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Community-based wildlife tourism and its contribution to distributive environmental justice for the community of Welverdiend: A case study of the Wild Olive Tree Camp

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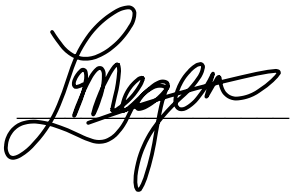

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Abstract of thesis submitted by:
Lizzy VAN MEGEN for the degree of Master of Science and entitled:
Community-based wildlife tourism and its contribution to distributive environmental justice for the community of Welverdiend: A case study of the Wild Olive Tree Camp

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The emerging wildlife tourism industry offers possibilities for communities displaced from their homelands during apartheid in South Africa to regain equitable access to environmental resources. By establishing community-based wildlife t*ourism* enterprises, these communities aim to benefit sustainably from environmental resources by marketing them to attract tourists. This thesis explores the commodification of environmental resources and critically discusses the neoliberal conservation approach. Furthermore, this thesis examines the contribution of community-based tourism enterprises to achieving distributive environmental justice. A qualitative case study was done with narrative and semi-structured interviews with 23 participants. The case study involves the Wild Olive Tree Camp, a community-based wildlife tourism enterprise in the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region in South Africa. The results demonstrate that for the community of Welverdiend, regaining legal ownership of their land is one step in achieving distributive environmental justice. Historical traumas regarding segregation and apartheid leading to unequal access to ownership of environmental resources must be acknowledged to involve all stakeholders in the future management of protected areas. By developing into agents of their land, community-based wildlife tourism enterprises in protected areas can be an additional piece of the puzzle in achieving environmental justice.

Keywords: community-based wildlife tourism, CBNRM, decolonial conservation, land claims, neoliberal conservation, wildlife economy, Kruger National Park, Manyeleti Game Reserve, distributive environmental justice

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List of Abbreviations

CBT:	Community-based tourism
CBWT:	Community-based wildlife tourism
CEU:	Central European University
COVID-19:	Corona Virus Disease 2019
CITES:	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
DEAT:	Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism
EJ:	Environmental Justice
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
K2C BR:	Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region
K2C NPC:	Kruger to Canyons Non-Profit Company
KNP:	Kruger National Park
MGR:	Manyeleti Game Reserve
MTPA:	Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency
NPC:	Non-profit company
PAs:	Protected Areas
PTO:	Permission to Occupy
Pty Ltd:	Proprietary Limited
SADC:	Southern African Development Community
SANP:	South African National Parks
TH:	Trophy Hunting
UN:	United Nations
WCED:	World Commission on Environment and Development
WOTC:	Wild Olive Tree Camp
ZAR:	South African Rands

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to research

"It was not a nice thing how this protected area has been created because it was in the sacrifice, in the pain of others, but the concept itself was good. When you see it now, because the natural resources have been conserved and out if it the ecotourism has been introduced"

(Theo, pers. comm.)[1]

The yet unsettled land claims in the Manyeleti Game Reserve (MGR), the former homeland of many families of the Mnisi community (Mahony and Van Zyl 2021), represent the ongoing battle for an equitable distribution of environmental resources. Almost 20 years later, the post-apartheid government still works on rebuilding and establishing fair policies regarding land use and ownership (Carruthers 1995; Venter et al. 2008). Theo, quoted above, is one of the land claimants of the MGR. His statement highlights the understanding of the current importance of the protected areas (PAs), despite their unfair establishment under colonial and apartheid power. The aftermath and traumas of the forceful removals still exist and pose contemporary challenges (Zips and Zips-Mairitsch 2019).

With the rise of the popularity of international tourists visiting places of "true nature" (von Essen, Lindsjö, and Berg 2020), local businesses in South Africa have favorable circumstances regarding environmental resources to fulfill international desires. The PAs are now being utilized as a valuable commodity to support businesses participating in the global ecotourism industry (Fabricius and Sisitka 2003). With the approach of community-based wildlife tourism (CBWT) towards resource use, communities who were displaced from their land during apartheid can now utilize their environmental resources and benefit from the growing ecotourism industry.

CBWT is seen as a form of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM), which has been used as a tool to include local communities in conservation efforts (Dressler et al. 2010). With this approach, local people are empowered to become agents of their land while using its resources sustainably (Gaodirelwe, Masunga, and Motsholapheko 2020). The contradiction between CBNRM and neoliberal conservation can induce complexities in its

[1] Theo. Member of the cooperative. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. The Orpen Kruger. 22nd May 2023.

implementation. The neoliberal growth-based approach to conservation can lead to exploiting environmental resources, subordinating social, cultural, and environmental factors to profits (Baer 2020). On the contrary, CBNRM aims to sustainably use environmental resources while empowering local people and enhancing their livelihoods (Fabricius and Sisitka 2003).

Theo's statement shows the dichotomy between historical complexities and contemporary solutions in achieving environmental justice (EJ). This study explores the possibilities that CBWT can offer in pursuing EJ for the people of the Mnisi community of Welverdiend. The EJ theoretical framework has emerged as a tool for comprehending conflicts related to environmental distribution on indigenous land (Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010). In this case study, the framework is applied to explore how regaining ownership of the MGR and CBWT relate to fair access and distribution of environmental resources. In acknowledging dominating hegemonies in South Africa, the EJ framework questions neocolonial dependency on the Western neoliberal approach of commodifying nature to enhance community development. Furthermore, this study will touch upon the national apartheid policies and how they impact the current opportunities for the environmental and social well-being of the landscape and community of Welverdiend. This qualitative case study presents place-based research in the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region (K2C BR), focusing on the village of Welverdiend and their CBT enterprise: the Wild Olive Tree Camp (WOTC).

1.2 Research questions and objectives

This study is led by the following research question: Using the case study of The Wild Olive Tree Camp, can community-based wildlife tourism in the Kruger to Canyon Biosphere contribute to distributive environmental justice for local communities?

The following objectives support answering the main research question and lead the structure of this study:

1. Understand the post-apartheid land ownership of the Manyeleti Game Reserve policies and how it impacts opportunities for the people from Welverdiend in the wildlife tourism industry.
2. Understand the implementation of community-based wildlife tourism enterprises in the Kruger to Canyon Biosphere Region and stakeholders' perspectives on the Wild Olive Tree Camp.

3. Critically understand the neoliberal approach to conservation and how it relates to community-based wildlife tourism in the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region.
4. Understand the meaning of distributive environmental justice for the community-based wildlife tourism industry: using the Wild Olive Tree Camp as a case study.
5. Define if and to what extent the commodification of nature can contribute to community-based wildlife tourism enterprises like the Wild Olive Tree Camp to achieve distributive environmental justice.

1.3 Research gap

Despite the growing body of interdisciplinary literature on social-ecological systems, limited attention has been given to the EJ framework in place-based research. Place-based research in areas where tourism is a significant source of income and environmental resources are commodified for financial gain can add to the existing EJ literature. This study aims to fill this gap with a qualitative case study approach, focusing on the local perspective on equitable access to environmental resources.

Existing studies have questioned neoliberal conservation as a tool for sustainable development and connected this to decolonizing conservation in the KNP area. While it is essential to engage in critical discussion regarding the effectiveness of neoliberal conservation, this study also aims to explore alternative solutions within the global framework of neoliberalism. By investigating place-based examples of environmental commodities and their role within the community of Welverdiend, this study adds to the understanding of using and marketizing environmental resources for community development and environmental conservation.

Furthermore, previous studies have focused on the failures and successes of CBNRM and community involvement in conservation efforts but have not yet comprehended the role of CBWT. This study aims to decrease the research gap in understanding how the interaction between tourists and rural South Africa can add to the well-being of the community of Welverdiend and the appreciation of environmental resources. This case study at the WOTC will evaluate the perspectives of local stakeholders toward CBWT and how it benefits their community. The results of this study add to the local understanding of the distribution of environmental goods and EJ. The research can contribute to establishing projects and further research with the community of Welverdiend and the Kruger to Canyons Non-Profit Company (K2C NPR).

1.4 Thesis outline

This thesis is structured according to the research objectives presented in Table 1. The second section contains the literature review, divided into three parts. Each aligns with the research objectives. The third section, the methodology, justifies the qualitative approach of this study and explains the interview methods and analysis methods. The fourth section discusses and introduces the results of the case study. Finally, the conclusion will concisely elaborate on the research findings and recommend further research.

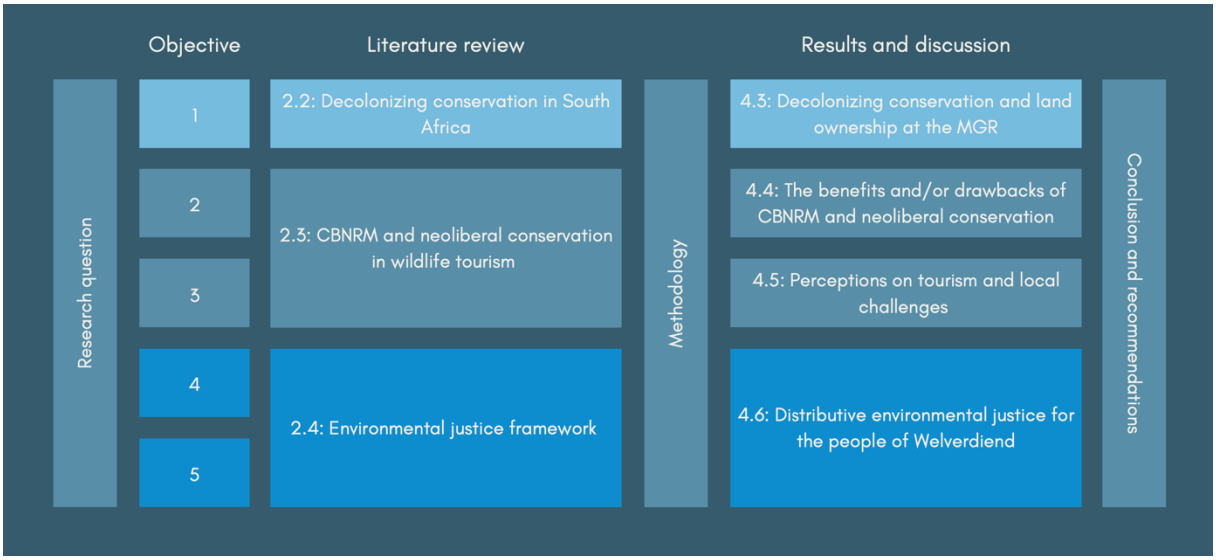

Table 1: Overview of the thesis outline. Table created by author.

2. Literature review

2.1 Structure of the literature review

The literature review is divided into three sections. The first section explores the history and concept of decolonial conservation in the KNP area. This understanding can be used in the case study to answer questions regarding land claims and conservation practices in the MGR, which is adjacent to the KNP. The second section discusses the concept of CBNRM and how CBWT fits within a neoliberal approach to conservation. This section critically analyses the commodification of nature and is beneficial for understanding alternative models that support communities dependent on wildlife tourism. The last section focuses on the theoretical framework of EJ, aiming to understand distributive justice on income generated by the commodification of nature.

2.2 Decolonizing conservation in South Africa

2.2.1 Ownership of land in South Africa

2.2.1.1 The forceful removal of people from indigenous land in South Africa

In the 17th century, white European colonialists aimed to protect wildlife from humans by building conservation areas where no humans would be (Carruthers 1995). This meant the forceful removal of local communities living in areas where the colonialists aimed to establish nature reserves (McDonald 2002). For centuries, indigenous Africans were displaced under the guise of nature protection, while the colonialists established nature areas where only they had access to the reserves, mainly for leisure practices (Carruthers 1995; Zips and Zips-Mairitsch 2019). While little critique and resistance of the people whose lives were discounted while they were forcefully removed for conservation in that time were documented (Igoe 2014), many protests at the end of the apartheid government were documented, where people demanded justice regarding their ancestral lands (Khan 2002). According to Reid (2001), it was believed that human livelihoods would conflict with the integrity of South African nature, wilderness, and wildlife, and preserving the lands from exploitation for the future became the aim of conservationists and national governments. Thus, a people-free landscape, or a separation of humans from wildlife, was seen as the sole solution until recent decades (Carruthers 1995). The idea of a people-free landscape for leisure and consumption of resources by the colonialists was the primary approach to land use in South Africa (Dressler et al. 2010). The powerful white extended their colonial political program and "formed the ideology [of] the perception of blacks as environmentally destructive" (Khan 2002, 18). Africans were portrayed as 'uncivilized'

(Khan 2002) or depreciated as 'others' or 'people out of place' (Coolsaet and Álvarez 2018) and so became alienated from the conservation efforts of their lands.

Besides the land that was created for conservation practices and the leisure of white people, the indigenous people were forced outside of such areas. While displaced, they were kept close enough for the colonizers to use the displaced communities as a cheap form of labor (Weinberg 2015). The black[2] population could only enter specific parts of conservation areas, like the MGR (McDonald 2002; de Koning 2010; Teversham 2013)[3]. The MGR is a reserve adjacent to the KNP. The fences between the KNP and the MGR were dropped. The MGR is registered as a separate PA, from which the indigenous population was forced to leave their settlements without their consent (de Koning 2010). Although with the right intentions for protecting nature, such colonial conservation practices are now considered inappropriate, as they form a colonial hierarchy and racial segregation (Carruthers 1995) through white leadership. "The cumulative effect of racially discriminatory laws and punitive conservation regulations has been the gradual but relentless alienation of blacks from the environmental sphere, and the growth of hostility to conservation issues" (Khan 2002, 16). The alienation of indigenous communities from their mode of living caused a traumatized relationship with their livelihood instead of a sense of pride in their country and natural resources (Carruthers 1995).

2.2.1.2 Communal land management

The former homelands of people who have been displaced from their lands are referred to as communal land (Weinberg 2015). About one-third of South Africans live on communal land (Weinberg 2015). The acknowledgment of decolonial land rights depends on the reclamation of the definition of communal land and should include its complex structures and arrangement of rights (Weinberg 2015). According to Weinberg (2015), the term 'communal land' must be reclaimed, as colonial administrators referred wrongly to communal lands as land that was led collectively by traditional chiefs at the expense of the individuals. Recent scholars defined communal land tenure as "'socially embedded' and inclusive, [where] individuals and families also negotiate access […] to common property resources" (Cousins 2008 as cited in Weinberg 2015). In this form of land governance, different levels of the community regulated other decisions, and it was only for the colonial and apartheid governments who tried to centralize

[2] As per (Mbembe and Dubois 2017) the term "black people" will be used throughout the thesis to denote the black native South African communities.
[3] More in-depth information about the occupation and history of the MGR in Chapter 3.4.2

decision-making to the communal chiefs, leading to the exclusion of individuals in the decision-making processes (Weinberg 2015). The colonialists granted the chiefs of the tribal authorities great authority, and they were given financial or social benefits if they engaged with the apartheid system regarding land use, political decisions, and the environment (King 2005). The chiefs were often tasked to lead their community and fade out the tribal levels of governance within a community, benefiting the apartheid government (King 2005). Thus, to recognize tribal governance structures, it is crucial to thoroughly understand the definition of communal land tenure before further approaches to land use and ownership can be considered.

One possible aim for local municipalities, national government bodies, and traditional authorities is co-management between all parties in land ownership, resource use, and benefit sharing (Khan 2002). The expectation is that the post-apartheid government can, in some form, coexist with traditional authorities, although it still needs to be determined how that would evolve successfully (King 2005). Land reform activists show skepticism as the new governance structures clash with traditional authorities, and there is much misunderstanding about social institutions and the equitable use of resources in South Africa (King 2005). Despite skepticism, environmental legislation and young members of local communities advocate for the inclusion of political institutions for new opportunities in fair development practices to alleviate the poorest households out of poverty (King 2005). Also, according to Venter et al. (2008), not only the sustainable future of local livelihoods can benefit from a co-management between national governance and tribal authorities, but also the KNP should shift to a co-management of both institutions for an improved conservation strategy. Though, clarification on land ownership and management is necessary; also for potential investors to ensure their investments are used accordingly (King 2005). A co-management could support development opportunities (King 2005), leading to better access to educational, skill development programs or health systems.

2.2.1.3 Laws on land ownership post-apartheid

The purpose of settling the land claims and restituting the land is to restore it to support local development, heal the historical trauma of apartheid and establish a rights-based mechanism to address poverty and just land reconstruction (Lahiff 2001). With the establishment of the post-apartheid government in 1994, the aim was to reconsider land and ensure just land distribution for all South Africans. South Africa's democratic government had to acknowledge the traumas from history, especially concerning land rights and communal land tenure models (Weinberg

2015). In South Africa, we find a variety of complex acts on land ownership and rights. The following paragraph will concisely elaborate on the Communal Property Association (CPA) and the Permission to Occupy (PTO).

2.2.1.3.1 Communal Property Association

According to the Communal Property Association (CPA) legislation (Act 28 of 1996), South African dispossessed lands had to be redistributed and restituted (Cocks, Dold, and Grundy 2001) to communities who were displaced from their lands. An example of an institution to regulate land restitution is the CPA. The CPAs "were established so that groups of people could come together to form a legal entity to acquire, hold and manage property received through the restitution, redistribution and land reform programs" (Weinberg 2015, 14). After four years of the new government, in 2000, the legal mechanism enabled 239 CPAs to be registered (Lahiff 2001). The CPAs were only allowed for communities without traditional councils, as they will be attributed to the title "conventional traditional communal areas" (Weinberg 2015, 14). The CPAs are specifically designed for black Africans who were forcefully removed from their land and are now left without traditional council. In case a traditional council already exists, they are required to be beneficiaries of the CPA to avoid complex twofold ownership (Parliamentary Monitoring Group 2018). With the CPAs, established councils will get full land ownership, where individuals and families will get the right to apply for land use with the CPA beneficiaries (Weinberg 2015).

2.2.1.3.2 Permission to Occupy

One of the methods of land use inhabitants in a CPA can apply for is the PTO. While the apartheid governments were ruling South Africa, the certificate of the PTO was founded to tackle poverty and the exploitation of land (Weinberg 2015). The PTO ensured conditional rights and was available for black people during apartheid. People could apply for a PTO, which permitted them to develop the land they were permitted (King 2005). But, due to the strict rules on land use, especially for black people, it was difficult to make a livelihood from the land (Khan 2002; Weinberg 2015). This means that the government could remove PTO holders from their occupied land as soon as they saw different potential for the land. This risk and insecurity led thereto that banks and other financial institutions were unwilling to grant development loans, as no collateral could be ensured (King 2005). Up until today, this is still considered a problem.

2.2.1.4 Land ownership in protected areas

2.2.1.4.1 South African National Parks[4]

Since the post-apartheid government, the South African Land Restitution Act (Venter et al. 2008) has been assisting people with reclaiming the land from which they, their community, or their ancestors have been displaced. Currently, the parks in South Africa are often contractual parks managed by the South African National Parks (SANParks) but are legally owned by the state or a group of individuals (Reid 2001). SANParks focuses mainly on conserving PAs in terms of wildlife, biodiversity, and accessibility to the benefits of biodiversity conservation for South African society (Khan 2002; Swemmer and Taljaard 2011). They aim to build and develop capacity with local communities living adjacent to the reserves and establish tourism and recreational outlets (Saayman, Rossouw, and Saayman 2012).

In its early days, the management of the SANParks was mainly led by white South Africans, responsive to the apartheid government (Khan 2002). The missing social component aiming towards equal distribution of benefits from biodiversity conservation was not fully developed yet. Only in recent decades has SANParks management started to focus on including all citizens of South Africa, where they would benefit not only from employment or recreation but also from the environmental, social, and economic effects in the long run (Swemmer and Taljaard 2011; Saayman, Rossouw, and Saayman 2012). The current aim of the SANParks contractual parks is to meet conservation goals, socio-economic equity, and its development goals (Reid 2001). While acknowledging the cruciality of the social component within SANParks, effective implementation is challenging (Swemmer and Taljaard 2011). With legal acts for nature conservation, such as the Mpumalanga Nature Conservation Act, local communities are restricted from using natural resources for their livelihoods to protect conservation, even if the land claims have been settled in favor of the indigenous local communities (King 2005). Therefore, developing a framework on social benefits and how people perceive those is crucial to develop further policies in increasing equitable benefit sharing (Swemmer, Mmethi, and Twine 2017). SANParks are collaborating with the South African Department of Rural Development and Land Reform to ensure equitable land distribution, rights, and ownership in and around the KNP (Swemmer, Mmethi, and Twine 2017). Land reclaims are seen as a strong

[4] The South African National Parks comprise all national parks in Southern Africa, including Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and South Africa. The individuals belonging to these countries are known as SADC citizens, and they can avail of local benefits within the SANParks such as discounted rates and priority in job opportunities (South African National Parks 2022).

tool for rebuilding equality and trust between communities and conservation authorities (Reid 2001).

With the right intentions of supporting local entrepreneurship and tourist businesses, the benefits to which local communities have access now have been elusive (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020), especially those living outside the borders of a national park (Swemmer, Mmethi, and Twine 2017). Meaning that, despite the efforts aiming towards inclusive and equitable management of ecosystem services, there are still gaps in the existing models (Swemmer, Mmethi, and Twine 2017) that need research and development.

2.2.1.4.2 Protected areas

Since 1994 and the liberalization of South African politics, many institutions and organizations began to challenge racist and segregated environmental policies (McDonald 2002). These redefined environmental issues became central points for new policymakers, and the land claim settlements are seen as the greatest method to rebalance unequal power relations between the communities and the conservation authorities (Reid 2001). The South African government policies emphasize conservation management regulation, land reforms, and claims (Ramutsindela and Shabangu 2013). The former policies on conservation aimed to protect nature from humans exploiting environmental resources. Rural communities were criminalized for harvesting plants and grazing cattle on the PAs (Dressler et al. 2010). Only centuries later, it is now believed by both development and conservation agencies that the inclusion of humans in PAs can contribute to sustainable livelihoods and give value to regional economies (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). It is worth emphasizing that while human involvement in resource use is important, it doesn't equate to unrestricted access. The focus must be on finding sustainable ways to utilize resources. Moreover, there are designated PAs where no exploitation of resources is permitted. In that case, it is crucial for displaced local communities to benefit otherwise, for example, with the allocation of employment opportunities elsewhere (Cocks, Dold, and Grundy 2001). The paradigm shift of the SANParks recognized the need for community involvement for effective conservation and natural resource management in South Africa, making the PAs relevant for all South Africans (Reid 2001; Cocks, Dold, and Grundy 2001; Venter et al. 2008; Saayman, Rossouw, and Saayman 2012). It is expected that 80% of South Africa will soon be community-owned (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020) or managed on a communal basis and group ownership (Cocks, Dold, and Grundy 2001) after all issues land

claims are processed. According to Chidakel, Eb, and Child (2020), about 15 land claims covering around 25,5% of the KNP were still under discussion in 2020.

In 2009, the government of South Africa declared all pending land claims within the KNP as annulled and declared that other solutions would make up for the requested land claims to protect the integrity of the PA (Dressler et al. 2010). A rightful and appropriate settlement of land claims can strongly impact the sustainable development of communities in rural areas, where natural resources are crucial for their livelihood (de Koning 2010). A strategy for an appropriate land claim agreement presents co-management, especially in PAs where communities opt for land restitution but are not allowed to resettle the land (de Koning 2010). The co-management of land is considered viable if the PA can make a net profit, which is often through tourism development, as it attracts private investors. With the help of private investors, according to de Koning (2010), socio-economic benefits for communities, such as equity stakes in profits, enterprise opportunities, and employment, can evolve.

2.2.1.5 Ownership of land conservation concerns and tourism opportunities

During the process of land claims, conservationists express their worries that too much of the restored land would turn away from conservation or would focus too much on ecotourism, risking a negative impact on the biodiversity and integrity of the KNP (Venter et al. 2008). Young generations are not specifically aiming for land claim settlements as the forceful removals often took place decades ago (Saayman, Rossouw, and Saayman 2012), but rather look for opportunities wherein their ancestral land can allow for employment opportunities. Most land claims from rural communities aim to be compromised and settle on new resourceful land (Lahiff 2001). Apart from the Makuleke community, who initially aimed to resettle in the KNP (Ramutsindela and Shabangu 2013), most communities who applied for settlements and got back their land after they claimed it were mainly in favor of conservation without resettling. The desire to benefit from the KNP to ensure a sustainable income remained (Venter et al. 2008). According to the annual report of SANParks (2022), the land claims program coordinated and facilitated negotiations so displaced communities could benefit from value chain activities and still use their sacred land for spiritual and cultural practices. To benefit financially from their land, communities welcomed assistance to learn about efficient land management and develop into agents of their land (Fabricius and Sisitka 2003).

Since the post-apartheid government, access for local communities to the wildlife economy has been redefined (Bunn et al. 2023). Many consultants "have tried to persuade communities of improved financial outcomes if they (re)turn their communal lands to wildlife" (Bunn et al. 2023, 15). The local people use the land within and around the KNP and its remarkable wildlife as a marketing tool for the booming tourism business, allowing for socio-economic change (Ramutsindela and Shabangu 2013). With aiming for economic equity, the government wants to entitle the incoming profits to the local communities (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). Or, if the community aims for tourism on their land, they can lease their land to tourism operators (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020) to benefit from the tourism industry (Fabricius and Sisitka 2003). Despite the unclarity of whether such models benefit only some local elites from the community or if they can assist in developing the whole community, they are worth considering for communities in land claim processes along the KNP (Ramutsindela and Shabangu 2013). If the required knowledge is available within a community, an alternative to leasing the land to tourist operators is for communities to start their own (wildlife) tourism business (Fabricius and Sisitka 2003).

