Stellenbosch UNIVERSITY IYUNIVESITHI UNIVERSITEIT

CST Centre for Sustainability Transitions

Call for applications: PhD bursary for 2025

Pathways to transformative scenarios in multi-functional conservation landscapes in Southern Africa

Deadline for applications: 23 June 2024

Overview

There is growing recognition of the need for deep, transformative change to achieve a more just and sustainable future, but the pathways and actions required for achieving such change represent a major knowledge gap. Escalating global challenges such as climate change, food and water security, biodiversity loss, socio-political conflict and economic volatility demand new approaches to researching and governing our environment and societies.

It has become critical to recognize the complex inter-relationships between human well-being and ecological sustainability, and how approaches to nature conservation may be transformed to support multiple outcomes in the context of the Anthropocene. In light of global commitments to curb biodiversity loss, recognize diverse values of nature, and reconnect people with nature, multi-functional conservation landscapes have become critical arenas to realise transformations. In South Africa, for example, SANParks is aiming to improve land management and support protected area expansion through "mega living landscapes", where it is experimenting with new models of protected areas, connected to sustainably managed agricultural farms, wildlife ranches and settlements in surrounding areas, supported by the engagement of multiple stakeholders in governance, and the development of wildlife-based economies, particularly to support livelihood options for rural communities and emerging Black farmers.

Such approaches in conservation requires dramatic changes in how multifunctional landscapes look and function, including the institutions and practices that govern them. Developing a broader set of visions and imaginaries of what these transformed landscapes could look like and how they might function in the future is critical to identifying potential leverage points and pathways for change that can guide policy, action and research. Similarly, understanding pathways to achieving such transformation, including the trade-offs and unintended consequences (positive and negative) that may emerge from pursuing different scenarios, is critical for multi-stakeholder processes towards change.

We are seeking a PhD candidate to explore the pathways to transformative scenarios in emerging multifunctional conservation systems, including: a) developing an understanding of how such projects can be further catalysed using existing innovative projects (so-called "Seeds"; b) exploring the historical transformations that have shaped multifunctional landscapes; c) exploring in greater detail the visions and possible scenarios for the landscapes; and finally, d) identify potential pathways, enablers and leverage points for transformative change, as well as the trade-offs and unintended consequences that may have to be navigated in pursuing different options for the landscapes. A broad diversity of methodologies and approaches (including evaluation of documentary sources, expert interviews, participatory workshops, and thematic- and land use change analysis), and

specific focal areas are possible within this project, and students with diverse skills and interests linking to transformative conservation approaches are encouraged to apply.

Centre for Sustainability Transitions (CST), Stellenbosch University

The Centre for Sustainability Transitions (http://www.sun.ac.za/cst) builds on a strong history of transdisciplinary research and complexity studies at Stellenbosch University, providing a vibrant hub for solution-oriented sustainability science that hosts leading scientists and students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds in a state-of-the-art research centre. The primary objective of the CST is to provide transformational knowledge on the dynamics of multi-scale social-ecological change, and strategic insights into the new modes of research and governance that can bring about a just transition to a more equitable and sustainable society, in southern Africa and globally. The CST hosts a tailored PhD programme which aims to support inter- and trans-disciplinary sustainability research, including two foundational courses to support students entering the field from diverse backgrounds.

Call for applications

We seek motivated individuals interested to pursue a PhD, who have a keen interest in social-ecological systems, sustainability and sustainability transformations, an interest and ability to think systemically and integrate across the social and natural sciences, and who enjoy collaboration and working in teams. Interested individuals should have a strong academic track-record, participate in the events and activities of the CST, and be interested in developing a career around topics such as social-ecological systems, conservation landscapes, the wildlife economy or pathways for transformation.

A variety of potential topics could be pursued, relating to one or more multi-functional landscape sites in the southern African region, which could include topics related to the wildlife economy, biodiversity financing, futures thinking, transformative change or the Seeds of Good Anthropocenes project.

Studies will generally be registered within the CST's PhD in Sustainable Development in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, but other options at Stellenbosch University can be considered. Supervisors will include Prof Reinette (Oonsie) Biggs, Prof Alta de Vos and Dr Julia van Velden. Prof Reinette (Oonsie) Biggs holds the DST/NRF South African Research Chair (SARChI) in Social-Ecological Systems and Resilience, and is the co-director of the CST. Prof Alta de Vos is the director the Programme for Ecosystem Change and Society (PECS) and a conservation systems expert; and Dr Julia van Velden is the co-ordinator for the Southern African Resilience Academy and is a biodiversity and scenarios expert.

Funding

Bursaries will be funded from the DST/NRF SARChI chair held by Prof Biggs. The NRF minimum academic requirement for PhD funding is 65% average for the preceding Masters degree. Applicants for doctoral funding must be 32 years of age or younger in the year of application.

Successful applicants will be funded either at Full Cost Study (FCS) or Partial Cost of Study (PCS). The FCS funding will be awarded to South African citizens and permanent residents only, who are either exceptional academic achievers or financially needy (i.e., those whose combined household family income is less or equal to R350 000 per annum), or living with a disability. PCS funding will be awarded to 5% of international students

including South African citizens and permanent residents who could not be funded under FCS but meet other minimum requirements for the NRF scholarship funding criteria.

Subject to availability of funds, CST aims to top-up NRF funding to R 150,000 pa (R 12,500 per month). Tuition and reasonable running and travel expenses will also be covered where possible. Successful completion of two non-credit bearing modules and defence of a research proposal within the first year will be a pre-requisite for continuing with the PhD.

Requirements

We are looking for a systems thinker who shows a strong aptitude for learning new skills, problem-solving, and working in teams. Potential PhD candidates should have completed a Masters degree or equivalent. Familiarity with social-ecological systems, running participatory processes, conducting interviews or surveys, and both qualitative and quantitative data analysis would be advantageous. All candidates should show evidence of strong scholarly performance. Based on the National Research Foundation's funding guidelines, strong preference will be given to South African nationals and under-represented groups.

To apply

Applications will follow a 2-step process:

Step 1. Apply to CST

All interested candidates should first apply to the CST by emailing the following documents to cstenquiries@sun.ac.za by **23 June 2023** with the subject line "**PhD application: Pathways to transformative multi-functional conservation landscapes**":

- a motivation letter detailing your previous academic and work experience, and how your experiences, education and skills speak to the proposed research topic, as well as your specific interests with regard to the proposed project,
- a detailed CV that includes your academic record, previous work experience, any scientific publications on which you have been an author, and the names of at least two academic referees,
- transcripts of academic qualifications,
- at least one example of recent written work (e.g. a paper, report, thesis chapter).

We will conduct interviews with shortlisted candidates between **26-27th June 2023.**

Step 2. Apply to NRF

Selected candidates will then be instructed to apply on the NRF system by **5 July 2023**, and link their application to Prof Biggs' SARChI Chair. Instructions on this process will be communicated to successful applicants in step 1.

Please note that funding will only be awarded to candidates selected and approved by the NRF in step 2.

Enquiries

Enquiries can be directed to cstenquiries@sun.ac.za. Please use the subject line "**Enquiry: Pathways to transformative Multi-functional conservation landscapes".**