2022). As conservation custodians or stewards, they are obligated to safeguard biodiversity and limit

poaching in accordance with the EM Programme mandate. Conservation custodianship or stewardship involves implementing conservation regulations in relation to the fence and the communities through disseminating knowledge of biodiversity protection to the communities and exercising leadership as conservation "champions". That includes reporting irregularities such as fence damage and being the "eyes and ears" of the rangers regarding illegal activities along the fence to increase the conservation capacity of SAN Parks (SAN Parks official 3, October 2022). The illegal activity includes poaching and wildlife trade especially regarding the rhino.

The environmental monitors stated how important their role within the KNP, and community is. They took pride in their responsibilities, stating that it was important for them to help the KNP, "…(we) educate and guide the younger generation about the importance of fauna and plant species…" and the importance of "protecting the nature" (Loyiso, 11 October 2022; Timothy, 11 October 2022). As youth leaders, they wanted to initiate change in their communities against biodiversity degradation and loss from poaching and pollution. The environmental monitors perceived that their communities were misinformed or uneducated about conservation. For instance, Jacob said, "The main challenge, is when the community doesn't take care of the nature… and it is because they don't have enough information on why they must not poach" (interviewed 10 October 2022).

Described as an issue that could be resolved through conservation education, Minie (11 October 2022) stated that youth must be taught that "… (by) destroying animals and vegetation, you destroy yourself". Each environmental monitor described community conflict with the environment as the gravest challenge for the EM Programme and the KNP. In addition to the poaching of small animals such as impala and birds such as the Blackstock and Ground Hornbill, the environmental monitors believed that certain groups in the communities "see animals as meat" and "they just don't understand the value" (Bonolo, 12 October 2022). Citing the lack of job opportunities for youth in his community, Ama (12 October 22) suggested that having more youth educated and working as environmental monitors would reduce poaching because he also grew up thinking poaching is the easiest option. He further said, "About crime: people who are unemployed they don't keep their self-busy full time that's why they end up doing crime but if they given jobs or project to keep them busy, it will result in decrease of crime" (interview, 12 October 2022).

The participants were committed to supporting field rangers in their communities and aimed to share the knowledge gained from their training with friends and neighbours. Their tenacity is similar to Jabu in Belfast who was made the ambassador of conservation during his secondary school education. He wanted to encourage his friends and family to reduce pollution and protect the trees. The environmental monitors cited tourism as a major contributing factor to conservation. In a group discussion, they stated that tourists come to the KNP to see rhinos, if the rhinos disappear, tourism will be affected. As such, the EM Programme gave them purpose in conservation as youth.

6.6.2.2. *Employment for conservation*

When asked why they became environmental monitors, the overarching theme was to educate the community and next generation about animals and the importance of protecting them. Citing poaching as the main issue in their community with conservation, Davis stated that "…value for the nature is lost when our community does not take care of it (13 October 2022)". As such, it is their mandate to protect the fence and report any illegal activity or "some people who are just moving around with no real reason". Taki highlighted that reporting community members perceived as engaging in illegal activities has resulted in conflict between environmental monitors and some of their communities. Firstly, environmental monitors are required to report activities like, miscellaneous movements, 'problematic' conversations and people hovering near the fence, to their Section rangers. Secondly, they are required to speak to the *Induna* and in community meetings to create awareness, raise issues or communicate information from the KNP; thereby operating as a bridge between the KNP and community. The conflict arises because environmental monitors are then perceived as spies by community members. Taki stated that "people in the community don't understand you, they think you are taking information (12 October 2022)", believing that the community misjudges the work environmental monitors do. He and Davis both stated that having to report on their fellow community members makes the environmental monitors, "enemies". Davis went on to say that "employment of field rangers and environmental monitors will help in the decreasing of illegal hunting" (12 October 2022). According to one SAN Park official, he described it as "my work as a leader" but noting that environmental monitor positions in and with the community become "dangerous" (SP3, 11 October 2022).

When probed about their journey on becoming an environmental monitor, the overarching theme was their love for nature and their need for a job. In a group discussion Taki and Ayanda (12 October 2022; SAWC campus) spoke of the living conditions in their respective communities. They alluded to the lack of running water, absence of household plumbing, waste build-up and dumping, constant electricity power cuts and the lack of tarred roads in-between communities. The same conditions described by the participants from Belfast. Furthermore, Taki and Gugu stated that they were informally employed before applying to the EM Programme. Gugu noted,

> "As a youth, you need to be doing something. You can't just sit at home. Me, first, I used to work with … to help fix pit toilets in schools to stop children from drowning in them… it was something that brought me happiness and I was working" (13 October 2022).

When asked to speak on their current living situation under the EM Programme, overarching sentiments emphasised that they needed permanent employment to be secure. Although, most still lived with their guardians or parents, they noted that earning ZAR 4,600 per month; ZAR 208 per day ($ 242.98; $ 10.98 [iii]) was insufficient to meet household expenses, personal and family needs. According to Bonolo,

> "How can I save (money) under the programme (EM) – from this programme to that programme and I'm getting older. Nothing will happen as we increase poverty whilst they (SAN Parks) are say (sic) they create job opportunities" (12 October 2022).

Disgruntled that the contracts "only lasts a short period", Loyiso (10 October 2022) stated that he would describe himself as a conservationist "if I get permanent employment". In fact, Jacob explained that he did not see the programmes employment as a "benefit", saying,

> "Who must benefit here? They say that we are beneficiaries (referring to employment) - beneficiary for what? Do they (KNP) deliver or are they just preaching benefits?" (10 October 2022).

The environmental monitors spoke of their work as being hindered by the lack of permanence. The temporary nature of their contracts results in job insecurity and a lack of confidence about the prospects of progressing to becoming a ranger or other conservation work. As such, Taki (11 October 2022) strongly stated that "…our relationship with nature shouldn't be a job opportunity!"

The experiences of the environmental monitors working in conservation highlighted how their training in the EM programme at SAWC empowered them to become conservation guardians. Their responses emphasised their passion for conservation work and their desire for permanent employment because of the insecurity caused by unemployment. Some of the participants expressed that their peers were unaware of the importance of biodiversity conservation due to unemployment. Therefore, they stated that the youth in the communities need to "do something". The final section discusses the youth narratives in relation to the literature on conservation labour and liminality to situate the experiences of both youth groups in the conservation landscape of KNP.

6.7. Discussion

This chapter has presented the views of youth participants interviewed in the Belfast community of Bushbuckridge, Mpumalanga, and those working as environmental monitors in the northern and southern KNP community clusters. These narratives have painted a picture of how youth in Belfast experience unemployment in the conservation landscape of the KNP, in addition to the experiences of those who could work in conservation.

6.7.1. 'Youth in action' in liminality

The youth in South Africa are described according to their vulnerability stemming from the unemployment crisis (Wilkinson et al, 2017). Such classifications are placed on youth depending on where they are located and who is defining them (Pitti et al, 2023). In conservation under the EM Programme, the youth are described as champions, custodians, and stewards of biodiversity protection. Yet, when they are unemployed or underemployed they are classified as disinterested and vulnerable due to poverty and unemployment (Community Practitioners Meeting, 2022). However, both groups of youth, expressed similar sentiments regarding money and their desire to support their families and subsidise household expenses to help their parents or guardians. Both groups are seeking to acquire employment that is secure and will help them progress financially and socially. For the participants in Belfast, the liminal phase is characterised by their unemployment and underemployment and their need for basic services in their community. Their relationship with the Sabie River highlights how the youth rely on the resources in the KNP to meet their household needs. As they cross the R536 and the KNP fence to 'fetch water', the youth participants are confronted with the lack of access to

water and employment. Literature on labour refers to how employment (or lack thereof) influences how and where the workers live (du Toit, 2003; Thompson and Smith, 2009). Desmond stated that working in the KNP would make him 'better off' because he would be employed and have access to resources that KNP staff have access to during their 21-day work cycles. The Sabie River highlights some of the social aspects that echo the conservation inequalities identified by Buscher and co-authors (2022). Youth and other community members must negotiate access to the KNP in full view of rangers and wildlife yet, they are expected to uphold conservation standards in the villages that lack basic infrastructure and services.

On the other hand, the environmental monitors are formally employed but exist in underemployment is a result of the fixed-term contracts with SAN Parks. Underemployment encompasses the ability to find work but for shorter periods than normal (Valoyi and Taku, 2017). They are support staff to KNP rangers and perform all the ancillary activities associated with anti- poaching. Through their role in conservation, the environmental monitors are conservation labourers (Thakholi, 2021). They exist within the governance system as actors who do not have power to negotiate the terms of their contracts such as working conditions or promotion into a permanent or higher paying role. The SAN Parks staff who were interviewed made it clear that environmental monitors were there to support the rangers in the offices with administrative tasks or in the field with basic duties that do not require substantial training or the use of a weapon. Although their relationship with the SAN Parks is primarily to empower them through employment and capacity building, they are not guaranteed longevity in those roles as the UNEP GEF 6 funding is aimed to close in 2025. As such, the programmes' main purpose to engage youth to reduce unemployment and alleviate poverty may be unattainable.

Underemployment with environmental monitors stems from their terms of their contracts which state that they are ineligible to receive benefits such as bursaries for further or higher education, mobile data, pension, and health benefits. Their monthly salaries must cover the cost of their food, household and family expenses and mobile data, and they are required to work on public holidays or weekends at short notice. The salary is based on an hourly rate (eight to ten-hour shifts), which is subject to a shortfall if they fall ill or have a family emergency. These employment conditions reflect what Thakholi (2021) describes as apartheid labour geographies. These were created from a large pool of unemployed community members who were available to work within private game reserves as low-wage and low-level labour.

In this context, youth are mobilised primarily to achieve conservation outcomes within anti-poaching with a secondary focus on their needs or well-being. During the interviews, despite being conducted at the end of a hot summer's day in the Lowveld, the environmental monitors displayed a positive attitude towards their training and work. They were visibly passionate about protecting biodiversity and participating as environmental stewards. This was reflected by the way they spoke about educating other youth from the communities about biodiversity. The environmental monitors considered their positions of employment as a privilege. In fact, Nrkumah points out that including youth in decision making may be regarded as a gift or privilege (2021). Their roles expose them to wildlife during training and fence patrols and this experience is juxtaposed to that of the youth from Belfast.

Sizwe and Jabu for example, experienced and engaged with conservation through the Sabie River. The river was the access they had into KNP due to water scarcity in Belfast. The youth explained that although it was disallowed, they swam and did laundry by the river because they did not have a choice. They wanted to be employed in the KNP because the perception was that tourists and employees had access to clean, running water, flushing toilets and electricity. Their lack of access to technical and material resources to search and apply for jobs adversely affected them. Youth are argued to "suffer most as they face the difficult metamorphosis from child into adult, deciding who they are and what they believe…it's a transition best made in an environment that offers stability, security and …certainty" (Kelly, 2000: 303). The KNP conservation landscape does not necessarily provide stability or security for the youth of Belfast. In fact, the state of fossilized conservation calcifies how youth experience the rites of passage of finishing their education and entering waged labour in the community. That is why Jabu, like many others who we observed commute to Hazyview and beyond daily, prefer to leave the village when an opportunity arises. Thus, both groups of youth participants are 'youth in action'. They are constantly 'doing' to 'become' employed, independent and secure in the conservation landscape.

As such, fossilized conservation in South Africa can be likened to a protracted liminal space. As the conservation landscape on the western border of the KNP immortalizes the lack of service delivery and unemployment in the communities, the youth and upcoming generations will experience the liminality that continues to be perpetuated in the communities. This fossilized state is experienced daily through the lack of clean running water. The youth in Belfast and the EM Programme expressed this as a hinderance to their daily activities. On a

national level, programmes and policies that target youth in the rural context frame them using the lens of vulnerability. For example, the EM Programme seeking to alleviate community poverty and unemployment by targeting youth (UNEP, GEF-6, 2021).

6.7.2. *Liminal youth, liminal conservation?*

Liminality, as a rite of passage for youth, presents both opportunities for gaining employment skills and risks when the liminal phase is prolonged by unemployment. Thus, the opportunities and risks need to be actively managed (Pitti et al, 2023). With conservation labour, critical geographers have shown how the inequalities created through apartheid have been perpetuated within South African conservation spaces such as KNP (Ramutsindela, 2015, Schmidt, 2022). The experiences of youth in the community of Belfast and within the EM Programme raises questions of their wellbeing and how the state (through local government and SAN Parks) seeks to address the intergenerational injustices. A comparative analysis of both groups of youth highlights that liminality is experienced differently and raises justice questions. For example, it is important to recognise the need for stable and secure employment among young people. They not only live near KNP but also bear an unfair burden of responsibility for environmental issues, such as biodiversity protection, as well as the well-being of their communities when they become community leaders (van der Westhuizen, 2021). The youth actors in this regard, can be labelled as marginalised due to their lack of resources and influence that could grant the ability to be active participants in negotiating their futures (Orsini, 2022).

These individuals are often described as vulnerable, impoverished or in crisis due to unemployment, which positions them to benefit from development targets aimed at empowering them, as discussed at the Community Practitioners Meeting in October 2022. The state and non-governmental organisations have the power to either persuade or coerce actors to adopt their preferences and interests in biodiversity protection (Kwon, 2019). This was evident in the Greater KNP area within debates around the green violence methods to anti-poaching in contrast to the community-based conservation approaches (Buscher and Ramutsindela, 2016; Shabalala and Thomas, 2019). Environmental justice challenges grounded social constructions of environmental problems such as climate change, poaching and biodiversity loss (Taylor, 2000). These social constructions are bodies of thought that are dependent on the actors who develop the paradigms which they assign meaning to through collective processes (Taylor, 2000). For instance, although biodiversity protection is a concern

for youth in Belfast, they are more concerned with meeting their daily needs and finding secure employment. Furthermore, conservation labour has resulted in a landscape where the transition from school to entering waged labour has been prolonged for multiple generations, as highlighted in the archival work by Thakholi (2021). These protracted liminal conservation spaces serve the interests of conservation capital, as identified by youth from Belfast and the EM Programme in tourism. The tourism sector in the KNP generates revenue from private reserves and conservation activities, such as safaris and game drives, as well as the fossil fuel industry (Buscher et al, 2022). In this research, the youth identified the importance of tourism and tourists for the KNP. Jabu compared the services offered to tourists who can afford luxury accommodation with those of his community, which is subjected to neglected roads and water scarcity.