2.3 CBNRM and neoliberal conservation in wildlife tourism

2.3.1 Community-Based Natural Resource Management in local businesses

Global capitalism caused the current economic and ecological crisis (Baer 2020). According to Baer (2020), the only way to preserve the planet is to envision alternative economic models and natural resource use. One such alternative model of natural resource use is Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM). CBNRM is an approach to conserving nature and its wildlife from a bottom-up approach, with the aim to include local communities and to preserve cultures, traditional livelihoods, and knowledge in a sustainable manner (Measham and Lumbasi 2013). Much of the wildlife conservation in Sub-Saharan Africa aims to be community-based, which means local ownership of land, equal environmental and socio-economic benefits, and equal participation in decision-making bodies (Zips and Zips-Mairitsch 2019). According to the guidelines on successful implementation of CBNRM by Fabricius and Sisitka (2003, 19), the main goals of CBNRM are:

1. "To improve local people's livelihoods and quality of life and help reduce rural poverty."
2. "To wisely use and conserve natural resources and ecosystems."
3. "To empower rural communities to make their own decision about the wise use of their natural resources."

In the sustainable tourism framework, this could be approached as the "triple bottom line" (Elkington 1997 as cited in Spenceley 2005), including economic, social, and environmental aspects.

As a response to ineffective conservation by the South African government (Cocks, Dold, and Grundy 2001; Gaodirelwe, Masunga, and Motsholapheko 2020), CBNRM became a tool for the post-apartheid government to build equity between all South Africans and to include communities in conservation programs (Dressler et al. 2010). Prior to the implementation of CBNRM, conservation was centralized and sponsored by international donors with the main interest to protect nature, from which tourists and the elites could benefit (Measham and Lumbasi 2013). Although it was believed that conservation areas should be protected from humans, studies have shown that CBNRM has led to improved protection of wildlife in comparison to areas where CBNRM was not implemented (Gaodirelwe, Masunga, and Motsholapheko 2020). CBNRM is best understood

> "in relation to the history of the Western conservation model. From the 18th century and onwards, ideals of a people-free landscape for the purposes of leisure and consumption played an important role in defining land use in colonized regions of the world" (Neumann 2002; Brockington et al. 2008 as cited in Dressler et al. 2010, 2).

To restore and restitute land to communities in regions in the east of South Africa, a CBNRM approach assisted them in successful land claim settlements and land management plans (Dressler et al. 2010).

The inclusion and leadership of host communities in tourist businesses can establish a shift between multinational-owned profit-based tourism enterprises towards successful local businesses, stimulating the local economy, the environment, and socio-economic status. Despite a lack of literature on reasons for the success of CBNRM, Measham and Lumbasi (2013) argue that implementing CBNRM often succeeded when local residents initiated and implemented the projects. With understanding the importance of local inclusion through education programs and direct participation, African wildlife lies in the hands of the local communities (Balyamujura and Van Schalkwyk 1999). When locals are appreciated and empowered to manage the natural resources accessible on or around their land, it is more likely that they aim to conserve the natural resources sustainably (Gaodirelwe, Masunga, and Motsholapheko 2020). Besides local initiation, another common factor in successful implementation was when the main focus was local conservation instead of having a bigger

political or financial agenda (Measham and Lumbasi 2013). Even globally, local participation and cooperation between local residents, their knowledge, western science, and decision-making bodies seem to be the best approach to managing land use (Anthony et al. 2011).

Despite the good intentions, CBNRM never emerged in South Africa as it did in other countries due to the already largely established conservation policies and arrangements on natural resource use (Dressler et al. 2010). Furthermore, the lack of tourism marketing skills puts the rural communities at a disadvantage compared to international private investors and businesses, who often have the resources to hire quality skilled staff (Lelokwane Lockie Mokgalo and Musikavanhu 2019). Despite the aim of CBNRM to empower local and displaced communities, the South African government's complex bureaucratic structures do not always support such initiatives, hindering its effectiveness (Measham and Lumbasi 2013). Although CBNRM has helped rural people regain their land rights and decision-making power in some cases, imbalanced power relations and differing stakeholder agendas can negatively impact local interests (Measham and Lumbasi 2013).

2.3.2 Neoliberal Conservation: the commodification of ecosystem services for tourism

2.3.2.1 A Shift from international development agencies to private investments: hegemonic imbalances

Due to a decrease in government subsidies (de Koning 2010) and global public funds for conservation, there has been a rise in private investments in PAs. This has led to the development of market-based conservation approaches known as “neoliberal conservation” (Büscher, Dressler, and Fletcher 2014). The tourism industry now funds conservation efforts (Cock and Fig 2002), and nature is seen as a free commodity for marketing purposes (Frey, Gellert, and Dahms 2019). The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) agreed that conservation and tourism offer much potential for economic growth in South Africa and should generate their income with a market-based approach (Ramutsindela and Shabangu 2013). They state that the DEAT argues that in this way, the government can focus on other responsibilities such as health care and education. In alignment with the government policies, SANParks agreed to commercialize their national parks and generate their income through marketizing its natural assets for tourism (Cock and Fig 2002; Ramutsindela and Shabangu 2013). Private market-based mechanisms are argued to be best at providing efficient services (Baer 2020), such as conservation or the accommodation of tourists, mainly because the market-based approach allows for hiring highly educated experts (Ramutsindela and Shabangu 2013).

While Baer (2020) acknowledges that capitalism helped to redistribute some wealth and could lift some out of poverty, social and economic inequality remains an unavoidable side effect of neoliberal capitalism. Along those lines, the environment's health is overlooked or subordinated to profits.

The conservation sector has shifted towards a neoliberal approach which prioritized international market mechanisms for generating profits instead of earlier conservation strategies where local cultural and social dynamics were the ruling mechanisms in landscape management (Büscher, Dressler, and Fletcher 2014). Conservation agencies now rely strongly on income generated through market-based principles to fulfill their duty to protect biodiversity (de Koning 2010). According to atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen, the shift towards neoliberal market-based investments results from an ideology where humans believe they can control nature (Igoe 2014). This means that nature serves humans. However, Ramutsindela and Shabangu (2013) argue that there should be space for fundamental alternatives that aim toward equitable access to global natural resources. These alternatives should prioritize the equitable distribution of environmental goods and resources. It is essential for societies to understand that we are a part of nature and should not exploit natural resources (Njonognkulu Ndungane 2002). Instead, societies should appreciate the integrity of landscapes and environmental health, which goes beyond market mechanisms.

2.3.2.2 Decoupling growth and development

In the neoliberal approach, growth and development are often seen as coupled. It is essential to recognize the distinction between these terms and how they relate. Decoupling involves understanding that growth and development have different meanings. Growth is primarily concerned with increasing the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while development encompasses not only beneficial economic arrangements but also other determinants such as social welfare, political rights, and civil rights (Sen 1999). With the focus on the development of the expansion of freedoms, achieved through the before mentioned determinants, Sen (1999) argues for eliminating poverty, poor opportunities, and social deprivation in the form of repressive states or neglecting public services. According to Sen (1999), development means enhancing the freedom to exercise basic human rights.

With a similar approach, French philosopher Guy Debord (1967) argued that while economic growth is necessary to ensure basic survival, it also has the potential to alienate individuals

from the self. This is because the production of commodities creates a reliance on the market and on the ability to purchase items for survival. Hence, it can be argued that economic growth stagnated development from this standpoint.

Another perspective on freedom is given by Harvey (2005), who argues that according to the Hungarian anthropologist Karl Polanyi, freedom in a system of neoliberal governance can be perceived as the freedom to do what is most beneficial for the self as a form of free enterprise while exploiting one other. For example, one can start a tourism enterprise in South Africa, hire highly skilled employees from other regions or countries, and provide high-quality service and optimize profits without giving back to the area or community in which the enterprise finds itself. The power lies in the hands of the enterprise owner, and they experience the freedom of 'doing what they want.' The other form of freedom is where people make inordinate gains without compromising the other, where freedom insinuates that people have an equal chance, establishing a just and free society (Harvey 2005). Meaning, that the same tourism enterprise used as an example before, incorporates all factors of society, environment, and economy, in its decisions. The employees will be from the area, and environmental impact assessments will ensure the environment is not discounted for profits. Besides, the enterprise invests in education, skill development, and accessible health care in the area. Meaning that community and environmental benefits have priority over solely financial profits. The last form of freedom allows for equal chances and sustainable development (Harvey 2005).

With the perspectives on the meaning of growth and development, we can conclude that growth aims to increase profits where environmental and social factors can be discounted. On the other hand, development aims for societal freedom, which includes all components within a society, allowing chances for a sustainable future for all. Thus, decoupling the growth and development paradigm can assist in acknowledging the importance of including social and environmental factors in development programs to raise the socio-economic status of the poor (Baer 2020), increasing environmental health and developing many into a stable middle class.

2.3.2.3 International development

Several global development institutions, including USAID, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), were established following the Second World War. These global development institutions have become increasingly dependent on private investments in recent years, offering loans to support developing countries (Peet 2009; Neubert 2016). These

institutions provided significant financial support to developing countries, aiding in preserving their landscapes, resulting in a boost in the elite tourism industry (Dressler et al. 2010). According to Peet (2009), experts have expressed concerns about the potential power imbalance resulting from the shift to a neoliberal approach. Specifically, there is a risk that countries needing loans could become dependent on those who grant the loans, leading to a complex situation where global economic institutions exert undue influence over a country's economic policies (Wallerstein 2004). Development investments that are provided in the form of international loans have the potential to foster a reliance between nations, particularly those in the developing world that may become dependent on industrialized countries, including former colonies.

International development institutions and organizations have focused the past decades on moving from resource-extracting and growth-based economies to greening the economy towards sustainable development (Wilhusen 2014). The United Nations (UN) defined sustainable development as "'development that meets the needs of present and future generations' through balancing economic, social and environmental considerations" (Roy et al. 2018, 450). With clear evidence of a correlation between climate change and poverty, the UN aims to mitigate climate change and adapt social structures under the guise of sustainable development for reduced global inequalities (Roy et al. 2018). Global institutions are focused on achieving sustainable development and are following the UN's approach by embracing the concept of the green economy. "The green economy seeks to value environmental goods and services in terms of natural capital, relying on a range of institutional "enabling conditions" to promote positive economic, ecological, and social outcomes" (Wilshusen 2014, 129).

With the perspective that substantial growth can serve as a mechanism to improve economically, socially, and environmentally, it is believed that the green economy can solve modern problems. Critics argue that the green economy movement neglects the origins of environmental degradation and poverty (Brand 2012). Others argue that the definition of sustainable development clashes with the theory of the green economy. Research shows that within the green economy, where business as usual continues, enforcing unsustainable growth as consumption patterns and extractive modes of production do not change (Brand 2012). Wilhusen argues (2014) that the shift to the greening of the economy is simply a change from conscious extracting economies to a related version of it, called the valuation of nature and thus ecosystem services. He argues that giving value to nature only ensures a place for nature in the

global market, as it is now packaged into a product. It means that now, by taking the right of nature into your own hands and giving it a monetary value, it can be part of the green economy. From the green economy approach, giving the right value to ecosystem services, or products deriving from the environment, both the people and the environment can benefit from the profits (Sullivan 2009). According to Brand (2012), it should be recognized that not every situation suits the market mechanisms.

Greening the economy aims to understand resource flows and develop into a just use and extraction, where the market deals with social, environmental, and economic justice to decrease poverty and support a healthy environment. Nowadays, conservation and tourism enterprises adopt the green growth theory, promoting the commodification of ecosystem services. This approach assumes that conservation efforts and neoliberal capitalism coexist harmoniously within the green economy (Wilhusen 2014).

2.3.2.4 Consuming nature

The natural resources in South Africa serve as ecosystem services that people consume to provide for their livelihoods. In a primitive economy, the surplus of products from natural resources is commodified and sold in the form of exchange (Debord 1967). However, with the shift from primitive economies towards a capitalist society, the "commodity production met the social conditions of large scale commerce and of the accumulation of capitals, it seized total domination over the economy" (Debord 1967, 20). The production of commodities was solely intended for the consumption of others at a mass scale.

The ecosystem services are now extracted for livelihood purposes and as a commodity in the form of tourism. Meaning that resources now exceed the purpose of providing for local livelihoods and also serve as a tool for the pleasure of tourists. The neoliberal market-based approach to conservation risks commodifying and exploiting nature, culture, and wildlife, where economic profits are prioritized over social and environmental benefits (Zips and Zips-Mairitsch 2019). Critics of the concept of economic valuation of ecosystem services argue that it can have "damaging effects, […] alienating people from nature and transforming public property and services into commodities that can be accessed only by those with purchasing power" (Gomez-Baggethun & Ruiz-Perez 2011; Robertson 2012 as cited in European Commission 2015, 18). Within the scope of this thesis, it can be understood that communities without the financial means to access the KNP or surrounding reserves where their ancestral

land lies are disconnected from their native inheritance. Meanwhile, domestic and international elite tourists can consume environmental resources. Others argue as a counter-argument that the commodification of nature can support conservation programs and communities surrounding the PAs while also protecting nature from overexploitation as it protects the public good (European Commission 2015). This argument presents a more complex power dynamic, where the commodification of ecosystem services is seen as a way to promote conservation efforts but fails to recognize the significance of social arrangements or environmental health. While traditional conservation practices continue to protect ecosystem services, the commodification of the natural resources alienated the locals from their traditional practices and made conservation the subject of a global approach with complex relations (Büscher 2014). Hence, the focus of liberation of neocolonial governance and post-apartheid structures of resource and landscape management stay subordinate to financial gains. It appears that the problem does not solely involve the commercialization of the ecosystem service provided by a PA. Instead, it seems to stem from the neocolonial transition, where those in power determine who has access to resources.

2.3.3 Wildlife tourism: comparing hunting tourism and photo tourism

The United Nations World Tourism Organization has defined sustainable tourism as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs n.d.). This section will focus on all three pillars mentioned above, economic, social, and environmental impacts, and how animal-based tourism may affect those.

The definition of wildlife tourism, nature-based tourism, and animal-based tourism vary in the literature. For the purpose of this thesis, a brief description is provided to clarify the definitions: *Nature-based tourism* involves tourists visiting national parks and wilderness areas, often in developing countries where much biodiversity can be found, with the goal to get back in touch with nature (Kuenzi and McNeely 2008; Masina, Boshoff, and Sifolo 2021). Nature-based tourism can be seen as the umbrella form of tourism, encompassing both wildlife and animal-based tourism. *Wildlife tourism* can be defined as a form of nature-based tourism, but it specifically includes consumptive and non-consumptive use of wild animals (Spenceley 2008). It has the potential to contribute to conservation practices in the area (Spenceley 2008). The visitors are often tourists from the developed world who aim to experience the wild animals of

the natural world, particularly in developing countries (Masina, Boshoff, and Sifolo 2021). Wildlife tourism aims to generate economic, environmental, and social benefits for the host country (Masina, Boshoff, and Sifolo 2021). *Animal-based tourism* proposes that tourists can actively interact with animals, physically or emotionally, and the animals play a crucial asset in the final experience of the trip (Bertella 2014). This thesis focuses specifically on wildlife tourism.

Nature-based tourism activities are framed as authentic and allow urbanized people to escape their lives in which they have been alienated from nature (von Essen, Lindsjö, and Berg 2020). These people are willing to pay a high price to rediscover the "wilderness" (von Essen, Lindsjö, and Berg 2020). While commodities seem absent in nature, the wilderness was turned into the ultimate commodity, and the only thing you see are commodities of nature (Igoe 2014). Wildlife tourism in South Africa focuses on presenting its unique wildlife to tourists who are willing to pay for an experience of wilderness. With the increase of wildlife tourism in the SANParks, the management did not believe that every form of wildlife tourism would benefit the communities satisfactorily (Reid 2001). The SANParks management believed that malaria and the insecurity of seeing the big five[5] would lead to disappointments for tourists (Reid 2001). Also, inaccessibility due to a lack of infrastructure has been mentioned as a constraint to visiting SANParks (Reid 2001; Kruger and Douglas 2015).

Tourist businesses found that economic profits from wildlife tourism are noteworthy (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020) and show potential to increase tourist numbers in eastern South Africa (Reid 2001; Spenceley 2005). The high demand for escaping urban life and the willingness for a back-to-nature experience shows the potential for an increase in the wildlife tourism industry (Saayman, Rossouw, and Saayman 2012). Up to 60% of all visitors to South Africa decide to participate in wildlife tourism activities (Spenceley 2005). With the potential for consumptive and non-consumptive wildlife tourism, the country has the potential to grow the industry significantly (Thomsen et al. 2022). The majority of KNP's revenue, approximately 80%, is generated through photo tourism and donations, which makes the park heavily dependent on tourism for financial stability. Wildlife tourism takes various forms, such as photo tourism and trophy hunting (TH), each with its unique approach to generating income. The contribution of

[5] "The term "Big Five" originally referred to the difficulty in hunting the lion, leopard, rhino, elephant and African buffalo. These five large African mammal species were known to be dangerous and it was considered a feat by trophy hunters to bring them home." (Nelson 2010, n.p.)

tourism to the development of South Africa's GDP coming from the KNP and private game reserves is significant and must be acknowledged. However, it is important to note that GDP alone does not ensure sustainable development or environmental well-being and should be considered as a separate benefit.

2.3.3.1 Trophy hunting tourism

Notably, a significant share, around 80%, of the revenue earned by four private game reserves within the KNP comes from the practice of TH (Chidakel, Eb, and Child, 2020). This involves the legalized hunting of game animals. The widespread practice of commodifying animals for tourist hunting is a common practice both internationally and in South Africa. "From the decade from 2011-2020, more than 300.000 trophy items derived from more than 300 species listed on the appendices of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)" (Jones 2023, n.p.). When counting all wildlife trophies, including from animals that are not endangered according to the CITES appendix, these numbers rise above 1.26 million, only imported to the United States (Jones 2023). Jones argues that most of these trophies come from Canada and South Africa. According to Bunn et al. (2023), TH and the hunt for meat contribute approximately 5.4 billion South African Rands (ZAR)[6] annually to South Africa's GDP, creating 17.685 jobs. These numbers could increase even more if the TH industry expands (Venter et al. 2008). The Amalgamates Banks of South Africa argue that TH can be up to four to five times more profitable than other forms of ecotourism, considering that shooting a white rhinoceros with a horn larger than 30 inches can cost up to 110,000 USD in revenue (Africa Hunt Lodge n.d.). However, it is important to consider the ethical implications of treating animals as commodities for profit.

According to Thomsen et al. (2022), the TH industry has allowed some community members to enhance their livelihoods and contribute to wildlife conservation while offering a way out from participation in poaching activities, all in the name of environmental empowerment. Although there is a lack of studies on the correlation between hunting tourism and poaching, this would argue for a strong relationship between economic and environmental empowerment within communities (Thomsen et al. 2022).

[6] On 24.07.2023, 09:02 UTC - 1 ZAR equals 0.050 Euro.

According to Thomsen et al. (2022), TH is connected to the neocolonial disempowerment of local communities in many Sub-Saharan African countries, causing frustration and placing the local people in a complex situation. There are many barriers for indigenous communities to hunt (Boudreaux 2010), which can lead to a loss of traditional hunting practices vital for local traditions and cultural conservation. Such distancing from traditional hunting methods may pose health challenges and difficulty accessing protein and other food sources (Thomsen et al. 2022). The neocolonial structures repeat themselves as the elites, the TH tour operators, and the hunters refuse to include local residents in their decision-making meetings, contrary to what is promised (Thomsen et al. 2022). While the TH enterprises argue that their money is reinvested in conservation, Packer (2015) and Jones (2023) argue the opposite. According to them, the income generated is reinvested in hunting tourism companies, tour operators, government officials, and foreign enterprises. They appear to reap the most benefits from TH (Jones 2023). The money generated through TH is invested in, for example, harvesting new species to be hunted again within the same reserve (Vermeulen 2022; Jones 2023).

In conclusion, TH enterprises related to tourism can certainly make a positive impact on nearby communities. The industry has the potential to offer financial aid for environmental conservation initiatives and aid in preventing illegal poaching activities. This ultimately benefits the tourism industry, allowing it to expand and advertise PAs and marketize its environmental goods. Besides the recognized benefits of TH, this chapter also underlined its downsides. Namely the unequal share of benefits, the lack of decision-making power for local or rural stakeholders, animal rights, the loss of traditional hunting practices for indigenous communities, and a neocolonial approach to conservation.

2.3.3.2 Photo safari tourism

Another popular form of wildlife tourism in South Africa is photo safari tourism. Whereas TH is often a source of income for private game reserves, photo tourism is the largest source of income for the rest of the KNP (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). Although no complete cost-benefit analysis has been done, it appears that ecotourism is the most profitable land-use method (Reid 2001). Considering TH's short-time income, photo tourism can lead up to years of income and could serve as a sustainable solution for tourism in PAs (Packer 2015). Capturing images of a mammal throughout its life can establish a long-term source of income, whereas a trophy only has a one-time value as a commodity (Packer 2015). Through photo tourism, job opportunities are created for locals who are trained and employed as tour guides (Saayman,

Rossouw, and Saayman 2012). Due to their training, the guides often know local rules and methods to impact the PA least (Spenceley 2005).

Due to the rise of technology and the access for amateurs to use professional cameras and high-quality smartphones to capture high-quality photographs, photo tourism increased its popularity (von Essen, Lindsjö, and Berg 2020). Photo tourism allows for both a physical and mental experience with the animals, as cars on self-driving safaris get the chance to get close to an animal to experience an interaction. In today's wildlife tourism industry, getting close to animals is essential for success, as it allows for physical and mental participation (Bertella 2014). Furthermore, photo safaris can be an indirect marketing tool, as pictures and videos will most likely be shared amongst family, friends, and other social media channels. The pictures can create a desire by homestayers to book their nature-based vacation (von Essen, Lindsjö, and Berg 2020). Wildlife as a marketing tool must be practiced cautiously as animal welfare and conservation practices must remain a priority (Spenceley 2005; Bunn et al. 2023).

Photo tourism contributes significantly to the wildlife economy in and around the KNP, providing employment opportunities and environmental education for local communities. Although photo tourism is considered safe for animals, the potential negative effects of prioritizing sales with marketing strategies and deviant behavior should be considered when analyzing its impacts on the environment and animal welfare.

2.3.4 The tourist desires, narratives, and expectations

2.3.4.1 Expectations and narratives of tourists

Sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966;1990) argue that the presence of phenomena determines our society. People construct their own reality within society through images, stories, and personal experiences. If someone their narrative aligns with our own reality, it is perceived as real. Therefore, the established narratives should be considered reality, as they are real in their consequences (Berger and Luckmann 1966;1990).

With tourism, new narrations can evolve and expand or reframe someone's reality. "A tourist [...] is an individual who has left his or her normal place of residence and has gone to a new place in order to gain new experiences, insights, and information" (Hitchcock 2019, 62). It is crucial to acknowledge that tourists frequently carry preconceived expectations of their destination before arriving. PAs are often promoted through documentaries, videos, and images,

which inspire visitors to explore these areas (Igoe 2014). The landscapes of South Africa are highly marketable, and the presence of wildlife makes them even more appealing. Tourism boomed with the marketization of wildlife and PAs, and the desire to visit "true wilderness" places became popular (Sterkl 2019). South African tourism destinations are often marketized as places of unique wilderness and the last chance to see "real nature" (von Essen, Lindsjö, and Berg 2020). The notion of "real nature" and "true wilderness" can be argued for as a colonial approach to nature, where a no-people landscape is the original landscape. To create a realistic representation of the marketized landscape, one could argue that it should include human presence and characterize a heterogenous landscape (von Essen, Lindsjö, and Berg 2020).

Nature is perceived as a momentous truth of reality but lacks actual social or historical connections (Igoe 2014). The narratives of the tourists define their expectations, and they must be willing to "look beyond the spectacle they have been shown [in the media,] to gain a more nuanced understanding of nature conservation in specific locales" (Igoe 2014, 215). This means that tourists must be open to changing their narratives if they are willing to understand the local environment. Not only has the actual space of nature been remodeled due to historical changes in land use, but also the media took its part in raising expectations when visiting nature (Igoe 2014). On the contrary, according to Ritterband (2019), tourists seek out destinations to experience authenticity and to expand their understanding of the place they are visiting. This can foster a new connection between tourists and hosts, allowing for adapted narrations and constructing enhanced realities (Lacey and Ilcan 2015).

2.3.4.2 Domestic and international tourism

The KNP is one of South Africa's most visited tourist attractions and largely depends on domestic tourists (Saayman, Rossouw, and Saayman 2012). Saayman, Rossouw, and Saayman (2012) have found that domestic tourism generates higher revenues than foreign tourism. The parks and reserves have become increasingly dependent on visitors from Southern Africa, especially since the beginning of the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (South African National Parks 2022). In the MGR, according to the surveyed data by Masina, Boshoff, and Sifolo (2021), 56% of the visitors were domestic South Africans. Domestic tourism supports a long-term sustainable tourism economy (Kruger and Douglas 2015).

According to Kruger and Douglas (2015), looking at the past, it shows that domestic tourism in South Africa was primarily enjoyed by white people due to the apartheid policies of

segregation. Therefore, the post-apartheid government has prioritized encouraging black domestic tourism (Kruger and Douglas 2015). Statistics from SANParks (2022) found an increase in black domestic tourism. In 2021 in total, 558.451 black South African domestic guests visited SANParks, representing 33.2% of the total South African visitors (Kruger and Douglas 2015; South African National Parks 2022). In their 2022 annual report, SANParks states that significant domestic travel reflects South Africans' love and admiration for their country's natural world.

