***Co-creation of an eco-cultural corridor along the lower Eerste River Catchment, Western Cape, South Africa, to scale social impact: A case study of the Faure Community***

The current economic model based on a continuous growth and profit driven mindset does not promote equitable sustainable development within the planetary boundaries, but has created the entwined planetary and human crises or grand challenges (Kotzé & Adelman, 2023; SEI & CEEW, 2022). The human crisis of extreme injustice and inequality disproportionately affect the most vulnerable, aggravated by a lack of humility and care (Kotzé & Adelman, 2023). The planetary crisis, referred to as a “code red for humanity” by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, is exemplified by the anthropogenically-driven Great Acceleration of exponential growth of socio-economic activities (Steffen et al., 2015; UN, 2021).

South Africa has its unique set of grand challenges, starkly exemplified in the Stellenbosch area situated in the Western Cape province of South Africa. We are the most unequal country in the world, with a Gini coefficient of 0.67 (The World Bank, 2023). We are also suffering from the impacts of climate change, with recent floods, droughts, mudslides, and heatwaves causing untold loss and suffering (Trisos et al., 2022). The Faure Community in the Stellenbosch area is a telling example of the debilitating daily reality caused by the systemic impact of social inequalities, environmental degradation, and climate change.

To address the interconnected planetary and social grand challenges and provide a just and revitalised world for future generations, we need to reconsider the economic systems, the importance of social impact, and how it can be scaled (Fiandrino et al., 2022; Han & Shah, 2020; Latane, 1981; SEI & CEEW, 2022). We need organisations that create integrated value by scaling social impact (Han & Shah, 2020). Therefore, I am guided by the following research question in the action research to be conducted in the Faure Community as a single case study:

*How can the Faure Community co-create an eco-cultural corridor in the lower Eerste River Catchment to scale social impact?*

The proposed case study is situated in the Faure Community along the lower Eerste River Catchment (ERC) on the boundary between the City of Cape Town and Stellenbosch, within the greater Cape Town municipal area in South Africa. The Faure Community is an indigenous community and part of the Cochoqua Tribe, affiliated to the royal family of the Klapmuts dynasty in the lineage of the Royal House of Oedasoa, 1689 (Cochoqua Tribe & Aboriginal Tribal Police, 2022). The Faure Community envisages a future defined by self-determination and self-governance whereby they determine their own political status, and freely establish and govern their own sustainable economic, social, cultural, and environmental development. The Faure Committee is desirous of drawing on their right to self-determination and self-governance to co-create with their partners an Eco-Cultural Corridor, the Faure Community Eco-Cultural Corridor (FCECC) (UN, 2008).

The Faure Community views the FCECC as the embodiment of a social-ecological system, representing the understanding of a group of indigenous people using their indigenous knowledge and nature-based solutions to tackle their complex societal problems, including river health, anthropogenic climate change and participation in the formal economy (Biggs, Clements, et al., 2022). The purpose of the FCECC is ambitious, multi-faceted, interconnected and interdependent, and include the following: i) to draw on and position the Faure Community’s heritage, culture and indigenous knowledge as foundational to the decisions and activities of the FCECC, ii) to serve as a legally recognised entity through which the Faure community can actively participate in the formal economy, iii) to raise the level of the Faure Community’s collective social wellbeing, and iv) to clean the lower Eerste River and its catchment area and revitalise the environment. It is anticipated that the process will be conducted in an integrated way that is guided by good governance, with the aim of the FCECC becoming financially prosperous, environmentally regenerative, as well as socially just and inclusive, (WEF, 2020).

The proposed qualitative research will primarily focus on providing a rich description of the emergent methodology and supporting methods used in the co-creation of the FCECC for scaled social impact, and less on existing literature and theory (van Breda & Swilling, 2019). Social impact can generally be understood as the collective impact of all actions that affect the way people live, work, and engage with one another as members of society (Fiandrino et al., 2022). Interestingly, it is not so much social impact *per se* which is critical for addressing these interconnected grand challenges to create a better future, but more so the way in which it can be scaled (Han & Shah, 2020). Scaling social impact is not only about growing organisations, or affecting more people, but more about a shift in the way social issues are addressed, changing the status quo, and bringing about “transformative social change or system change” (Han & Shah, 2020, p. 216).