Procedural and recognition justice can be applied when discussing the youth experiences presented in this chapter. Procedural justice refers to decision-making process with regards to participation and representation (George and Reed, 2016; Svarsatd and Benjaminsen, 2019). Participatory justice refers to opportunities for disadvantaged or marginalised groups to contribute meaningfully to decision-making (George and Reed, 2016). Whilst recognition justice stems from political and cultural statuses that are embedded in identity groups defined by their characteristics such as race or gender, intersecting with historical and spatial contextual factors (George and Reed, 2016; Svarsatd and Benjaminsen, 2019). For the youth in Belfast and in the EM Programme, participatory and recognition justice would shed light on how their experiences with conservation adversely impact their ability to meaningfully engage with conservation. In tackling youth poverty and unemployment, justice-based approaches to conservation should recognise the needs of young people that are equally related to service delivery and infrastructural development, in addition to the methods already used.

The tensions experienced through youth 'being', 'becoming' and constantly 'doing' whilst their ability to achieve adulthood are inhibited should also be considered a justice issue in Youth Studies. The societal and cultural markers placed on youth have resulted in a linear progression that is often unattainable due to the lack of adequate housing or even decent employment as is the case for youth in Belfast (Cuervo and Wyn, 2014). Youth as a term is therefore better understood when it intersects with other concepts such as gender and race in light of the cultural and historical contexts. This will allow for a just environmental policy process that is inclusive of youth experiences who are marginalised from decision-making

(Wiebe, 2019). Therefore, it is important to consider the intersection of youth with other concepts such as gender and race, considering cultural and historical contexts. This will enable a fair environmental policy process that includes the experiences of marginalized youth who are excluded from decision-making (Wiebe, 2019). Liminal conservation exposes the justice issues of the Greater KNP landscape on youth. Liminal conservation prolongs the liminal within youth and the historical social injustices that have shaped behaviours for communities and their positioning with conservation and the KNP. In fact, when liminality joins forces with fossilised conservation, it is visible that the social landscape has remained in the betwixt state whilst youth are aging in stagnancy. These conflicting realities presuppose that youth are mobilised for their energy and positivity regarding conservation whilst they remain subjects of persistence. In tackling youth poverty and unemployment, justice-based approaches to conservation should recognise the needs of young people that are equally related to service delivery and infrastructural development, in addition to the methods already used.

6.8. Conclusion

In conclusion, youth engage with conservation through employment and unemployment. When faced with unemployment, they encounter visible and invisible barriers to accessing the KNP. The invisible barriers become apparent when they desire to apply for jobs through SAN Parks but lack the necessary resources or information. Additionally, they encounter conservation while crossing the R536 to fetch water and performing household chores, where they encounter wildlife. According to Thakholi (2021), youth often perform invisible work for their families, such as construction, cleaning, laundry, and caring for younger siblings, which is essentially a form of labour that is not recognised as such. However, it is often gendered (Thakholi, 2021). For employed individuals, the absence of job security, employment benefits, and low wages can create a false sense of security and a "new status position" (aggregation) (Turner, 2017). Environmental monitors are still working towards achieving the markers associated with adulthood, such as leaving the family home or being able to provide for oneself. The conservation labour landscape was established to ensure that conservation capital has access to inexpensive labour. Therefore, it extends the liminal stage even for youth employed in conservation. As such utilising the literature on liminality and conservation labour has aided in understanding how some youth experience conservation in the Greater KNP.

The experiences of environmental monitors and youth participants from Belfast have highlighted the importance of considering youth classifications in governance. This chapter demonstrates how youth are described as both at risk and mobilised as champions for conservation. Although they may have opposing descriptions, youth classifications are often used when addressing young people in governance. This thesis argues that this practice will have implications for how young people engage with conservation. Therefore, this chapter has contributed to the Youth Studies literature through the perspectives of youth in employment and unemployment in conservation. Through the lens of liminality, the chapter capitalised on youth transition literature that argues for the acknowledgement of the life stages and processes engrained in youth identities. Considering the literature on transitions and liminality, this chapter has contributed to the conservation labour literature by providing a youth perspective from within the UNEP-GEF6 Environmental Monitors Programme. Hence, this chapter has situated how youth in the conservation landscape are engaging with conservation at the local level.

From the conference halls of the World Conservation Congress (WCC) to the narrow roads of the Kruger National Park communities, this thesis has been on a journey to understand how youth are engaging with conservation. Each empirical chapter provides a unique perspective for understanding youth and conservation. The chapter on a global scale presented the perspectives of youth who participated in the WCC in France. The regional chapter focused on the perspectives of youth who are being trained and educated as leaders in conservation in Eastern and Southern Africa. Finally, the local level provided insights on youth within conservation programmes targeted at those in rural settings, as well as those seeking employment in the conservation landscape of KNP. Each chapter is presented as an independent contribution to this thesis, providing youth-centred data to the broader literature on Youth Studies, conservation, and governance.

The corresponding chapters will complete this journey of youth engagement in conservation by discussing the key themes from each of the empirical chapters in two parts. Chapter 7 discusses the importance of youth classifications in governance and conservation. This will be achieved by situating the empirical evidence from data collected throughout the thesis to challenge the term 'youth'. Secondly, Chapter 8 will briefly discuss what the key contributions to this thesis mean with regards to youth, engagement, and governance in conservation before concluding.

CHAPTER 7.

Discussion (Part 1): Youth classifications in governance

7. Introduction

This thesis has examined the experiences of youth in three areas of conservation and governance. It aimed to understand how youth are framed in conservation and their inclusion in governance. The global level located youth experiences in decision-making with IUCN at the World Conservation Congress Forum. It further examined youth in leadership positions in the Leadership for Conservation in Africa and Southern African Wildlife College organisations. Finally, this thesis analysed the relationship between youth at the grassroots level of Kruger National Park in South Africa and conservation labour. Each chapter offers an independent contribution to the literature on Youth Studies, governance, and engagement. This chapter will build on the empirical materials to return to the scholarly debates in Youth Studies.

7.1. Contribution to broader Youth Studies debates

This thesis presents insights into Youth Studies. The aim was to identify the young people to whom global and local conservation governance refer and how they have been involved in conservation through governance. As such, it brings a youth perspective to the discussions that pertain to youth in conservation and environmental governance. Scholars in youth engagement and policy have adequately discussed, debated, and presented useful analysis on the importance of Youth Studies and the implications of engaging with them in environmental science and policy. As such, the insights presented in this thesis sought to unmask and humanise youth by presenting their experiences in global conferences, in leadership and in programmes targeted at youth in conservation and employment.

This thesis challenges the term and demographic classification of youth as it has been used in development and environmental policy and governance approaches. Through an analysis of the global to local organisational policy classifications of youth the thesis will present the inequality embedded in the governance interactions between youth and other actors. These inequalities have underscored youth engagement at all levels of governance and engagement. It also challenges environmental policies that target youth utilising the youth description or classification. In light of liminality and youth transitions, it seeks to situate youth as diverse actors who offer a range of perspectives, experiences and solutions to the environmental problems faced in various contexts. As such, it will conclude by providing recommendations from a youth perspective in governance and conservation.

7.2. Youth classifications: implications on engagement and governance

The thesis began by stating that it defines youth utilising the age bracket of 15 – 35 from the African Youth Charter, IUCN, and International Labour Organisation. It did this to create parameters for the scope of the research and to challenge the age-related dimensions presented in environmental policy and governance spaces. This section will first discuss youth classifications. It will then explore the implications of the term and social category of youth in relation to conservation governance.

The Youth Studies literature describes the term youth a discursive construct embedded with multiple and complex meanings (Bennett, 2017). In fact, the term 'youth' is argued to shape youth identities, practices, and behaviours (Mhlongo, 2016). Such constructs are co-created based on the interests of those defining them (Mholngo, 2016). This thesis describes youth classifications as social constructions that determine how youth engage in governance. Collins and Mead argue that social constructions are created for target populations and reinforced by policies which impact the ways in which these groups engage in political processes (2021). As a discursive construction the term 'youth' is exercised in the environmental governance and conservation sector through youth classifications (Bennet, 2007). With regards to this study, governance is exercised through the IUCN, the LCA (Leadership for Conservation in Africa), SAWC (the Southern African Wildlife College), WWF and state apparatus such as the DFFE (Department of Forestry Fisheries and the Environment) in South Africa. Although independent to each other, they operate in tandem and often in collaboration to pass and implement conservation policies in and around protected areas from the global, to regional (African) and local grassroots levels. For instance, Zhang et al. (2023) describe the implementation of other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) through the IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas. As such, youth as a social category, are mobilised to advance conservation interests in governance and implementation. This starts from what the Youth Studies literature framed as youth cultures and transitions rooted in socio-economic identities. The empirical chapters discussed how youth are described: by age, global slogans, or framing, and as a tool or resource to be mobilised. This section will discuss each with regards to youth classifications. First, it will situate youth classifications in conservation.

7.2.1. Conservation and youth classifications

Conservation, particularly in the context of youth and youth classification, has provided a platform for visualising how youth transitions unfold and how youth interact in governance. Conservation is argued to be a hegemonic construct that transcends the global, regional, and local levels through the interactive governance of knowledge, ideas, people, beliefs, and practices (Kooiman, 2016; Di Gregorio et al, 2019). In practice conservation determines behaviour, actions, and regulations in human and non-human interactions. It does this through physical, social, and institutional boundaries (Kooiman, 2016). An example of the boundaries includes physical fences along the KNP and institutional boundaries such as the IUCN Red and Green Lists.

In this study, conservation governance practices influenced youth interaction in decision-making spaces as they navigated global discussions and deliberations with different conservation stakeholders during conference sessions and networking spaces at the WCC. The youth who participated in this study at the global level were external to IUCN and interacted through the Global Youth Summits, formulation of the Output Statements and the multiple sessions of the WCC. By challenging tokenism, youth participants highlighted that their local experiences need to be considered in global decision-making because their interactions with conservation are diverse and uneven. As such, classifying youth as homogenous in global decision-making overlooks the intersection of other important social positions influencing youth and youth identities (for example, race, ethnicity, and gender). Furthermore, the young participants emphasised that they have agency but need support. While the IUCN 2022-2030 Youth Strategy recognises the life stages of youth (young adults, young professionals), their social, economic, and political opportunities and limitations must also be considered. Chapters 5 and 6 of the thesis explored in greater detail the challenges faced by young people, which were highlighted in the global chapter (chapter 4) but not addressed in global governance spaces such as the WCC.

For youth on the regional African level, leadership was a fluid construct as it mobilised youth to have positions of authority and responsibility in the LCA and SAWC. It was fluid because youth had to embody various leadership styles due to the challenges, they faced in their leadership positions (for example, the servant leader and mother or paternal leader). In conservation, youth were targeted as stewards for educating and training communities, students, and their peers to understand and practice conservation. The literature highlighted

that youth leaders needed to possess specific attributes to effectively influence others as leaders, for example, ability to influence and equip people and leading environmental change (Dietz et al, 2004; MacNeil, 2006; Riemer and Dittmer, 2016). The young participants possessed these attributes. However, the literature addressed in this thesis did not highlight the challenges they faced in fulfilling their roles, such as, the experiences of female leaders emphasised the importance of considering the intersection of gender when formulating strategies for engagement. Therefore, when considering youth engagement in conservation, it is important to consider the social and cultural positions that young people occupy, which may hinder their ability to engage. This was the case with IUCN. If the term 'youth' is used to refer to individuals between the ages of 15 and 35 (as is the case in some countries and organisations), then the diversity of experiences that embody youth identities must be considered.

On the local level, societal challenges such as unemployment have informed how youth engage in conservation especially in the rural context. Thakholi (2021) carried out extensive research on labour and social reproduction in the Greater KNP. Her findings relate to that of the environmental monitors and the youth in Belfast. In this context, conservation and conservation labour have been fossilized to perpetuate a cheap labour pool for the conservation economy (Thakholi, 2021; Buscher et al, 2023). However, for youth like Sizwe and Milton who exist outside of conservation labour, the boundaries of conservation are more distinctive because their everyday livelihood experiences are hindered by conservation. In liminality, the ritual processes include the relationship of the instructor or elder (adult or conservation) with the neophytes (youth in this case) who exist in tandem (Turner, 1967). Liminality describes this relationship as a social structure that assumes equality between the two groups where the authority of the elders is not legal or sanctioned but is instead a personified self-evident authority (Turner, 1967). This authority is absolute and represents the societal values that are expressed as the 'common good' and 'common interest' (Turner, 1967). Similarly, youth in the liminal phase experience the authority and leadership of conservation policies and regulations that govern their behaviour and their access to resources needed for their transitions out of the liminal phase. Conservation through the physical and social boundaries of the KNP and the SAN Parks represent the perceived 'common good and interest' of protecting biodiversity as a national heritage (Carruthers, 1992). However, the rules and regulations of conservation are legally binding unlike the authority of the elders described in liminality.

The concept of belonging aptly situates youth in liminality regarding employment within the boundaries of conservation. Firstly, because of their age, youth desire to have waged employment (salary). These desires are coupled with their immediate family and household needs. In fact, the youth experiences trace the complexities of belonging to the conservation landscape yet living outside of its physical parameters. Belonging is relational and considers the quality of connections between youth and their broader societal context (Cuervo and Wyn, 2014). As they age, they wish to belong to the broader society through employment and earning a decent liveable wage. Similarly, for the youth in leadership, belonging in a group where the subjects are experiencing similar processes in life is comforting and reassuring. Although their age may simplify their identities, the youth in leadership programmes such as the Leadership for Conservation Youth Advisory Council were able to learn from each other and establish relationships where they are to share ideas and experiences. Therefore, it is crucial for youth engagement in conservation governance spaces and approaches to consider the term 'youth' beyond age and as a multifaceted concept. In the next section 'age' as a classification will be discussed in greater depth.

7.2.2. *Age-based classifications*

Age has been used as the primary indicator to identify youth in governance and policy from the global to local level. For example, in the IUCN WCC, youth were described as those between 15 – 35, however, the cost of registration was increased for those 25 and above. The social category of age is linked to temporal classifications that have shaped youth subjectivities in conservation and governance. Age and aging are regarded as a biological, social, and psychological experience that shapes human appearance, mentality, and identity (Bennet, 2007). The age brackets denoted as 'youth' have created artificial spatial boundaries for engagement in what is described as "geographies of age" (Cuervo and Wyn, 2014: 904). Geographies of age play a central role in shaping research and youth policy, for example, in education and labour market policies (Cuervo and Wyn, 2014). In essence, youth identities have been simplified to 'age' to categorise youth groups in spaces of governance which either include or exclude them. In fact, aging has temporal implications that can either allow or inhibit access to certain spaces and social strata. For example, access to the WCC varied in cost depending on age, with a difference of over 1000 Euros between those under 25 and those over 25 or the UNEP GEF6 Environmental Programme targeting youth (under 35).