Many domestic and international come from urban areas, looking to reconnect with nature outside of the city (von Essen, Lindsjö, and Berg 2020). When it comes to wildlife tourism, tourists typically choose their destination carefully and are often influenced by effective marketing efforts (Masina, Boshoff, and Sifolo 2021). Effective marketing includes the presentation of clean and inviting environments, the presentation of cultural, historical, and natural artifacts and phenomena, and unique experiences such as wildlife encounters (Masina, Boshoff, and Sifolo 2021). Furthermore, tourist motivations for travel are often driven by the desire to embark on an adventure, escape from real life, relax, visit friends, or gain knowledge (Kruger and Douglas 2015; Masina, Boshoff, and Sifolo 2021).

2.4 Environmental justice framework

2.4.1 Environmental justice scholarship

2.4.1.1 Defining environmental justice

Although EJ is not a new phenomenon, it has only been studied thoroughly over the past few decades. Over time, various scholars have defined, redefined, and applied the EJ framework. The EJ movement attempts to "achieve environmental equity for all groups within society through fair treatment and substantial involvement of people regardless of their racial and socio-economic background in the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies" (EPA 1998; Newton 2009 as cited in Gebeyehu et al. 2019, n.p.). Furthermore, EJ has become an "important framework for understanding battles over environmental conditions and sacred sites on indigenous lands" (Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010, 12), particularly in regions where indigenous communities were forced to sacrifice their environment and their entitlement to land (Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010).

The EJ framework recognizes that environmental resources are unequally shared, and it seeks to protect the rights of those who suffer most from imbalanced hegemonic exploitation and

deconstruction of natural resources (Swemmer et al. 2015; Gebeyehu et al. 2019). With "decent paying and safe jobs; quality schools and recreation; decent housing and adequate health care; democratic decision-making and personal empowerment; and communities free of violence, drugs, and poverty" (Bryant 1995 as cited in Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010, 14), EJ can be tackled. Similarly, according to the South African Environmental Justice Networking Forum, EJ is about

> "meeting basic human needs […] – economic quality, health care, housing, human rights, environmental protection, and democracy. In linking environmental and social justice issues the [EJ] approach seeks to challenge the abuse of power which results in poor people having to suffer the effects of environmental damage caused by the greed of others" (EJNF 1997 as cited in McDonald 2002, 4)

According to Schlosberg (2007), a significant gap in current research requires attention - the intersection of social justice and ecological justice perspectives. It is imperative that future research focuses on exploring both perspectives to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of EJ issues (Schlosberg 2007). This study aims to understand distributive EJ for all "terrestrials"[7] and advocates for EJ encompassing both the human and non-human world. This implies that humans can derive advantages from a healthy environment and ecosystem while simultaneously ensuring that the non-human environment benefits from human involvement. This is achieved by recognizing the viewpoints of both indigenous and Western ideologies beyond the Sustainable Development Goal framework established by the UN (Breidlid and Krøvel 2020).

The Brundtland Report, written in 1987, outlined the rights of humans living within and adjacent to conservation areas worldwide. The report introduced the concept of sustainable development within the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) and proposed that "intergenerational equity could not be achieved unless the environmental impacts of economic activities were considered" (WCED 1987, 43 as cited in Spenceley 2005, 137). The Brundtland Report presents a human-centered approach to conservation, where people have the right *to* the environment (Leiman 2014). It entails the approach that using nature should contribute to human well-being and development (Boluk et al. 2021; Saarinen 2021). While the Brundtland Report has been criticized for its anthropogenic approach, it has played a vital role

[7] According to Bruno Latour, "Terrestrials" refers to all living creatures on Earth and their participation in global politics (Latour 2018).

in pursuing EJ through the redistribution of land in South Africa (Bond 2000) and assisting in lifting people out of poverty by commodifying their environmental goods (McDonald 2002). With a community-based approach to the equitable use of environmental resources, CBNRM uses the environment sustainably to improve the livelihoods and quality of life of local people (Fabricius and Sisitka 2003).

2.4.1.2 Distributive environmental justice

Contemporary EJ studies are seen as the second generation of research, which has expanded to cover a broader geographic than the first generation, which mainly focused on the USA (Coolsaet and Álvarez 2018). In the second generation of research, Schlosberg introduced an analytical framework consisting of four EJ dimensions: "distribution, recognition, participation, capabilities" (Coolsaet and Álvarez 2018, 54). Although all four dimensions are imperative, this thesis emphasizes the framework of distributive justice. Distributive justice concentrates on communities that are considered minorities within society who experience unequal access to natural resources and are disproportionately affected by the environment (Schlosberg 2007). The EJ framework aims to understand the distribution of goods and how these are used to sustainably develop communities that suffer from environmental injustices (Schlosberg 2007). According to Schlosberg and Carruthers, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum focus their theory of EJ on the capacity of society and the individual to "function fully in the lives they choose for themselves" (2010, 15). They argue that distributive EJ should focus on how distributions affect people's well-being and functioning, not only on how goods, commodities, or ecosystem services are distributed (Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010). Distributive EJ research investigates the distribution of environmental resources and how their byproducts are distributed within society. Its goal is to identify ways to ensure everyone can benefit from these resources while addressing imbalanced power dynamics that can result in environmental injustices (McDonald 2002).

2.4.1.3 The Western understanding of environmental justice

The concept of EJ is often defined within the Western understanding of justice, lacking regional context (Coolsaet and Álvarez 2018). The underlying conditions for justice must be incorporated in the correct context, which can differentiate between countries, regions, or communities (Sen 1999). "Rather than offering a specific, universal set of capabilities to be met for all people, [Sen] insists in public reason and deliberation – a community-based approach – to develop more specific, contextual, capability sets" (Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010, 16). A

deliberate and regional approach to conservation must consider the values of all stakeholders. With the standpoint that humans were not meant to be part of a PA, the colonizers in South Africa overruled the capabilities and freedoms of indigenous South Africans at the beginning of the 20th century (Carruthers 1995). For centuries, traditional communities coexisted with wildlife and natural hazards, facing their own challenges and dealing with coexistence in their own ways (Modise et al. 2018). However, the colonialists enforced their beliefs about what was most beneficial for the environment under the guise of conservation, implementing conservation policies with Western values and ideologies (Reid 2001). It appears that these policies may not have fully considered the potential effects on the socio-economic welfare of the local communities (McDonald 2002). Indigenous people were disowned and, over time, alienated from their land and the natural resources they needed for their livelihood (McDonald 2002; Bunn et al. 2023).

Second-generation EJ research finds an increase in studies concerning racial inequalities and connecting cultural and environmental issues using decolonial theories (Coolsaet and Álvarez 2018). Decolonial EJ theories acknowledge the difference between colonialism and coloniality.

> "colonialism refers to political and historical moments that ended with the political independence of the last colonies in the 1960s, whereas coloniality refers to the diversity of practices that derive from the matrix of power created by colonialism and are still at work within contemporary, post-colonial societies" (Maldonado-Torred 2016 as cited in Coolsaet and Álvarez 2018).

Meaning in the scope of this thesis, that South Africa, despite no longer being under the colonial power of the Netherlands and Great Britain, the colonial occupation still influenced its history and so its contemporary practices, culture, and tradition (McDonald 2002). The forceful removal of people from their land in South Africa caused colonial trauma and resulted in many being settled in areas with insufficient ecosystem services for the population (Njononkulu Ngungane 2002). Therefore, when studying EJ in a formerly colonized country, it is important to consider the colonial legacy of the case, as environmental injustices may be a consequence of colonial history. This is especially true in South Africa, where "the legacies of apartheid and the heavy correlation between race and class […] are such that racial classifications remain an integral part of political analysis" (McDonald 2002, xi). By studying the EJ literature, we can see how it increasingly acknowledges social and local issues such as race, class, and gender (McDonald 2022). This has transformed the framework into a diverse, intersectional, and interdisciplinary field in science (McDonald 2002).

2.4.2 The distributive justice of environmental goods

When discussing the distributive justice of the environment, the assumption must be made that humans have the right to a fair share of natural resources. As mentioned before, the Brundtland Report expresses the humans' right *to* the environment, inconsiderate of the rights *of* the environment (Leiman 2014). CBNRM, or in other words, the decentralization, participation, and community involvement in environmental resource management, is strongly encouraged when redefining the current inferior role of the environment in economic or political decisions (Cocks, Dold, and Grundy 2001; Khan 2002).

With the growing tourism industry, natural resources are increasingly being utilized in a market-driven approach through photo safaris or hunting expeditions (Thulin and Röcklinsberg 2020). They are marketized globally through documentaries, advertisements, and other tourism campaigns (Igoe 2014). This has also given rise to the concept of "true wilderness" and other marketing strategies (Sterkl 2019; Zips and Zips-Mairitsch 2019). It is arguable to which extent local communities benefit from their resources besides them being a commodity for tourists. While the wildlife is commodified for tourism leisure, Kruger and Douglas (2015) expressed their concerns that many locals living adjacent to the KNP have never been able to witness the wildlife themselves due to financial constraints. At the same time, local individuals have expressed increased personal economic growth through participating in the tourism industry (Zips and Zips-Mairitsch 2019).

It has been questioned by McDonalds (2002) whether a market-based approach to resource management a solution for ensuring a fair distribution of environmental goods is. The market-based approach to environmental resource management is "believed to avoid the tragedy of the commons by privatizing certain resources, and is viewed as a strategic tool for communicating the value of biodiversity" (Kopnina 2017). This would assume that a neoliberal approach can allow efficient access to resources. On the other hand, the tragedy of the commons theory suggests that individuals, when seeking access to resources, will prioritize maximizing their own benefits through rational decision-making (Hardin 1968). While using a neoliberal approach to avoid the tragedy of the commons argument may have some merit, it is worth noting that often the local communities do not seem to reap any benefits from the profits generated by the market-based approach to resource management (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). Meaning that the neoliberal approach is not benefiting societal minorities or those in

need of environmental resources for their livelihood. Kopnina (2017) expresses her concerns about the potential negative impact of the neoliberal approach to resource management. She argues that this approach could lead to an unfair distribution of environmental goods and risks. In her research, Kopnina (2017) concludes that neoliberal conservation results in a rise of corrupt state governance, allowing private businesses to profit from resource extraction at the expense of vulnerable communities and environments, causing environmental injustices.

2.4.2.1 Coloniality and distributive justice of environmental goods

As Coolsaet and Álvarez (2018) found, environmental injustices have origins in power inequalities that directly affect marginalized people. In the context of this thesis, it refers to individuals who have been colonized and subjected to subordinate treatment due to racist policies. They currently face challenges such as limited access to ancestral land, natural resources, and benefits from the resources in the area (Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010). Additionally, they lack access to education and knowledge on sustainably managing these resources (Fabricius and Sisitka 2003). While acknowledging those components of inequitable environmental distribution due to colonial history, Coolsaet and Álvarez (2018) argue that within the framework of equitably distributing environmental goods and risks, it should be considered that certain cultures have another understanding of modes of life and might not be compatible with a Western capitalist approach to benefit sharing. By rethinking the distribution of nature in a post-colonial time, place-bound research can allow us to understand the "remainders of colonialism that are still at work in our discourses and practices, while at the same time providing us with alternatives to a Western model of society" (Coolsaet and Álvarez 2018, 54). Involving place-based knowledge and local communities in the decision-making regarding benefit sharing and land use of the KNP and surrounding reserves is, according to Bunn et al. (2023), a more appropriate way of commodifying environmental resources beyond just their monetary value. This approach emphasizes making informed and equitable decisions considering human and non-human stakeholders (Swemmer et al. 2015), fading coloniality in the contemporary approach to conservation.

2.4.3 Distributive justice of income generated with the commodification of nature

2.4.3.1 Profits, expenditures, investments, and benefits

It is unclear how much the communities who settled the land claims in their favor benefit from their partnership with the KNP (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). Especially indirect benefits are complex to measure and define. According to Swemmer et al. (2015), benefits can vary in type,

meaning being either “economic, social, ecological, cultural and political […] but all benefits by definition play a role in improving people’s well-being” (2015, 3). The notion of well-being goes thus way beyond material wealth, including “our happiness, confidence, physical condition, and general outlook on life” (Swemmer et al. 2015, 3). This section will focus on the benefits of capital generated through the commodification of the environment.

The unemployment rate in the KNP area is 40.8%, which is 14.1% higher than the average unemployment rate in South Africa (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). Amongst the youth, the unemployment rate lies at 44%. Most of the youth within this 44% are currently also not trained nor attending any education (Bunn et al. 2023). It should be recognized that the chance for young black entrepreneurs to develop businesses in the wildlife economy on the west side of the KNP is low. Training programs fail to invest in skill development for young people, and there are many difficulties in obtaining loans or starting capital (Bunn et al. 2023). According to the annual report of the KNP, the full-time equivalent of jobs in the KNP was 5406, with a total of 1.2 million person-days (South African National Parks 2020). In 2022 the full-time equivalent jobs expanded to 6065, counting annually for almost 1.4 million person-days (South African National Parks 2022). Each job taken in the Greater KNP sustains another 1.43 jobs outside the system (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). In the Mpumalanga region in 2022, 50,8% of the population lived below the lower-bound poverty line of 810 ZAR per month (Sithole 2022). According to the data published by the government of the Mpumalanga province (2022), 96.000 people lost their jobs in the Mpumalanga region as a direct impact of the COVID-19 lockdowns, increasing the unemployment rate from 43.9% in Q1 of 2020 to 46.4% in Q4 of 2020. The South African government strives to lower unemployment by creating job opportunities in the conservation and biodiversity industry. However, it has reduced subsidies for this sector in favor of private sector involvement and market-based mechanisms (Ramutsindela and Shabangu 2013). According to their annual report (2022), the KNP expects to gain 110.000 jobs, contributing 47 billion ZAR to South Africa's GDP.

Investments from the South African government and the KNP aim to include adjacent communities to increase job opportunities, have joint control over the land, and build good relationships between conservationists, local communities, and traditional leaders (South African National Parks 2022). SANParks acknowledge that some of their national parks were established on land belonging to indigenous inhabitants and that past injustices should be compensated fairly. As argued by Bunn et al. (2023), the focus of the government on the

wildlife economy and the attempt therein to include rural communities in the wildlife economy "are a response to a far older, destructive paradox: the violently inequitable ownership of natural resources in South Africa" (Bunn et al. 2023, 4). The KNP donate live game and game meat to the communities in need and use parts of the profits to invest in community development (South African National Parks 2022).

The annual report by SANParks (2022) documented a total revenue of 2.7 billion ZAR, compared to the total revenue of R3.16 billion in 2019, arguing that the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to travel restrictions and interruptions in commercial tourism, had a direct and immediate impact on the financial results of the KNP (South African National Parks 2020; 2022). The decreasing numbers due to COVID-19 lockdowns show the economic dependency of direct financial income generated through tourism for conservation, poverty alleviation, and development. As a result of the COVID-19 crisis and the current recovery period, the KNP and surrounding game reserves (both private and governmental) are seeing the importance of tourism for creating job opportunities (South African National Parks 2022). Tourist spending is seen as 'new' money, which can benefit the local communities if distributed fairly (Saayman, Rossouw, and Saayman 2012). By sharing the benefits, the development of rural communities can lead to a higher employment rate in higher employment positions.

The government and the KNP continuously invest in tourism enterprises and tourism development (South African National Parks 2022). The KNP follows a Corporate Social Investment Programme approach by investing 1% of all tourist accommodation bookings and activities towards developing the communities living near the KNP (South African National Parks 2022). These investments allow the communities to develop, educate, and decrease abuse, poverty, and crime in the villages. (South African National Parks 2022).

2.4.3.2 Perspectives on local involvement in resource distribution

According to Gaodirelwe, Masunga, and Motsholapheko (2020), the communities close to the PAs have limited land access and few business opportunities to compete in the already established tourism industry. The local residents feel they have little say in the decision-making process of management and future planning at the KNP (Saayman, Rossouw, and Saayman 2012).

Not all communities are satisfied with the PAs being so close to their villages. The communities express their fear of animals escaping from the parks, damaging their crops and cattle (Anthony 2007; Boudreaux 2010; Saayman, Rossouw, and Saayman 2012; Mahony and Van Zyl 2021). The fear of wildlife in the area is not unsubstantiated as it can significantly impact the livestock properties of the communities. The human-wildlife conflicts are rarely or poorly compensated (Spenceley 2005). When compensated, it is usually done only in monetary form. According to Spenceley (2005), communities may prefer another form of compensation, such as employment or more involvement in decision-making bodies and meetings (Spenceley 2005). From a neoliberal and anthropogenic perspective, monetary compensation is sufficient as all environmental goods can be commodified. This includes animal living creatures such as cattle (Bunn et al. 2023). The goods are commensurable by assigning them a monetary value based on "the substantial benefits that ecosystems provide to humans, which should be considered in economic, political, and ecological discourse" (Foody 2015; TEEB 2010 as cited in European Commission 2015, 19). In conclusion, while goods can be commensurable through a monetary valuation, this approach does not acknowledge the wishes nor the demands of rural communities when they suffer the loss of cattle or crops due to poor fencing and tourism.

According to the data collected by Spenceley (2005), the majority (63%) of the community members in villages adjacent to the KNP find that the benefits of tourism are not enough to make up for the problems they face with wildlife. Therefore, to encourage wildlife conservation in and around the village, the locals want the benefits from tourism to be shared with the communities (Spenceley 2005). Private tourism companies should be encouraged to improve their local community engagement in their corporate social responsibility to promote and appreciate wildlife and its conservation (Gaodirelwe, Masunga, and Motsholapheko 2020). Gaining benefits for the local communities should have priority. According to Boluk et al. (2021), power relations between local communities and current tourist operators and (local) governments should shift toward equal involvement to establish sustainable tourism. They argue that tourist businesses, especially large multinational companies, should stop seeking as much profit as possible and extracting tourism opportunities for financial benefit. But instead, they should focus on establishing a sustainable business where environmental, social, and economic equity is the goal. Eventually, the goal should be for communities to be in charge of both the costs and the benefits of conservation and be the agents of their land (McDonald 2002).

The numbers show that in SANParks, approximately 80% of the employees are people from the local area, while "for the private reserves only 55% of wages are captured locally" (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020, 8). In the area around the KNP, one employee in the tourism industry makes a living to provide for about 4.3 dependents (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). These numbers show that it is crucial to employ people from the local area and invest in their skill development so they can fill the higher-skilled jobs within the reserves (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). The economic sector and neoliberal environment often schedule their business on short-term success, contrasting the intergenerational aim of sustainable development, where future generations should be enabled to benefit from the same resources as current generations (Saarinen 2021). While from a CBNRM approach, a project should not start when the long-term goals are not worked out (Fabricius and Sisitka 2003).

According to Chidakel, Eb, and Child (2020), tourism businesses in the KNP and adjacent areas provide financial resources to social development organizations for rural communities. Besides direct economic benefits, non-direct economic benefits should also be considered. For example, the increase in employment, skill development, educational development opportunities, happiness, and outlook on life. Other non-direct financial benefits could also include protection of land against outside threats, support for local people, establishment of facilities, enabling loans and grants, and strengthening cultural and spiritual values (Fabricius and Sisitka 2003). Although communities acknowledge how national parks contributed positively to their life in terms of infrastructures, biodiversity, and tourism opportunities (Saayman, Rossouw, and Saayman 2012), the financial costs and benefits of the national park, in terms of ecotourism which are not directly located in the park, are not equally shared, especially considering the communities living adjacent to the KNP (Carruthers 1995; Gaodirelwe, Masunga, and Motsholapheko 2020). Many funds derived from tourism and income distribution do not follow economic empowerment goals and instead sustain existing inequalities (Thomsen et al. 2022). The SANParks recognize that the rural areas that are located around the national parks have limited opportunities in the job market due to low education, which is due to the vicious circle of high unemployment rates, low quality of teaching, and high levels of poverty (South African National Parks 2022).

2.5 Summary of the literature review

The literature review provides a broad overview of the current literature, debates, and challenges regarding the wildlife tourism industry in PAs in the K2C BR. A concise introduction to the political history of South Africa provides the reader with the necessary background and debate around land ownership. The current research highlights the underrepresentation of disadvantaged communities in management positions in PAs. This study will add to the existing literature by exploring how CBWT businesses can be utilized as a resource to enhance their skills. The second section of the literature captures the concept of neoliberal conservation. Existing literature has criticized neoliberal conservation and promoted CBNRM to promote the sustainable use of environmental resources for tourism. This study will provide place-based examples of the commodification of environmental resources, its benefits, and its downsides. The final part of the literature review explores the theoretical framework of EJ, which is utilized in this study to theoretically conclude with practical examples regarding the equal distribution of environmental resources within the tourism industry.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopted a case study approach and was conducted in April-July 2023 in the K2C BR. A case-study approach was adopted to evaluate the effectiveness of wildlife-dependent community-based enterprises in the K2C BR. The current study uses qualitative analysis to gain insights into local people's perspectives on their political situations, how they value nature and wildlife as a resource of income, and how they perceive EJ. The thesis aims at understanding the correlation between wildlife tourism, the commodification of nature, and distributive EJ. By taking an inductive approach, the qualitative analysis enabled the author to capture real-world and local perspectives on CBNRM and CBT and comprehend their expectations for the future of communities and sustainable wildlife tourism. With the collected data, the thesis aims to provide new insights into the existing knowledge on community-based tourism (CBT) within the framework of decolonizing conservation and pursuing EJ. Furthermore, this thesis will provide policy and management recommendations for developing a CBNRM approach to the tourism industry in South Africa.

A literature review was conducted of studies that could identify the three main concepts and build a knowledge body on the current state of research. The three main concepts were:

1. the colonial history of conservation and land claims in the KNP and surrounding reserves and how it affects the tourism industry,
2. the role of CBNRM and CBWT in contrast to neoliberal conservation and current tourism practices in the KNP and surrounding reserves,
3. and the EJ framework, the equitable distribution of nature, and income generated with the commodification of nature.

Qualitative methods offer an effective way of understanding local perspectives. The qualitative data, conducted during the fieldwork, enabled first-hand insights from five groups of research participants with each of their criteria. The first group of interviewees consisted of two tourists visiting the WOTC. They were interviewed together, as they were traveling together. The second group of interviewees consisted of three people working for the WOTC. The third group consisted of ten people living in the village of Welverdiend but not working for the WOTC. Two interviews were done within group three; one was done as a group interview of nine women, and the other was with one woman. The fourth group consisted of four people with a

managing role in the WOTC business. The fifth group consisted of four people working within the Kruger 2 Canyons Non-Profit Company (K2C NPC), who should be considered experts on topics touched upon in the thesis. Table 2 provides insight into the interview participants, the research participant group they are assigned to, the pseudonym of their name, their role within the K2C BR, and the type of interview that was conducted. The following paragraphs will discuss the data collection and methods more thoroughly.

Nr.	Name	Stakeholder	Interview type
1	Anja	Tourist	Semi-structured with Thomas
1	Thomas	Tourist	Semi-structred with Anja
2	Kwame	WOTC employee	Semi-structured
2	Lesedi	WOTC employee	Semi-structured
2	Tyra	WOTC employee	Semi-structured
3	Abena	Welverdiend citizen	Semi-structured
3	Woman in craft	Welverdiend citizen	Focus group with translator
4	Anna	The Cooperative	Narrative
4	Arno	Indalo Inclusive	Semi-structured
4	Henry	The Cooperative	Semi-structured
4	Theo	The Cooperative	Semi-structured
5	Audrey	Private game reserve employee	Semi-structured
5	Bruno	State veterinary	Semi-structured
5	Mia	K2C employee	Semi-structured
5	Scarlett	Private game reserve employee	Semi-structured

*All names have been pseudonymized

Table 2: Overview of the interview partners, showing their interview group, the pseudonym for their name, their role in the study area, and the type of interview that they were part of. Table created by author.

3.2 Qualitative data collection and analysis

In total, twenty-three adults consented to their participation in the interviews. Coming from a different continent and culture, the first research cycle consisted of two weeks in the field, focusing on getting to know the study area. The first research cycle furthermore consisted of a

narrative interview that aimed to explore latent meanings of the way of speech from the local culture. The second research cycle consisted of semi-structured interviews. The narrative interview and the objective hermeneutic analysis served as a tool to design a culturally appropriate semi-structured questionnaire. The data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed in the final research cycle according to the thematic analysis.

All the interviews for this study were conducted in English. One interview was translated with the help of a local who speaks fluent Tsonga and English. The names of the interviewees have been pseudonymized to ensure anonymity. When data saturation was reached, recruiting more participants was put on hold. All interviews were transcribed, coded, and categorized with the help of the software package of NVivo 20.0. The software allowed to organize and compare the data from each interview. Through the software, some main categories were developed, which will be discussed in the results chapter.

3.2.1 Narrative interview

A narrative interview was done to achieve a cultural understanding and introduction to the latent meaning of the use of words in a culture different than the culture of the author. According to Rosenthal et al. (2002), narrative interviews allow for an understanding of the latent orientation of the interviewee. Besides understanding latent structures in speech, the interview also provided a broad understanding of the impact of the establishment of the K2C BR and the WOTC for the community of Welverdiend. The narrative interview was conducted with one interviewee from research group four and lasted 35 minutes. The other groups were less relevant for a narrative interview approach as they might either not be aware of the establishment of the WOTC or not benefit directly from the WOTC as an employer. The chosen interviewee has a managing role at the WOTC and was selected due to her connection with other stakeholders in the area and the length of her employment for the WOTC. Also, the interview partner is originally from the nearby village of Welverdiend.

