If I speak from Cape Town:
What happens when ’stewardship’ travels the world?

Henrik Ernstson

KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory, Stockholm & African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town

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My paper responds to the conference theme and in particular this panel on:

“Theoretical Perspectives on Urban Environmental Stewardship”.

With the questions:

What is urban environmental stewardship?

How does it work in varying social/political/and cultural settings?

What are the gaps and opportunities in the current conceptions of this notion?
Our concerns for gathering at the conference

theory

environment  city  democracy
Presentation is a loose conversation with the work of Dana (Fisher), Lindsay Campbell and Erika Svendesen’s from whom we have received a bunch of good articles on *environmental stewardship*. They imply that environmental stewardship could address several important problems in society, including:

- increasing trust and social capital—“local groups are also the key to building the social and cultural infrastructure necessary for sustained environmental practices”” (citing Kempton et al. 2001: 558)

- contributing to democratic practices—“people [see] themselves as the co-creators of democracy”

- supporting sustainable practices—“groups that are proactively managing sections of the landscape and planning for sustainability”;

- and generate “civic innovation”—e.g. new forms of managing complex land compositions in urban areas.
• Fisher et al define environmental stewards as “community groups that serve any of the following stewardship functions:

• conserving, managing, monitoring, advocating for, or educating their friends, neighbours, or public officials about the local environment.”

• They argue that there are two lines of research that can be combined

• civic stewardship and social movement/civic environmentalism—to better understand local civic efforts and

• “the organizational structure of local environmentalism”, or what they also refer to as “environmental stewardship”.
Key for my argument is to bring you to Cape Town to test how differently the notion of stewardship might play out.
Provocation #1

- My first provocation is somewhat naïve perhaps, and it is based on how we define what to include in our studies: I simply wonder what happens if we go out and interview a bunch of groups, and then only focus on the groups that are ‘green’ or environmentalist, that is, those that carry the attributes of being an urban environmental steward? Who is left out, and what could go missing from the picture?

- What if we remove groups not counted “environmental stewardship” groups? What happens then?
Provocation #2

• What if the term stewardship is too narrow to capture what is really going on in the city?

• Who fits in the mold of ‘the steward’?

• What does this mold mean to our political situation today?
• We have done a civic network study in Cape Town
• 129 organizations interviewed
• All those mobilizing on the urban environment—from conservation, habitat and biodiversity—to political ecology issues like access to water, sanitation, & housing.
• From affluent areas of Constantia to poor shacks in Vrygrond
• A range of questions including ties to other organizations, govt, spaces, issues
• Field work 2013-2014
In our network study in Cape Town we had included all organizations mobilizing on the environment in a wide sense of the word.

Including environmental justice issues to conservation issues.

This includes those that follow Fisher et al’s definition of “environmental stewardship” groups—but also several others.

To test what happens in our network if we remove those that are not mobilizing on typically green issues, we used a question that asked

“What issues are most important to your organization?” In responding to this question (choosing from a long list of issues, from ‘green’ issues to environmental justice and others) we can identify those that are “environmental stewards” (coded as GREEN NODES) and those that are not (coded as RED NODES).
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We can analyze collective action processes based on our data as “modes of coordination” (MoC; Diani 2004; 2015) (simplified argument)

**Social bonds**
Based on shared core members between groups, and core members sharing ties

Regulates **boundary definition**, Who are you? Ideology, Fundamental values

**Transaction ties**
Based on exchange of resources, information and doing joint projects.
No social bonds ties allowed.

Regulates **resource allocation** (material & symbolic) money, labour, ‘support other groups in media’

*Necessary for a MoC social movement process*

*This seeks out a ‘looser’ MoC based on Coalitions and instrumental alliances That might break apart after a campaign*
If we toggle between keeping and removing the RED NODES we see a difference.
If we toggle between keeping and removing the RED NODES we see a difference.
The removal of RED nodes - non-stewardship groups leads to a truncated analysis, missing the wider network in which so called stewardship groups are embedded in.

**Social bonds**
Regulates **boundary definition**, who are you? Ideology, fundamental values

**Transaction ties**
Regulates **resource allocation** (material & symbolic) money, labour, ‘support other groups in media’
The removal of non-conservation groups

Transaction ties
Regulates resource allocation (material & symbolic)
money, labour, ‘speak up for in media’

Social bonds
Regulates boundary definition, who are you? Ideology, fundamental values
One more example of what happens if so-called non-stewards are removed. Less issues seen as connected in Cape Town when “non-steward groups” are not taken into account.
One more example of what happens if So called non-stewards are removed.

In total we found 137 “working sites”. Of these 80 were engaged by the 48 ‘green environmental groups. The rest, 57 working sites are “added” by the groups that do not see themselves as green environmental groups.
Provocation #2

My second provocation is somewhat different. It concerns a deeper question of how concepts operate in different settings, and what can be captured by them and not. The provocation circles around the questions:

- What if the term stewardship is too narrow to capture what is really going on in the city?
- What if it is too narrow to grasp questions of power, in particular that form of power that Michel Foucault talked about—the power to define “what is sayable and thinkable”?
- Indeed, who fits in the mold of ‘the steward’?
- What does this mold mean to our political situation today?
- What happens if stewardship networks—as it is being researched by social scientists, transition from an ‘object of analysis’ to an ‘object of governing’?
- If we place the label of “stewards” on some groups, could they even be robbed of qualities that they need to become empowered?