Additionally, Youth Studies literature has sub-categorised the youth into life stages (based on age) to acknowledge the varying and diverse life processes that youth undergo as they age and endeavour to achieve the socio-economic markers of adulthood (Pollock, 2008; Thieme, 2018; Iwilade, 2019). These socio-economic factors influence how youth are perceived, for example, if they are accomplished enough to transition into adulthood (Pollock, 2008). Moreover, age encompasses the liminality of youth as they transition. This was the case with the environmental monitors and youth from the Belfast community in South Africa. Both groups were described as youth or young in their villages and through the EM (Environmental Monitors) Programme. Their ages were utilised to target and mobilise their engagement in conservation activities through conservation education and through the EM programme. For example, through conservation education, non-governmental organisations sought to teach primary and secondary school children about biodiversity protection, water management, deforestation, and pollution in Belfast. Additionally, through the EM Programme, the UNEP-GEF 6 in collaboration with DFFE targeted youth from the villages neighbouring Kruger National Park (KNP) to alleviate poverty through employment in conservation. With the youth in leadership, age influenced how they carried out their duties within professional spaces. Although they were defined as leaders and the scope of their responsibilities were extensive, their age influenced how they engaged with the communities, in training and with older colleagues in conservation.

As such, the age -bracket that is often primarily used in policy and governance to identify and qualify youth does not aptly encompass who the youth are and how they engage in governance. In fact, utilising age alone to describe youth, homogenises and compartmentalises their identities and experiences, thereby limiting their abilities, individual subjectivities, and capacity to engage as active citizens. Therefore, challenging the age – based classification is necessary. Critics of the twin-track approach in Youth Studies argue that the focus on 'transitions' directs attention towards predetermined and linear markers of progress, such as employment or education, which renders the experiences of young people in between these markers invisible (Cuervo and Wyn, 2014).

Chapter 6 utilised the concept of liminality to explore the subtleties of transitional experiences of young people in relation to employment and unemployment. The critical geographers and political ecologists have extensively analysed the conservation landscape in South Africa, specifically with regards to the Greater KNP. It continues to be described as a conservation

space where the inequalities of apartheid regarding the local neighbouring communities have been perpetuated through conservation labour (Thakholi, 2021; Busher et al, 2022). Additionally, these inequalities have been fossilized through the fossil fuel and tourism industry (Busher et al, 2022). Through liminality we can trace the linkages between youth experiences and the broader conservation landscape of KNP.

The concept of liminality not only encompasses the transitional experiences of youth, but also sheds light on how conservation has fossilized or perpetuated a liminal space for youth in the Belfast community and the EM programme. This can be argued because some of the youth participants had a desire to belong in conservation through employment yet, were stuck in unemployment or underemployment within this conservation landscape. However, conservation in the Greater KNP has played a pivotal role in positioning youth who must live and work in the structures of governance of the KNP. The KNP's nature-based tourism contributes significantly to its wildlife economy (Spenceley and Goodwin, 2008; Buscher et al, 2022). The conservation labourers come from communities like Belfast and are often invisible to tourists as their gaze is "fixated on wildlife" (Buscher, et al, 2022:4). They are employed as cooks, guards, rangers, ground maintenance staff, builders, managers and are "poorly paid, highly insecure and subject to intimidation, racism and other forms of abuse" (Buscher et al, 2022: 4). In essence, youth in this context also exist within the fossilized landscape described by Buscher and co-authors.

Thus, this thesis posits that the youth like Thakalani, Sizwe and Cresta have faced a greater degree of social hinderances within the conservation landscape. For instance, the human-wildlife conflicts, fetching water and water scarcity, and a lack of material resources for access to better quality education and jobs in the village. The youth perspectives from Belfast encompass prolonged liminal phases, where the threshold of finding waged employment could not be obtained because they believed to have lacked capacity, lacked education and access not only to resources but to the jobs that were within their vicinity in conservation. As such, they perceive themselves to be at a deficit compared to youth and other individuals employed in the KNP. In addition, the environmental monitors reported that their employment positions in the EM Programme lacked permanence. The UNEP GEF6 EM Programme is set to conclude in mid-2025, which will result in the cessation of funding for environmental monitors' employment. This lack of job security has made them feel insecure in their positions in addition to the low wages. As youth, the environmental monitors expressed gratitude for the opportunity

to be employed and compared themselves with other youth in their communities who were not. Employment is argued to beget confidence and security because it is supposed to elevate an individual's social standing and class (Cuervo and Wyn, 2014). However, although they are formally employed, they still experience underemployment (Valoyi and Taku, 2017).

7.2.3. Classifications based on collective action framing

The second social category used to denote youth in this thesis is the use of slogans by environmental organisations to engage with youth on their websites or programme reports, and as 'calls to action' to communicate to their partners, members, and wider audiences. Literature based on the concept of 'collective action framing' addresses this issue. This thesis has shown how these slogans have been used at global, regional, and local levels. For example, IUCN refers to youth as 'champions' and 'changemakers' globally, while WWF refers to them as 'changemakers' and 'leaders' at the grassroots level. These slogans were observed at each stage of the fieldwork in a variety of settings such as the World Conservation Congress, websites, leadership summits and meetings, and through grey literature using document analysis.

Framing is a method used to understand and analyse environmental communication in areas such as climate change (Molder et al., 2022). It has a significant impact on motivating individuals to act by promoting behavioural change and policy action (Molder et al., 2022). Collective action frames are slogans that aim to mobilise people to act together and consist of three factors: diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing (Benford and Snow, 2000; Molder et al., 2022). Diagnostic framing involves the identification and attribution of problems, while prognostic framing proposes solutions and specific actions and motivational framing serves as a call to collective action (Molder et al., 2022). Motivational framing is used to analyse the framing of slogans and 'calls to action' that were observed in this thesis to be targeted at young people.

Jones, Davison, and Lucas (2023) established an analytical thematic review process to understand how youth are framed within climate change governance. This is an important process because it helps ascertain how youth are positioned in governance in relation to motivational framing. The storyline method is employed to trace the collective narratives of actors and create meaning from their shared experiences through written and spoken language, discussions, visual images, or symbolism (Jones et al., 2023). This thesis made use of thematic

review and analysis to capture the experience of youth through the narratives recorded during interviews. Furthermore, it made use of content analysis to capture recurring themes in words utilised by the IUCN, LCA, SAWC and WWF, to describe youth or to encourage youth to engage in conservation.

Storylines utilise narratives to construct meanings and ideas of groups and activities. For example, the social construct of youth which is often (re)produced by politicians, parents, teachers and in this context, environmental organisations (Jones et al, 2023). Additionally, storylines delineate how the perceived characteristics of the groups or activities contribute to the construction of dominant ideologies (ibid). Jones and others present eight storylines to describe youth in climate change (innocent, vulnerable, heroic, alarmist, inheriting, apathetic and narcissist) (2023). However, this chapter only employs four for analysis: innocent, vulnerable, heroic, and inheriting (Figure 4).
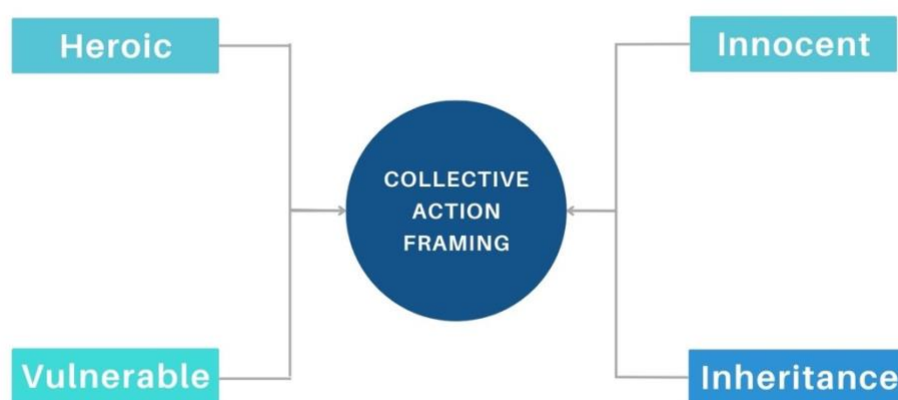
Figure 4: The relationship between framing and storylines that inform the social constructions of groups and individuals. The diagram illustrates the four storylines related to the empirical chapters. The colours used in the diagram do not hold any additional significance.

The 'heroic' storyline presents youth as the protagonist and central figures who are destined to be champions or saviours capable of 'speaking truth to power' (Jones et al, 2023). An example of the 'heroic' youth is environmental activists such as Melina Sakiyama of the Global Youth Biodiversity Network who spoke about the injustice's global south youth face as environmental activists at the WCC. Another example is Ruvarashe, the youth leader. Moreover, the

'inheriting' storyline of youth places them within generational injustices. Youth are described according to the temporal lag between cause and effect regarding climate change (ibid). As such, the 'inheriting' youth are cast into the future where the urgency and responsibility is placed on adults (ibid). In fact, the procedural and representation justice lenses draw on these storylines of youth as marginalised actors who are excluded from decision making. By contrast, the innocent storyline describes youth as 'virtuous' because they have had no time to contribute to climate change or biodiversity loss (Jones et al, 2023). In the same vein, youth are seen as 'naïve and ignorant' and at the mercy of the environmental issues. These arguments reflect the debates on eco anxiety about the uncertain future of youth. Whilst the vulnerable storyline describes them as inherently more at risk and lack power to change because they are victims and exploited (Jones et al, 2023). The vulnerable, inheritance and innocent storylines blur the lines between children and youth or young people. These descriptions position youth as in need of protection and often delegitimises their suggestions as political actors, for example, when youth are described as 'at risk' or 'in crisis'.

This thesis argues that environmental organisations strategically adopt collective action framing approaches utilising the various storylines of youth, to either include or exclude them in decision-making and governance. Through motivational framing such as the 'One Nature, One Future' by IUCN, youth are mobilised by the 'call to action' such as 'together we can'. Similarly, the environmental monitors were described by WWF and the Peace Parks Foundation as conservation stewards, champions, and leaders in expectation of how the youth from the communities would respond to biodiversity protection. In this context, the organisations make use of motivational framing when referring to the environmental monitors by constructing positive and uplifting narratives of how the youth are active participants in anti-poaching and improving community perceptions of wildlife. The vulnerable storyline acknowledges and emphasises the needs of the community (poverty and unemployment) to show how the EM Programme benefits youth and the communities. However, this storyline does not exist in isolation but contributes to dominant ideologies of youth and communities in the Greater KNP. The slogans or buzzwords underscore positive and encouraging affirmations to anticipate how the youth should respond to the calls if they are to engage.

The construction of youth as champions, leaders and changemakers is also utilised in the regional and global level. For instance, IUCN describes young leaders as changemakers, particularly during their annual Leaders Forum. The changemaker construct classifies the

selected few as stewards and leaders of innovative ideas and projects in their respective communities. The storylines describe the selected youth in a heroic role (Jones et al, 2023). However, this thesis did not trace where these constructs and slogans originated from. As such, these constructs are argued to speak to the rationale for collective action such as 'One Nature, One Future'. Collective action framing of global slogans is likely influenced by the characteristics represented in the storylines of youth. Figure 5 illustrates how youth motivation framings are informed by the storylines that are used to classify them.
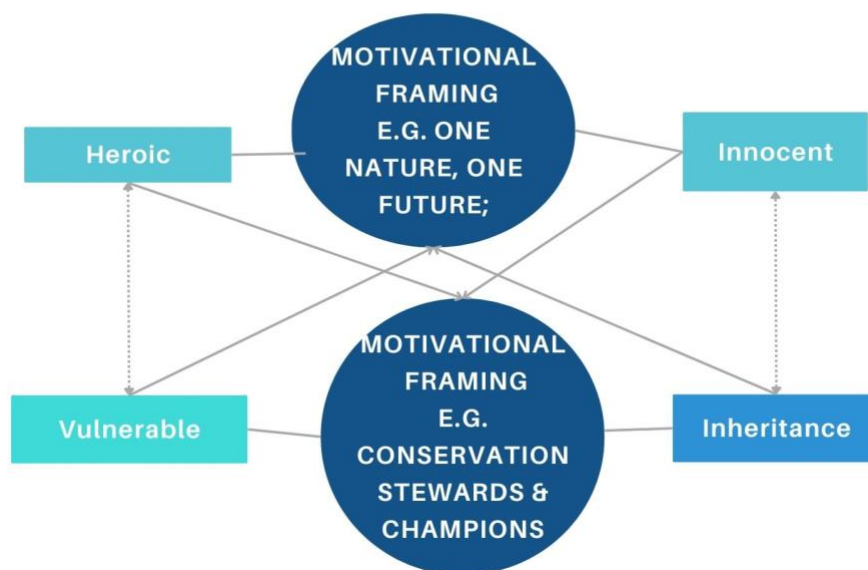
Figure 5: This diagram illustrates how motivational framing is informed by the various youth-centred storylines. The colours used in the diagram do not hold any additional significance.

This continuous process of storylines and framings influences how environmental conservation organisations engage with youth (Figure 5). These framings are classifications which are based on social constructions from powerful actors that have informed youth identities.

Nonetheless, this analysis is not presented negatively but rather as an approach to highlight the importance of youth classifications and how they associate with dominant ideologies of youth. In this way, the categorisation of youth as change-makers or at risk exposes the structural inequalities that exist between youth and the powerful actors who can perpetuate these frames when seeking to engage them. In fact, the literature on justice approaches has also adopted these storylines as a means of recognising and motivating equitable youth participation and representation in decision-making spaces and processes. As leaders, the youth participants had

opportunities to exercise their authority and positions in professional spaces. Nevertheless, how other actors related to them was influenced by these storylines, which were linked to their age and gender.

7.3.   Should 'youth' be categorised?

The previous sections shed light on how age-based classifications and youth framing through slogans, influences youth in conservation and governance. The subject of inquiry is therefore, should youth be categorised at all? The thesis has presented various youth narratives from youth participating in conferences, to leadership and as conservation labour. These narratives sought to understand how the selected youth were engaging in conservation. The thesis proposed that youth classifications (how they are categorised) by age and through slogans and framing, either describes them as vulnerable and in need of assistance or as changemakers who are equipped to achieve conservation outcomes. In fact, policy discourses are critiqued because of these contradictions. Youth are framed as 'becoming an adult or citizen' and the lines between childhood and youth are blurred (Cahill and Davidand, 2018). However, the social constructs behind such collective frameworks or identities could strengthen collective identity and unite individuals around a meaningful cause (Molder et al, 2022). Despite the overlap of concepts used to classify youth, this thesis found that youth experiences were not considered. The overlapping collective action frames plus age were the dominant indicators used when organisations engage with youth.