The narrative interview began with a written form of consent. In the attempt to make the situation as comfortable as possible, the interviewee was asked to choose a location where she would feel comfortable to talk. This was her office. After consent was given and the place was decided, the recording started, and with small talk, a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere was created. After the interviewee gave the impression that she felt comfortable, the main interview began with the question: "*Tell me about your life since the establishment of the Wild Olive Tree*

Camp." The question allowed for an analysis of perspectives and observations of a local towards the WOTC or the K2C BR and how it impacted her life and livelihood. It also allowed to gain insights into the interviewees' perspectives on the tourism industry and local wildlife. According to Rosenthal et al. (2002), the introductory question in a narrative interview should be asked so that it invites the interviewee to a longer narration. The interviewer only shows signs of affection and promotion of the interviewee (Rosenthal et al. 2002). The first phase of the interview ends when the interviewee sets a final statement such as "That is all I have to say" or "I don't know what else I should say." Questions that arose during the narration could be asked in the next phase of the interview. The second phase serves to ask more in-depth about topics that were mentioned and might be of interest to this study.

3.2.2 Objective hermeneutics

The narrative interview was analyzed according to the method of objective hermeneutics, which was developed by Ulrich Oevermann in the 1970s to reconstruct the latent meaning of the data (Wernet 2006). This approach advantages the research, as it allows for a deeper understanding of deviant cultures for the author. With understanding how words and concepts are used in a narration, the narrative interview serves to gather knowledge to improve the semi-structured interview questionnaire, which was used after the narrative interview.

The method of objective hermeneutics follows six steps in the analysis, according to Wernet (2006), and are listed below.

1. Interpretation of the objective data, meaning the biographic knowledge of the interviewee, such as age, place of birth, occupation, and family situation.
2. Segmentation of the transcript, meaning to divide paragraphs into codes to get an overview of important issues touched upon by the interviewee.
3. Analysis of the start of the interview, as it often starts with a statement that reveals a dilemma or sketches the state of mind.
4. Analysis of a maximum of 3 further paragraphs discussing different themes. The result leads to varying interpretations of the paragraphs, leading to one hypothesis. The hypothesis serves to answer the research question.
5. Test the hypothesis for modifications and falsifications with the remaining text sequences.
6. Interview and interpret cases to further elaborate on the research questions answers.

When following the steps mentioned above to analyze the narrative interviews, it is essential to interpret the sequences word for word. Especially when a sequence appears irrelevant, it could still be significant in developing a case structure hypothesis (Wernet 2006). Additionally, comprehending the spoken words' latent meanings is crucial. The sequences must be interpreted context-free without any preconceived assumptions. Thus, the analysis should only focus on the words that are currently being analyzed, leaving out further knowledge of the interview.

For this study, one narrative interview was done and analyzed according to the methods of objective hermeneutics. The results mainly served to design the semi-structured questionnaire, which will shortly be elaborated on in the results and discussion section.

3.2.3 Semi-structured interviews

Using the knowledge gained with the analysis of the narrative interviews, the second research cycle aimed to achieve an in-depth understanding of specific issues essential to answering the research question. The questions were prepared before the interviews took place. Due to the five different groups that were questioned according to the semi-structured interviewing tools, five different questionnaires were designed. The method of the semi-structured interviews was chosen to compare the answers of the different interview participants. Therefore, the questions needed to overlap within the different questionnaire designs for the research groups. The method of the questionnaire was based on the following six themes:

1. Theme one aimed to understand the motivations of people or businesses within their role as a stakeholder in the area.
2. Theme two aimed to understand the perspectives of both businesses and individuals on the MGR and land claims.
3. Theme three questioned perspectives on the current and future situation in the context of local livelihood, conservation, sustainable wildlife tourism, equal opportunities, CBNRM, and CBWT.
4. Theme four questioned the interviewees' perspectives on valuating ecosystem services and the value of environmental goods, including wildlife.
5. Theme five questioned current policies on tourism, community protection, and ecosystem services. This theme aims to understand how stakeholders believe EJ can be pursued within current societal structures.
6. Theme six questions perspectives on government involvement, the role of private entities, and stakeholder responsibility for local development.

The participants of the semi-structured were asked to sign the consent form or give verbal consent before the interviews. After consent was given, the interviews started with a basic introduction question. *"Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?"* After establishing a comfortable situation, the interviewer would start the primary questionnaire. Within semi-structured interviews, it is crucial to ask open-ended questions and to let the interviewee speak as freely as they wish (Baur and Blasius 2014). Once the interviewer gets the confirmation that a question is fully answered, they can ask a follow-up question on something that the interviewee mentioned or proceed with the next question from the pre-structured questionnaire. During narrative interviews, interviewers should only ask for elaboration on topics after the first research cycle is finished. In contrast, in semi-structured interviews, the interviewee can ask follow-up questions or request clarification from the interviewee if needed. This approach allows a more direct understanding of the interviewee's responses (Baur and Blasius 2014).

In total, fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted, and they lasted between 30 and 90 minutes each. One interview questioned two, and one interview surveyed nine participants simultaneously. The interview with nine participants was approached as a focus group interview. The interviewees were mainly selected through the so-called snowball method. Starting with interviewing people with a managing role, they were glad to inform me about other people from the area who could assist in answering questions or had the right knowledge to answer specific questions. Other interviewees were selected because they are part of the community in which this case study is involved: the people of Welverdiend who are part of the Mnisi community. The tourists were selected due to them visiting the WOTC. As there were not many tourists during the fieldwork, the choice of interview partners was low.

3.2.4 Thematic analysis

The semi-structured interviews will be analyzed according to the thematic analysis. This method systematically processes interview data (Williams and Moser 2019). Establishing an organized approach to coding reduces impeded outcomes. Before conducting the interviews, five themes were established that would be discussed, aligned with the research questions. This means that the themes were established beforehand and would be controlled afterward by the codes found through the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews.

The thematic analysis focuses on three steps; open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Williams and Moser 2019). Open coding is the first step in the thematic analysis to analytically identify phenomena in the data (Corbin and Strauss 2015). The researcher organizes similar words and phrases from the interviews to create an overview of the conducted data (Williams and Moser 2019). Open coding assists in reducing large amounts of data into manageable categories (Corbin and Strauss 2015). The codes were sometimes redefined or merged by reading and re-reading the interviews and field notes. After establishing the open codes, the foundation for the axial codes is set.

The second step in the thematic analysis is axial coding, which Corbin and Strauss define as "the process of relating categories to their subcategories, termed "axial" because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions" (2015, 123). Hence, the codes which arose in the first step will now be consolidated into categories. Axial coding will assist in identifying relationships between the different codes and develop "core codes" (Williams and Moser 2019, 50). Codes related to each other or fitting in the pre-established research themes can form a category. It allows to think about relationships between the open codes (Corbin and Strauss 2015). With the help of the axial codes or categories, the data can be structured into overarching themes referred to in the theory.

The final step of the thematic analysis is selective coding, intending to transform data into theory (Corbin and Strauss 2015). Because the main themes of this thesis were decided before the interviews, selective coding served merely as a tool to prove that the themes were valuable in answering the research question. The categories established with axial coding are now "organized around a central explanatory concept" (Corbin and Strauss 2015). According to Williams and Moser, the results from selective coding allow to design stories "that accurately and powerful present the sum of the progressive coding process" (2019, 53). With the help of both the open codes and the axial codes, the themes were validated and saturated in this thesis's results and discussion section.

3.3 Case study: The Wild Olive Tree Camp and the people of Welverdiend

The following section introduces the case study of this thesis. A case study approach was chosen to engage the outcomes in a local context.

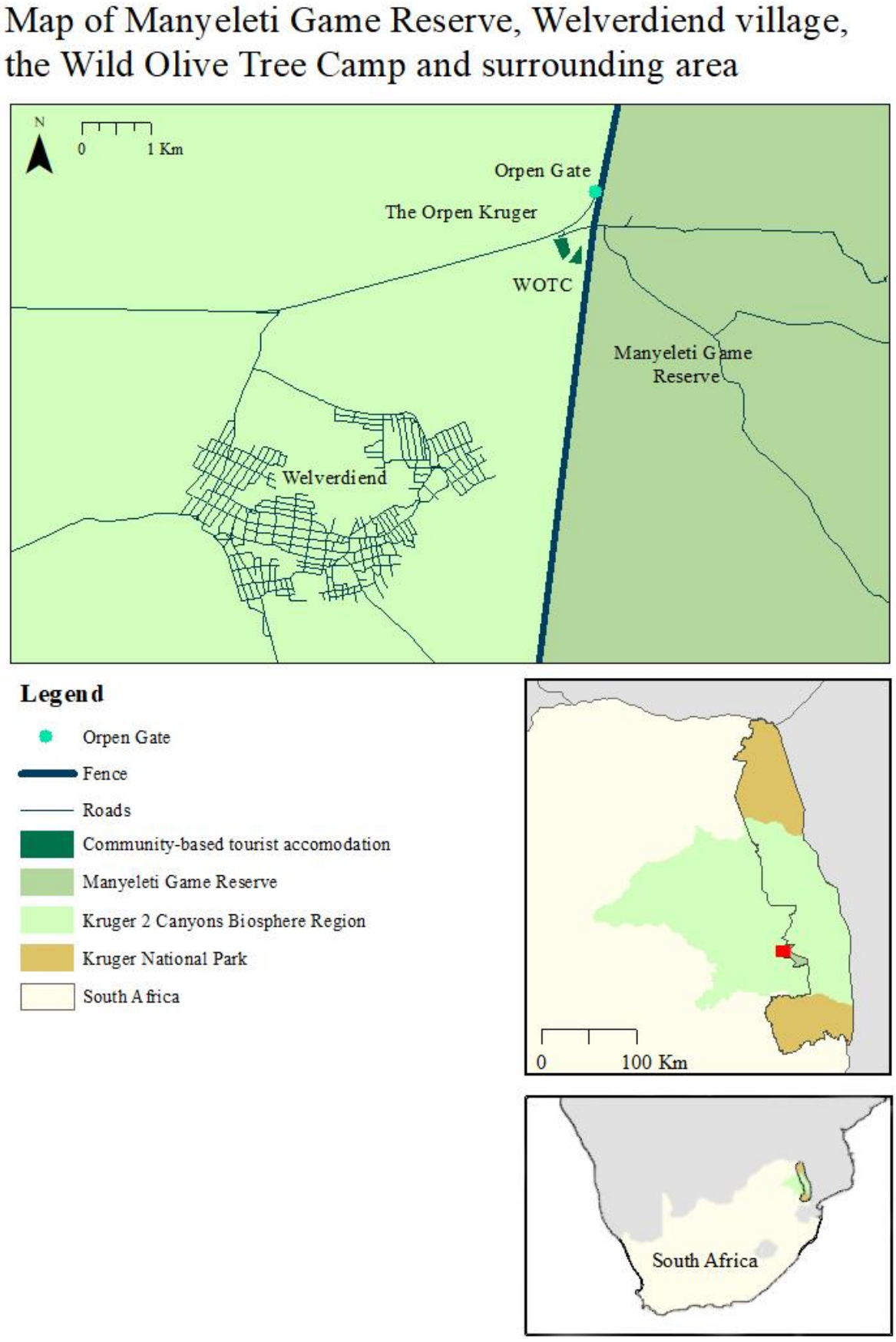

Figure 1: Map of the Manyeleti Game Reserve, Welverdiend village, the Wild Olive Tree Camp, and surrounding area. Map created by the author. Sources: Natural Earth Data, countries; Kruger 2 Canyons Biosphere Region; Geofabrik. The fence, the gate, and the two camps are digitized.

3.3.1 The Wild Olive Tree Camp

The WOTC is a community-owned camp with twelve safari tents built by the community members of the Mnisi (Wild Olive Tree Camp n.d.). Because the camp runs entirely on solar energy, load shedding does not directly affect it[8]. As seen in Figure 1, the camp is built on the land next to the village of Welverdiend and next to the fence to the MGR. This area is about 50ha. The surface[9] of the WOTC itself is not bigger than 2 km^2. On the same land, The Orpen Kruger, a luxury lodge, is built and owned by the same community members who call themselves "the cooperative[10]."

According to their website, the WOTC is a unique project next to the MGR, which they call the "place of the many stars" (Wild Olive Tree Camp n.d.) They state that the camp offers the ultimate African rural experience as you can hear the lions roar and the hyenas calling at night. They offer community tours through Welverdiend where tourists can "learn about the local Tribes, Chiefdom and lifestyle" (Wild Olive Tree Camp n.d.).

The WOTC opened for visitors in 2013, while The Orpen Kruger only opened in October 2022. For comparison, one night for one person at the WOTC, including dinner and breakfast, costs around 990 ZAR. One night for one person at The Orpen Kruger costs 5813 ZAR, including dinner and breakfast. The WOTC is located next to the Orpen Gate entrance to the MGR and the Kruger National Park, making it a convenient place for tourists to stay. The Orpen Gate entrance lies in the east of the Mpumalanga province in South Africa.

[8] Load shedding is a method used in South Africa where controlled power cuts are implemented by the state-owned electricity utility Eskom (Mkhize 2022) in different regions of the country on a rotating basis (Igamba 2023). This is done on a daily basis according to a region-based time schedule. As stated by Igamba from Greenpeace South Africa (2023), load shedding could result in residents being without power for up to six hours a day.

[9] Rough estimate based on google maps legend

[10] The cooperative is known as the Mutlhwareni cooperative but is called as "the cooperative" within the community, which is why this thesis will refer to them accordingly. Muthlwareni is the Shangaan translation for a wild olive tree.

Figure 2: Picture of the entrance of the Wild Olive Tree Camp. Picture made by the author. 8 May 2023.

Figure 3: Picture made from the observation tower at the Wild Olive Tree Camp. On the right side you find the land that belongs to the Welverdiend community, and on the left side you see the Manyeleti Game Reserve. The land is bordered by a fence. Picture made by the author. 9 May 2023.

3.3.2 The Mnisi community and Manyeleti land claims

The WOTC borders with the MGR, a privately-owned reserve that reaches up to 22.750 ha. The MGR is situated in the former Gazanhulu homelands of apartheid South Africa (Mahony and Van Zyl 2021) and lies along the western boundary of the KNP (de Koning 2010). In 1922, the unoccupied land was used and settled by the Mnisi community for grazing and subsistence farming until 1964. When the apartheid government removed the Mnisi without their consent or compensation, they developed the land into a game reserve accessible for black people (Balyamujura and Van Schalkwyk 1999) as the KNP was only accessible for white people (de Koning 2010). After the end of the apartheid government in 1994, 253 households of the Mnisi community started to reclaim their tribal land. The Manyeleti Conservation Trust represented these households, which led to success in 2010, where the majority of claims were resolved (de Koning 2010). All the claimants agreed that the land should not be used for human settlement but only for conservation (de Koning 2010). The same agreement encompasses benefits for the landowners of the MGR and neighboring communities within a radius of 5 km from the game reserve (de Koning 2010), including:

- ownership of fixed assets and infrastructure to the Mnisi community,
- hundred percent of revenues, including the revenues from wildlife trade or hunting practices, go to the Mnisi community,
- the profits of ecotourism enterprises will be used for poverty alleviation and further community development,
- the claimants can use environmental resources with a limited amount agreed on with the co-management committee,
- the claimants have free access to sacred burial sites and do not pay gate entrance fees at certain times of the year,
- and the claimants have priority in being employed in unskilled positions. Due to education programs, landowners can improve their skills and will, over time, also qualify for more skilled jobs.

Tourism in the MGR has the potential to grow, is attractive for private investors, and creates opportunities for government and communities in developing employment, economic empowerment, and community participation (Mahony and Van Zyl 2021). The CBT enterprises in the Manyeleti area, and the communities adjacent to the gate, are motivated to enter partnerships with the government and private investors to develop their community, as they recognize the value of tourism and their environmental resources (Mahony and Van Zyl 2021).

Tourists of the MGR expressed that they found the travel worth the time and the effort, and although they would not choose to revisit the destination, they would recommend it to friends and family (Masina, Boshoff, and Sifolo 2021).

3.3.3 Mpumalanga Province and KNP

The Mpumalanga Province is in the northeast of South Africa, relatively close to Mozambique's and Zimbabwe's borderlands, to which the KNP borders. The KNP reaches almost two million hectares (Anthony 2007) of low-lying savannas, divided into public, private, and community-owned PAs (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). The KNP is part of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park and is an important socio-economic and ecological element for the area's people and wildlife (Anthony 2007; Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). Around 2.9 million people live in and adjacent to the KNP, with a high unemployment rate of about 40,8% (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). The KNP is one of Africa's leading nature tourism destinations, confirmed by the large share of searches in the Western market (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020).

3.3.4. Indalo Inclusive

The aim of Indalo Inclusive as a social enterprise is to "creat[e] an entrepreneurial ecosystem that contributes to a thriving, inclusive, and green economy in South Africa" (Indalo Inclusive n.d.). Other businesses in partnership with Indalo Inclusive aim for environmentally friendly and high-impact socially inclusive entrepreneurship. Through innovative business operations, Indalo Inclusive contributes to policy facilitation and the collaborative creation of new policies, and they aim to find policy gaps (Indalo Inclusive n.d.). The office of Indalo Inclusive is based in Pretoria, one of the capitals of South Africa.

The WOTC has been managed by the non-profit social enterprise Indalo Inclusive since the 1st of May, 2023. Due to COVID-19, the tourism industry in South Africa decreased, and the SANParks and collaborating businesses had to suffer financial losses (South African National Parks 2022). The WOTC was not able to recover from those losses, which is why Indalo Inclusive decided to offer their assistance to help the business out. With a long-term plan, they aim to make the WOTC again a self-sustaining CBT enterprise that benefits from the MGR and can support the community of Welverdiend to develop financially, economically, and environmentally.

3.3.5 K2C Biosphere Region

The K2C NPC is donor-funded and works towards three objectives (Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region n.d.).

1. "Conservation of biodiversity and cultural heritage, maintain ecosystem services and foster the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources through the implementation of projects." (Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region n.d., n.p.).
2. Develop and study the biosphere region to understand local opportunities and economies.
3. Understand environmental changes in the area and develop ways to deal with the changing landscape in the long run.

The K2C BR is one of the ten recognized Biosphere Reserves in South Africa and was officially ratified by UNESCO under the supervision of the DEAT of South Africa (Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region n.d.). The biosphere region is part of the Limpopo and Mpumalanga Provinces. It is a complex area as a significant part is dedicated to conservation, varying from PAs to provincial and private reserves (Wilson and Anthony 2023). The core focus area of the K2C BR is the Bushbuckridge Municipality and the Mpumalanga Municipality.

The WOTC and the Orpen Gate entrance to the MGR and KNP lie within the Mpumalanga Province area of the K2C BR. The K2C BR covers the study area, including the KNP and adjacent villages. The K2C BR land cover is visible in Figure 1.

3.4 Limitations

One of the challenges that were faced when writing this study concerned cultural differences. When doing fieldwork in a foreign country with a different culture, it can take time to get used to other cultures, norms, and values, which could also impact the results of the interpretations of the interview. Coming from Europe and doing fieldwork in South Africa, the language barriers, culture adaptation, and network establishment should be considered and acknowledged to reduce the research limitations. The narrative interview and informal conversations with the people on-site helped establish a better understanding of the cultural differences and how to interpret the interviews more accurately.

Another significant challenge was that staying in our accommodation after dark was strongly recommended. This meant that after 17:00, no fieldwork could be done. During the daylight, the car that was needed to leave the accommodation was shared with another colleague, which

decreased interview flexibility. Due to the high stages of load shedding during the fieldwork, the flexibility of the schedule was impacted even more. Most of the time, the load shedding was on stage 5, meaning up to 8 hours per day without electricity. Although the accommodation had a generator, it was often and unpredictably out of order. This led to the insecurity of the use of WiFi, the insecurity of cooking, and the use of electricity needed to charge the laptop. It took time to adjust the schedule and get used to irregular access to electricity. Although it was known before departure that this could be the case, it remained a challenge on site.

While conducting fieldwork, the WOTC was experiencing limited functionality due to the off-season for tourism and the transition period for the new management of Indalo Inclusive. Consequently, the pool of participants for research group one was small, comprising only two tourists who were available for interviews.

3.5 Research ethics

Following the ethics guideline of the Central European University (CEU) and the K2C NPC, each interviewee was asked to sign a form of consent or to give verbal consent before the recordings and interviews began.

The author of this thesis, a Dutch master's student enrolled at the CEU in Vienna at the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy, conducted all the interviews. An agreement was signed with the WITS University in Johannesburg, the K2C NPC research team, and the non-profit organization II to conduct interviews with the WOTC. The K2C NPC asked for an ethics form before starting the fieldwork. The CEU also required a signed ethics form before beginning the fieldwork. Both forms were accepted before arrival. Besides these agreements, each interviewee was informed about voluntary participation, their possibility to withdraw from the interview, their right to privacy, potential threats, and how the data will be used and handled after the interview and publication. Each participant was asked to sign a form of consent[11]. Before transcribing, all names were pseudonymized, and each interview was assigned a code according to which group, as mentioned above, they belonged. If a translator was deployed used, the consent form was translated and verbally agreed upon with the interviewees.

[11] Appendix 1

3.6 Implicit bias

The positionality of the researcher influences the implicit bias. This means that the worldview of the researcher, which can be formed through factors such as work experience, accessibility to education, birth country, gender, and general life experiences, can influence the research results. In qualitative research, transparency on the positionality and possible biases of the author are essential as they can affect the interviews, the analyses, and the final interpretations of the interviews and data collected.

The author of this thesis is a master's student at the CEU at the Environmental Sciences and Policy department with international educational experience in Europe. Coming from the Netherlands as a Caucasian female, the author is aware of privileges and biases which can influence the research. The author acknowledges her background in sociology, which in her university primarily focused on criticizing neoliberal theories and advocating for a Marxist theoretical approach. This is important since the thesis reflects neoliberal conservation theories and aims to understand CBNRM practices. The academic background has significantly shaped the author's worldview towards a democratic eco-socialist view. This entails the belief that all living creatures should be treated with respect and should be considered in political decisions.

As an interviewer, reducing the mention of interview sponsors is crucial. Knowing the sponsor of the research could impact the interviewee's answer as the desired answer could be implicated. In the scope of this thesis, the sponsor could be exposed, as a minimum alteration of answers is expected. For this thesis, the researcher intends to be open with the interviewees about the aim of the research. The expectation is that with the knowledge of the research aim, the interviewees will not answer the questions as differently as they would otherwise. Also, not mentioning the objective of the research could cause ethical dilemmas. Thus, open communication and neutrality are essential for building a trustworthy relationship with the interviewees. This could lead to more usable and valid data.

During the data analyzing process for the objective hermeneutics and the content analysis, it is essential for the interpreter to understand their own implicit bias and to aim for a neutral position. During this phase, reevaluation of the interpretations can be helpful to acknowledge actively and, in turn, reduce the bias. Due to the lack of a research team, the interviews were structured so that the data could be tested during the following interviews. By discussing similar

topics with other interviewees with open-ended questions, the data could confirm itself in some cases or negate itself in others.

4. Results and discussion

In this section, the findings from two types of interviews will be presented. Firstly, the case structure hypothesis results will be presented and discussed. This was developed based on the results of the narrative interview. Secondly, the results of the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews will be presented and discussed, which are divided into five main subjects.

The data analysis allowed for the establishment of three overarching themes that align with the literature review. The interviews were structured into six topics mentioned in the methodology section to gain a deeper understanding of the three main themes. Within the three established themes, twenty-four open codes were found, which were each present in at least three interviews. The twenty-four open codes led to seven axial codes, which can be traced back to the three main themes, as visible in Table 3. The titles of the headings correspond to the axial codes, with occasional use of open codes for more comprehensive analysis.