I aim to abductively distil and comprehensively present the unique and specific occurrences that contribute to scaling social impact of this action research case study as it unfolds (Boulton & Preiser, 2022; Dubois & Gadde, 2002, 2014; Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021). I will draw on a theoretical framework to provide guidance to structure and position the research, but in an emergent and flexible way (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

This Faure Community case study is set within a social-ecological system, which requires an integrated and systemic approach, drawing from multiple disciplines and bodies of literature (e.g. (Biggs, Clements, et al., 2022; Dorado et al., 2022; Han & Shah, 2020; Ives, 2014; Kininmonth et al., 2015; Kotzé & Adelman, 2023; Latane, 1981; McGinnis & Ostrom, 2014; Meadows, 2008; Midgley et al., 2021; van Breda & Swilling, 2019; Whiteman & Cooper, 2011). Therefore, I expect that the theoretical framework will continually evolve as the research and co-creation vacillate iteratively between the empirical action research and the theoretical framework (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, 2014; Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021).

In the preliminary literature review, I have identified multiple bodies of literature that are and may become relevant to inform the theoretical framework. This includes social impact, scaling social impact, integrated and systems thinking, corporate integrated reporting and integrated thinking, social-ecological systems, the commons, indigenous knowledge, *buen vivir,* wellbeing economy*,* co-creation, co-operative as legal structure, as well as impact investing, and its methodology and measurement. For purposes of creating the initial theoretical framework, I have limited the boundary of the literature review to the following bodies of literature: scaling social impact, integrated / systems thinking theory and social-ecological systems and indigenous knowledge.

In their call for research on the scaling of organizations and the scaling of social impact, Shepherd and Patzelt (2022) acknowledge that even though scaling is a “hot topic” for practitioners, and fundamental to the entrepreneurial field, it is largely absent in academic literature (2022, p. 255). They developed a framework for future research dealing with both the scaling of organizations and the scaling of social impact. The framework identified accumulating knowledge, communicating knowledge, relocating knowledge and connecting knowledge as proposed drivers of scaling and how these interact and interconnect organisational scaling and social impact scaling (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2022). This framework ties in well with the importance of indigenous knowledge and how the Faure Community recognises indigenous knowledge as basis for their relationship with nature and their culture and heritage (Cochoqua Tribe & Aboriginal Tribal Police, 2022; SEI & CEEW, 2022).

Complex and dynamic interconnected environments, such as the Faure Community, are best dealt with through an integrated / systems thinking approach, since it is concerned with understanding the interconnectedness and interdependencies of elements within a system and with their environment (Grewatsch et al., 2021; Meadows, 2008). More specifically, social-ecological systems thinking is most suited to investigate cross-scale dynamics within the human and ecological dimensions in an interconnected and interdependent manner (Biggs, de Vos, et al., 2022; Nilsen, 2023).

I aim to develop a process model based on scalable social impact occurrences that guides how communities can, together with their partners, co-create organisations that drive scalable social impact (Cloutier & Langley, 2020). A key contribution to the process model will be the meticulous narration of the unique methodological processes followed in the Faure Community case study. As part of the process model, I intend to develop a measurement and monitoring framework which investors and funders can use to measure and manage the efficacy of social impact, and its scalability.

The Faure community will benefit from the registration and establishment of the Faure community co-operative as preferred legal vehicle, and be foundational for their ambitions of self-determination and self-governance in an ecologically and socially sound way. The social impact projects will be managed through the co-operative. It is my desire that this collective research will result in the Faure Community being able to generate income in a profitable and sustainable way, that will improve their social wellbeing, whilst contributing to the revitalization of the lower Eerste River Catchment. This case study could become a blueprint for scalable implementation globally.

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