As such, a deeper analysis of youth experiences was conducted utilising the Youth Studies approaches of transitions and cultures in lieu of liminality. The youth narratives were supported by environmental justice approaches which aided in analysing the governance interactions between youth and other actors in conservation. Furthermore, the concepts of transition and liminality aid in analysing individual youth experiences in relation to societal phenomenon. Youth transitions and liminality are complimentary as they imply a movement from one stage to the next. This requires the subject to learn from the instructor, embody the lessons as the subject ascend into their new role. Regarding youth, these processes are embodied through employment and unemployment, family responsibilities, education, training, or teaching and simply being young. However, the age-based classification negates these important nuances which are indicative of youth employability and agency as active, political citizens. Yet, organisations have not adopted these beyond the age-based

classifications. However, through the Youth Strategy 2022-2030, IUCN has sub-categorised youth by acknowledging the transitions. For example, they denote young people as an umbrella term that includes youth (15-24) and young professionals (18-35) (Youth Strategy, 2022). This is even reflected within the Commissions. For example, the Species Survival Commission that has recently established a Young Professional Task Force[7]. As such, the active effort to engage youth and acknowledge the subtleties by IUCN is commendable.

In light of the discussion, the thesis argues that 'youth' framings in governance should be challenged to reflect and incorporate a better understanding of the multiple life stages, global north-south dynamics, the social, cultural and financial inequalities that underscore youth as a term and social category. Youth have a finite room and time to possess such identities and take advantage of opportunities (youth-based programmes, funding and access to conferences and conventions) whilst they are at the age where they are regarded as youth, in what can be called the 'Conveyer belt of time'. This journey goes through the demographic positions and age (Figure 6). The precarity is perpetuated by inequalities that are increased by unequal access to networks and mobilities, as well as the intersectionality with class and gender (ILO, 2019). As previously stated, youth are not homogeneous and therefore, experience these transitions based on their subjective realities (ILO, 2019).
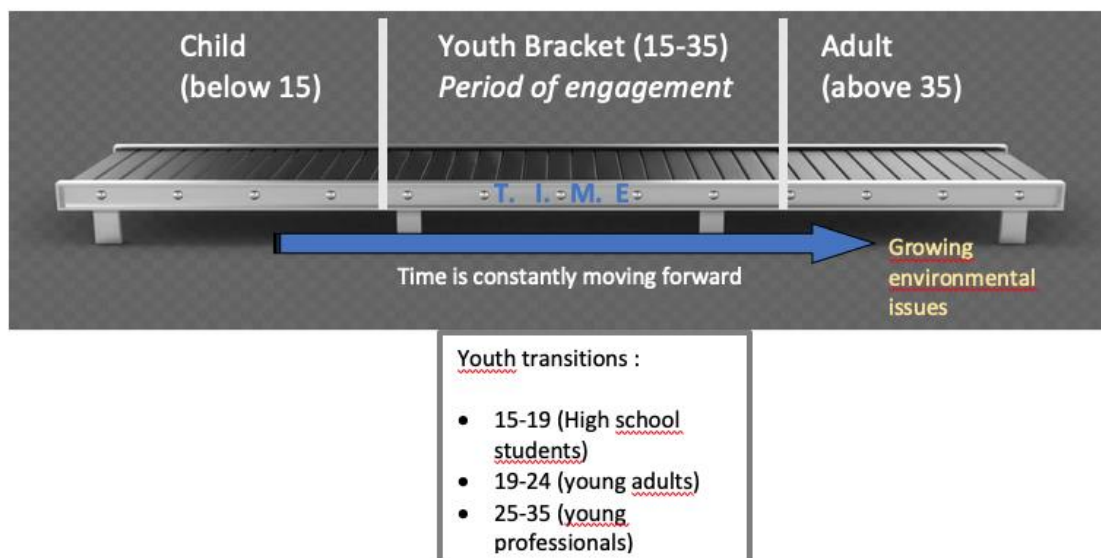

Figure 6: The diagram is an illustration of time in relation to Youth transitions according to the ILO and the intensifying environmental issues (for example, climate change and biodiversity loss).

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[7] Please see: https://iucn.org/our-union/commissions/group/iucn-ssc-young-professional

As the conveyer belt (time) moves, youth have a limited period to react because of the intensifying environmental issues and because they are aging and may not have those opportunities once they are outside the age-parameters. Therefore, there is an increased cost that is being passed down to the younger generation (Mkhize et al, 2020). As time passes, the environment and the effectiveness of solutions to combat environmental issues are constantly changing. For example, IUCN's 20-year process to develop resolutions, conduct the extensive Intergens Report and finally establish a youth strategy, is commendable yet also concerning. Concern is raised because it took a prominent organisation almost 20 years (2003-2022) to institutionalise youth engagement within its governance structures. Considering time in decision-making would place urgency in developing frameworks to combat the growing environmental threats. Youth engagement was earmarked as a solution in the Rio 1992 conference, however, the response to this call has been delayed significantly.

Thus, youth and time are interrelated. As youth age, the environmental problems they are encountering will also continue to intensify. Yet, they are expected to "act now" and form solutions for environmental issues. Their ability to act now, is determined on their age because decision-making spaces like the WCC have structural barriers that cater for youth engagement within a specific and finite age bracket. Furthermore, as youth transition from compulsory schooling to entry into waged labour, they embody waithood and action (Cook et al, 2021; Iwilade, 2019). Their identities are subsumed in their ability to 'do' and 'become' whilst they wait to enter the aggregate phase where they take on social positions with responsibility and adulthood.

Empowering youth as leaders, champions, and changemakers for conservation enables them to take on responsibilities that align with their identity. It is important to consider cultural differences, including the dynamics between the global north and south, as well as racial differences, which reflect the intersection of historical inequalities influenced by colonisation and oppressive systems such as apartheid. Furthermore, younger women may experience gender biases in male-dominated fields such as conservation. It is important to acknowledge that youth experiences are not independent of intersections with race, gender, culture, and historical factors. However, it is common for youth to be treated as a homogenous group in governance. As such, this thesis adopts the sentiments of Orsini (2022: 29) who clearly stated that "there are no global youth".

7.4. Conclusion

This chapter discussed how youth classifications in governance influence how youth are engaged with in conservation from the global to local level. It highlighted that youth engagement is influenced by the political and social construction of youth by powerful actors in conservation governance. In light of this, this chapter discussed the implications of this research for youth in terms of their classification. The purpose of this discussion was to challenge the category of youth as it has been used in conservation governance spaces. The thesis highlights three areas where youth have been mobilised for conservation. Youth have been mobilised to engage firstly, through conservation decision-making in conferences, secondly, through leadership programmes and positions, and lastly, as conservation labour. Each of these conservation governance interventions placed youth as important actors in achieving conservation aims through the three approaches. The chapter discussed the results of the three empirical chapters to emphasise why the term youth is instrumentalised as a tool for conservation governance and how youth experience and engage with conservation when they are classified as for example, "youth leaders".

The discussions were anchored in how youth are classified utilising conservation, the age-based categories and through collective framing and storylines such as slogans. The thesis argues that the classification of youth by organisations and other powerful actors is based on the interests of the actors and therefore influences youth engagement. The lens of Youth Studies helped to understand how youth has been conceptualised, and this was important in examining who environmental organisations were referring to when they targeted youth. Furthermore, this thesis argues that the term 'youth' is often used in conservation governance at the global, regional, and local levels to mobilise young people as a tool or resource for conservation interests. However, this is done without careful consideration of the diversity, complexities, and underlying inequalities that comprise youth. Furthermore, the term 'youth in governance' encompasses individuals within specific age brackets, but often neglects careful consideration of race, gender and life transitions that may hinder their ability to engage as active agents effectively and fully for conservation. Additionally, the collective framing of youth further homogenises them. This thesis argues that if young people were not limited to a single category, it would be possible to address their underlying subjectivities. This is because young people require safe spaces to engage and support to develop their skills and capacity.

Therefore, this section contributes to Youth Studies and governance literature by proposing a deeper dive into youth experiences through assessing organisational collective framing and age as indicators to target, address, and mobilise youth. In the final and following chapter of this thesis, youth engagement will be discussed to answer the main research question of the thesis.

Chapter 8.

Discussion (Part 2) and Conclusions: Learning through youth experiences: Youth engagement or disengagement in conservation?

8. Introduction

This chapter is the second part of a two-part discussion on youth in conservation. The previous chapter analysed the insights that emerged from the youth-centred evidence presented in three empirical chapters. It discussed the key findings on the classification of youth in conservation governance. This chapter will utilise the analysis of youth classifications to examine how youth have interacted with conservation considering the challenges and opportunities. The chapter then concludes with the overall implications of the global, regional, and local evidence for youth engaged in conservation.

8.1. Contribution to the broader debates on youth engagement and governance

This thesis has presented youth engagement in governance spaces (decision-making and leadership), and how engagement manifests in conservation protected areas where youth live and work. The empirical chapters drew from literature on environmental justice, leadership, environmentality, liminality and labour to investigate and draw insights from the youth narratives. This chapter situates youth and youth engagement in the broader conservation context. The aim is to contribute to the understanding of youth experiences in relation to those of other groups such as Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and women. Each chapter sought to elaborate on the 'how' and 'why' of engagement to develop an understanding of the processes that youth are included or excluded in decision-making and conservation governance approaches. The 'how' elaborates on the organisational approaches to engagement with a focus on how youth have been classified and constructed. The 'why' challenges global to local organisational policies and strategies targeted at youth and in turn analyses how youth have related to them. To investigate the how and why of youth engagement, this section develops an analytical tool for youth engagement assessments using the 7-P model developed by Cahill and Davidand (2018) in lieu of environmental justice approaches (recognition, participation, and distributive justice). Although the general literature review of this thesis did not discuss the concept of environmental justice, it was used to examine youth engagement throughout the empirical chapters. It was introduced in assessing global environmental governance (Chapter 4), analysing leadership (Chapter 5) and conservation labour (Chapter 6). Therefore, it is necessary to draw from some of the approaches in environmental justice literature to effectively analyse youth engagement in conjunction with the 7-P model. Before concluding the

implications of youth and engagement on conservation and environmental governance will be discussed.

8.2. Youth engagement

Engagement is the approach used in this thesis to understand the relationship between youth, conservation, and governance. Engagement emphasises the focus on how youth actors are involved in conservation. The aim was to trace youth engagement in the conservation literature and in practice. This thesis posits that it can be viewed in two ways. Firstly, youth engagement is based on youth agency and the desire to be actively involved in public life. Secondly, it is based on how state non-state actors actively engage the youth within their governance structures. Engagement is broadly described as active participation in activities that are beyond oneself (Cahill and Davidand, 2018). In the previous section, this thesis analysed youth as a social construction based on age and influenced by collective action framing. It challenged the social category of youth as a term used in governance approaches. This thesis argues that such classifications influence how youth engage with conservation. However, how have the youth experiences of those selected for this research contributed to the literature on youth engagement? Broadly, the empirical chapters presented youth perspectives on engagement in conservation and government through conferences, leadership positions and programmes, and in conservation work and unemployment.

8.2.1. Youth engagement in the global, regional, and local chapters

The results suggest that youth have agency but need support to engage effectively in conservation governance. At a global level, participants from the Global South highlighted rural-urban inequalities in terms of access to technology and their ability to effectively voice their concerns in high-level governance spaces. Youth facing this constraint may not have access to such decision-making spaces in the first instance because they lack the language, financial resources, and social capital to participate in high-level meetings. Therefore, youth activists have challenged governance actors to be more proactive and inclusive to avoid perpetuating tokenism. Youth perspectives have highlighted that decision-making spaces often fail to consider the social positioning of young people, including the intersection of age and unemployment. The study found that youth engagement was unequal, stratified, and siloed on a global level.

At the regional and local levels, youth experience the same inequalities as those observed globally when implementing or practicing conservation. Youth at the regional level stated that it is necessary for those in positions of authority and power (for example, the environmental organisations) to relinquish authority and trust that youth will be able to fulfil their roles. The youth leaders have been exposed to the natural environment and the challenges it faces, such as drought and pollution. They are aware of these issues and have ideas and strategies to mitigate them. However, they have encountered barriers in communicating often complex information to non-conservation and non-academic partners or audiences. For example, the participants stated that there is a lack of information about careers and work-related activities in conservation because there is perception that "conservation work doesn't pay". As a result, some participants found it difficult to maintain connections with other youths in their communities. Additionally, female participants faced resistance and challenges due to their gender and age. Other participants struggled to balance their education with their conservation work. In response, the participants emphasised the importance of managing their own expectations. For example, Fayyadh noted that, as leaders, they need to communicate and work closely with communities and other youth to build trust, while being aware of their own personal well-being and mental health. Naledi has to manage the relationships and expectations of the young people involved in her conservation work, the main aim of which is to involve teenage girls in the community in the fight against teenage pregnancy. As such, similar to their global counterparts, youth engagement requires support and guidance.

The local chapter helped to investigate and understand the experiences of youth living and working in the KNP periphery. Unlike the youth from the global and regional levels, those living near the KNP are facing the challenge of unemployment and employment. Their transitions are highlighted because employment can facilitate socio-economic mobility, which underscores the transition of young people into adulthood. The UNEP GEF 6 Environmental Monitors Programme involved environmental participants who implemented and engaged in conservation practices. Despite being funded by a global organisation; these participants still face livelihood insecurities due to low salaries. Taki emphasised that "our relationship with nature should not be reduced to a job opportunity". Furthermore, the participants in Belfast expressed a desire for employment in order to attain financial security and stability. However, due to the high rates of unemployment, as well as issues such as water scarcity and lack of service delivery in their communities, young people face challenges when it comes to engaging in conservation activities beyond wrestling with the KNP fence and the Sabie River. Some

participants expressed a desire to work as rangers or guides in KNP. However, they were constantly disappointed due to the lack of resources and opportunities to seek employment in conservation work. The EM Programme is currently training 74 youths from a population of over two million people (Stefan and Bernstein, 2017). Despite being described as 'in action' and 'champions', young people in the KNP landscape face significant obstacles to employment, resulting in a situation that is far from ideal. The accompanying photograph (Image 8) illustrates the severity of the unemployment problem and the efforts of young people in neighbouring communities to find work in conservation as a solution.

Image 8: A multitude of young people (21-30 years old) from the communities neighbouring KNP at the SAWC gate, Mpumalanga, South Africa. They are responding to a call for field ranger pre-selection. Photo credit: Amukelani Mashele (12/03/24).

The young people's experiences in this study illustrate how engagement manifests in different conservation governance spaces, depending on the interventions used to target and mobilise them. The evidence presented provides insights that support the argument that young people are mobilised in conservation to advance conservation interests. Youth provide energy, passion, and ideas and, when supported, are able to move ideas forward. Iwiliade (2022) argued that youth are more accurately described as a verb rather than a noun, as they are constantly active. This supports the idea of 'youth in action' for conservation. Conservation organisations require the support of younger generations, as they represent the future. To ensure practices and ideas remain relevant and sustainable, it is important to have the buy-in of younger generations. Therefore, it is crucial to engage with the youth. However, although youth are willing and able, some protected areas do not have the full capacity to accommodate their ideas or needs. The case of KNP provides insight into how the historical remnants of apartheid are fossilized in conservation and continue to affect the large pool of unemployed youth seeking work in this field (Buscher et al, 2022). As such, youth have agency, but due to the inequalities raised in each of the empirical chapters, they remain subjects of persistence.