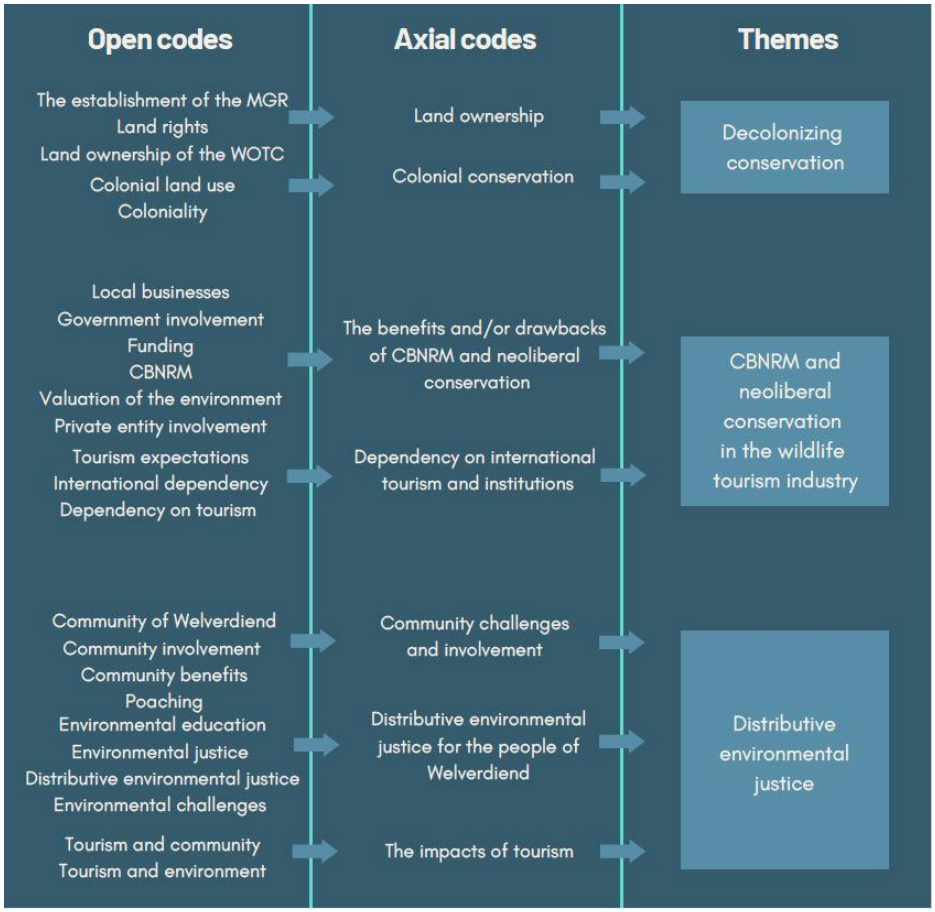

Table 3: Chart showing the open codes, axial codes, and themes discussed in this thesis. Table created by the author.

4.1 Case structure hypothesis: narrative interview

This study uses the interpretative method of objective hermeneutics, applied to a narrative interview, to establish a better understanding of local cultures and the latent meanings of

speech. The analysis outcomes mainly served to establish culturally appropriate questions in the local context of the field study area. Furthermore, the analysis assisted in establishing the main categories of the questionnaire as local issues, struggles, and benefits came about. This section will elaborate on how the findings were adopted in the semi-structured interview questionnaires.

The case structure hypothesis was developed using three sequences from the interview. The first sequence was the introduction of the interview. In the second sequence, the interviewee elaborated on the starting process of the WOTC. In the third sequence, the interviewee explained about daily life in the village of Welverdiend.

One key point that was found is that the interviewee frames life events in a timeline. In the interview, the interviewee mentioned all the years of the WOTC and what had happened each year since its establishment. This finding suggests that a definition of time is essential for the interviewee when narrating her life. This finding indicates that the questionnaire should aim to be chronologically organized to allow interview participants to elaborate their interview questions through a structured timeline.

> "and then I got the job here at ehm the Wild Olive it was ehm 2013 November yes so when we start here we were not getting paid -- before -- we were just working cleaning this place and then after that we go home -- didn't get anything even at the end of the month and then the K2C took over and then started to to pay us the salary end of the month and we were happy about that because we were not getting paid – before ehm we worked then with K2C for about two years I think 2013, 2014 and then – they were us on that time and then after they bring the – the contract yeah they just breach the contract and then Wild Olive started to pay as it was about 2015" (Anna, pers. comm.).[12]

Another key finding is how the interviewee describes the problem of not getting paid and ends with how the problem was solved within one sentence.
The situation appeared important enough to mention at the beginning of the interview. While the interviewee spoke of the difficulties that emerged from non-payment, she did not provide extensive details on the duration of the unpaid work period. It is more emphasizes how K2C NPC compensated the workers.

[12] Anna. Member of the cooperative and manager at the Wild Olive Tree Camp. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen. Wild Olive Tree Camp. 11th May 2023.

These interpretative results raise the question of whether the interviewee finds it unimportant to discuss her financial situation and prefers to keep the interview formal. Another suggestion would be that the interviewee is traumatized or has negative emotions when thinking about this period and does not want to bring back memories. It may also be the case that the interviewee believes that the interviewer will not understand the situation and that explaining would cost too much time. These results indicate that the questionnaire should be aware of the difficulties the community has been through. The questionnaire for the semi-structured interview should focus on mixing complex and positive topics so the interviewees are not pushed into a situation they might not feel comfortable with.

Furthermore, the sequences indicate that there is a "we," which could implicate that the interviewee did not feel alone in the situation and felt supported by other people who were going through a similar experience.

> "the problem they were we were not working yeah at the time and we with suffering and then we formed the the group of youth and then we decided what can we do as youth of the community because there is a lack of job we are not working we're not doing anything" (Anna, pers. comm.).

She insinuates that community helped her through the tough times. They felt proud that they collaborated on their project, even though they did not get paid. It assumes that the project was for the community and that they felt empowered to start a project. K2C NPC saw the potential and decided to invest. The interviewees' positive experiences were expressed in the "I" form and the negative experience in the "we" form. This could imply that success was produced by the interviewee herself, but complex times were part of a greater group. "since ehm on 2015 I'm still working here I'm happy about this place I like it because all this the kind of things I built it with my hands and I'm proud of that" (Anna, pers. comm.). These results suggest that the questionnaire should aim to discuss complex issues by questioning how the interviewee believes the community sees the issue. When focusing on personal perspectives, benefits, and successes, the questions can be directed to the interviewee alone.

Further data analysis reveals that the K2C NPC is assigned a heroic role. The non-profit company (NPC) was mentioned multiple times within the three sequences chosen for this analysis. In the first sequence, Anna (pers. comm.) noted, "K2C took over and then started to pay us the salary". In the third sequence, Anna (pers. comm.) mentioned:

> "what is encouraging the K2C that I was talking about they put their – what can I say because they are helping our youth now they they each year employ about 10 or 20 or I don't know how can I say how how many people lot of youth just to go and help the the old people that are owning the cattle and everything so they helping a lot now because all the time they keep changing employing the the youth and then they pay them end of the month."

The interviewee suggests it was a good change, and the community could not do otherwise. The role of the K2C NPC is significant. Although the community could not solve the salary problem by themselves, the interviewee is clear about the strength of the community and wants to acknowledge its importance. When discussing the role of K2C NPC, it is essential to consider the involvement of the community of Welverdiend. Although K2C NPC may have positively impacted the community, the focus of this study is to understand the involvement of the local community in CBT enterprises. Therefore, the questionnaire should not overlook community participation.

4.2 The role of local stakeholders

Prior to the fieldwork, the local stakeholders had been identified. However, their roles, perspectives, and significance were clarified during the fieldwork. This section will elaborate on each of the stakeholders. It is important to note that the residents of Welverdiend are stakeholders, but as their perspectives and involvement will be discussed throughout all sections, they will not be discussed separately in this section.

4.2.1 The cooperative

The cooperative is named after the Shangaan translation for the "wild olive tree," the Mutlhwareni, and is widely known as *the cooperative*. The cooperative consists solely of citizens from Welverdiend. Some members of the cooperative were teachers, which is, according to the interviewees, mostly a voluntary job in the Welverdiend community. One of the members is a pastor, and other members come from a tourism background (Henry, pers. comm.)[13]. The cooperative was formed around 2001 by 17 people from the village of Welverdiend to create employment opportunities for themselves and later for the rest of the community (Henry, pers. comm.). After 20 years of struggle, the community has something to be proud of: the product of hard work and a vision (Henry, pers. comm). Another member of

[13] Henry. Member of the cooperative. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. The Orpen Kruger. 23rd May 2023.

the cooperative confirmed this pride when mentioning that the WOTC, as a CBT project, is one of the first successful community-initiated projects in the whole Mpumalanga region.

In 2001, the cooperative set out to create a cultural village named after the community: the Mnisi resort. However, they had to revise their plans due to the lack of funding. This led to the concept of The Orpen Lodge and the WOTC. The Orpen Lodge was completed recently and began welcoming tourists in October 2022. The WOTC already opened in 2013. The two tourist destinations are entirely different. The Orpen Lodge is a top luxury accommodation with private chalets, while the WOTC is a budget-friendly tented camp that runs on solar energy without access to the electricity grid. Even though both places operate separately, both are considered CBWT businesses initiated by the same cooperative. The Orpen Lodge is 51% owned by the cooperative, while the WOTC is wholly owned by the cooperative (Arno, pers. comm.)[14] The WOTC is highly appreciated within the cooperative. During interviews, one member of the cooperative referred to the WOTC as their "little baby" in the interviews, and an employee of the WOTC expressed her pride as she helped to build the camp with her own hands.

The cooperative wrote a funding plan for both projects. The government of South Africa was supportive of the vision of the cooperative to build tourism accommodations, as it would create job opportunities in Welverdiend both during and after the construction phase. In 2006, the first grant of approximately 4 million ZAR was awarded, but more was needed to finish both projects. Consequently, another grant of 7 million ZAR was issued in 2012, with the condition that the cooperative would hire more employees. Most of the funding went into constructing The Orpen Lodge. Smaller grants, investments, and gifts were invested into the WOTC. Gifts were, for example, the sleeping tents and poles used to build the dining area.

The people from the cooperative actively participate in a variety of social and environmental activities happening in and around Welverdiend. An interviewee mentioned that they volunteer for NGOs, are involved in community empowerment, and are involved in resolving the land claim issue of the MGR. Their involvement in the land claim issues with the MGR is crucial for the community as the people from Welverdiend were forcefully removed from MGR as a result of colonial conservation practices (Theo, pers. comm.). These results were also found in previous research by de Koning (2010). The cooperative member working on the land claims,

[14] Arno. Manager at Indalo Inclusive. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Hoedspruit. 17th May 2023.

together with other former inhabitants of Manyeleti, now aims to claim back their previously inhabited land. Once the land claims are settled, they plan to distribute the natural resources and profits generated through the use of these resources within the community. Currently, the community is not benefiting from the environmental goods and the profits made from these goods to their fullest potential due to the pending land claims.

The cooperative is known in Welverdiend, and their work is appreciated. Interviewees from Welverdiend voiced their appreciation towards the cooperative more than once. Even though there is much appreciation, it was mentioned during the interviews that some community members see the new land use for tourism as a waste of grazing land and do not see the benefits it provides. An employee from the WOTC (pers. comm.) confirmed that some community members have complained about this and would prefer the land to remain grazing land. As previous studies showed, including the local community in tourism-related projects around the KNP is crucial, as it can ensure social, environmental, and economic benefits in the long run (Saayman, Rossouw, and Saayman 2012). Measham and Lumbasi (2013) have found that community-based projects are less likely to succeed without community support. This would suggest that the cooperative and the rest of the community of Welverdiend must collaborate to determine the best use for their previous grazing land. Although involving the whole community in the decision-making process may lead to disagreements, a democratic approach could support gaining the acceptance of the majority of the community.

4.2.2 The Wild Olive Tree Camp

The WOTC currently has eleven employees, of which eight were born and raised in the area and are part of the Mnisi community, and three employees are hired from other nearby villages, such as Acornhoek. During the first two years of operating the WOTC, K2C NPC assisted in covering salary costs. After two years, the camp became financially self-sustaining. Until COVID-19, the camp was considered successful and had good ratings on the booking platform www.booking.com. Table 4 presents the timeline for the establishment of the WOTC.

Multiple interviewees have stated the strong motivation of the employees to work for the WOTC. The motivation showed especially when the COVID-19 lockdowns kept tourists from visiting the camp. “The company have survived COVID-19 with the strong support of its employees, whom decided to work without salary” (Anna, pers. comm.). According to Arno (pers. comm.), the staff members of the WOTC have been working under extreme conditions,

meaning they sometimes did not receive their salary, put all their resources into the business, and sacrificed a lot. He argued that despite the sacrifices, people still continue because they strongly believe that the projects can benefit their whole community in the future. Anna and Lesedi[15] confirm they have been working for the WOTC without getting paid any salary. "It was very difficult because we were staying at home, nothing happened here. We didn't get the enough money, because the lack of money we were starving and guests, they didn't come regularly" (Lesedi, pers. comm.). Although all interview partners who work or had a part at the WOTC argue it was a hard time as buying food and paying for education for their children was difficult, they wanted to continue working for the WOTC as they had trust in the company to grow and to benefit them eventually. Considering the high unemployment rates in the area, it is arguable to which extent the employees had a choice to stop working for the WOTC, even for little or no salary. It could be argued that a combination of a difficult job market, especially in times of COVID-19, and an emotional connection with the WOTC created a form of dependency on the WOTC and made the employees want to work for the business and turn it into a thriving CBWT destination. A successful CBWT destination would then, in turn, be beneficial for both personal and community development.

The WOTC and the Orpen Lodge depend on governmental funding and private investors. Some investors that have been mentioned throughout the interviews are:

- DEAT,
- the Wildlife College (an education center across the road from Welverdiend, funded by World Wildlife Fund),
- K2C NPC,
- the Industrial Development Corporation (a national development finance institution),
- the Southern Cross Foundation,
- the Andover Reserve (a reserve neighboring the Welverdiend village),
- a private investor called Doris, and two developers called Jorgen and Hank.

The investors mentioned above comprise a combination of foundations, government institutions, and private investors. The plurality of external funders shows that the government's original funding was insufficient for all expenditures to build the WOTC and keep it running. Instead, they depended on private investors like Doris, Jorgen and Hank and foundations in the area, such as the Southern Cross, the K2C NPC, the Andover Reserve, and the Wildlife College.

[15] Lesedi. Employee at the Wild Olive Tree Camp. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Wild Olive Tree Camp. 10th May 2023.

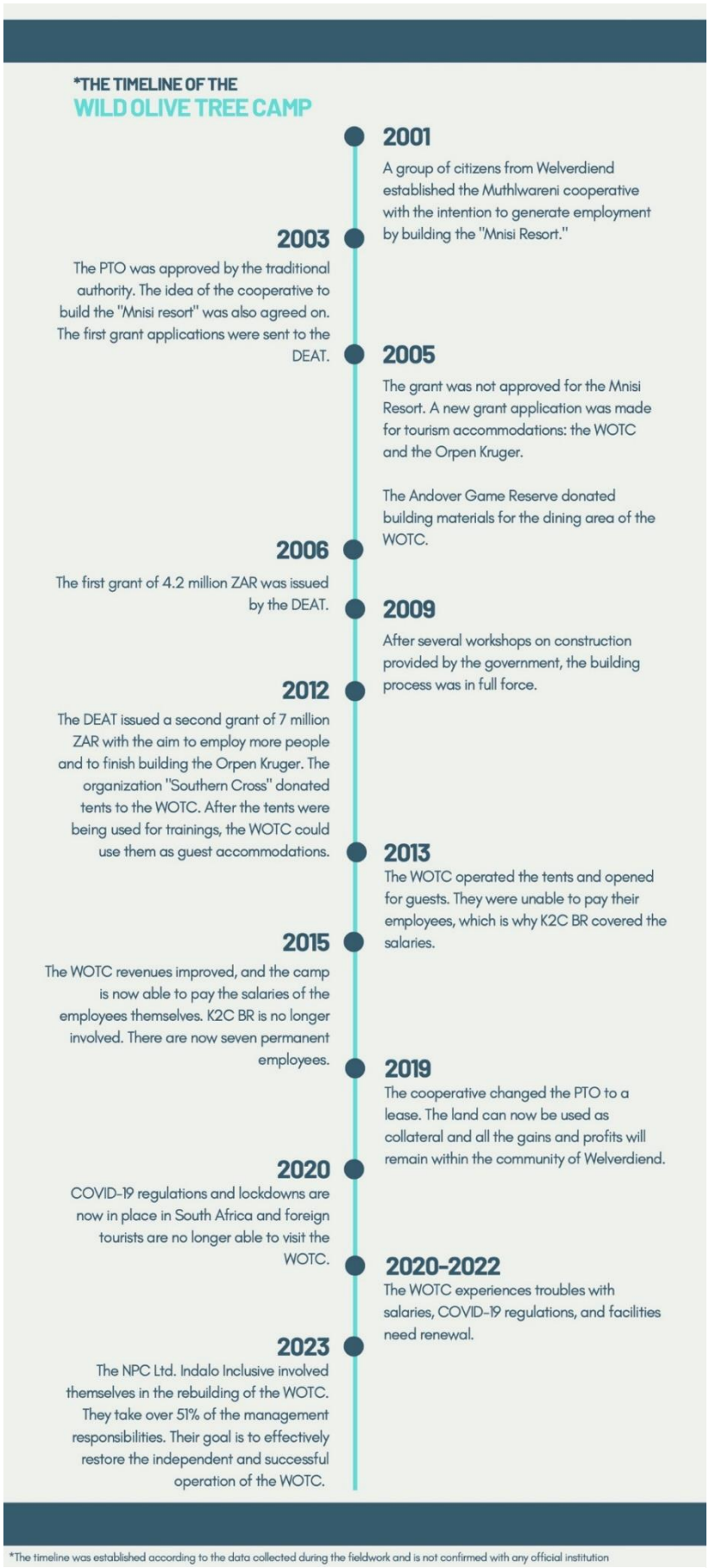

Table 4: Timeline of the establishment of the Wild Olive Tree Camp. Timeline created by the author.

4.2.3 Indalo Inclusive

Indalo Inclusive is arranged in two different businesses. One part of Indalo Inclusive is the NPC, which promotes green community development projects. The second is the proprietary limited (Pty Ltd.), which operates as a profit-based enterprise. In the future, Indalo Inclusive aims to use the profits from the Pty Ltd. to support the NPC (Arno, pers. comm.). The Pty Ltd. invests in projects and often retains partial ownership of the supported enterprises, generating passive income to sustain and expand the NPC's initiatives. When asked about the priorities of Indalo Inclusive, it was answered that the employees of Indalo Inclusive identify as social entrepreneurs, putting community needs over profits. At the same time, they also believe they need to understand money before they can work with it:

> "if we are true to that which we preach, we've got to run an enterprise ourselves. We've got to feel the taste of money. And not just grant money. We must feel sales. We must go in and work hard and sell stuff, and we must make money from sales, and we must deal with problems that come with running an enterprise" (Arno, pers. comm.).

Combining their aims and the statement above, it is arguable that Indalo Inclusive is motivated to earn money and willing to reinvest it into community development projects.

Before COVID-19, the WOTC was running successfully. This means that tourists were coming regularly, and they had the resources to pay their employees. Multiple interviewees have argued that the business suffered a major setback due to COVID-19, making it a significant challenge for the camp to be as successful as before. According to an interviewee from the cooperative, the WOTC needs external assistance and knowledge to make the camp successful again. The data from the interviews imply that the cooperative has a strong mind on keeping the WOTC a community-based and owned business, making it harder to accept external assistance. During the interviews, when asked about why the cooperative is trusting Indalo Inclusive to take over management temporarily, it was mentioned that the owner had dedicated many years of hard work to the Welverdiend community. Arno (pers. comm.) himself said that he believes the community trusts Indalo Inclusive due to "sweat capital." Many years of supporting the people from Welverdiend instigated a special bond where both stakeholders trust each other. A member of the cooperative confirms that Arno was at the WOTC from the beginning. When building the camp, Arno connected the cooperative with the Industrial Development Corporation and other institutions that could help fund the project. Although Arno is not from Welverdiend, he comes from a nearby village called Acornhoek. The inclusion of Indalo Inclusive in the management of the WOTC strongly suggests that the WOTC needs external

assistance. Interviewees mentioned that due to a lack of knowledge and education from the Welverdiend community, Indalo Inclusive could help rebuild the WOTC into a sustainable and self-sufficient community-based project. Their help could also support further development and employment for the community of Welverdiend.

When asked during the interviews about the motivation behind accepting to help the WOTC, Indalo Inclusive stated that they want to make money. "We want to make money, both for ourselves, we also want to make money for the wild olive, and we want to make money for the cooperative too. And ultimately for the community" (Arno, pers. comm.). Indalo Inclusive has expressed keen interest in the camp because of the location. It has also been suggested that their desire to take over is influenced by economic incentives. Based on the knowledge obtained in the field, Indalo Inclusive aims to start creating a just working environment for the employees of the WOTC, granting loans to enable fair pay and leave possibilities. The investments, which are loans, will be paid back when the WOTC makes profits. When asked how Indalo Inclusive can ensure that the WOTC will not be left with a large loan in a few years, Arno argued that they are motivated because it is their money. "It's our money that we are loaning, we must make sure that it works. We must make sure that it's not just money. […] Our target is to make sure that the loan is paid back." According to these findings, it can be assumed that Indalo Inclusive as a social enterprise directly relies on the WOTC their success. With the resources from Indalo Inclusive, they can make the camp a successful community-based enterprise that will run self-sufficient again when the right resources are invested in the right places. With the expertise of Indalo Inclusive and its approach to entrepreneurship that is not based on fast growth but on sustainable green development, the WOTC enters a new management era.

4.2.4 Kruger to Canyons Non-Profit Company

The role of the K2C NPC is to implement projects that align with their perspective on protecting the K2C BR. In the interviews, the role of the K2C NPC has often been mentioned as a crucial role for local development. Anna (pers. comm.) mentioned that much of the youth receive help from the K2C NPC.

> "Most of the youth, they are not working now they just sitting at the home. But what is encouraging the K2C that I was talking about [...] they are helping our youth now. […] They each year employ about 10 or 20 or I don't know how many, […] but a lot of youth, they just to go and help the old people." (Anna, pers. comm.)

Previous literature by Bunn et al. (2023) confirmed that many of the youth in the area around the KNP are unemployed, uneducated, and untrained. The field notes suggest that the K2C NPC is assisting these youth to explore their talents in jobs. Often, the youth is employed within an existing project supported by the K2C NPC. It can also occur that a young member of the community is employed by the K2C NPC themselves. As observed, this can also be in the form of an internship. In addition to assisting the youth in villages within K2C BR, they support upcoming projects. One such project was WOTC in its beginning years. During its first two years of operation, the WOTC received funding for the employees' salaries. "K2C was involved because of we were just working and not getting paid" (Anna, pers. comm.). While supporting new projects, according to Mia (pers. comm.)[16], the main objective of the K2C NPC remains to support local businesses in multiple forms: all stakeholders must be considered, and the landscape in which they work must be understood. Mia mainly provides mentorship opportunities to connect people and businesses based on market opportunities, which benefits local businesses socio-economically. This approach is particularly effective in the tourism industry.

The K2C NPC is currently mainly funded by donors. The employees of the K2C NPC generate funding for their own projects by writing "beautiful, long, amazing proposals with the hopes that Europe gives us money" (Mia, pers. comm.). Although the primary focus now is to get governmental funds from foreign countries, the new catchment projects will also enable domestic private investors and philanthropists to fund the K2C NPC. Mia (pers. comm.) also argued that funding became more difficult to obtain due to the financial grey status of South Africa. This means the country is considered high risk for investors due to governmental corruption. The Financial Action Task Force lists the grey-listed countries, stating that South Africa scored badly on laundering money and terrorist financing (Financial Action Task Force n.d.). The statement implies that when public, governmental, and international funding decreases, private funding becomes more important, which can lead to a development economy that is supported by neoliberalism. On the other hand, the reduction of public funding due to South Africa's grey-listing may be an international tool to combat corruption and improve the likelihood of receiving funding for socio-economic development projects that benefit local communities from other countries or organizations.

[16] Mia. Employee at the Kruger 2 Canyons Non-Profit Company. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Hoedspruit. 19th May 2023

4.3 Decolonizing conservation and land ownership at the MGR

4.3.1 Decolonizing conservation

The history of segregation and colonial conservation is broadly discussed with the interview participants during the fieldwork. It is worth noting that the term "colonial conservation" was not directly mentioned during the interviews. It appears that individuals involved in land claims and community development are more open to discussing South Africa's history than those not as closely connected to the land claims in their everyday lives. The cooperative, K2C NPC, and Indalo Inclusive have been open to discussing the issue of segregation and decolonial conservation.

The literature review has presented the issue of the forceful removal of indigenous people from their land under the guise of conservation (Carruthers 1995). The local people and descendants of former inhabitants of the homelands of the MGR confirm the perception that the MGR is "a result of the apartheid laws of segregation and reserved as a park for black people who were not allowed in the KNP" (Arno, pers. comm.). Although the former approach to establishing the PAs is perceived as unjust, there seems to be an understanding of the importance of the PAs.

> "It was not a nice thing how this protected area has been created because it was in the sacrifice, in the pain of others, but the concept itself was good when you see it now because the natural resources have been preserved." (Theo, pers. comm.)

These findings suggest that individuals understand the importance of conserving environmental resources, despite the historical events associated with it.

According to previous studies (Lahiff 2001; Venter et al. 2008), conservationists have expressed concerns about the future of conservation because they are unsure if land claimants are doing their best to preserve the integrity of the landscapes. The results of this study suggest that the mindset towards conservation is relatively positive, as the interviewees all agreed that conservation helps their community and community-based enterprises. One interviewee from the cooperative mentioned that "since the forceful removal we were having a negative mind towards conservation because we saw it as something coming to persecute the local people" (pers. comm.). The interviewee explains that through accessibility to the MGR and the environmental goods on the other side of the fence, the perspective of the community towards conservation changed positively. Education on the importance of conservation also helped.

