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Strengthening Sustainability, Engagement, Art and Learning Innovation through Fostering Excellence in Research

Nelson Mandela University



Institutional University Cooperation (IUC)

The SEALIFER project aims to achieve more sustainable livelihoods for marginalized coastal communities. The Nelson Mandela University (NMU) takes up a central place in the Eastern Cape, where a unique socio-ecosystem is found at the confluence of the Indian and Atlantic Ocean. The project aims to revitalize the humanities, rethink teaching and learning approaches, especially in response to the digital divide, and strengthen the engagement and uptake with the local First Nation communities. It is the poorest province in a country that already has high levels of inequality and unfolding ecological change. SEALIFER therefore emphasizes an intersectional, transdisciplinary and engaged research-based approach towards sustainable change and development.

Main Topics

- investigating human-ocean cultural relations
- intersectional inequalities
- policy
- decentring
- digital divide
- gender and diversity
- climate change
- empowerment
- anthropogenic ecological change
- arts-based research
- coastal indigenous knowledge
- material and immaterial maritime heritage
- sustainable economy
- engagement

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Bridging the digital divide through inclusive digital education and coastal community empowerment

	Flemish Team Leader	Local Team Leader
	Tammy Schellens	Darelle van Greunen

Based on and in close collaboration with the other 5 SPs listed here, this transversal institutional strengthening sub-project pilots a training for lecturers to develop online formats and curricula to close the digital divide in a context where many lack access to a laptop or tablet. It implies a close collaboration with government offices and educational stakeholders, while starting from indigenous knowledge present in coastal communities and with respect for vulnerable groups in society (eg, female learners, lecturers, First Nations).

Gender, sustainable entrepreneurship, and the ocean

	Flemish Team Leaders	Local Team Leader
	Elke Piessens & Anneke Kenens	Thobekani Lose

This research-based science to business sub-project aims at transversal institutional strengthening of especially the engagement capacity at NMU and concentrates on the role of sustainable entrepreneurship in coastal and ocean management in the Eastern Cape, related to NMUs incubator (Propella), with special attention to the role of women and their relation to the ocean. Examples could include (the list is tentative): tourism and seafood cultivation; but also of leather production using fish skins (fashionable these days); making fertilizer, animal feed, fish scales for cosmetics or bioplastics; biomedical applications (Chitin, chitosan) (all using leftovers from the fishing industry); algae for biofuel or animal feed, pharmaceuticals; carbon capture; artificial fish meat; current research is happening into using fish scales for nanomaterials; water purification; fish bones for bone grafts and implants; fish skins for wound healing and tissue regeneration. Kelp (and seaweeds) for biofuel, bioplastics, textiles or animal feed (think of drought conditions); cosmetics, carbon capture and building materials.

Ecology, Coastal Commons and the Future

	Flemish Team Leader	Local Team Leader
	Marc Kochzius	Daniel Lemley

The “fisherman’s problem” (the term is McEvoy’s) refers to the interplay of the commons (common resources such as the ocean), (a changing) ecology, the economy and law that historically has placed – and continues to place – already marginalized communities at a competitive disadvantage. This research project pursues a better understanding of coastal cultural heritage, ecological history, shed a different light on society and culture and ecological change in the longue durée and, based on this, will inform future policy decisions, future mitigation measures relative to the ongoing climate crisis, and existing inequalities in the Eastern Cape.

Ocean governance at the intersection of gender and poverty

	Flemish Team Leader	Local Team Leader
	Trui Steen	Enaleen Draai

Because of the diverging demographics between the Eastern and the Western Cape, a comparative research project into public administration and ocean governance offices at the level of (coastal) municipalities and Provinces yields insights in how to achieve inclusive and equitable public administration and relieve poverty, especially with regard to the position of women and youths in relation to ocean-related management. This research project also pays special attention to the issue of gender equality in ocean governance, port and border management and their impacts on the ‘blue’ economy.

Youth, knowledge and ocean literacy

	Flemish Team Leaders	Local Team Leader
	Valérie Lehouck & Thomas Remerie	Jessica Thornton

With the goal of strengthening ocean literacy, in the first 5-year phase this action-research sub-project investigates ocean related indigenous knowledge among coastal communities in general, and First Nations in particular, to from there integrate scientific findings. Thus reversing the common knowledge hierarchy and connecting with the everyday life-world of school going youths, this sub-project conceives and pilots a program to entice pupils to act as human sensors and future citizen scientists not only to familiarize them with scientific findings, but with science and the scientific method itself. Whereas ocean accounting efforts, for instance, are great at quantifying variables relating to ocean life, they experience difficulties grasping social, political and cultural dynamics. Historically informed, arts-based ethnographic research in combination with numerical evidence may pain a more dynamic and time- and culture-sensitive picture of marine and maritime life.

Heritage infrastructure and the coastal landscape

	Flemish Team Leader	Local Team Leader
	Yonca Erkan	Sharon Gabie

In collaboration with local communities,architectural action research designs a more inclusive coastal and heritage infrastructure (e.g., the new World Heritage Centre at Pinnacle Point, Mossel Bay) with the aim of (in a following phase) realizing an endogenization of the landscape in collaboration with government and the private sector to contribute to social restoration and cultural tourism. Herein, special attention is paid to the intersection of gender, age, and socio-economic background, with the aim of creating or supporting sustainable livelihoods among vulnerable groups.