In this context, the youth participants stressed that organisations and other powerful actors in conservation need to consider the following to engage youth effectively and meaningfully: collaboration through trust, respect, authority, and mentorship. To discuss these components effectively, the next section will introduce the 7-P model of youth engagement (Cahill and Davidand, 2018). The 7-P model is adapted from participation theory and combined with the environmental justice approaches of recognition, participation, and distributive justice.

8.2.2. *Assessing youth engagement utilising the adapted 7-P model*

The 7-P model critically evaluates youth engagement and participation in decision-making to assess whether the interactions are intergenerationally just (Thew et al, 2021). For example, intergenerational equity was proposed in Zurba et al's (2020) Intergenerational Partnership for Sustainability evaluation of IUCN to assess youth engagement and propose approaches. Within the 7-P model, there is an emphasis on action which involves agency to engage in environmental and political activities (Thew et al, 2021). The 7-P model suggests a series of questions that critically analyses seven intersecting 'Ps': purpose, positioning, perspectives, power relations, protection, place, and process (Figure 7) (Thew et al, 2021). Youth

engagement has benefits for both the youth as individuals and the projects in which they engage (ibid). For example, the involvement of youth leaders with the Youth Advisory Council and the LCA has resulted in collaborative exchanges amongst these youth. Environmental justice and the 7-P model can be interconnected to analyse youth engagement (Figure 7).
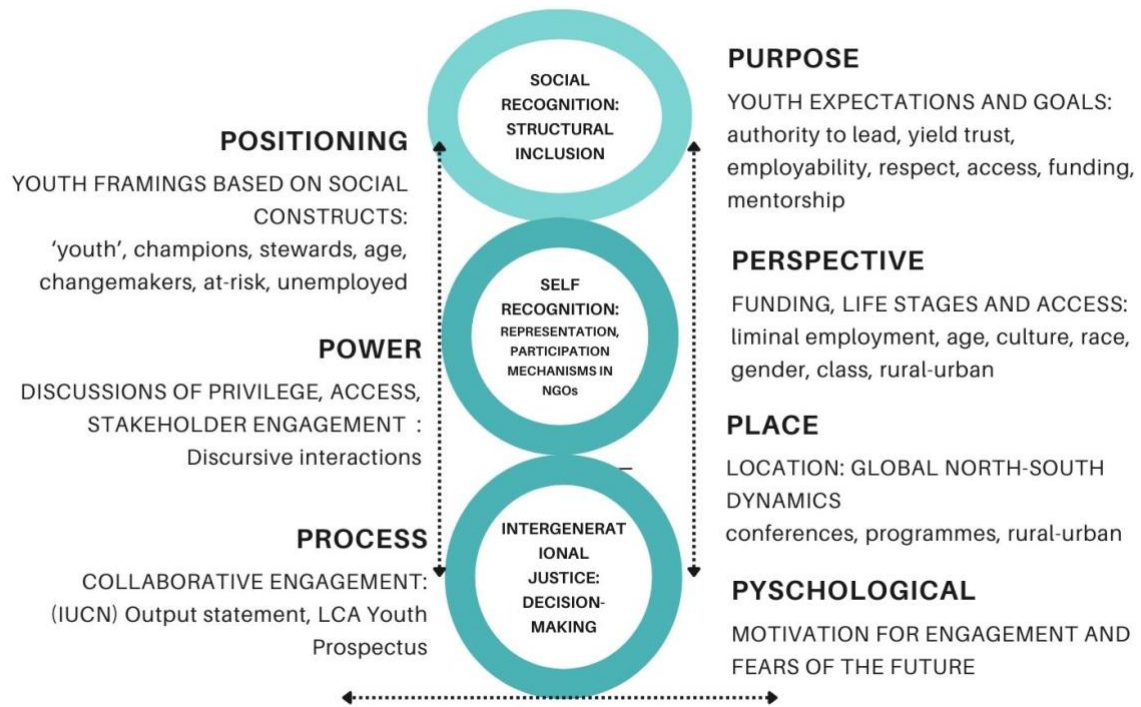

Figure 7: An adaptation of the 7-P Model intersecting with procedural, recognition, and distributive justice to analyse youth engagement (Thew et al, 2020; Thew et al, 2021).

Youth engagement is analysed against the youth narratives presented in this thesis. The model offers a critical analysis to measure the efficacy of youth engagement approaches. Therefore, the 7-P model when combined with environmental justice provides a holistic method to understand how it is applied and what measures can be taken to understand youth in the context of the 7 factors illustrated (Figure 7).

Social recognition justice addresses the inequalities laden in social structures that either grant or inhibit access to actors in decision-making processes (Thew et al, 2021). This is rooted in asymmetrical power relations between actors, groups, organisations and states. Environmental organisations have access to material and symbolic resources that gives them the ability to create engagement mechanisms that meet their needs and interests. Yet, youth are disproportionality affected by unequal distribution of environmental costs (van der Westhuizen et al, 2021). For example, the youth from Belfast are experiencing the intergenerational

injustices of apartheid. This is because the conservation landscape in KNP has perpetuated the racial and economic injustices on the communities that neighbour it (Thakholi, 2021; Buscher et al, 2022). The youth have inherited the lack of service delivery and the lack of decent and secure employment within their home communities. The EM Programme acknowledges the social need to alleviate unemployment through 'purpose', 'perspective', and 'positioning' in conservation. However, it overlooks the collaborative engagement process. For example, the environmental monitors noted the lack of job security (noted in the quote by Taki, "our relationship with nature shouldn't be a job opportunity") which deprives youth of the ability to transcend out of the liminality embodied in conservation labour for black employees (noted in the quote by Taki "Nothing will happen as we increase poverty whilst SAN Parks say they create job opportunities") (Buscher, 2022; Thakholi, 2021). On the other hand, the female youth leaders had to navigate challenging environments with older, male counterparts. Ruvarashe had to take on a maternal leadership role to gain respect from the men as well maintain her position of authority as she facilitated training. This provided her with 'power' and 'position' as a youth leader.

It is important to note that youth engagement is not a one-way process where young people lack agency and are merely recipients of opportunities, such as access to space and funding, to participate in conservation and environmental management. Instead, youth engagement as an approach helps understand the position of youth in conservation and governance. In light of the self-recognition justice, the youth perspectives highlighted that youth seek safe spaces to engage with "adult" actors and leaders. The findings showed that youth desired spaces and opportunities to freely voice their concerns, suggestions, and ideas even if they were not politically correct or popular. These safe spaces would give youth a space (place) to voice their opinions. As such, the participants shared that when they had the opportunity to be in spaces of governance, their individual employability (ability to be employed) was a barrier to how much they shared with older counterparts. They were afraid of being described as problematic, critical, or rebellious. Therefore, strategies such as the Intergenerational Partnership for Sustainability Review (Zurba et al, 2020) are important for youth within governance spaces because they would foster spaces for intergenerational justice through peer-to-peer learning and peer to elder or adult learning. The components of trust, respect, authority, and mentorship could be fostered if such approaches are utilised collaboratively. For example, mentorship has been highlighted as an important collaborative approach that fosters learning and provides guidance. Youth mentoring is broadly conceptualised as "matched relationships between a

young person and non-parental adult" (Hatzikiriakidis et al, 2019: 266). This relationship involves interpersonal support and guidance from the adult who should act as a role model (Hatzikiriakidis et al, 2019). It has gained popularity for youth of all ages and life-stages (childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood) as it is argued to provide positive psychological, social, and behavioural outcomes (Hatzikiriakidis et al, 2019). This would benefit youth through purpose, perspective, place whilst empowering them and other actors.

Furthermore, intergenerational justice (under distributive justice) would expose the cultural, gendered, and racial intricacies that affect youth engagement. For example, the development of the Youth Prospectus as the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) of the LCA. The youth leaders had to set realistic expectations of their roles in the YAC in relation to their education, jobs, families, and life goals. This exercise helped the LCA advisor to the YAC understand the individual needs of youth, their expectations in the LCA and for their future as youth. This has given youth position, purpose, and perspective for both the organisation and the youth. Similarly, some of the youth leaders reported the benefits of being closely associated with an organisation that is willing to offer capacity building and mentorship in conservation leadership. Additionally, the IUCN Global Youth Summit called on youth participants to contribute their suggestions and ideas to the Output Statement that would inform the Resolution that would be proposed at the Members Assembly. These contributions also informed the IUCN Youth Strategy 2022-2030. Therefore, this thesis argues for utilising an intersection of environmental justice and the 7-Ps as a practical way to ensure collaborative engagement by assessing youth engagement processes in conservation governance.

8.3. Youth and environmental governance

Governance approaches involving youth have been characterised in three ways in the breadth of this thesis: decision-making in conferences, leadership and in conservation labour. Through these three approaches youth experienced conservation's governance processes. The previous section explored youth engagement using the 7P model and environmental justice. Through the youth's experiences, the intersection of justice with power, position, and place, among others, became apparent. Governance underscores these interactions and how youth have been able to navigate the various conservation spaces (conferences, organisations, and protected areas). The findings have shown that youth are engaging with conservation in multiple ways and on multiple levels (global to local; as leaders; as residents of neighbouring communities).

Firstly, by focusing on a multi-level governance approach, this thesis has contributed to understanding how actors, ideas and resources intersect between global, regional, and local levels. In conjunction with interactive governance, this thesis was able to identify how youth collective frameworks were applied at global conferences, regional leadership programmes and courses, and at the local level with conservation workers. This research used the term youth to refer to young adults, young people, and young professionals. It sought to challenge the social category of youth by exploring how governance has contributed to youth framing and youth engagement in conservation.

The research asserts that youth is a discursive social construct with varying definitions depending on the defining organisation, state, policy, or actor. The thesis demonstrates that collective action framing and storylines used in global slogans and statements mobilise and position youth to fulfil conservation interests in governance. For instance, individuals are expected to act as agents of change for conservation by safeguarding conservation interests. However, they are often situated at the lower end of the decision-making hierarchy, with no means to express their concerns or propose solutions (such as the environmental monitors). Youth engagement is an approach that puts into practice the social construction of youth. Therefore, although conservation interests target youth, they do not necessarily engage them meaningfully. Youth face numerous challenges, including societal, cultural, and environmental pressures, which hinder their active engagement. In other words, they disengage. Participants (Chapter 5) reported that other youth in their communities were not interested in pursuing conservation jobs due to perceived low salaries and lack of job security.

In addition, conservation work at the local level is not always glamorous, as youth are often confronted with socio-economic and environmental challenges in remote areas, which can make it difficult for them to engage effectively in conservation efforts. However, leadership literature suggests that it is important for youth to be influential and have positive perceptions of the environment. For young people in the Global South, especially in Africa, financial insecurity and unemployment can have a significant impact on their emotional and psychological well-being. While youth possess and embody hope, passion, tenacity, knowledge and a passion for conservation, organisations working with them need to strategically assess how to channel this expertise in a meaningful way that provides youth with a decent living wage and remuneration for their expertise. Therefore, the thesis has demonstrated how the term 'youth' is used in literature to position youth as either vulnerable or

as the hope for the future, or both, in conservation. Despite this, youth have not been effectively offered a seat in decision-making at the global, regional, or local levels. They represent hope for solutions and action in conservation. As a social construct and term, youth is a position of change through engagement, whether in corporate halls or along the fence.

Conservation was the therefore the starting point because there has been a great deal written about climate change and youth engagement in literature, media, and social media. In addition, youth activists such as Greta Thunberg have been mentioned and quoted so often that she appears several times in this thesis. This raised the question: where are the youth in conservation and biodiversity protection? The thesis reports on the position that environmental organisations have in framing and constructing narratives about actors, such as youth, to suit their interests. The findings show that there is a complex relationship between youth actors and governance, as engagement literature reports that youth are marginalised and excluded from decision-making. The findings showed that at the local level in South Africa's KNP, youth from neighbouring communities, whether employed or not, were marginalised from conservation governance structures and decision-making due to the historical structures of apartheid and a lack of concentration on engaging youth outside of employment.

Therefore, the findings have highlighted that conservation governance spaces are unequal in their engagement with youth from the global South, due to their lack of equal access to resources, decision-making spaces, and the broad categories used to frame them in global environmental governance spaces.

8.4.   General conclusions and overall contribution

The journey of a thousand miles began with one step.

Lao Tzu (Chinese Philosopher)

With each step and page in this thesis, the study has endeavoured to propose that youth are more than just a social term or category. The Youth Studies literature aptly reported the dynamism of youth actors based on their cultures and transitions. The life stage of youth evoked more questions than answers. Such as, do youth become adults when someone, a state or an organisation decide they are not? Delving into the theory of youth transitions highlighted that life stages are a continuous process of reflection and growth yet governance approaches that sought to mobilise youth did not reflect these nuances. In fact, investigating youth engagement in conservation and biodiversity protection brought to light the inequalities that are rooted in the term that has framed this thesis, 'youth'. This thesis argues that youth are mobilised in conservation through youth classifications that determine how they engage. Youth as a term should therefore be challenged in global, regional, and local policies to acknowledge the diversity embedded in youth. The thesis has shown that youth experience conservation in a variety of ways and this is strongly influenced by their life experiences which were captured utilising the concept of transitions and liminality.

Youth are a dynamic and diverse social category that cannot be simply defined or categorised by the numbers in brackets nor the dominant ideas that have been perpetuated in culture and society. The theory of liminality elaborated on the liminal and how youth embody this transitional process. In addition, the thesis suggested that conservation offered a broader understanding of liminality from the perspective of Kruger National Park in South Africa. As a global hegemonic discourse that is historically rooted in inequalities, conservation can be perceived to be liminal as it perpetuates the injustices and inequalities experienced by youth, Indigenous peoples and local communities, thereby, propagating their liminal betwixt state. Thus, conservation was an essential lens from which to analyse youth engagement in governance. The conservation organisations offered an understanding of how actors navigate decision-making in conservation governance. Youth had been denoted as important, champions and necessary to find solutions, yet their engagement was absent in the literature on conservation and biodiversity protection. As such, combining Youth Studies with conservation created the way to understand youth engagement processes in conservation governance.

The thesis has therefore articulated that youth classifications do influence how youth have engaged with conservation. Youth are engaged based on how they are framed. This transcends the global to local level because similar slogans (champions, changemakers, leaders) were used to describe youth across multiple platforms. Youth respondents were receptive to conservation and passionate about getting involved however they were inhibited by access to funding, capacities, employability, gender, and race. The youth spoke up as leaders, trainers, educators, friends, students, and colleagues. Their insight and input shed light on some of the challenge's youth experience engaging in conservation versus the organisations they are involved with. Furthermore, their insights with the aid of environmental justice and the 7-Ps model helped assess whether engagement was effective and meaningful from the perspective of the youth.