So my second provocation is around the performativity of science. That we as scientists are part of this world, our concepts and how we use effect the world and forms of governing.
Ecology is impregnated with power.

“Few cities can lay claim to as many spectacular natural attractions as Cape Town, and with a population as vibrant and inspirational as its features, it's no surprise that this beautiful city on the south-western tip of Africa is regarded as one of the world's premier tourist destinations.”

Sentinel, Hout Bay.
- ecology of violence

A metro cop opens fire in an attempt to disperse angry residents who took part in a violent stand-off against the police in Houtberg, Hout Bay.

Protestors line up outside the auction. Photo: Cindy Woko, Cape Argus

Police open fire in an attempt to disperse residents who took part in a violent stand-off against the police in Houtberg, Hout Bay.
Cape Town has a physical geography of sand dunes, winds wetlands and a big mountain. But also a deep legacy of apartheid and one of the most unequal geographies in the world.
The Group Areas Act from the 1950s divided the city in ‘racial group Areas’ and used ‘nature’ as barrier; sand dunes, green fields etc.

Nature and ecology is part of power. Power is part of any environmental project. Any environmental project is part of power (Swyngedouw 1996).
How is this situation handled in Cape Town by the state?

Answers — in depoliticizing and in “collaborative” ways
- Using biodiversity mapping techniques, nature is rendered a cartesian object that can be mapped and counted.
- Using ecosystem services framework, nature and ecological complexity is catalogued, divided and valued in numbers and prices
- But there is collaboration as well between city and civil society groups. These collaborations range from groups from high-income areas, predominantly white and conservative, to those from lower-income groups where an inherent critique of the social order is brought forward through the engagement with the environment.
1. A Cartesian way of knowing

“In simple terms, the data, targets, and [biodiversity] criteria are input into the spatial GIS system and the computer model runs a number of iterations and selects the sites and areas from those that are available to meet the minimum targets using the criteria [...].”

/City of Cape Town report, 2007

Value of green areas by counting the number of difference species they contain.
2. ‘Business case’ of knowing—ecosystem services

\[
\text{for } j = 1 \text{ to } |N| \text{ do} \\
I_j = \frac{I_j}{\sum_{k \in N} I_k} \\
P_j = \frac{R_j}{\sum_{k \in N} R_k} \\
\text{end}
\]
3. Collaboration
Friends of A Small Pond

- Started in 2003 in the ‘garden city’ of Bergvliet, former White classified area
- Caring for an old farm dam, dug by slaves under the Dutch in 17th century
- From a “fearful place”, “overgrown with alien vegetation”, “children were warned” and – “The beargies used to live [here], [the] homeless”— the created…
- … a bird sanctuary with increased number of species, school visits.
- Although fenced in.
- And they developed close collaborative relations with City departments.
• Princess Vlei – and the campaign to save a wetland in the previously Coloured area.
• Civic-led rehabilitation project
• A humble project to plant and restore *fynbos* started in 2009 by a small organization run by a local baker.
• He signed an MOU with the City Biodiversity Branch, and SANBI, the South African Biodiversity Institute.
• In 2010 the City wanted to allow the building of a shopping mall which lead to a longer and quite bitter campaign until even Desmond Tutu came to the vlei to give his support.
• In 2014 the City backed off.
3.5 minute long video – not playable here.
Film 3 min

• Raw cuts from the film “One Table Two Elephants” film by Jacob von Heland and Henrik Ernstson

• 0:00 - 1:18 — Emile Jansen: “And whoever writes the history books determines what is fact?”

• 1:18 - 1:50 — Brad von Sitters: The Princess Vlei legend “that is her real name”

• 1:50 - 2:18 — Emile YX and Mixed Mense and the song Princess of the Vlei: “they plan to concrete away our memory”

• 2:18 – 3:16 — Stefan Benting: “because apartheid legacies are still embedded in us, even though we are the next generation.”
• What are we learning from this video from the group... I think it is that there is something deeper going on than simply protecting Princess Vlei. The mobilization in and through Princess Vlei, the planting of the plants, the gathering of the people and the children, the writing of protest songs and the organizing of barbecues and hip-hop concerts all seems to tell about something beyond what is seen at the surface level.

• Indeed, in a city wrought about through colonial and apartheid planning, history cannot be in singular and put behind us. Rather, Capetonian histories wrinkles, curls, and interlaces and becomes part of the present when we move and breath through the city. There is no power that can put these histories in place, or sum them up in a book. They become part of everything, even such mundane things as plants, wetlands and greenery as is demonstrated, manifested and made into public reality in and through Princess Vlei.
• So, if we place the label of *environmental steward* on the Hip Hopper and Baker at Princess Vlei, and regard them as being of the same kind as that of the *Friends of Die Oog*, could that be an act of disempowering?

• So, I think the notion of *stewardship* could be part of a wider form of disciplining, of the making of “responsible citizens” that voluntarily should take care of their environment. But who should do this, without upsetting the wider order of things. This is where the hip hopper, his young dancers and the Baker, undermine the confines of ‘stewardship’—demonstrating that they are political subjects, that the environment is caught up in histories and memories of oppression that needs to also be accounted for if the coupled concerns of cities, environment and democracy should be addressed.
Conclusion

• Provocation #1 – narrow focus, collective action processes

• Provocation #2— ‘governmentality’—the act of governing; depoliticizing actors and groups

• Cape Town as a location to think with today
Thank you!

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