UNDERSTANDING THE INTERACTIONS AMONG LOCAL COMMUNITIES, PROTECTED AREAS AND TOURISM:
CASE STUDIES OF KRUGER NATIONAL PARK AND PURNULULU NATIONAL PARK

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Environmental Science, Murdoch University

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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ABSTRACT

New management approaches for protected areas emphasise a ‘humans in nature’ perspective, with protected areas seen as intrinsically connected with surrounding human populations. Tourism often provides a connection between these communities and protected areas. While both protected area managers and tourism operators can benefit from tourism, only recently has concern been directed towards its effects on local communities. This study investigated these effects.

A mixed methodology combining ethnographic approaches with social-ecological system perspectives was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex and changing environment in which protected area tourism operates. Interactions among protected areas, tourism and local communities were investigated using guidelines for resilience assessment. This approach focussed on identifying system states, drivers and issues, using these to develop indicators for monitoring. Methods included repeat semi-structured interviews, participant observation and document review. Two case studies provided focus: Kruger National Park, South Africa and the adjacent communities of Cork and Belfast, and Purnululu National Park, Australia and the nearby Indigenous community of Warmun.

The research revealed a complex, multi-faceted relationship between protected area tourism and local communities. Some economic benefits accrued to community members, although these were not widely distributed. Members expressed a desire for greater access to the Parks and the associated perceived benefits. In the Purnululu case study, this included resolution of and greater involvement in Park governance. In both studies, local communities had a contested relationship with the Parks’ natural resources, with strong connections to nature and the Parks juxtaposed against perceptions of separation. Lack of skills, education and money impeded the accrual of benefits in both case studies.

The indicators derived focus on the interactions among local communities, the Parks and their tourism. Intrinsic socio-cultural values held by local communities for their protected areas and community involvement in and benefits from Park tourism are
emphasised. These indicators provide a much-needed basis for engaging these communities in Park-based tourism and monitoring the success or otherwise of these efforts.
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