However, this study was not able to address all possible stakeholders including government or state entities and national or global youth policies. Furthermore, it only focused on youth in the global South and in Eastern and Southern Africa in greater detail. There are many youth experiences that have not yet been researched or addressed in this thesis, particularly those from Asia and South America. Future research in this area would be beneficial. Furthermore, there is potential to study only youth-based organisations such as the Global Youth Biodiversity Network to assess whether engagement is more seamless amongst youth in decision-making. Does power still influence youth interactions even though they are all categorised in a similar way albeit the different backgrounds? These are potential avenues worth exploring for future research in this field.

Therefore, the thesis has contributed to the Youth Studies literature by teasing out how youth classifications and social constructions influence how youth engage in spaces of governance in conservation. Furthermore, it contributed to the conservation and environmental governance literature through providing youth experiences and perspectives to how they engage with conservation through decision-making, leadership and as conservation employees and residents of neighbouring communities. Lastly, it has contributed to the engagement literature by focusing on the narratives of youth who were speaking to methods or approaches of engagement and the challenges they faced when it was in the conservation context. Therefore, the research journey from the halls of the World Conservation Congress to the fences of the Kruger National Park has argued that youth are not a homogenous group and youth engagement approaches should reflect their diversity. As I conclude this thesis, I pose a question asked to

me: Even if institutional consultations better engaged youth, would their knowledge be taken seriously?

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Annexes

Annex 1. Additional Information

A comprehensive list of the Primary and Secondary data collected and analysed from January 2020 – June 2022. (Chapter 4).

Data Category	Data Collection method	Duration	Data sample	Data summaries	Themes for analysis
Primary Data	Semi-structured interviews	April 2021- June 2022	**7 internal actors** (Commission members and staff) **21 external actors** (comprised of activists, practitioners, students and volunteers).	o Internal process of youth engagement o Intergens Report and the youth strategy o Youth expectations of IUCN GYS and WCC o Work or activities youth participants are involved in. o Experiences at the GYS and WCC o Conservation topics/issues they wanted to discuss/highlight during sessions	o Inequalities within environmental solutions o Future of conservation with youth-based solutions o Transgenerational and intergenerational dialogue o Post 2020 Biodiversity framework = transformative change o Youth positionality in solutions
	Event Ethnography AND Participant Observation	April 2021 (virtually)	IUCN GYS: **24 virtual events**	o Formulating the GYS Outcome statement o Dominance of Global North in hosting sessions (Canada, US, Japan, China) o Climate change and youth engagement o Youth and rights to nature and policy	- Making space for youth voices - Mobilising/rallying youth for biodiversity protection

					- Education and storytelling
		September 2021 Marseille, France (in-person)	IUCN WCC: **10 in-person sessions**	- Reactions from the GYS Outcome statement - Transgenerational approaches to conservation – rights and duties -	- Intergenerational dialogue - Private sector engagement
Secondary Data	Document analysis	January 2020 – September 2022	**Press Releases:** o #NatureforAll youth champions (IUCN, 2021) o One Nature, One Future: Together we can! (IUCN, 2021)	o Youth definitions/classification o Youth engagement objectives o Strategies to establish youth engagement o Responsibility of youth o Social/environmental movement objective for youth-in-action o Youth Roles o Youth incentives for engagement	o Power dynamics between organisations versus the youth o Youth definition/classification importance o Youth engagement strategy evolution for IUCN
		2021-2022	**IUCN Reports:** o IUCN Youth Strategy 2020-30 (IUCN, 2022) o #NatureForAll Youth champions Annex I and II (IUCN, 2021)	o Youth definitions/classification o Decision-making inclusion of youth o Youth engagement objectives o Position of IUCN with youth o Responsibility of youth o	o Tracing youth incentives for engagement o Narratives of youth engagement held by global NGO

		2003 - 2021	**Resolutions and Recommendations** from 2003 World Park's Congress and 2004 – 2021 WCC.	o Younger generations are gaining empowerment in relation to protected areas, which involves giving them the tools and resources to participate in conservation efforts and make a positive impact on the environment.	o
				o The Union is focused on capacity building for young professionals, aiming to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute effectively to conservation and environmental initiatives.	
				o Intergenerational partnerships are being fostered to promote ethical leadership, ensuring a just, sustainable, and peaceful world for present and future generations.	
				o Efforts are being made to increase youth engagement and promote intergenerational collaboration across the Union, encouraging young people's involvement in environmental issues.	
				o The goal is to connect people with nature on a global scale, emphasizing the importance of appreciating and preserving the natural world.	
				o Children and youth play a crucial role in conservation, recognizing their potential as agents of positive change and key stakeholders in environmental decision-making processes.	
				o The creation of an Ombudsperson for Future Generations is being considered, which would be an independent authority responsible for protecting the rights and interests of future generations, ensuring sustainability and responsible decision-making.	
		September 2021	GYS Output Statement	o Resolutions to engage youth	

				(IUCN, 2021)	o Position of youth at IUCN GYS and WCC
					o IUCN Response to Intergens Report
		January 2019 and January 2021	**Other Reports:** o Canadian Wildlife Federation: Youth engagement at IUCN WCC (2019) o Summary Report: UNIL Delegation at the IUCN WCC in Marseille (Sithole and Walters, 2021)	o Intergenerational partnership strategies in IUCN o Mechanisms to include youth o Youth definitions/classification	

Youth Advisory Council (YAC) Youth Prospectus:

Leadership for Conservation in Africa (LCA)
Prospectus of the LCA Youth Advisory Council (YAC)
10 July 2023

Drafted by the Current Members
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1. Purpose

This prospectus provides an overview of the functions of the LCA Youth Advisory Council (YAC), to be endorsed by the LCA Board. In line with its objectives, values and founding principles, this prospectus will focus on the governance structures of YAC in support the rejuvenation processes and the incorporation of the views of the younger generations within the LCA, its sister-organisations and other associative organisations.

2. Vison

To be a voice for, and a representation of the youth of Africa within the LCA, promoting a habitable and lasting future for up-and-coming generations.

3. Objective

YAC will deliberate and seek to provide a perspective regarding the unique global disposition of the youth and their perceptions as guided by their generational experiences. In so doing, to

bridge the gap between the youth and the older generations' views regarding sustainability, biodiversity loss and climate change. Therefore, YAC will strive to:

3.1 YAC members undertake to be Ambassadors of the LCA by networking within our spheres of influence while creating a constant awareness of work done by the LCA and its sister organisations.

3.2 Bring fresh perspectives to the LCA Board, its sister organisations and within its various impact areas. We will seek to sensitise all about the diverse inputs of the rural and urban youth and the diversity of various educational systems and exposures which will lead to alternative and diverse ways of thinking about conservation.

3.3 Seek opportunities to develop the members of YAC's exposure, knowledge, and leadership skills to be the next generation of future conservationists and seek opportunities to encourage their peers and the younger generation to take up their responsibility.

3.4 Create awareness using modern-day technologies in multifaceted ways in support of the dissemination of knowledge and solving biodiversity-related challenges.

3.5 Promote conservation rejuvenation, encouraging young African leaders to be fully involved in African-based conservation efforts and the protection of their future.

3.6 Seek ways to influence other, non-conservation, academic disciplines to take a stronger role, spearheading solution-driven innovations in support of the 2015 Paris Accord.

4. Action Driven Initiatives

The action-driven initiatives of YAC could include, but not be limited to, the following interventions:

4.1 Strategic Level

- Firstly, YAC is to focus on its growth in terms of experience and insight by listening to, learning from, and debating matters with experienced others during LCA Council Board and applicable other meetings.
- Serve as youth advisors for the LCA Council, Board and relevant operational leaders concerning the modern-day challenges, perceptions, fears, and aspirations of the youth facing uncertainty in terms of overpopulation, biodiversity loss and the resulting impacts.
- Enquire about, investigate and research, on request of the LCA Council or Board, any youth-related matters that need clarification, to be reported back to the relevant entity.
- Form part of a monitoring and research action to determine the impact of all LCA actions in terms of their relevance and bearing on the youth.

4.2 Operational Level

- Depending on our skills, to be operationally involved in all four of the LCA impact areas i.e., Biodiversity management, EduConservation, ShareScreen Africa and Leadership Development.

- Voluntary commit our time, energy, and knowledge in support of the above impact areas, and positively contribute to the LCA cause.
- Be an additional voice for and form part of the LCA drive, to promote the LCA and its efforts at academic institutions (alma maters) of our involvement, other youth movements, associative organisations and within our respective work contexts, where applicable.

4.3 Peer to peer
- Using all means at our disposal, both within and external to the LCA, we undertake to create a conservation consciousness amongst our peers to form part of the global initiative to protect ecosystems, promote the sustainable use of landscapes and advance justice and equity in conservation.
- Initiate practical projects, in collaboration with the LCA operational Directors in all four impact areas, which would benefit the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with specific reference to SDG 12. Responsible consumption and production (Conservation Agriculture), 13. Climate Action, 14. Life below water (Marine Biology) and 15. Life on Land (Including biodiversity protection).
- We undertake to seek some way to also address the very loaded topic of planetary overpopulation, the complexity of which most likely lies at the heart of a sustainable future.
- Create video material from within our respective countries regarding relevant conservation-related trends, actions, initiatives, and the like, to be disseminated on the SSA platform and placed on YouTube. This is to spread knowledge and entice our African peers to follow suit, being a voice for nature and our future.
- Make a special effort to involve non-nature conservation students from all academic disciplines to participate and take the lead in the sustainable future debate.

5. Values
Linked to the LCA values, YAC will guide its actions considering the following values:
- We believe in the power of the diversity of people, respecting the cultural difference between all African countries and will therefore seek wisdom in the collective of opinions.
- When involved in a specific country, we will align our activities with the culture of those people, allowing them to accept (or reject) proposed interventions and actions.
- We value the voice and inputs of local, often marginalised, communities bordering national parks and reserves, as primary custodians of their own land.
- We value environmental education as the golden thread weaved in all YAC actions.
- We value the right of the youth to contribute to, and play a major role in their own future, to be fostered by creating an ongoing conservation and sustainability consciousness amongst our peers in Africa.

6. Structure and Governance of YAC:

6.1 Structure

As the above founding principles pave the way for the implementation of the YAC strategies, the governance structures are designed for such strategies to be executed within two functional areas, i.e.:

Functional Area 1: As part of the LCA rejuvenation process, individual YAC members to work on a part-time contract basis within various LCA operational areas, reporting individually to their operational line-managers.

Functional Area 2: YAC as youth advisory council to be represented on the LCA Board, whereas not all YAC members will necessarily be working for the LCA on a contractual basis as per functional area 1.

These functional areas are schematically presented below:
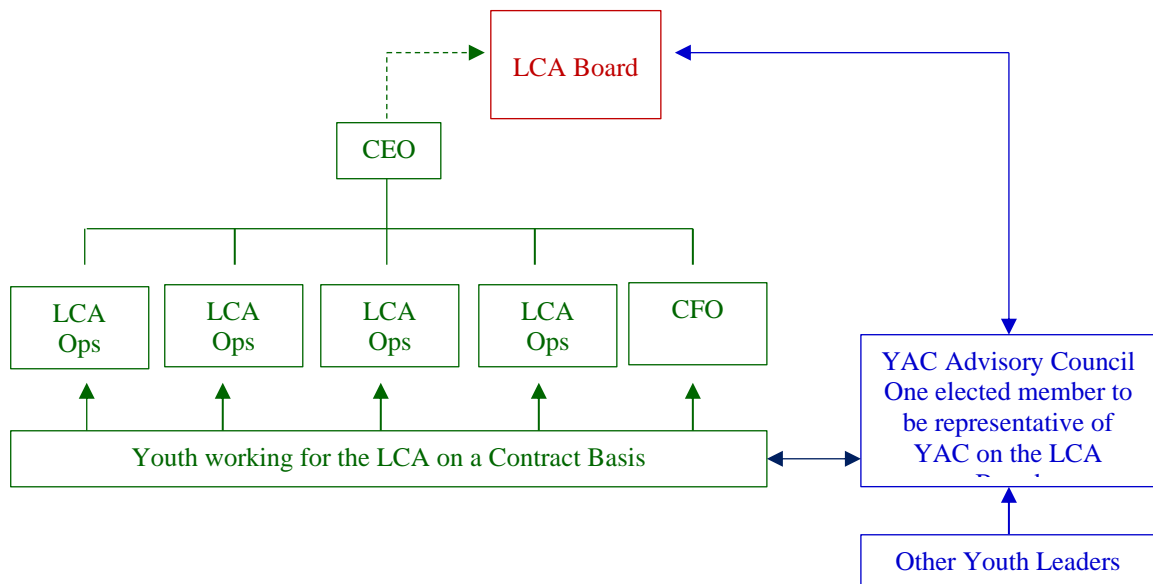
6.2 Membership

- YAC will consist of a maximum of 15 members. The 10 young adults selected to attend the 2022 LCA Council Meeting will be known as the founding members of YAC.
- Members will serve a term of four-years but can be re-elected on an annual basis subject to contractual reappointment within the LCA or any other merit.
- Any member that resigns, or has become a non-active member, (to be agreed by majority vote), will be substituted.
- New members will be selected, from a nominated pool introduced to the present members of YAC, whereas the existing YAC members will elect such a member by majority vote.
- Potential new members must be aligned with the YAC values and already be involved in relevant activities related to the founding principles of YAC.

239

- YAC would typically include youth aged between 20 and 35, however the merit of each case should be considered, whereas YAC should never become a male-dominated organisation.

6.3 Meeting procedures

- There will be four virtual YAC meeting per annum whereas the annual LCA Council meetings will serve as a fifth in-person meeting. If the LCA Council Meeting is extended over a 24-month period, an alternative in-person meeting will be scheduled.
- In the case of virtual meetings, a quorum will constitute two-thirds of existing members. If a quorum is not represented an alternative meeting should be scheduled.
- Any changes of this YAC Prospectus will only take place with prior notice of such changes, to be agree by a two-third majority.
- All YAC members have the right to attend the annual LCA Council meetings to also express their opinions, within the spirit of respect and integrity, loyalty, and discretion.
- Executive members are elected by nomination and a majority (blind-voting) process.
- Each executive position will have a pre-determined Proxy to assist and step in when needed.