One interviewee mentioned that communities living near PAs, particularly those on the western boundary of KNP, were excluded from benefits during apartheid. The interviewee suggested that these communities should now be given the opportunity to benefit from the advantages. When asked about access to the MGR, interviewees commented that some have never visited the MGR or the KNP, as mentioned in previous literature (Kruger and Douglas 2015). One interviewee who had never been to the MGR stated that she would "love to see the animals and spy at craft markets […] and to learn what [we] don't know". The main issue, she said, is that visiting the MGR comes with high costs. The transport, the entrance, and other expenses were mentioned to be too much and cannot be paid by all members of the Welverdiend community. These results suggest that financial resources may determine access to MGR and KNP, resulting in a possible inequality for tourists, conservation personnel, and local communities living adjacent to PAs. One of the interview participants from the cooperative suggested that the local social ecologists could arrange an excursion to the MGR for those working sustainably with South African environmental resources. Those excursions could support local businesses to continue the sustainable use of environmental resources and, at the same time, also support the displaced communities to rebuild their relationship with the MGR. Interviewees have acknowledged the importance of regulated access to the MGR for people living adjacent to the reserve. Access to the reserves for those who should benefit from the resources is crucial, but strict regulations on resource use remain necessary to protect the integrity of the landscapes.

To meet global conservation goals and support local minorities, Mia (pers. comm.) mentions that it is essential to talk about the history of South Africa. The history of segregation in the country enabled white people to occupy managing roles in conservation practices. The lack of openness regarding current imbalanced power relations between privileged and unprivileged people has resulted in an uneasy relationship between people with different worldviews who must coexist in the same country and manage environmental resources together (Mia, pers. comm.). Education was mainly accessible to white people, leaving black communities behind in knowledge on managing a business or achieving global standards for conservation (Mia, pers. comm.). Another interviewee confirmed that education on conservation was mainly accessible to white people and that black people felt disconnected from the desire to protect their environment. Thus, it could be argued that the education gap in managing PAs, conserving ecosystems, and understanding their global importance is due to the long-term effects of segregation and apartheid laws. To close the gap, previous studies noted that SANParks

prioritizes hiring South African citizens, resulting in environmental, social, and economic advantages many (Swemmer and Taljaard 2011; Saayman, Rossouw, and Saayman 2012).

4.3.2 Land rights and ownership

The land claims started to be issued after the post-apartheid government in South Africa was resolved. Since then, families from the cooperative have been battling to claim their land back rightfully. They aim to keep the land a PA, but the people must have the right to benefit from its resources. According to Arno (pers. comm.), people have fought and never stopped fighting for justice for their community since the post-apartheid government. Although the literature on land claims in the MGR and the KNP states that most land claims were settled (de Koning 2010), according to the cooperative, Indalo Inclusive, and the people from Welverdiend, the Manyeleti land claim is the longest pending land claim that is still not resolved. In theory, the Manyeleti land claim would fall under the land claims within the KNP that are annulled and declared to be considered for other solutions to make up for the forceful removal of the Mnisi community (Dressler et al. 2010). In practice, some interviewees feel there is still no rightful solution, as the land claimants do not get all the benefits from the MGR.

During the data collection, multiple participants were asked about the forms of land ownership in South Africa, especially regarding the MGR and the land on which the WOTC is built. The difference between both areas is that the land on which WOTC is built is part of the communal land of the Mnisi tribal authority and is not a PA. Also, there are no land claims on that land. The land of the MGR is currently claimed by families and descendants from families from the Mnisi community. The MGR borders the current tribal land of the Mnisi community. The MGR is a PA and cannot be inhabited, even after the claims are settled in favor of the land claimants. The cooperative managed to enhance the PTO on the tribal land to a trust or long-term lease. They aim to obtain a CPA for the MGR.

4.3.2.1 The Wild Olive Tree Camp land ownership

In South Africa, the land defined as tribal is held under a trust by the tribal authorities. The land on which the WOTC is built is tribal land. The Mnisi tribal authority had the land in its trust, and it was formerly used by the citizens of Welverdiend as grazing land for their cattle (pers. comm.). The Mnisi tribal authority issues pieces of land through a PTO. A PTO is free of charge and only gives those assigned the right to occupy the land. A PTO does not give the land any economic value and no guarantee, which is why the land cannot be used as collateral when

requesting a loan from the bank (Arno, pers. comm.; Henry, pers. comm.; Theo, pers. comm.). A PTO remains communal land, meaning the tribal authority retains the right to withdraw the PTO if they, or the community members, feel the land is not used accordingly. Thus, one potential solution for businesses like the WOTC to ensure collateral and security for their business is through a novel form of land ownership known as "trusted land." This would provide assurance that their business can continue to operate without interruption. The land on which the WOTC and the Orpen Lodge are built has been accepted as a trusted land since 2019 (Henry, pers. comm.). Arno explains that trusted land is now in private hands, called a long-term lease. The long-term lease must be converted from a PTO at the Department of Rural Development. After acceptance, the land can be leased from part of a community as a collective (Arno, pers. comm.). The cooperative pays for the trusted land to the Mnisi tribal authority. The lease can rise when the land gains more value. It is unclear how this value is determined and would need further research.

4.3.2.2 The Manyeleti Game Reserve land ownership

The MGR is a government-owned game reserve managed by the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA). It has been mentioned multiple times during the interviews that the concept of the MTPA management approach seems correct, but they lack management tools, skills, financial resources, and regulations. The MGR is a reserve with much potential and serves as a saving grace (Arno, pers. comm.), as it is soon the property of its rightful owners, allowing considerable benefits for the community. According to the interviewees from the community, MGR is not too big and has excellent vegetation for game viewings. All the game from the KNP can freely migrate through the MGR, making the MGR a hotspot for tourism. The Orpen Gate, directly located next to the WOTC, allows tourists to enter the KNP through the MGR, greatly benefiting the reserve. According to some interviewees, this is confirmed by businesses willing to develop their projects in the MGR. A collaboration between tourist businesses and the land owners already exists with the tented camp “Honeyguide,” located within the MGR (Honeyguide Tented Safari Camps n.d.). The existing literature confirms that co-management between businesses and other stakeholders involved in PAs can be an approach to successful conservation and community development (Fabricius and Sisitka 2003; King 2005; Venter et al. 2008; de Koning 2010).

According to the current land claim signatures, the MGR was the homeland of 151 families (Theo, pers. comm.). He explained during the interview that the number of land claimants has

varied over the past few decades. This is because it was often unclear who had lived on the land, who used the natural resources of the land, and which families were forcefully removed from the land. The first land claim settlements were rejected due to this lack of clarity, causing delays. The land claimants who could provide evidence of their former homelands decided to collaborate and present a more prominent and stronger case. According to Arno (pers. comm.), the Manyeleti land claim is one of the longest pending land claims that is unable to settle due to large interest in the land. Not only did the private companies interested in the MGR try to corrupt signatures, but the chieftaincy and the traditional authorities tried to get more benefits from the claims than the actual claimants would receive (Theo, pers. comm.). The timeline in Table 5 shows the longevity of the claims in Manyeleti.

The current pending land claim settlement aims for 100% ownership of all the benefits coming from the MGR. This includes all the income generated from tourism and other forms of business. It is known amongst the Welverdiend community that only those with pending land claims will eventually directly benefit from the income generated in Manyeleti (Abena, pers. comm.)[17]. But there is hope, and the expectation, that those monetary benefits will help the whole community of Welverdiend through investments in community development. The interview data shows that some claimants are willing to share their benefits with the community. It became evident that the residents of Welverdiend highly value their community and are supportive of community projects. These findings suggest that the advantages will be distributed fairly among all members of the community. Henry (pers. comm.) mentioned that even if the benefits stay within the claimants' families, it could indirectly benefit other community members, as it can uplift the village economy. Small changes in a village economy can mean a lot for the future development of a village. Henry (pers. comm.) explains that if one person manages to get a minibus, more people will have access to nearby cities such as Hoedspruit or Acornhoek for education or employment. Those village economies might seem small to outsiders, but according to Henry (pers. comm.), they can significantly impact the well-being of a rural village community. Previous literature (Dressler and Büscher 2008) has found that focusing on local economies is crucial to creating independence from the private sector and supporting local development economies.

[17] Abena. Citizen of Welverdiend. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Welverdiend, 30th May 2023.

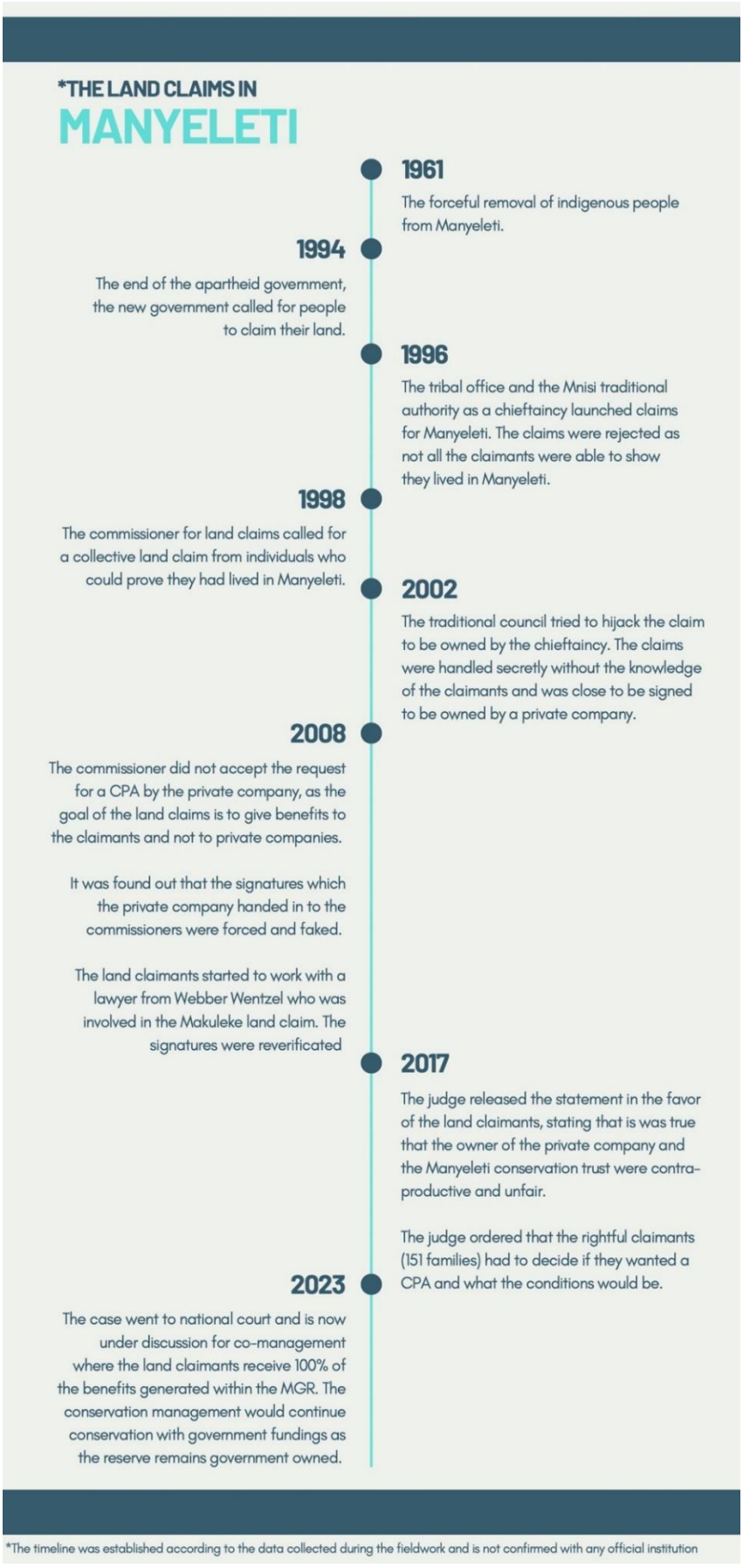

Table 5: Timeline of the process of land claims in the Manyeleti Game Reserve. Timeline created by the author.

Theo (pers. comm.) has mentioned that once the current lawsuit is won in their favor, the claimants will apply for a CPA. The CPA will then receive all the profits made within the MGR and distribute them from their account to the claimants. Theo (pers. comm.) acknowledges that the monetary benefits are not the only profit the community gains from the land claims. He argues that part of the budget of the CPA will be invested in capacity building for the youth of the community. This aims to prepare the youth for future management roles within the MGR. The aim of the agreement is that the MTPA will remain the management authority for five years until the community can take over the management themselves. Currently, the cooperative argues that there is a lack of knowledge on the tourism sector and conservation within the community, so taking over the management of the reserve right away would most likely fail. Although five years can be argued as a short time to take over the whole management, the cooperative sees it as a start toward equity.

To develop the community sustainably, it is seen as crucial that future landholders take over high positions in managing the MGR. Currently, only lower positions are occupied by the people of Welverdiend. It is unsustainable to have a conservation manager externally. One of the interviewees argued that the community should "plough something on the ground with [their] own youth" (The cooperative, pers. comm.). Educating and employing youth from the community allows for poverty alleviation within the community and enables the youth to understand the value of conservation and tourism. According to multiple participants, there are some negative views towards conservation due to the forceful removals and the fences between villages and reserves (Bruno, pers. comm.; Henry, pers. comm.; Mia, pers. comm.; Theo, pers. comm)[18]. They believe that education and inclusion in conservation can assist in changing the negative mindset and in appreciating their natural resources like wildlife. These results suggest that the community perceives obtaining a CPA in the MGR as a solution to enable an equitable share of resources and profits from the reserve. The benefits can be used for environmental education, skill development, and poverty alleviation. As discussed in the literature, this follows the EJ research approach, which aims to understand the distribution of byproducts of environmental resources and how a colonial perspective can lead to environmental injustices (McDonald 2002). The injustice in this situation arose from the forceful removal of communities from the MGR and low levels of education within those communities. This results in an unequal knowledge of conservation and tourism.

[18] Bruno. State veterinary. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Hoedspruit. 2nd June 2023.

4.4 The benefits and/or drawbacks of CBNRM and neoliberal conservation

4.4.1 Commodification of the environment

The field data give insights into what extent the environment in the case study area is perceived as a commodity by its citizens and how that impacts the local stakeholders. The results have shown that the local communities perceive the commodification of the environment as ethically correct and necessary for their livelihoods. It should be remarked that most interviewees primarily depend on tourism and commodify their environmental resources to benefit from it financially. The results of this study show that commodifying nature can lead to positive outcomes, such as the awareness of endangered species. Additional research is needed to better understand the long-term effects of a neoliberal approach to conservation, such as the alienation of local communities from their environment (Büscher 2014).

A common view among interviewees is that the MGR is crucial to attracting tourists to Welverdiend. One interviewee stated that the WOTC is only there because of the MGR and that "if it's destroyed and it's not a tourist attraction […] there is a problem." The same interviewee argued that the "saving grace" of the MGR is that the government is not allowing human settlement in the reserve and that the people who suffer from the forceful removal of indigenous land should be compensated in another way. This suggests that the interviewee acknowledges the high value of the land for local people, stating that resettlement would be a waste of possible income flow from tourism.

The animals in the MGR are perceived as the environmental resources in the area that can be extracted and preserved sustainably. Henry (pers. comm.) mentioned that "the animals are our gold; there is money behind it. If we don't have Kruger, we are dead, we are all dead." Theo (pers. comm.) also mentioned that the animals in the MGR are the communities' renewable resource because:

> "the very same impala you saw last year, when you come you will find it being multiplied […], and then so many tourists will pay a lot of money using one resource. But gold, when once you dig it, it's non-renewable. You sell it, you are left with nothing. So, we are fortunate."

According to another interviewee, the perception of the value of animals has changed over time, arguing that people used to see animals only as a source of food. It gained value since they realized they can have paying guests who want to see the animals. The result of this study aligns with previous studies stating that tourism is a profitable land-use method and a significant

source of income for reserves (Reid 2001; Packer 2015; Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). These results further support the idea that tourism creates a source of economic income and changes the local perspective on the importance of conservation, which can be argued as a significant benefit.

Previous studies found that conservation and tourism have the potential to improve the economy in South Africa and that the market-based approach to the reserves is a nation-wide accepted mechanism (McDonald 2002; Ramutsindela and Shabangu 2013; Frey, Gellert, and Dahms 2019). Audrey (pers. comm.)[19] mentioned that "we're in a conservation area and everybody, the private and public sector, are fighting to keep it, otherwise there is no tourism. […] The only reason we have tourism is environmental beauty." She argues that private and government entities gain from selling the South African environment to tourists. These results support the hypothesis that the value of the environment comes from the potential of the tourism industry.

The critical view on a market-based approach to the environment was elaborated on by Baer (2020). Baer states that a neoliberal approach could only help some out of poverty, but social and economic inequality and environmental health are subordinated to profits. The interviewees who speak positively about the marketization of the environment see a direct positive effect of the economic capital coming from tourism as it is invested in community development and conservation projects. Bruno (pers. comm.) considers the commodification of animals as crucial for conservation and states that "for the sake of conservation, animals will have to earn money." It could be argued that long-term results and environmental impacts are not yet registered or directly visible. As mentioned in the literature review, not every situation suits a market mechanism (Brand, 2012). Thus, an alternative mechanism that aims for equitable access to global natural resources should be considered instead of a market-based approach (Ramutsindela and Shabangu 2013). Notably, although one can be critical of the long-term effects of a market-based approach in PAs, the wildlife tourism industry shows potential for community development (Thomsen et al. 2022).

[19] Audrey. Employee at private game reserve in the Kruger 2 Canyons Biosphere Region. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Orpen Road. 19th May 2023.

4.4.1.1 The commodification of the rhinoceros

When asked about how poaching affects the tourism industry in the area, the majority of the interviewees were unanimous that poachers harm their businesses. One interviewee said:

> "those rhinos are the big five. So, tourists who come here, they are looking for the big five so then it might happen that we can have a big four. […] They came to see those animals. […] They will see us because we are the one who can show them. So, if you kill the rhinos, it means we are destroying our tourism."

The colleague of the interviewee had a similar statement on the same question saying that poaching affects tourism significantly.

> "They like the big five. But if they kill those rhinos, the tourists just won't be happy about it. How are we going to tell them? Do we have a big four if the rhinos are gone?"

While there may be room for further research on the local perspectives on poaching, this study highlights the evident disapproval of the respondents toward this issue. Their primary concern lies in its detrimental impact on their tourism businesses. According to the findings, rhinoceroses are not only hunted for their horns and immediate gain, but they are also significant for commercializing reserves, serving as long-term assets that attract paying tourists. The fear of losing one of the animals of the big five was mentioned throughout multiple interviews and verified to which extent the environment is commodified within the local perceptions. None of the interviewees has mentioned any other relationship with the rhinoceros than it being an asset to their tourism industry. While some may question the perception of rhinoceros as a commodity, the results suggest that it can benefit local conservation efforts and the overall health of the environment.

The study by Measham and Lumbasi (2013) showed that conservation projects initiated by local communities tend to be effective. Therefore, involving the local communities is crucial for addressing the issue of rhino poaching. A successful co-management project can potentially result in protecting the rhino and keeping the big five as a marketable concept. In this way, tourists will not be disappointed when they only see the big four, and business can continue. While analyzing the market-based approach to the environment and the rhinoceros' role as a commodity in the tourism industry, this study suggests that such commodification could aid in preserving the species and preventing poaching.

4.4.2 COVID-19 and local dependency on (international) tourism

Previous studies evaluating the impact of COVID-19 in Southern Africa observed a strong decrease in tourism and employment rates (Sithole 2022). The results of this study align with previous studies, showing the negative impact of COVID-19 on local communities and local economies. During the lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, international guests could not visit the WOTC, and their salaries could not be paid anymore. According to one interviewee, they were registered at the time, meaning that the South African Unemployment Insurance Fund would help them financially. Other interviewees mentioned that those times were extremely hard, and they were suffering from not being paid.

Since COVID-19, some interviewees mentioned that the WOTC has been unable to run at full capacity, the marketing has been affected, and the facilities were getting old. According to Indalo Inclusive (pers. comm.), the camp must be occupied for 30% at least to break even, and the current numbers show an occupation of around 12-24%. The lack of guests leads not only to a lack of income for the company but also to a lack of work for the employees. Although all employees who were interviewed mentioned that they are working under contract, they are unsure about their salaries. As some interviewees mention, their salary fluctuates depending on whether there are guests at the camp. One interviewee mentioned, “I can say it’s full-time. But for now, they said maybe we cannot work because maybe there is no guests. […] When there is guests, we can get in here and work.” Another interviewee said that they were promised 4080 ZAR per month, but it is unclear how much will be paid out as they were told, "if there’s no guests I am not getting paid.” These results reflect the unstable employment rates in the Mpumalanga Province. Even when employed, salaries cannot be assured. In alignment with previous studies, this study confirms that the local people are dependent on tourists visiting the WOTC. It was mentioned multiple times that if there are no guests, they will not receive a salary. While this study highlights that economic gain is not the sole factor for successful community development, it should be repeated that the average income in the area surrounding the KNP takes care of an average of 4.3 people (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). This would suggest that the lack of tourists coming to the WOTC, which has 11 employees, can directly affect the livelihood of about 47,3 people. It is essential to acknowledge that salaries are not withheld due to a lack of willingness to pay but rather because of the complex situation where the WOTC is purely reliant on tourism, both domestic and international. This puts the livelihoods of those reliant on a thriving tourism industry in jeopardy and insecurity.

Previous studies have shown that domestic tourism has a significant share in the total income generated in and around the KNP, indicating that the KNP is largely dependent on domestic tourists (Saayman, Rossouw, and Saayman 2012). This study confirms that local stakeholders acknowledge, mainly because of COVID-19, how important domestic tourism is for their businesses. One interviewee working for a private reserve in the K2C BR said, "we need to rely on our South Africans now." She mentions that before COVID-19, their lodges were mainly focused on international guests, and now they have lowered the prices for South Africans and SADC citizens. Not only the private reserves have reduced their prices for locals, but tourism destinations like the KNP have a special lowered price for South African and SADC citizens, making activities more attractive for domestic tourism (South African National Parks n.d.).

4.4.3 Tourist expectations

When discussing with two interviewees who stayed at the WOTC for one night why they chose to book there, they mentioned that they like the idea of going "back to nature." The expectation of going back to nature has been mentioned in previous literature under the term "true wilderness" and "real nature" (Sterkl 2019; von Essen, Lindsjö, and Berg 2020). The low price of staying for a night, including dinner, was also a positive factor. According to the interviewees, sleeping in a tent was the ideal way to be close to nature and experience feeling small next to such a nature reserve.

According to one interviewee from the cooperative, the tourists are very keen on visiting the rural communities in the area. He argues that people want to see the real people of South Africa after seeing the wildlife and the big five. Community tours appear to be an upcoming tourist attraction offered by multiple villages in the area. The village of Welverdiend also has a weekly community tour organized by the tented camp "Honeyguide" in the MGR. The community tours can be seen as a side effect of the wildlife economy that could benefit the village economy. This study suggests that it could also benefit the perception that tourists have of rural South African communities. The two German tourists confirmed they would be interested in a community tour after seeing the wildlife.

When asked about their perceptions of tourists on CBT accommodations, one interviewee from the K2C NPC and one employee from a private game reserve in the K2C BR area had a unanimous view. According to Mia (pers. comm.), tourists tend to be scared for their security and safety when they would visit a local community. When their perspective on the community

tour is positive, they will deliver that to the rest of the community. An employee of a private game reserve in the K2C BR made a similar statement:

> "Community-based tourism can be a sort of deterrent or a shying away factor for people to want to come into these community areas. You know, I think a lot of internationals will land in South Africa and be pre-warned of the violence, of the dangers they could face and yes, I don't want to say it doesn't exist that we should be obnoxious to it but I do see that as a stumbling block in these areas that just general crime can really scare people away from looking at a community-based tourism organization but I think what plays hand in hand is that communities are well-benefited whether it be from adjacent private nature reserves or organizations, […] perceptually people in the community see the benefit." (Scarlett, pers. comm.)[20]

The results of this study suggest that there may be a misunderstanding between tourists and rural communities. Tourists might perceive the villages as unsafe, while the community might feel threatened by the coming of visitors. To ensure safety for both parties, the tour operator must work with the traditional authority (Mia, pers. comm.). Both interviewees have noticed that international tourists might be warned by their home countries or tour operators about the dangers of rural South Africa and that visiting a village should be done with a guide or someone who lives in the community.

To attract tourism and escape the perceived dangers, many tour operators and private game reserves have created a bubble for their guests (Mia, pers. comm.). An employee of a private game reserve confirms this.

> "Guest flies into the airport, the lodge goes, pick them up, they take them to the lodge and so that's where they stay until they take them back to the lodge instead of exposing them to what else is out there, there's much more to this area than just wildlife and we need to break that perception as well."

Another interviewee mentioned that there is a common misconception about rural Africa. She mentioned that some tourists think the people live in a "mud hut," but when they arrive and take the chance to visit a rural village, they realize there is a bit of economy happening. However, if the tourists stay in the safety bubble of their lodges, they miss out on experiencing rural South Africa, which can perpetuate negative stereotypes. During the interviews, most

[20] Scarlett. Employee at private game reserve in the Kruger 2 Canyons Biosphere Region. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Orpen Road. 19th May 2023.

participants expressed their opinion that a positive image among international tourists is vital for the future of tourism in the region. An activity like a community tour can help achieve a change of perspective and can be beneficial in supporting their village economy. Staying in a community-owned tourist accommodation such as the WOTC can be another way for tourists to connect with rural South Africa, its culture and its reality. Even if Scarlett (pers. comm.) believes that promoting community-owned accommodation may deter some tourists.