6.4 YAC Representatives and role of the Executive Function

To ensure the good governance, efficiency and that the founding principles are adhered to, the following portfolios have been created:

- **Chairperson:** The Chairperson is to be elected by majority vote for a period of a year and would hold the normal functions of a chair such as coordinating and leading the meetings in line with agreed tasks, a per requests of the LCA Board. If needed a Deputy Chair can be elected to help carry the workload, especially due to possible student/ academic workload at certain times of the year.
- **Secretary:** Will be responsible for all governance and administrative matters, with inclusion of agendas and minutes, as well as any memos to be forwarded to the members of YAC. The Secretary will play a significant role in the coordination process with regards to members who will be attending the annual LCA Council meetings. If needed a support secretary can be elected to help carry the workload, especially due to possible student/ academic workload at certain times of the year.
- **Treasurer:** The position of a Treasurer is optional; however, the role of the Treasurer is to communicate and/or coordinate any financial related matters in collaboration with the LCA CFO.
- **YAC Executive Functions:** Will grow organically in interaction with the LCA Board and LCA Council Meetings, as well as YAC-related operational projects.
- **Attending LCA Board Meetings:** The Chairperson or his/her Proxy will attend the LCA Board Meetings for a maximum period of one-year, whereafter a next fonctionnaire will take the function over for a maximum period of one-year. (The idea is to ensure maximum exposure as to many as possible of the YAC members to high-level Board Meetings). The task of the relevant representative on the LCA Board is to relay information and decisions from the LCA Board to the YAC and back.

6.5 Voting Rights

- **YAC Inhouse Meetings:** All members will have a vote at any such meetings.

- **LCA Annual Council Meetings:** It is proposed, (depending on a resolution at the next LCA Council meeting) for YAC to have two or even three votes, depending on the proportion of their numbers represented.
- **LCA Board:** As all decisions on the LCA Board is taken by consensus the possibility of a YAC vote, if necessary, is to be determined by the Board. If a vote is taken which has a specific reference to rejuvenation or the youth, it is proposed that in such cases YAC could be granted a vote.

6.6 External Mentor(s)

A person external to YAC could be selected to advise the Council on matters relating to the general running of a council and or/on specific topics. This does not necessarily constitute a single mentor, rather various mentors, depending on the need and or task at hand.

7. Potential Projects with LCA and LCA Partners

Any projects will evolve through the coordinated action from Functional Areas 1 and 2 as per the above.

Agreed November 2023

_____   _____
Signed Chairperson   Secretary

Reviewed on: 3 July 2023
Last Review: 10 November 2023

African Parks. Youth Job Call – Kruger National Park (March, 2024)

African Parks: Field Ranger Pre-Selection

TARGETING MPUMALANGA AND LIMPOPO YOUTH ONLY

African Parks, in association with the Southern African Wildlife College, is looking to expand our field ranger complement. We are looking for young enthusiastic individuals who want to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to help conserve and protect Africa's natural resources and biodiversity. This includes law enforcement training in mitigation of wildlife crime.

Candidates who successfully pass pre-selection and selection will undergo elite counter-poaching training and, depending on successful completion of the training course, will stand the chance of permanent employment with African Parks.

Preconditions: (This will be completed once the pre-selection course is passed and the candidates have been selected)

- **Polygraph test**
- **SAPS criminal clearance**
- **Medical examination**

Age: 21 years minimum and 30 years maximum

Health: All applicants must have no pre-existing health issues/conditions and they must be physically fit

Minimum Fitness Requirements:

- 4 Km run in 30 minutes or less
- 40 Push-ups in under 2 minutes
- 50 Sit-ups in under 2 minutes
- 5 Pull-ups in under 2 minutes
- Fireman's Carry – 100m
- Shuffle Kicks – 2 minutes
- 15 Km Walk – 1 hour 30 minutes

Qualifications: No specific qualifications are required, however PSIRA Grade C as well as SAPS self-loading rifle and handgun competency will be advantageous as will the required attitude to take up a position of this nature

Basic Literacy: English – read, write and speak

Indemnity: Indemnity (exemption from liability for damage) must be signed before the candidates can partake in the pre-selection

Summary Report Following the IUCN World Conservation Congress

![UNIL | Université de Lausanne]

![IUCN]

SUMMARY REPORT

UNIL Delegation at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Marseille

2-8 September 2021

Samantha S. Sithole and Gretchen Walters

17 February 2022

1

243

Table of Contents

Acronyms

FBM Faculty of Biology and Medicine
FGSE Faculty of Geosciences and the Environment
IUCN International Union for Conservation of Nature
IUCN-WCC International Union for Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress
PCR Polymerase Chain Reaction
RI International Relations
UNIL University of Lausanne
VIP Very Important People/Person

Introduction

Youth engagement has been at the forefront of many conservation agenda and strategies including that of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) which is working to include youth within its strategic framework. The University of Lausanne (UNIL) established a partnership and signed a memorandum of understanding with the IUCN in 2019. This partnership has a strong focus on providing opportunities for UNIL students, who are often youth, to engage in conservation. The Congress Delegation was part of an effort to strengthen joint activities in teaching, research, and events within the field of conservation. These highly renowned institutions in Canton Vaud, Switzerland complement each other with UNIL generating research and students interested in conservation and IUCN using research to inform their practice. Through this partnership UNIL, under the guidance of professors Gretchen Walters and Antoine Guisan, and with the coordination of Samantha Sithole, thirteen student delegates (see Appendix 1: UNIL delegation list and summaries) volunteered and attended the IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC) in Marseille, France from 2 to 8 September 2021.

The UNIL delegation attended the IUCN-WCC as participants and official volunteers with IUCN. As participants, the delegates were encouraged to attend sessions, take part in activities, network and engage with the topics that interested them the most. The volunteering responsibilities for the delegates were namely, session rapporteurs, assisting in the virtual channels, assisting with the pavilions, and attending to VIPs (very important person).

Report Outline

This report provides a summary of the experiences, key duties, and activities of the delegates as volunteers and WCC participants. It also outlines the budget and reflects upon the preparation that facilitated a fifteen-person delegation from UNIL to travel to Marseille, France and attend the IUCN-WCC. It highlights the importance of youth involvement in the context of the WCC and conservation institutions such as the IUCN. It will conclude by outlining the lessons learnt and will propose recommendations for future partnerships that aim to incorporate student volunteers at upcoming IUCN-WCC or conferences of this magnitude.

The importance of youth involvement in conservation

IUCN officially recognizes the importance of youth engagement and intergenerational partnerships within their global conservation strategy and decision-making processes (Zurba et al (2020). They are committed to implementing a Youth Strategy under the guidance of a Youth Advisory Committee (Zurba et al (2020). Their youth strategy includes engagement and intergenerational dialogues as standard practice that aims for realistic measurable actions. Zurba et al (2020) states that "there is a strong link between environmental governance and

'intergenerationality', with intergenerationality as an enabler of precondition to sustainability" where there is mutual respect and commitment from one generation to another (Zurba et al, 2020: 498). This was made evident when they hosted the first-ever Global Youth Summit virtually, in April, 2021. Furthermore, through its commitment and partnership with UNIL, IUCN allowed thirteen students to volunteer at the WCC in Marseille, France as official IUCN staff volunteers.

The UNIL Delegation

The UNIL delegation comprised thirteen students from the Faculty of Geosciences and the Environment (FGSE) and the Faculty of Biology and Medicine (FBM), as well as Antoine Guisan (FBM) and Gretchen Walters (FGSE). Twelve countries represented in this delegation and eleven languages spoken by the delegates representing a global diversity both at UNIL doctoral student levels and in international conservation. The student-delegation was comprised of six Master's of Science students and seven doctoral students[1]. The selection process for the delegates included an application process where the students had to submit their Resumés, state their research interests and motivation for attending the WCC. The students selected demonstrated a keen interest in conservation issues and participating at the conference.

Volunteering at the WCC

A short feedback survey was completed by the delegates after attending the WCC. The survey aimed to understand how the delegates experienced the WCC through volunteering and networking. This section will summarize the results of that survey as well as the volunteer experiences of the student delegates. As previously mentioned, the delegates were divided according to the following responsibilities (in no particular order):

1. session rapporteurs
2. assisting in the hybrid/virtual channels
3. assisting with the pavilions
4. attending to VIP participants.

Based on their responsibilities, delegates had to manage their time between volunteering and attending events that interested them. Each of the responsibilities listed above had three to five student volunteers. As shown in Figure 1, the survey indicated that the delegates had on average, an excellent to very good experience volunteering.

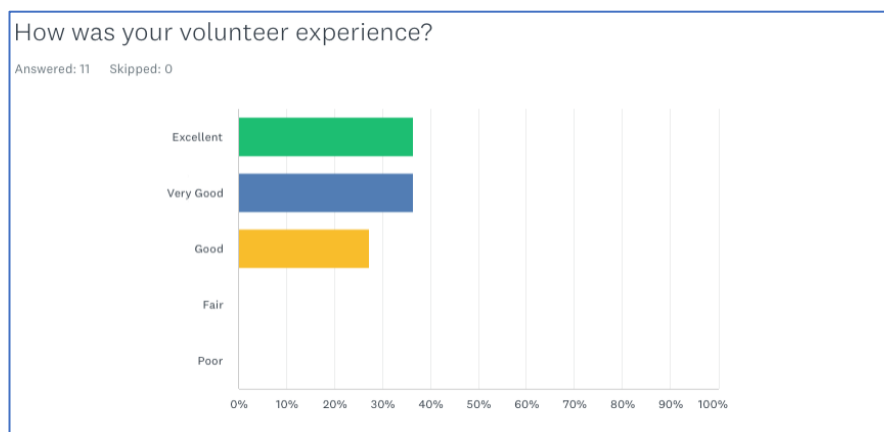[1] Please see Appendix 1 for more information about the UNIL delegates.

Figure 1: Results of survey question 4.

Session rapporteur volunteers

The rapporteur team consisted of four delegates, namely Mia Kortur Corliss, Sonia Sarmiento Cabello, Brendan Parlange and Samantha Sithole and was led by Denise Young (an IUCN Consultant). She met with the four students prior to their arrival in Marseille to inform them of their key responsibilities, answer questions and give them useful tips on how to effectively capture notes in long sessions.

Together with the team of consultants, their responsibilities included writing detailed notes for sessions that were between one and half hours and four hours in length. After each session, the rapporteurs had to distill the information into a succinct summary of the key points and thereafter, submit them to Denise Young before the end of each day. These notes were then consolidated by Denise Young in order to be utilized by IUCN to inform the outcome statements for the various thematic streams and official reports that were to be distributed at the end of WCC.

The delegates were kept busy with multiple lengthy sessions which did not leave a lot of time to network and attend other events or sessions during the WCC. Although they described their experience as challenging, intense and time consuming, they found it rewarding and enjoyable as the process required them to fully engage with the topics being discussed.

Hybrid and virtual channel volunteers

The team assisting in the hybrid/virtual channels consisted of three delegates namely Yasmin Ghadyani, Chanelle Adams and Estelle Milliet and were assisted by James Mcbreen of IUCN. They described their experience as interesting yet stressful. COVID19 prompted IUCN to design the first hybrid WCC. It allowed participants to attend sessions online as well as in- person. The delegates had to assist with communicating or relaying information between the moderators, technical staff from IUCN and the organizers of the online session. They also had to manage

questions from the audience/participants who had to use the IUCN Application to ask questions. Due to circumstances beyond IUCN's control, the delegates did not have any information about their responsibilities prior to arriving in Marseille. The team explained that they had to be "spontaneous and learn on the job". However, this experience gave them insight on how IUCN was running the hybrid events and the challenges to make it possible

Pavilion volunteers

The team that assisted in the pavilions was made up of five delegates namely David Amuzu, Astrid Oppliger, Yan Wang, Yasmin Ghadyani and Estelle Milliet. They were assisted by Corbett Nash of IUCN. Their responsibilities included setting-up the stages before events and sessions, facilitating meetings, being available to assist the organizers and participants during an event and, enjoying the experience. The delegates were situated in the Knowledge Hub and the Capacity Development Hub on the Pavilion floor in Hall 3. The pavilion team described their experience as enjoyable and a good learning experience.

They expressed excitement when describing the pavilions because they were located in an open room that allowed the free flow of people from one event or stand to the next. This gave them the opportunity to meet people and to also attend other events and see other stands. However, the lack of coordination within the IUCN, regarding their responsibilities, made it difficult to know what to expect at the beginning. Yasmin and Estelle later joined the pavilion team because of the lack of communication and coordination from the Hybrid/virtual channel organizers.

VIP volunteers

The team that were tasked to attend to VIPs were Vasco Ferreira da Costa, Camille Gilloots and Pierre-Louis Rey and they were led by José F.C Hong and Giuditta Andreaus of IUCN. The VIP guests ranged from donors, ministers of countries, diplomats to Indigenous Peoples representatives. The delegate responsibilities included assisting and directing VIPs during events and helping IUCN staff during VIP evening cocktails.

The VIP team described their experience as enjoyable, insightful, and a learning experience because it gave them insights on how the world of politics and diplomacy works in conservation. They however stated that it was difficult to interact with the executive participants who attended the cocktails because they were occupied and "were not really interested in the entrance staff". The team expressed that the VIP events with which they assisted did not include youth representatives who were present at the WCC; these representatives were not invited to the VIP cocktails where important discussions and decisions were made by the decision makers and executives in attendance. They also stated that Indigenous Peoples and local community representatives were vocal in sessions and events at

the WCC, however, like the youth, were not invited to VIP cocktails. They posed the following important question:

> "…we know that these people are, at least, as effective as any development bank for conserving nature, (but) we may (need to) think about who are the true *Very Important People* in conservation's world?"

Overall, the volunteering experience for all delegates provided practical experience into the world of conservation from the lens of the IUCN.

Networking at the WCC

Navigating the IUCN-WCC space can be an overwhelming experience because of the vast number of people in attendance, as well as various exhibitions and sessions available. The IISD (2021) reported, "6,000 participants on site in Marseille, France and 3,500 more people attending online". Described as the "Time-square" of conservation events, the WCC has a plethora events and it is easy to get lost in all the activity. For the delegates, volunteering at the WCC provided some structure and gave the delegates an opportunity to network with IUCN staff and other volunteers as they fulfilled their duties (Figure 3). In addition, the delegates were encouraged to socialize and exchange contact information with the people they found interesting. Although this was not simple for everyone (Figure 2), actively networking at WCC allowed the delegates to develop their communication skills by introducing themselves and talking to other participants. They were encouraged to ask questions during sessions in order to be more visible and engage with topics/subjects that interested them. Printing contact/business cards for distribution at WCC was an extra step taken by a few of the delegates. Delegates had to actively seek out sessions and people that were involved in their fields of interest and could be helpful in their research or give them information about employment opportunities. A number of delegates reported that the WCC space allowed them to meet individuals that will be helpful in their current research and careers in the future.
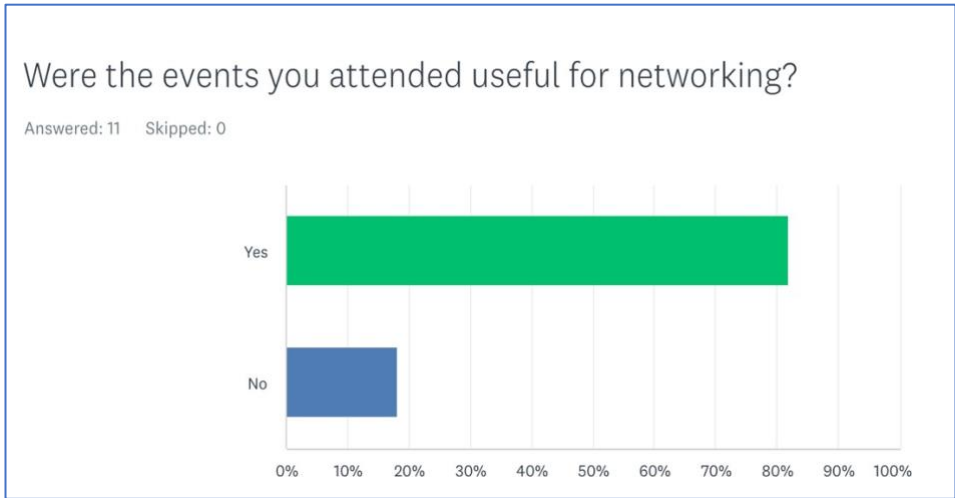
Figure 2: Results of question 8 of the survey. 9 students responded YES and 2 responded NO.
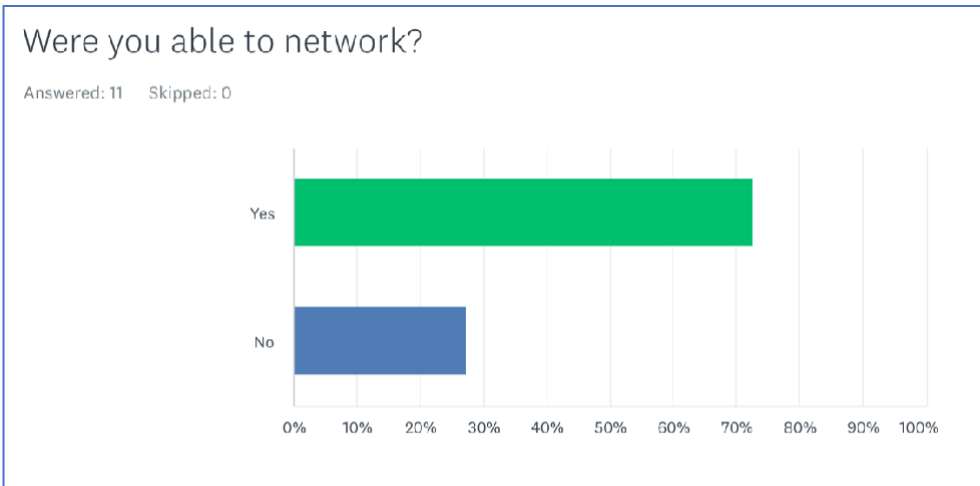

Figure 3: Question 7 from survey- 8 students responded YES and 3 responded NO.

Attending Congress: The Budget and Planning

Organizing the student delegation to the IUCN-WCC was made possible by funding received from the FBM, the International Relations (RI) office and the FGSE. As shown in Table 1 (below), the sum total of 19,500 CHF was awarded to Professors Antoine Guisan and Gretchen Walters to cover the costs for students from UNIL to attend the WCC in Marseille. The planning process began in 2019 before the COVID19 pandemic and continued to 2021. The pandemic complicated the process of organizing the volunteer arrangement between UNIL and

IUCN because each time the WCC was postponed, the process had to begin again, often with a new point of contact from IUCN.

Budget	CHF
Amounts Received:	
FBM Funding	4,500
RI Funding	9,000
FGSE Funding	6,000
IUCN contribution in kind	10,816
Total	30,316

Table 1: Outlines the total amount awarded by the various sponsors.

The extensive budget catered for the costs of fifteen people over seven days. The costs included, travel expenses (which included train tickets, possible PCR Tests[2], local transport tickets in Marseille), accommodation (Hotel stay including breakfast), a daily food stipend (lunch and dinner) and the early-bird registration fees for three students (one student is a commission member and the other is below the age of 24).

IUCN's contribution to the budget comprised granting ten free entries in exchange for volunteering. This can be valued at 10,816 CHF for two youth registrations and eight general registrations[3]. Organizing the free entries in exchange for volunteering was challenging because IUCN did not have a designated individual or team with whom we could enquire about bringing student volunteers to the WCC. At first, UNIL negotiated directly with the City of Marseille who was organizing local volunteers, however, this did not permit entry into the venue or volunteering in any technical capacity. So, UNIL then negotiated directly with the IUCN secretariat. The IUCN Secretariat recognized the high technical capacity of our students and wanted them to volunteer in a more in-depth way; they also saw it as a contribution to the UNIL-IUCN partnership.

This was an important step in the planning process because it allowed thirteen students to participate. Furthermore, it resulted in ten students being registered as volunteers (registration fees waivered) which left room in the budget for other pressing expenses that were brought on by the uncertainty of COVID19.

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[2] The cost of travel PCR tests because of COVID19 was not initially included in the budget granted by International Relations (RI). It was later granted upon request in case the need for PCR tests would arise.

[3] The exchange rate is calculated from Euro to Swiss Franc using OANDA Currency Converter and is valued at the time of the WCC - 216 CHF (youth registration, those aged 24 or less) 874 CHF (early bird registration) and 1,298 CHF (general registration).

Lessons Learned: Youth inclusion in the WCC

1. Uncertainty and COVID19

The COVID19 pandemic resulted in several challenges with planning and budgeting. Although the WCC was held in Marseille, France, the uncertainty of border closures and travel increased the budget in order to cater for PCR tests and other unforeseen costs. International Relations provided critical support in a time of great uncertainty in planning especially regarding the unforeseeable costs of PCR tests for crossing borders. The UNIL model encourages planning and funding grants should permit the cost of unforeseen eventualities in order to cater for students who need to travel to big events like the WCC.

2. IUCN Registration Fees

As mentioned earlier, a large portion of the initial planning budget had to be set-aside to cater from the registration fees of students. Unfortunately, most of the UNIL delegation were above the Youth age of 24 and would have had to pay the hefty price of CHF 874 (early bird) or CHF 1,298 general fee. This aspect of the planning process was challenging. We learnt that age is an important factor when planning a student delegation (CHF 216 for youth under age of 24) and this could potentially inhibit other universities or student/youth led organizations from attending or engaging with the IUCN. This may be due to the fact that there is a lack of consensus in defining who the youth are across global institutions. The IUCN Youth Summit (2021) defined youth as those aged between 18 and 35, while at the Congress, youth were aged 24 or less. UNIL's student delegation however, fell within the definition by the IUCN Youth Summit. IUCN's granting of ten entry passes was critical for permitting the participation of UNIL students.

3. Coordination between IUCN and UNIL/other institutions

Due to past engagement with IUCN, UNIL was successful in communicating with key people in IUCN in order to facilitate the entry fee waiver for the student delegation. However, this was challenging because (as alluded to earlier) of the disruption of COVID19. The IUCN-UNIL partnership helped facilitate this process because it provided a framework within which such a collaboration could occur, however since such an arrangement had not previously occurred with past congresses and university volunteers, it took time to negotiate what such an arrangement would look like. There are other partnerships between IUCN and universities. Therefore, we would encourage more engagement with these and other education/learning institutions in order to foster more volunteering experiences such as the one experienced by the UNIL delegation, especially those from the region where the Congress is held.

4. Feedback: Learning from students

To conclude the undertakings of attending the WCC, we hosted a debriefing event at UNIL and online on October 19th 2021 and invited our sponsors from the FBM, FGSE, RI and IUCN. It was organized in order to hear and learn from the students about their experience at the WCC and as youth volunteers. The overarching theme from the discussion was that the student volunteer model should be reproduced at future congresses and large conferences in order to allow young researchers to experience the practical world of conservation and the environment. Students called on IUCN to provide certification for volunteers in order to validate the experience for future employment opportunities. They also stated that the VIP events needed to be more accessible to the youth in order to allow them to network with decision-makers. Lastly, they encouraged IUCN to use this model at other IUCN events in order to enable interested students to attend those events and conferences. Finally, UNIL expressed interest in replicating this model to other large conferences in other disciplines.

Highlighting the importance of youth engagement at the World Conservation Congress

The partnership between UNIL and IUCN paved the way for a student delegation to volunteer at the WCC. UNIL students volunteering at the WCC speaks to IUCN's commitment to youth engagement within their internal strategy. Youth from UNIL were able to network, engage with different themes and topics whilst assisting and working with IUCN staff as volunteers. Such youth-focused initiatives have gained prominence because youth are increasingly being viewed as active agents who are negotiators and competent decision-makers (Muthee, 2010). IUCN's work towards establishing a youth strategy can benefit from how the student volunteers engaged with the conservation space and the various stakeholders. As highlighted by the experiences above, youth voices need to be further incorporated in decision-making platforms, such as the VIP events and cocktails at WCC, in order to realize their (IUCN) objective for intergenerationality in events of this magnitude. Enabling students of conservation, who are often youth themselves, to engage directly in a Congress such as this, helped UNIL youth to become more engaged in conservation at the international level, learn from other generations of conservation practitioners, while also contributing to the event in various ways. We hope this experience will be carried forward to future IUCN Congresses and other UNIL large events.

Acknowledgements

References

Zurba M, Stucker D, Mwaura G, Burlando C, Rastogi A, Dhyani S, Koss R. 2020. Intergenerational Dialogue, Collaboration, Learning, and Decision-Making in Global Environmental Governance: The Case of the IUCN Intergenerational Partnership for Sustainability. *Sustainability*; 12(2):498. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12020498

Muthee, W.M. 2010. *Hitting the target, missing the point: Youth policies and programmes in Kenya.* Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars -Africa Public Policy Scholar (July -December 2010).

Appendix 1: List and Summaries of the UNIL Delegation

UNIL 2021 delegation	
Chanelle Adams	Chanelle is a second-year doctoral student of geography. Fulbright awardee Adams completed a BA at Brown University in STS and MA at the École des hautes études en sciences socials in Comparative Social Science Research. Her current research focuses on the globalization of plant medicine commodities from Madagascar, including market boom impacts on landscapes of value, meaning, and access.
David Amuzu	David is completing his doctoral studies in Geography at the University of Lausanne. David had his MPhil in Development studies-specializing in Geography at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. He obtained his Bachelor's degree in Geography at the premier University of Ghana. David has a strong research interest in sustainability transition in commodity production systems, business and biodiversity conservation, green economies, social values, value chain governance, innovation scaling, and political ecology.
Vasco Ferreira Da Costa	Vasco is a second-year master's student at UNIL, where he is pursuing a degree in Development and Environmental studies. For his thesis, he investigates the importance of mapping the needs of local populations in the development of conservation projects, mainly through participatory mapping methods that can complement GIS tools.
Yasmin Ghadyani	Yasmin is a second-year master's student in Environmental science: Natural hazards and risk at UNIL. She is currently doing her internship at ON A MISSION, a non-profit organization that offsets carbon emissions by sustainable reforestation.
Camille Gilloots	Camille holds a master's degree in environmental engineering and is currently pursuing a master's degree in Sustainability at UNIL. Her research

	focuses on nature conservation by local communities in "Common Pool Resources" (E. Ostrom) in France. This work is highly linked with the identification of OECMs in the European context. In addition to this master's thesis, she works for green transition policies of the Geneva area.
Mia Kotur Corliss	Mia is a second-year master's student at UNIL, where she is pursuing a degree in Behaviour, Evolution, and Conservation. For her thesis, she investigates the maternal effects on eggs in barn owls (_Tyto alba_). When not working with birds, she likes to relax by taking photos of them instead.
Astrid Oppliger Uribe	Astrid is a Ph.D. candidate in Geography at the Université de Lausanne, where she investigates the science-policy nexus on forest hydrology issues through the production, circulation, and application of knowledge. She holds a Master of Science degree in risk governance and natural resources from the Universität Heidelberg (Germany); a specialization in Sustainable Development from the International Graduate School (IGS) North-South in Switzerland; and is a geographer from the Universidad de Chile.
Antoine Guisan	Antoine is Professor at the University of Lausanne, both at the Institute of Earth Surface Dynamics and at the Department of Ecology and Evolution, with primary interests in spatial ecology, macroecology, biogeography and conservation. His research focuses on the development and application of spatial models of species distributions, with main applications to the conservation of biodiversity under global changes.
Estelle Milliet	Estelle is a second-year doctoral student in ecology and social sciences. After a Bachelor's and Master's in Biology at the University of Lausanne, her current research focuses on the collaboration between farmers and scientists and its impact on pro-environmental behaviors and on-farm biodiversity conservation.
Pierre-Louis Rey	Pierre-Louis is a Ph.D. assistant student in the IDYST department, focused on spatial conservation planning. He wishes to improve the relationship between ecosystem services and biodiversity. For that, he develops an innovative tool to evaluate the value of ecosystem services for species and map the ecosystem services based on the species' distributions models. This multi-disciplinary approach has a significant potential to help the stakeholders for a sustainable future. During the summer, Pierre-Louis enjoys the summer as a mountain guide to raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity.
Sonia Sarmiento Cabello	Sonia is a master's student in Behaviour, Ecology, and Conservation with computational specialization. Her master thesis focuses on studying genome-wide selective pressures on brown trout (Salmo trutta) to understand the consequences of conservation programs in the population in river Aare.
Samantha Sithole	Samantha is a doctoral student at the Institute of Geography and Sustainability at UNIL. Her research is centered on conservation and natural resources governance and has touched on the militarisation of protected areas, and is now focused on youth in conservation on a global to the local level. She is passionate about youth participation in decision-making platforms within environmental governance structures. Samantha was a rapporteur in the youth stream at Congress and was the student - delegate and logistics coordinator for the UNIL Delegation.

Yan Wang	Yan has obtained her doctoral degree in Tourism studies at the University of Lausanne and a sustainable development certificate from International Graduate School (IGS) North-South. With years of experience in tourism and travel consultancy, she is interested in tourism and development, sustainability, heritage, and destination images in both global North and South.
Gretchen Walters	Gretchen is a professor at the University of Lausanne, at the Institute of Geography and Sustainability in the Faculty of Geosciences and the Environment. Her research focuses on conservation practice, protected areas and commons in western Europe and Central Africa, and the historical ecology of tropical forests and savannas. She coordinates the partnership for UNIL with IUCN.

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[i] Currency conversion as of 25 January 2024 on OANDA: https://www.oanda.com/currency-converter/en/?from=ZAR&to=$&amount=1.

[ii] Currency conversion as of 25 January 2024 on OANDA: https://www.oanda.com/currency-converter/en/?from=ZAR&to=$&amount=1

[iii] Currency conversion as of 25 January 2024 on OANDA: https://www.oanda.com/currency-converter/en/?from=ZAR&to=$&amount=1