4.4.4 Private sector and government involvement and financial investments

Previous studies found that government funding decreases while the market-based dependency on development and conservation increases (de Koning 2010; Büscher, Dressler, and Fletcher 2014). When asked about government funding and support for conservation and community development, Bruno (pers. comm.) said that most development programs mainly run on private investments. According to previous studies (Ramutsindela and Shabangu 2013), the DEAT agreed that a market-based approach to conservation and tourism is most efficient and thus implemented, confirming Bruno his statement. With the market-based approach, the government expects the profits to be invested in community development projects. According to three interviewees, this is managed, implemented, and regulated roughly through conservation levies. They explain that each tourist pays a conservation levy directly invested in conservation and community development. Scarlett (pers. comm.) mentioned that 10% of their conservation levies, which tourists pay per night, go directly into community development projects. The rest will be invested in the conservation of the private game reserve. According to the Corporate Social Investment Programme implemented in the KNP, on top of that, 1% of all tourists' accommodation booking and activities are invested in the communities living adjacent to the KNP (South African National Parks 2022). It is essential to acknowledge the significance of private entities investing in community development. However, it is important to note that relying solely on private investments for the well-being of a community is not sustainable and makes community development reliant on market-based structures. The government should not delegate all investment responsibilities to private entities (Audrey, pers. comm.). When comparing numbers from previous studies, it appears that private entities do have the potential to invest more of their profits into adjacent communities.

Mia (pers. comm.) argues that qualifying for private funding is difficult as a project has to tick many boxes. She gave an example of a mining company that will only invest in community development up to 50km around the mines, mainly to shrink their footprints. In the context of

neoliberal conservation and a market-based approach, previous critical studies have mentioned that leaving control over society-nature relations in the hands of the market might lead to unequal access to resources (McDonalds 2002; Kopnina 2017; Baer 2020; Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). Mia's statement supports the fact that the mining company focuses on shrinking their environmental footprint or making their practices appear environmentally friendly rather than delving deeper into why they extract resources and how it affects the development of nearby communities. The results also suggest that to receive support from a private entity, the community must live in an area that is already impacted negatively by the company. While questioning the motivation of private entities to invest in community development projects, it should be acknowledged that the development projects that the private reserves have done have shown their success and have been crucial for, at least, immediate development. Bruno (pers. comm.) has also argued that private investments have helped environmental challenges like rhino poaching a lot and that without the immediate investments of such entities, "things would have been very very very very bad".

This study questions the long-term equal distribution of benefits coming from environmental goods. Therefore, it is essential to critically evaluate the current market-based approach and consider socio-economic factors to understand region-based economic systems and sustainable development better. For now, this study shows that people perceive a lack of government funding and see private funding as the only solution for their complex situation. Private funding is perceived as a crucial tool for community development until the government is willing to allocate more resources.

4.4.5 Local businesses and CBNRM in Welverdiend

The WOTC uses its location close to the environmental resources in the MGR, such as wildlife, as its main selling point. The conservation of environmental resources is crucial for their business. Their approach to entrepreneurship is known as CBNRM. When discussing CBNRM with Mia, she mentioned that most community-based products show strong socio-economic benefits. In confirmation, multiple interview partners working for the WOTC said that they believe the WOTC has the potential to support their livelihoods in the future further.

When asked if the employees of the WOTC feel they receive fair pay, one mentioned: "Not a fair pay, but as we see that they are struggling a bit. We just hope that maybe when time goes

on, they will improve something" (Kwame, pers. comm.)[21]. He also mentioned that the money is spent mainly on food and children. Saving any money is impossible. Tyra[22] also stated that the wages are too little, especially with kids. "It is very difficult for me because I have kids attending school in Acornhoek. I have to pay the transport which is 851 Rand per kid. It's two of them" (Tyra, pers. comm.). The statements were confirmed by another employee of the WOTC, who mentioned that the money earned at the WOTC is used only to raise the kids and that another job would be needed to make more money. When asked about the future, the interviewee stated: "I am sure this camp is going to be a very big camp because people work as hard workers. Every day I pray for that to be a big company." When asked about skill development or growth within the WOTC, the employees seemed unsure. One interviewee stated that she wished she could develop her skills or get training from the WOTC. It was mentioned that tourism is a nice job, but if possible, learning how to do massages would be the next achievement. When asked if the WOTC could support those desires, she answered, "maybe". According to the previous literature, SANParks aims to develop the skills of communities living adjacent to the reserves (Saayman, Rossouw, and Saayman 2012).

The results of this study have shown that a business like the WOTC, which might seem small, can significantly impact the livelihood of many people from the local community. Besides the direct impact resulting from the salaries of the local people that are reliant on domestic and international tourism, all local suppliers, tour operators, and businesses are also reliant on those tourists. When discussing with the interviewees to what extent the WOTC can support local businesses, it was mentioned that the local suppliers depend on businesses like the WOTC. The issue remains that without guests, the WOTC cannot purchase products from other local businesses (Henry, pers. comm.). Bruno (pers. comm.) confirms that the whole economy of Hoedspruit, including all local businesses and CBNRM enterprises, fully relies on tourism. Without the tourists, the well-being of the people and the animals will be compromised.

When discussing the dependency of community well-being on tourism with the interviewees, the majority of the interviewees mentioned that the KNP is the main reason tourists come to the area. One interviewee mentioned, "if you remove the KNP from Welverdiend, then we become

[21] Kwame. Employee at the Wild Olive Tree Camp. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Wild Olive Tree Camp. 31st May 2023

[22] Tyra. Employee at the Wild Olive Tree Camp. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Wild Olive Tree Camp. 31st May 2023.

nothing and these lodges become nothing." Another interviewee argues that "Kruger is the only reason people come from different countries in Europe, America, Asia. They come to you because we have Kruger." Surprisingly, the women in craft (pers. comm.)[23] mentioned that they would continue their CBNRM enterprise even without tourism. They argued that doing their crafts is a daily activity where the women support each other, whether there are tourists or not. Thus, tourism is only an extra opportunity for them. Their crafts are made with natural resources from the area. Selling their products to tourists was not their initial plan and mainly turned out to be a pleasant bonus from which they can afford their children to obtain education (pers. comm.).

As previous studies have found, CBNRM is a bottom-up approach to preserving natural resources and traditional cultures, which can enable sustainable livelihoods (Measham and Lumbasi 2013). The results of this study suggest that CBNRM can support the livelihoods of communities. However, the employees of the WOTC confirm that it is not easy, and they hope the future will bring more benefits. Firstly, they would appreciate a slightly higher salary. Secondly, they wish to benefit in terms of benefits other than higher salaries, such as talent or skill development or growing into a higher position within the company. It appears that there are no ongoing discussions regarding projects aimed at developing the skills and talents of the employees at WOTC.

Previous studies (Zips and Zips-Mairitsch 2019) showed that wildlife conservation is highly dependent on CBNRM initiatives, as it brings community, conservation, and poverty alleviation together due to equal participation and land-use methods. Although the land claims of the MGR are still up for court settlement, the WOTC is already able to use its location next to the MGR to attract tourists to their camp. Meaning that supporting conservation is also relevant for the camp. In alignment with previous studies, this study shows that now rural communities are involved in conservation, they share the interest with conservationists to preserve environmental resources. In discussions with employees of WOTC, members of the cooperative, and informal conversations with night guards and gatekeepers, it became evident that everyone values the conservation of environmental resources in the area. Specifically, the importance of wildlife conservation was emphasized. It was mentioned that there is much respect towards the animals from the community because people see how the whole community

[23] Women in craft. Nine women working in a local craft center in Welverdiend. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author, translated by Andries Sihlangu. Welverdiend. 30th May 2023.

benefits from it. One person mentioned in an informal chat that no one from Welverdiend is poaching rhinos because people are aware of the value of the animals, and if one of the community members would make a mistake to go poaching, it would bring a lot of trouble to the whole community. It appears that the start of the WOTC not only generated a direct income for the employees of the WOTC, but it also assisted in including the whole community towards a positive image of conservation. Based on these findings, it appears that CBNRM can effectively promote the involvement of local communities in conservation efforts, leading to greater benefits for these communities and stronger relationships with conservation agencies. This result may be attributed to the initiatives taken to address the ongoing issue of former segregation policies in the area. In accordance with the present results, previous studies (Anthony et al. 2011) have demonstrated that local participation and cooperation between local residents, their knowledge, and Western science are the most effective way to a just approach to land-use management.

The examples of CBNRM in Welverdiend support the statement made by one of the members of the cooperative that local economies have a significant impact on the well-being of the community. This study also confirms previous findings that CBNRM can potentially lift local communities. When asked, the women in craft (pers. comm.) confirmed that the income they can generate from their crafts is sufficient to make a living. According to previous studies (Spenceley 2005), empowering communities to be the agents of using their natural resources sustainably is a main aim of CBNRM. The results of this study confirm that community-based projects assist in conserving natural resources in the study area, that it can uplift people in Welverdiend out of poverty, and that it creates social security as people collaborate, ensuring each other's well-being. This study also shows that the community-based projects in Welverdiend are still highly dependent on tourism, which can make them vulnerable to global crises like COVID-19. Further research could focus on understanding how to expand CBNRM within a local economy, decreasing dependency on international stakeholders and increasing dependency on local stakeholders.

4.4.5.1 Challenges in local businesses

Local businesses and CBRNM can contribute to support community development, but they often encounter challenges before a thriving local economy is established. According to Mia (pers. comm.), the biggest challenge is a misalignment between local businesses.

> "everybody in the protected areas has this beautiful idea and ideal world. Where they want to support small businesses in their peripheries. Sounds great. They will tick all of their boxes because they can go to their guests and say this is what we do. But when it comes to reality, these small businesses that's in the communities, they are not orientated like a big enterprise." (Mia, pers. comm.)

Mia elaborates that basic training on owning a small business was never available for business starters. Small businesses usually arose out of necessity as a means to end poverty (Mia, pers. comm.). For example, a local farmer would sell the overshoot of their crops to other villagers without worrying about meeting global quality standards. The misalignment lies within the lack of references on quality.

This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Lelokwane Lockie Mokgalo and Musikavanhu (2019). They argued that a lack of skills in tourism puts local businesses at a disadvantage, which results in international private investors and businesses choosing to invest in well-trained foreign staff, leaving local potential and businesses out. To reduce the gap between such misalignments, K2C NPC offers basic training and business management to help local communities and "guide them to make the right decisions" (Mia, pers. comm.). With such training, local businesses can improve and foster collaboration with other local businesses. This supports local communities in regaining power over their local environmental resources. Furthermore, it helps the local economy and restores regional power locally, nationally, and globally. These findings align with previous studies (Dressler et al. 2010; Measham and Lumbasi 2013), which have shown that CBNRM and local businesses can assist in establishing counter-hegemonic programs to restore imbalances power relations and different agendas of different stakeholders.

4.5 Perceptions on tourism and local challenges

Different interview partners have varying perspectives on the benefits that the community can generate from CBWT. Previous studies have mentioned that beneficial arrangements for community development should go beyond considering economic arrangements to prevent environmental and social harm. According to Sen (1999), determinants such as social welfare, political rights, and civil rights are equally important when aiming to lift communities out of poverty. Other authors, such as Harvey (2005), added that the environment should not be compromised when aiming for community development, arguing that the neglection of public services for impoverished communities is disadvantageous for environmental, social, and

economic development. The interviews for this study have focused on understanding the meaning of benefits for both the people from Welverdiend and people from NGOs, private entities, or social enterprises working and living in the K2C BR. The results of this study align with previously written literature. Mia (pers. comm.) mentioned that the K2C NPC aims for pro-nature economic development. "So, we look at supporting SMME's[24] with a triple bottom line. So, they have social benefits, they have economic benefits, and they have environmental benefits." This aligns with previous studies (Spenceley 2005), where the framework of sustainable tourism is based on the triple bottom line.

4.5.1 Direct financial benefits in CBWT

When asked how CBWT can benefit the community of Welverdiend, Theo mentions that employment for the community is crucial, and the employees of the WOTC also feel that their biggest benefit comes from employment opportunities. Henry argued that the main objective of the cooperative has always been better wealth for the community, which goes beyond employment or a high salary. Abena (pers. comm) mentioned that "many people are working at wildlife, so they help the community." She argues that local communities are employed in the wildlife tourism industry and can benefit from the wildlife economy through employment. Audrey (pers. comm.) argued that the biggest benefit they can offer is employment and bringing a certain amount of money back into the community. She states that the benefits they can offer are mainly financial. The women working in the local craft center in Welverdiend say that they benefit most from the cooperative and their work, as they bring tourism to the village to sell their products, thus a form of employment. In alignment with previous studies (Dressler and Büscher 2008), it shows that the majority of the interviewees recognize that the wildlife tourism industry brings employment to the area. These results also confirm the significant dependency on tourism. The dependence of CBNRM projects on tourism income can be named under neoliberal CBNRM (Dressler and Büscher 2008). This study confirms the market-based approach of community-based projects, both the craft center in Welverdiend and the WOTC.

4.5.1.1 Perception of success

Previous studies have criticized the approach of the SGDs, applying the green growth theory (Wilhusen 2014), arguing that the movement neglects the origins of environmental degradation and poverty (Brand 2012). When asked Mia (pers. comm.), she mentioned that the perception

[24] Small, medium, and micro enterprises

of success in the Western world is based on growth. Growth is seen as a measurement of success, hence the use of national and global GDP to define whether a country is developed. Although the community of Welverdiend is keen to develop their livelihood and improve their businesses, their perception might differentiate from the Western view. Multiple interviewees have argued that the success of development within a community goes beyond growth or financial success. An interviewee from the cooperative argued that the well-being of the community is the priority, not economic growth. Mia (pers. comm.) confirmed this argument, stating that achieving growth is not always the aim for rural communities.

> "It's not for me to say that community means that everybody gets X amount of money per day because that's not a relevant form of development. Because development for indigenous groups might be completely different to what the northern hemisphere is. […] Just because money doesn't drive him doesn't mean that he's undeveloped. It's different perspectives of development. Then that's where community development is. It's different perspectives of development for different people. But essentially, it is getting people to that level and having that adapted and changed as you go along."

Mia portrays the lack of aim to achieve economic growth not as a negative asset but as another approach and perspective to success implemented in indigenous systems. She explains that development can differ for people living in different societal systems or structures. As discussed in the literature review, growth and development are often coupled, while the decoupling of these concepts can assist in achieving social welfare and human rights instead of solely a growing GDP. Although success and growth might have a different meaning in indigenous systems or social groups, South Africa is now integrated into global markets and Western systems, which currently focus on a neoliberal approach to development. This clash of priorities and systems has led to an interdependency between the elites and the rural communities (Mia, pers. comm.). Thus, finding an equilibrium between indigenous and Western priorities should be considered when discussing decolonizing conservation and community development in South Africa. Including indigenous systems within global conservation aims is crucial for adapting and including both priorities and objectives.

4.5.2 How is CBWT benefiting rural communities?

When discussing the social benefits of community-based projects and community involvement, it was mentioned by Mia (pers. comm.) that one of the biggest social benefits is the regeneration of pride towards their communities and environment. In alignment with the previous literature (Carruthers 1995), this study confirms that co-management and participation in the local

economy bring pride back into the communities. According to previous literature, indigenous communities displaced from their homelands have a traumatized relationship with the land (Carruthers 1995; Lahiff 2001; McDonald 2002).

> "Community members are now noticing that people are identifying our community as something good and immediately that changes the mindset. […] So, we need to keep our community clean. What else can we do? And that grows the morale of the community and that also helps them to move out of that poverty line." (Mia, pers. comm.)

These results suggest that when the community gets involved, it can reignite a sense of pride, which can lead to improved development and awareness of local issues.

Another social benefit from CBWT that multiple interviewees mentioned was that local cultures are transmitted to tourists through a show or a community tour. One interviewee gave a practical example of such. They explained about the Octopus Horse Riding School in Acornhoek and how it benefits local people regarding environmental education but also leaves tourists with a new perspective on communities in rural South Africa. As mentioned earlier, tourists sometimes expect that rural South Africa is inaccessible to foreigners and that the people "live in mud huts" (Scarlett, pers. comm.). By enabling tourist access, CBT contributed to changing global perspectives on rural communities in South Africa. These results align with the theory by Berger and Luckmann (1990) that tourists expand their worldview through the presence of phenomena, concluding that when they are exposed to the reality of South Africa's rural areas, the newly established narrative has the potential to gain an understanding of a non-marketized notion of reality. The narrative, as mentioned in previous literature by Lacey and Ilcan (2015), can potentially establish a new relationship between the host community and the tourist.

Another finding that stands out from the socio-economic benefits originating from CBT in the area is that it supports the youth from participating in the job market and allows them to grow their position and knowledge on managing local businesses. One interviewee said that the MGR and the WOTC are helping to employ the youth of the community, which gives them an opportunity to leave home, making them independent. With the PAs employing the youth, interviewees mentioned, the crime rates have decreased in the community.

> "The lodges inside the protected areas can employ a lot of people from the community so that crime can be degraded and because they could see that most of the people who are involving themselves in such crimes it's because the lack of employment and then they are

starving and then they try to help themselves and also that brings a negative impact in the community. It would look like it's not a good community, there is crime, meanwhile it's the situation that they are living with." (Abena, pers. comm.)

In accordance with the present results, previous studies have demonstrated that the employment rate in the KNP area is low, leading to higher crime rates and negative perceptions of the unemployed youth. To solve the high unemployment rate in the area, the majority of the interviewees mentioned the importance of training the youth and offering an entrance to the job market. Both government and private entities should have a part in creating opportunities.

The annual reports from SANParks state that they aim to employ first the people living adjacent to the PAs. Especially since the PAs now acknowledge, according to Bunn et al. 2023, that many of those people suffer from the inequitable ownership of natural resources. Besides government entities such as SANParks, private entities claim to do their part in enabling job opportunities in the area. An employee from a private game reserve in the area stated:

"Let's give youth an opportunity for whether it's an intern or full-time job, that already stimulates the local economy, but it's also giving youth that opportunity to think that they can actually be something and add something, not just sit at home. […] it gives a bit more hope for these areas." (Employee of a private game reserve, pers. comm.)

Previous studies have found that of the employees of SANParks, 80% of the people come from the region, while this number only lies at 55% for the private game reserves (Chidakel, Eb, and Child 2020). The numbers show that private game reserves need to catch up on regional employment on governmental reserves. Further on, the results of this study align with the previously mentioned results, where the communities can benefit when they are involved in projects and businesses in the area. Instead of multinational private tourism operators, now CBT enterprises can benefit from the environmental goods in the tourism industry.

Another advantage discussed in the interviews is that community-based enterprises are often located close to the community. According to Kwame (pers. comm.), this is beneficial because time can be used more efficiently as work at home is better manageable. Multiple interviewees mentioned that households suffer from the men working far away as they cannot take part in the care work for the children at home. With the WOTC so close to Welverdiend, the employees are more flexible in combining work and private life.

"The advantage is our neighbouring village. So, we manage to come here and work. Then after we go home, do another activity, something like that. It's better than being somewhere

like in a Kruger. You don't allow maybe to come out, something like that. You need to look after the family, something like that. But here we have an advantage that we came here. Then maybe we can be here for eight hours. The rest we can spend at home. So, I think it's a good advantage for that. Because we manage to maybe look after something at home there. By the way, next morning we can be here the whole day. But then after we can check in, maybe something went wrong at home then. But you can be there for your family and something like that. So, it's like working from home." (Kwame, pers. comm.)

Besides community-based enterprises, it also seems that the private game reserves, just like SANParks, aim to employ people from the area, which would decrease the number of employees coming from further away, being forced to leave their families behind. One interviewee from a private game reserve in the area confirmed that the communities that live close to the reserve benefit the most from their existence, as they are employed within the nearby reserves.

4.5.3 Tourism and the environment

In the literature review, the question has been raised as to what extent mass tourism can harm the environment. It was elaborated from a Western perspective that mass tourism has detrimental effects on the health of the environment. Hence, caution towards the growing tourism industry is necessary (Carson and Carson 2021). It is important to note that their European perspective comes from a privileged position and may not fully consider the priorities of local people. The notion that this comes from a European perspective is confirmed by Anthony (2011) and Spenceley (2005), who conducted surveys in the communities living adjacent to the KNP. Based on Anthony's (2011) household surveys of the Tsonga communities living adjacent to the KNP, employment is the utmost concern, whereas protecting wild animals is given the least priority. Spenceley (2005) suggests that the benefits of tourism are inadequate to support conservation efforts, as the community sees socio-economic issues such as job creation and income as their priority. Likely, mass tourism is not considered a concern as it helps to lift communities out of poverty by creating jobs, which is, according to the surveys, their main priority. By adding economic value to wildlife, local communities decide it is necessary to generate profits by commodifying their natural resources. According to Mia (pers. comm.), it will take a long time before reaching a state of overconsumption of environmental resources through tourism. For now, tourism can efficiently be used as a tool to alleviate rural communities out of poverty and raise employment rates. The majority of the interviewees stated

that the environment also benefits from revenues made through tourism, as it is partly invested in conservation projects.

Multiple interviewees acknowledged the importance of a healthy environment when discussing the benefits of conserving environmental resources. According to Henry (pers. comm.), around 1960-1970, the government found coal in the MGR, but with the help of the community and conservationists, coal mining was prevented. This example shows a successful co-management accomplishment between stakeholders with different interests, favoring conserving biodiversity and the PA. No data was found to confirm the coal in the MGR, but it appears that Mpumalanga, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, and Free State are provinces where most of the South African coal is found (Ratshomo and Nembahe, n.d.), which means that there is a chance of coal in the MGR.

Consistent with the reviewed literature, this study affirms the interdependence of tourism and the environment in safeguarding the well-being of both the environment and the local economy, as well as the social arrangements in Welverdiend. It has been argued that people become more aware of the environment and show more appreciation towards it because a healthy environment offers employment for the local communities (Bruno, pers. comm.; Henry, pers. comm.; Mia, pers. comm.). Audrey and Scarlett (pers. comm.) state that people are aware of the need to protect the PAs as it ensures their income. By protecting the environment, tourism can remain a significant source of the local economy. In the same scope, it is acknowledged amongst the interviewees that animals are a crucial resource as it creates the main source of income for the area. Concluding, the results of this study suggest that protecting environmental resources results from tourism enterprises as it creates awareness and a desire for a healthy environment to be commodified in the tourism industry.

4.5.3.1 Perceptions towards poaching and trophy hunting

During the interviews, despite being different practices, poaching and TH were often mentioned together. According to Bruno (pers. comm.), there is a clear distinction. Poaching involves illegal and unethical actions, while TH is conducted within the bounds of the law and with ethical considerations (Bruno, pers. comm.). According to him, poaching can involve unethical practices such as poisoning. When visiting the local rehabilitation center Moholoholo, a guide mentioned the unethical nature of poaching as it threatens many other animals through practices like poisoning or snaring. Interviewees mention that many animals are killed through poaching as a side effect, whereas TH only kills the targeted and bought animals.

This study has been unable to demonstrate that local people feel affected or disempowered by TH as a form of tourism, as Thomsen et al. (2022) have found in their studies. They argued that local people feel disempowered because traditional hunting practices are no longer allowed. The majority of the interviewees in this study mentioned they support TH. It was mentioned that TH boosts the economy (Kwame, pers. comm.), that it generates more income for conservation practices (Bruno, pers. comm.), and can support controlling the carrying capacity of a PA (Bruno, pers. comm.; Henry, pers. comm.).

Within the context of this thesis, the commodification of environmental goods, including animals, is questioned. It is essential to recognize that poaching and TH are prime examples of humans placing monetary value on animals for their own leisure. While the interviewees generally do not oppose TH, it is worth mentioning that their primary motivation for supporting it is financial gain. When asked about the prices for trophies, Bruno (pers. comm.) argued that the rate depends on the demand of the animal in the hunting market. When further questioned why a male lion would cost more than a female lion, Bruno (pers. comm.) mentioned this is probably because a male lion is more spectacular for a tourist to take home than a trophy than a female lion. This study confirms that local people acknowledge and support the commodification of animals when the benefits are shared amongst the community. Contrary to poaching, where the income generated through the commodification of animals is perceived to be kept within the poaching schemes.

According to Mia (pers. comm.), the difference between poaching and TH is the perfect example of the conflict between Western and indigenous systems. She questioned the paradox that it is illegal to kill and use rhino horns for medicinal practices in Asian indigenous cultures, but when killing a rhino with a permit under the guise of TH, it is legal.

> "It's an indigenous system, whether we like it or not, whether science has approved it or disapproved of it, that doesn't matter. It's an indigenous system that's there. It's something that is acknowledged and because it's done because of those purposes, it's illegal. But because I've got a permit to pay money towards doing that, then it's okay. […] If it wasn't perceived as illegal to kill a rhino for its horn, would it have been different to killing the rhino for its head? What's the difference? […] If I have a piece of paper, then it's okay?" (Mia, pers. comm.)

The contradiction Mia brought about is the double standard within the wildlife industry of shooting a rhino for its horn, perceived as illegal, versus shooting one with a permit for its head, perceived as legal. Mia proposed a solution to contradictory policies, saying indigenous hunting systems can control the carrying capacity of the PA.

> "Why not utilize indigenous systems of hunting? Because it is an indigenous hunting system. It's not poaching. It's hunting. Utilize that and let them come in and do it. Give them authorization to it. Let them get a small permit and go and do their thing and take it off. Yes, there's a lot of red tape to it. And yes, it's much easier said than done. But that kind of systems has to be investigated to look at how you can integrate it." (Mia, pers. comm.)

As she mentions, investigating this could offer a solution for Western-centric policies undermining indigenous knowledge systems where traditional hunting practices are crucial for conserving culture. These results suggest a lack of communication and discussion regarding the complex and essential matters surrounding poaching and TH. It is important to consider environmental protection and preserving local cultures, especially when conflicting knowledge systems and worldviews exist. Effective communication is necessary to ensure fair participation in decision-making bodies.

Interestingly, all of the interviewees expressed their disapproval of poaching. They mainly recognized the negative impact it could have on their individual businesses. At the same time, no interviewee expressed disapproval of TH. The rhinoceros is a highly poached species in the KNP and adjacent reserves. As mentioned previously in the results section, the community of Welverdiend values the rhino because it attracts tourists and is a unique selling point for the tourism industry. The interviewees and other people in informal talks have mentioned the harmful effects of poaching on the tourism industry. Community development and biodiversity reduction were also mentioned as being harmed through poaching practices. Notably, these results confirm the importance of protecting the rhinoceros as it is correlated with the species' economic value: dead as a trophy or alive as a commodity for photo tourism.

4.6 Distributive environmental justice for the people of Welverdiend

4.6.1 Distributive environmental justice

The interviewees were asked how they perceive EJ regarding the MGR during the interviews. Although the majority of the interviewees agreed upon the broader topics, such as access to employment for the surrounding communities and access to harvest resources (Abena, pers.

comm.; Kwame, pers. comm.; Lesedi, pers. comm.; Tyra, pers. comm.), others were open to go deeper into the discussion.

When asked about a definition of EJ, Mia (pers. comm.) defined it as going back

> "to the whole of jurisprudence systems and looking at a way of integrating indigenous systems. Unfortunately, you have to acknowledge the Western influences because it's there and it's what's making a lot of the other functions possible. But it's looking at bringing that back. So, your typical deep ecology methodologies, looking at how you can then utilize your natural resources to bring in economic benefits, which already automatically spills down as social benefits. […] So, you have to look at better management systems to make sure that the economic benefits on the one side, which is completely outweighed, there's a system in place to make sure that there's more corporate social responsibility and investment that goes into the other side of the fence. So, I think it's more following those indigenous systems to get the ecology better because if the ecology is better, then automatically the economic value is better. If the economic value is better and it's better mandated, then the social benefits will be there and there will be more of a motivation to protect the environment because I get something out of it. If I don't get something out of it, why should I protect it?"

As found in previous studies, EJ is about understanding different worldviews (Coolsaet and Álvarez 2018), where place-based systems and ideologies are acknowledged (Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010). Mia her statement acknowledges the interconnection between Western and indigenous ideologies and recognizes the need for both approaches when pursuing EJ. Moreover, Mia (pers. comm.) proclaimed that implementing indigenous systems would safeguard the environment's integrity, increasing value and improving community development. Integrating indigenous systems to preserve ecosystems while capitalizing the commodity in the neoliberal system could represent a successful collaboration between diverse ideologies. In alignment with Mia, Audrey (pers. comm.) agrees that EJ is about ensuring that everybody gains from the environment by commodifying the natural resources that South Africa has to offer. Previous studies (Schlossberg and Carruthers 2010) have argued that distributive EJ should contribute to the well-being and functioning of people within the lives they choose for themselves. Acknowledging indigenous systems, Western ideologies, and local desires, the equal distribution of recognition, and implementing policies on environmental resource use can contribute to a just distribution.

When asked about the land claims and how they can benefit the equitable distribution of environmental goods, it was mentioned by multiple interviewees that the people of Welverdiend are entitled to gain from the MGR. The land claims can be seen as a step toward equitable sharing of benefits of environmental goods. However, receiving the ownership of the MGR must be seen as just the beginning of a long-term process (Mia, pers. comm.). She states that the people with land claims most likely do not possess the skills or tools to manage the PA. Multiple interviewees emphasized the significance of providing educating and training to members of the community to enable them to secure higher-level jobs in the tourism industry and the MGR. According to Theo (pers. comm.), gaining full ownership of the MGR takes a long time, and training the people to take over in the future is essential. When asked if five years is enough to train all the staff for managing a PA, Theo said it will not be enough, but it can be a start towards a more equal employment scheme. Conserving the land is a top priority as it is a significant source of income for many. While receiving ownership is a step towards equal distribution, enabling land claimants and their community to become stewards of the land is another step towards achieving distributive EJ.

Bruno (pers. comm.) questions to which extent the people will receive their benefits or whether the benefits will mainly go to the chiefs of a community. In confirmation with Bruno, Kwame (pers. comm.) mentioned that the community of Welverdiend benefits from tourism because they visit the chief and leave money. “When they went to the Induna here, I think maybe they leave something. I am not sure but according to me, they won’t visit without anything. […] I think the village benefits from that” (Kwame, pers. comm.). On the contrary, it has been argued by other interviewees that the advantages of the future land claims are not limited to a select few but instead distributed equitably among the community. Theo (pers. comm.) mentioned that households with direct claims will receive a fixed percentage of the income generated in the MGR. Other citizens of Welverdiend will not benefit directly from the financial benefits. Still, according to Theo (pers. comm.), they will receive much support from the traditional authorities and the cooperative with initiating community-based initiatives that aim for a CBNRM approach.

The data of this study show that both Henry (pers. comm.) and Theo (pers. comm.) believe that the beneficiaries from the land claims will enhance the welfare of Welverdiend. They believe because they are convinced that the beneficiaries will support local businesses and community-based initiatives. Henry owns a tourism business himself, with which he aims for all citizens of

Welverdiend to visit the MGR. “Some of them they’ve never been to Manyeleti or Kruger so I want to create a cohesive environment, you know, I make money but also they get experience from what I do.” With access to the MGR, the women in craft (pers. comm.) mention they can lift and develop their business and learn from other crafts found in the shops in the MGR. Henry (pers. comm.) believes that the community of Welverdiend is supportive of individuals gaining benefits from the land claims because “the community wants us to make money so that they can make money.” He stated: “I have been always all my life trying to make sure that what I have I share with the community” (Henry, pers. comm.), and he believes others will do the same if they receive their fair share of the gains.

These results emphasize the importance of achieving justice in resolving land claims. However, education on land management, conservation, and equal benefit sharing is critical for the environment and society, according to interviewees from Welverdiend and other stakeholders in the K2C BR.

4.6.2 Community involvement as an approach to distributive environmental justice

During the interviews, it was frequently discussed that achieving fair policies requires including all stakeholders and recognizing the needs of both humans and the environment. Within the case study, Arno has argued that Indalo Inclusive aims for the full participation of the community of Welverdiend in the WOTC. To make this reality, it is essential that people can participate in education and skill development projects. Arno (pers. comm.) emphasizes that it is crucial to take time to educate people well on their job; “if it takes us two years, or three years, so be it. By the time we finish they can now say: we run this thing” (Arno, pers. comm.). He mentions that when the time has come, Indalo Inclusive can step down and leave the competent new management with all the tasks.

The employees of the WOTC have mentioned in the interviews that they would be willing to grow within the WOTC but that they are not sure it is a possibility. When asked, “do you feel that there is a chance for you at the WOTC to develop your talents or to get a course to develop yourself or your skills?” one employee answered, “I wish.” Another employee mentioned the collapse of the WOTC due to COVID-19 and said: “there is nothing maybe because of COVID it destroyed us. Maybe I will wait what happens.” One other employee said it was difficult to answer and asked to skip the question. These results suggest that the WOTC does not offer its employees to grow within their job or to explore further talents. This raises questions about

whether the WOTC aims to actively involve the Welverdiend community in their development or if their current employee base is the extent of their community involvement for now. These results must be interpreted with caution, especially considering the difficulties COVID-19 brought about. The employees all mentioned they are glad that the WOTC is giving them a place to work, and it could be assumed that skills development is not a priority at this point.

To achieve sustainable employment for the community of Welverdiend, it is crucial to establish possibilities for the community members to be involved in conservation and tourism. It was mentioned by Theo (pers. comm.) that the distribution of knowledge on conservation has been unequal for decades. In order to establish equal distribution through tourism, coloniality should be acknowledged.

> "The apartheid history of colonial conservation still constrains community participation in ecotourism. It is of great importance that these and other constraints are explicitly recognized […]. This includes an appreciation of negative local attitudes towards conservation and authorities due to people's historical loss of land and resources." (IWPA 2016 as cited in Zips and Zips-Mairtisch 2019, 312)

In alignment with previous research, Theo mentioned that one of the reasons for the unequal distribution of education is historical segregation, where black rural communities could not attend education. As previous literature has found, coloniality can cause trauma and have long-term effects on people (Coolsaet and Álvarez 2018), even when segregation is legally dissolved.

> "We need to plough something on the ground within our own youth to see the value of conservation, the value of tourism. So, because we were not exposed to this since the forceful removals we were having a negative mind towards conservation because we saw it as something coming to persecute local people. And now you find that when they look they go and study. They start teaching for other spheres of the government, but conservation they just neglect it. So, we need to bring that mind back" (Theo, pers. comm.).

The results suggest that the traces of colonialism have impacted the willingness to support conservation.

Henry (pers. comm.) acknowledged that the former perspective towards conservation within local communities was different. He mentioned that when he was young, in the 1980s, it was difficult because the humans conflicted with the wildlife, and they were scared for their crops and cattle and their own lives. Meaning that roughly 40-50 years ago, animals posed a threat to food security and safety, making it difficult to live in the area.

> "it was difficult for us, we didn't know anything about tourism and then we've killed everything meanwhile if we didn't kill those things there would be a lot of zebras around. It was difficult at the same time that people were afraid that their livestock is killed by the lions and there was no compensation and also some of the animals were putting a risk to people's life as well. You know, you could be killed by a leopard anytime around here. One thing the community members thought was like we're going to kill them all, some of them were it was an antelope, but we killed them all there was nothing outside. And now we want them back." (Henry, pers. comm.)

The statement by Henry suggests that now in 2023, the community has become more aware of the animals' value beyond just being a source of food. With this knowledge, they want the animals back, at least the ones that are not creating danger for human lives. It is noteworthy that this statement refers to the 1980s, roughly 20 years after many households were removed from their land in the MGR, decades after the people lived in harmony with nature, according to previous studies (Modise et al. 2018). Based on the results, colonial policies and the exclusion of black individuals from conservation efforts have resulted in a distorted perception of animals and a negative outlook toward wildlife. Rather than involving people in conservation efforts, they were left with a lack of understanding of conservation practices on the other side of the fence.

Prior studies have noticed the importance of including local communities and minorities in conservation (Dressler et al. 2010; Zips and Zips-Mairitsch 2019; Gaodirelwe, Masunga, and Motsholapheko 2020). As argued by interviewees from the cooperative (pers. comm.), the only sustainable management of a PA is if you have a good working relationship with the communities adjacent to the PA. According to Scarlett (pers. comm.), the inclusivity of local communities has changed in the private game reserves.

> "No longer should it be: here's my boundary fence, we do what we need to do, you guys do whatever you need to do. There's been a huge mind shift change over the past sort of six years where reserves are putting priority in ensuring they are inclusive and quite a transparent sort of workings between inside and outside which is hugely favorable for these areas." (Scarlett, pers. comm.)

Another interviewee, a member of the cooperative, confirmed that the local communities should be included in the management of PAs. He mentioned that allowing regulated access to natural resources for the community can support businesses that focus, for example, on arts and crafts with natural materials. Access to natural resources in PAs supports businesses, but it also helps

displaced communities rebuild their relationship with the environment and gain positive experiences with it.

If the community of Welverdiend wants to achieve distributive EJ with complete ownership and management of the MGR, they must be involved in conservation as the MGR is a PA. According to multiple interviewees, the relationship with conservation has improved now that local communities are better involved. Although interviewees experienced an improvement, others mentioned that local communities are still excluded, especially by the international community. Bruno (pers. comm.) mentioned that even he, as a state veterinarian, is excluded from decision-making meetings. "Even myself, that has to enforce it, I'm not invited to the meetings where these things are decided. I just get a document which says this is how it needs to be done" (Bruno, pers. comm.). He proposes that those working for the international community must go to the ground and see what is happening before imposing rules. By imposing policies on the community of Welverdiend and excluding them from land ownership and decision-making, the traumas of coloniality within the communities will achieve the opposite, as what happened in the 1980s, according to Henry (pers. comm.). The results of this study show that while the segregation laws are dissolved, history still largely impacts social structures and perspectives. By acknowledging and discussing the historical events, a cultural shift might occur, and minds towards conservation can shift (Mia, pers. comm.).

4.6.2.1. Community exclusion due to fencing

The fieldwork for this thesis has presented challenges due to the nearby wildlife and other environmental phenomena the community of Welverdiend faces. In alignment with previous studies, the challenge of wild animals that would escape due to lousy fencing was acknowledged by the majority of the interviewees. However, an unexpected finding was that multiple interviewees also reported additional issues for local communities caused by the fences in the area surrounding KNP.

It appears that more private game reserves aim to drop the fences and be a part of the Greater Kruger Environmental Protection Area (Mia, pers. comm.). When asked about the fences, Audrey (pers. comm.) mentioned that dropping the fences from the private reserve she works for is a huge accomplishment, mainly because it increases the value of the land as animals can migrate and return to their regular routine. She sees the fences as a result of former human

intervention. “Us humans came in and put up fences and blocked off everything, pushed people out, and then stopped the animals from doing their normal routine” (Audrey, pers. comm.).

Besides blocking animal migration and raising land value, the fences also create mental and physical barriers for neighboring communities of KNP and private game reserves. Mia (pers. comm.) explains:

> “I think the biggest challenge is that the fences create a barrier of accessibility. Both physically and mentally. Because on this side, if I can picture, you're a little kid and you want this huge adventure. But there's this huge fence and you're standing there going, I can't go through there. And then you hear the stories about the dangers of these people in there that will kill their people because they poach. And then you hear the stories of a lot of white people are so arrogant that they won't pay you a fair salary and all of these things. And they get this overwhelming feeling of, oh, and that is how they grow up. And then as an adult, you're standing there and you go, but how dare you? That used to be my forefather's land. It's a huge barrier that's created. And both sides have the perspective of the other side without really getting the knowledge of it in the ground.”

These results show that the fences are symbolic of the history of racial segregation within conservation practices in South Africa. The areas behind the fence have become the places of “true wilderness” which tourists can enjoy, while the people who are the rightful owners of the land have no financial resources to visit (Henry, pers. comm.; Women in craft, pers. comm.). The elites are allowed access to the land under the guise of tourism. Although this study suggests that displaced people understand the necessity of conservation (Theo, pers. comm.), the land remains inaccessible for those excluded from it. According to Bruno (pers. comm.), this exact paradox is where benefit sharing and environmental education come into place.

> “They need to benefit from the fence that’s next to them, from the land where their cattle are not allowed to graze. They need to benefit from it. That’s where the environmental education plays a role, but […] even if they understand it and they’re educated about it, they need to also benefit financially from it. Because otherwise, they’re not going to have their support.” (Bruno, pers. comm.)

In alignment with Mia, Bruno argues that the fences create a physical barrier that disconnects people from their former land, but it creates a mental barrier in terms of disagreement and misunderstanding of what is done behind the fence. When asked whether dropping the fences would be a solution, Mia argued that it would not be a solution, as it is more than just a fence. “So, it doesn’t necessarily mean that the fences need to be dropped, but the perception that the

fence creates, needs to be dropped. So there needs to be more clarity" (Mia, pers. comm.). Zips and Zips-Mairitsch (2019, 313) have argued similarly that "'development' […] does not invariably mean to bring all fences down and to remove all restrictions or sanctions". Without access and education for people on both sides of the fence, understanding both complex situations cannot be established. As long as the tourists stay on their side because they are told it is unsafe on the other side (Mia, pers. comm.; Audrey, pers. comm.), they will not be able to connect with local communities and understand rural South Africa. Vice versa, if local communities remain uneducated on conservation and are denied access to the PAs, they will not be able to connect with tourists and understand the importance of the PAs for global environmental health.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

By using a qualitative approach, this case study set out to examine the potential of CBWT in promoting distributive EJ for the community of Welverdiend. The results of the narrative and the semi-structured interviews suggest that the WOTC as a CBWT enterprise can be seen as a tool for the local community of Welverdiend to participate in the tourism industry in the K2C BR. This study has found that the involvement of the community of Welverdiend in the wildlife economy through CBWT can contribute to decolonizing conservation. Furthermore, this study found that CBWT can enhance the equal distribution of environmental goods.

This study found that the MGR as a PA is a valuable asset for the wildlife economy as it attracts many tourists due to its location next to the KNP. Tourists have the opportunity to spot unique wildlife from the KNP as the animals are free to roam through the MGR. The current households from Welverdiend with land claims in the MGR aim to obtain a CPA for the MGR. If successful, they will have access to environmental resources and the right to 100% of the income generated from the land. Access to environmental resources must be regulated in alignment with the regulations of the PA. With the settlements of the land claims, this study expects that the community of Welverdiend is one step closer to achieving distributive EJ.

This study found that solely settling the land claims is insufficient to achieve EJ for the citizens of Welverdiend. In alignment with previous research, this study suggests that the long history of apartheid and segregation in South Africa caused an education gap. When pursuing EJ for the community, this gap must be restored for the community of Welverdiend to benefit from their land. By gaining skills and knowledge on managing a PA accordingly, the community becomes the steward of their valuable land while benefiting from its environmental goods. Place-based decision-making can then become a tool to move away from global hegemonic ruling, shifting towards inclusive leadership.

The unequal access to education and environmental resources has led to a negative perspective towards conservation within displaced communities, perceiving it as something that is carried out for elites, leaving out rural minorities. This kept black people from rural South Africa from involving themselves in conservation. These inequalities and negative perspectives are essential to acknowledge and appreciate when aiming to shift towards just conservation. The interviewees have seen a shift in the participation of local communities in conservation

employment. The findings of this study suggest that while there is still much progress to be made, there are indications of a trend toward slowly decolonizing conservation. Training programs concerning conservation for the people of Welverdiend can improve their knowledge and foster better understanding between the current conservationists and the community. This can help meet the needs and desires of both parties.

The WOTC is highly valued amongst the community of Welverdiend. People have been working on the success of the CBWT enterprise for two decades and have put a lot of their power into making it a success. By using the environmental resources as a commodity, the direct benefits from their former homelands assist in regenerating pride towards the MGR. Furthermore, the WOTC contributes to the community's well-being by offering employment and establishing a positive mindset towards tourism in the village. The WOTC, as a CBWT enterprise, has played a significant role in promoting awareness about the conservation of environmental resources within the community. Hence, CBWT is associated with improved community well-being, increased chances of employment, an increase in pride in the remarkable wildlife in the area, and participation in the wildlife economy.

Despite the significant benefits, the study found that community-based initiatives solely relying on international tourism can make the existence of the initiative precarious. The results have shown that the WOTC has difficulties running successfully again after COVID-19 impacted the global tourism industry. This study suggests that shifting from international dependency toward a primary focus on village economies would decrease the vulnerability of such important projects.

The dependency of the community on tourism has also shown its benefits. Being reliant on the integrity of the PAs supports the local awareness of conserving wildlife. This study has shown that the community of Welverdiend has concerns about the integrity of the PAs. The common disapproval of poaching confirms this suggestion. The establishment and the dependency of the community of Welverdiend on CBWT played a significant role in conservation awareness.

This study questioned the neoliberal approach to commodifying environmental goods for the tourism industry. The results of this study show that the community of Welverdiend is reliant on the tourism industry and must participate in commodifying its environmental goods to enable the community to develop. Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that the

commodification of environmental goods has a positive impact on conservation practices. The relationship between commodifying environmental goods and gaining from its benefits ensures that the community is driven to preserve these resources.

The results regarding the protection of the rhinoceros served as a prime example of the benefits of the commodification of wildlife. As the rhinoceros is part of the big five, it is a highly marketable product for the (international) tourism industry. Due to poaching, the rhinoceros is endangered, and the marketable product is threatened. With its extinction in the area, the big five becomes a big four and is no longer as attractive to wildlife tourists. This study indicates that individuals who depend on the tourism industry have a strong motivation to act against the extinction of the rhinoceros to safeguard the sustainability of their business.

Despite the benefits coming from the commodification of environmental goods, this study has raised important questions about neocolonial dependency on global economies. With the decrease in global and governmental aid and the increase of dependency on private entities, indigenous systems have become reliant on a neoliberal approach to conservation and development based on economic growth. The question remains whether a growth-based approach to global development is sustainable. Hence the doubt whether the neoliberal approach fails to acknowledge place-based needs and desires. This study suggests that finding an equilibrium between place-based systems and Western concepts must be considered when aiming for the sustainable and equitable use and distribution of environmental resources.

The results of this study implicate that distributive EJ can be achieved by restoring equal access to the environmental goods of the MGR. This study aspired to communicate that it is essential to consider the ambitions of parties on both sides of the fence when looking toward the future. Acknowledging and breaking down historical and colonial barriers and communicating towards a fair distribution of environmental resources is crucial. This means taking into account the needs of humans, animals, and all living beings.

5.1 Avenues for further research

This study adds to our understanding of how CBWT can contribute to achieving EJ in the K2C BR. Using a case study allowed for understanding local perspectives towards benefiting from environmental resources and historical colonial and apartheid structures in South Africa. Based

on the findings, several questions remain to be answered. Therefore, further research on the following issues is recommended:

- To close the gap between investigating social justice and ecological justice, I recommend that future research acknowledges the need for an interdisciplinary approach to understanding complex contemporary issues. Especially in regions where both nature and humans are highly dependent on each other.
- Similar research could be done with another CBWT enterprise bordering the KNP to verify the findings and conclusions of this study.
- This study shortly introduced the alienation of indigenous communities from their environment due to the commodification of environmental goods. Further research could contribute to understanding the role of alternative economies in preventing the alienation of humans toward nature.
- The study has raised important questions about the motivations behind TH in relation to photo tourism. The results suggest that treating animals as a commodity can support both the health of the species and contribute to community development. Although the findings suggest no negative perspective towards TH, critics expressed it as a neocolonial practice, subordinating the right of nature. Further research could explore methods of including traditional hunting practices in maintaining the carrying capacity of a PA while shifting away from unethical or Western practices towards wildlife while leaving coloniality behind.
- Further research could explore how place-based and vulnerable businesses, such as the WOTC, can become independent from the global market and increase dependency on national and local markets.
- Current research tends to be either a proponent of the neoliberal market-based approach to development or against it. Further research could indicate where a neoliberal approach to conservation, tourism, and development can enable sustainable tourism in the K2C BR.
- Future place-bound research exploring local remainders of colonialism – coloniality – could add to an understanding of how to achieve EJ. With an understanding of local societal complexities and how it impacts EJ, one can explore methods to tackle these disparities.

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Anja. Tourist at the Wild Olive Tree Camp. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Wild Olive Tree Camp. 9th May 2023.

Anna. Member of the cooperative and manager at the Wild Olive Tree Camp. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen. Wild Olive Tree Camp. 11th May 2023.

Arno. Manager at Indalo Inclusive. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Hoedspruit. 17th May 2023.

Audrey. Employee at private game reserve in the Kruger 2 Canyons Biosphere Region. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Orpen Road. 19th May 2023.

Bruno. State veterinary. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Hoedspruit. 2nd June 2023.

Henry. Member of the cooperative. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. The Orpen Kruger. 23rd May 2023.

Kwame. Employee at the Wild Olive Tree Camp. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Wild Olive Tree Camp. 31st May 2023.

Lesedi. Employee at the Wild Olive Tree Camp. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Wild Olive Tree Camp. 10th May 2023.

Mia. Employee at the Kruger 2 Canyons Non-Profit Company. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Hoedspruit. 19th May 2023

Scarlett. Employee at private game reserve in the Kruger 2 Canyons Biosphere Region. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Orpen Road. 19th May 2023.

Theo. Member of the cooperative. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. The Orpen Kruger. 22nd May 2023.

Thomas. Tourist at the Wild Olive Tree Camp. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Wild Olive Tree Camp. 9th May 2023.

Tyra. Employee at the Wild Olive Tree Camp. Personal communication. Lizzy van Megen/author. Wild Olive Tree Camp. 31st May 2023.

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Map layers

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Appendix 1: Consent Form for Participants in Research Studies

Please complete this form after your interviewer has explained you the research.
Title of study: **The implementation of sustainable wildlife tourism in the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region and its influence on distributive environmental justice of local communities: an evaluative case study of the Wild Olive Tree Camp**
In case of a language barrier, this box should be ticked by the translator:

- O I confirm that the research participant is informed about this form and gave verbal consent to all the boxes below.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organizing the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the information sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You are able to request a copy of this consent form at any time.

- O I understand that by ticking each box, I am consenting to this element of the study.
- O I confirm that it will be assumed that any unticked box means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study.
- O I understand that by not giving consent for any one element, I may be deemed ineligible for the study

Please read the following sentences carefully:
Participation

- O I confirm that I voluntarily participate to this study
- O I confirm that I can refuse to answer questions
- O I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason, up until the 1st of July 2023

Data privacy

- O I consent to my interview being audio recorded
- O I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially
- O I understand that my name will be anonymized at any time
- O I understand that I can request any further information to be anonymized
- O I understand that all raw data will be destroyed latest by the 1st of October 2023
- O I understand that only Lizzy van Megen will have access to the raw data

Data use

- O I understand that my data will be used for this thesis
- O I understand that my data will not be used for any commercial enterprise outside from K2C and Indalo Inclusive
- O I understand that K2C and Indalo Inclusive will have access to the research findings
- O I understand that the research might be published and therefore publicly accessible

Name of participant	Date	Signature
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature