

# 1 INTRODUCTION

“The greater St.Lucia Wetland Park is the only place on earth where the worlds oldest land mammal, the rhinoceros and the biggest terrestrial mammals, the elephant, share an ecosystem with the worlds oldest fish the coelacanth and the biggest marine mammal, the whale.” As former president Nelson Mandela himself put it during a speech marking the historic 2002 re-introduction of elephants to the Eastern shores of the Greater St.Lucia Wetland Park.

St.Lucia is a place of great natural beauty with World Heritage Site status, but it is also a place of other extremes such as abject poverty.

Socio-economical pressures are growing and new opportunities are being realized to ensure that advancements are being made towards putting an end to the paradox of human shortages amidst the abundance of nature.



1 Aerial photograph of St.Lucia town and estuary mouth, 2000

## 2 PROJECT OUTLINE

### 2.1 THE CURRENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC CRISIS AROUND ST.LUCIA

According to the South African portion of the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative (LSDI), there is a population of approximately 500 000 people that suffer from socio-economic problems in the areas around St.Lucia, and that the region is one of the poorest areas in South Africa. Please refer to the comments on the LSDI, point 3.3.

Here follows a summary of the socio-economic profile as described by the LSDI (Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative, 2000: 33):

- The area has one of the greatest poverty gap levels, as well as some of the lowest literacy levels and highest unemployment levels in KwaZulu-Natal.
- Some 90% of rural households earn incomes of less than R800 per month.
- The region has the province's highest backlogs in housing, social infrastructure and community facilities.
- The area has major employment problems with 38% of the economically active population classified as unemployed.
- Residents say their major problems are a severe lack of transport, employment, schools and clean water.
- Rural areas are not well served and many have effectively been sealed off from their commercial potential because of remoteness and isolation.
- There are a number of major rivers, lakes and pans but the area suffers greatly during periods of drought. This, together with inadequate irrigation and reticulation systems, has caused rural residents to complain that their single biggest social need is for clean drinking water."

### 2.2 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

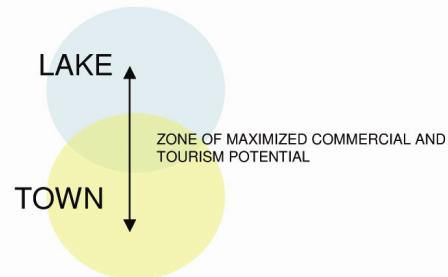
#### Reconnecting St.Lucia town and the Lake

The research problem is mainly a socio-economic problem set within the abundance of nature.

This thesis concludes, in points 4.7, that the dominant and current paradigm, for the South African context, concerned with altering the environment sees nature as a recourse that needs to be developed and managed to ensure the maximum benefit to humans over the maximum period of time.

This present day paradigm is made visible through current legislation, policies and initiatives that intend to guide the alterations and development of our landscape. The extent of the socio-economic paradigm is fully realized, in point 3, when the Coastal Management Policy and Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative are analyzed.

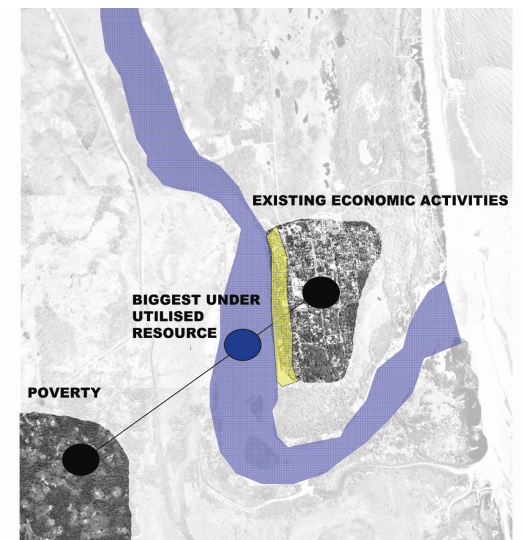
In order for the socio-economic paradigm to be successful, when applied to St.Lucia and its surrounding areas, the town of St.Lucia needs to be reconnected to the lake, Figure 2.



2 Diagram showing maximized socio-economic potential

When looking at the utilization potential of resources for socio-economic gain, in the St.Lucia area, The Greater St.Lucia Wetland Park only creates 350 direct jobs in tourism. This figure is alarmingly low considering that the park is 220 km long and one third the length of Kwa-Zulu Natal.

Lake St.Lucia is identified as the primary under utilized resource, the lake supporting little or no direct economic activity, except for four pleasure boat ride.



3 Aerial photograph showing an area, in yellow, where the potential for a socio-economic development scheme is maximized

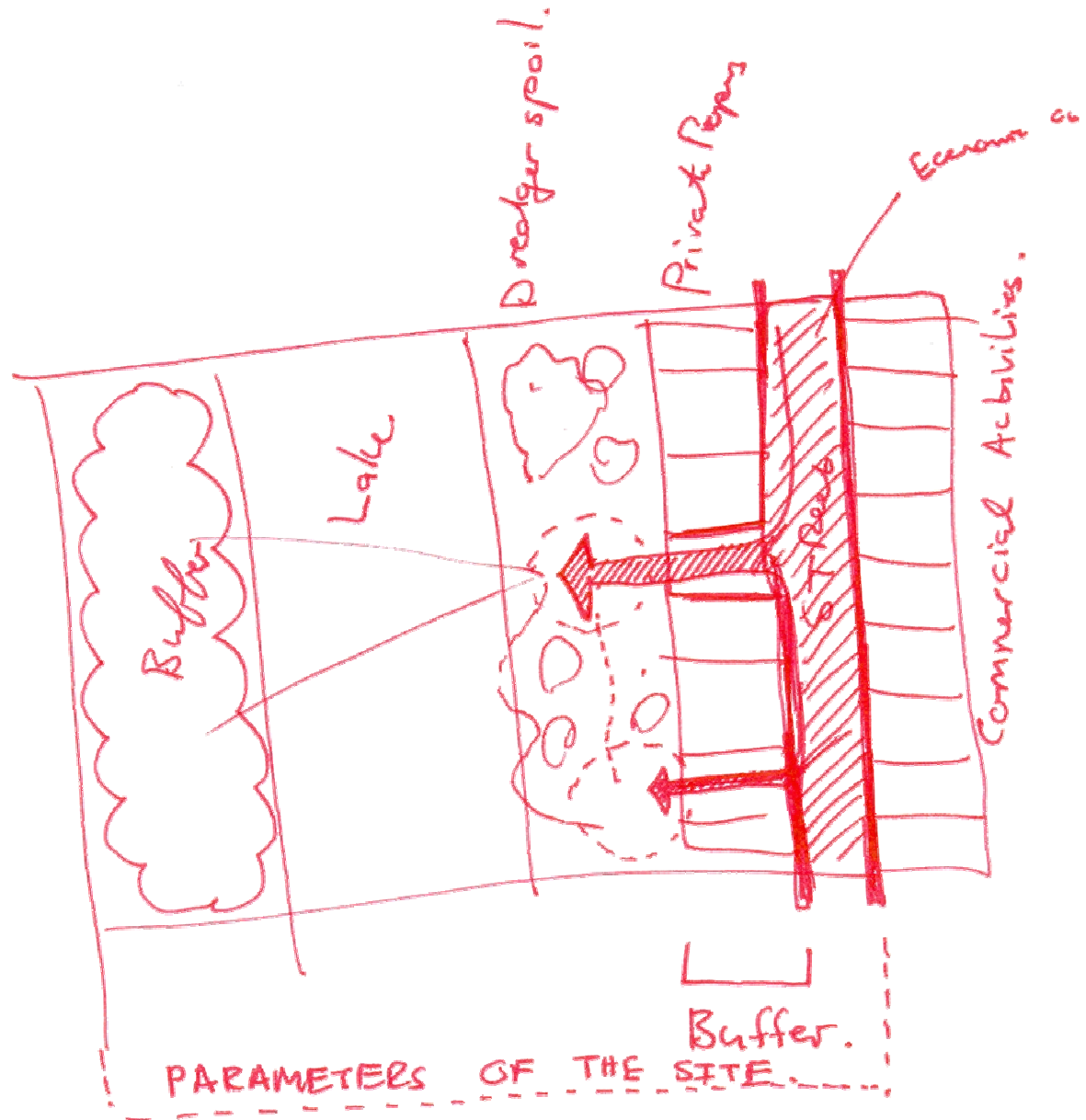
Figure 3 illustrates the socio-economic research problem: Considering the existing economic node created by St. Lucia town and its proximity to both the lake and Dukuduku informal settlement, the potential for development that could eradicate socio-economic problems are realized.

When the town and lake is reconnected a zone of maximized commercial and tourism potential becomes accessible.

This thesis researched the proposed connection and presents a concept of how such a link is envisioned, both functionally and architecturally,

The proposed connection, as illustrated by Figure 4, implies redesigning McKenzie Street, breaking through an existing barrier of privately owned hotels and dredger spoil vegetation, and establishing open spaces that would facilitate public access to the lake and the proposed eco tourism developments.

Also the long term economic sustainability of the proposed development is examined and certain visual buffers and no-construction zones are recommended.



4 Diagram illustrating the concept of the research problem



## 2.3 THE SITE



5 Diagram showing the detail research area

The site is situated on the Eastern shores of Lake St.Lucia in close proximity to the estuary mouth. This is a dynamic ecological area with a high biodiversity. Refer to section 5, which deals in detail with the environments within the study area.

The site is situated between the formal village of St.Lucia and the informal settlement of Dukuduku. The social and

economical imbalances of the two nodes are clearly visible in Figure 5, when looking at infrastructural patterning.

To the west is St.Lucia town and specifically McKenzi Street, the economical heart of the area. Refer to points 5.5 and 5.6 respectively.

In previous times the site was disturbed by the dumping of dredger spoil- dramatically changing the hydrology and gradients of the site. Refer to point 5.3.

As researched by this thesis in point 5.5.2 the lake and the town are separated by a buffer zone of privately owned hotels and accommodation resorts as well as the above mentioned dredger spoil.

To the west is the lake with beautiful vistas and sunsets over the western shores. Because of the buffer zone mentioned in the previous paragraph none of the economic activity in McKenzi Street makes use of this asset presented by the site.

This is a dynamic site that is characterized by contrasts and fluctuations: rich-poor, natural-urban, water-land, formal-informal, local-international, fresh-saline...

The site, although not always appearing to be, is a harsh environment for animals and plant: tidal currents, winds, large temperature fluctuations, varying saline concentrations and suspended sediments in the water, but because of the rich nutrient supplies, there are large rewards for the plants and animals that were able to overcome the problems that result from its unstable environment.

The same can be said for humans. If the local community is able, through research and design, to overcome what is currently being viewed as problems and successfully reconnect the town and lake, there will be huge social and economic reward.



## 2.4 THE CLIENT

### 2.4.1 The Greater St.Lucia Wetland Park Authority

The following is a short overview that explaining the structure of The Greater St Lucia Wetland Park Authority (GSLWPA) and its mandate.

The Greater St Lucia Wetland Park Authority was established following the regulations published in terms of the World Heritage Convention Act of 1999. With the dedicated national act, South Africa became only the second country to incorporate the World Heritage Convention into its domestic law. The legislation is unique because it ensures that the principals and values of the convention are given genuine application over South Africa's potential and inscribed World Heritage sites, but in a manner that is uniquely suited to South African conditions. By carefully balancing preservation and conservation with job and wealth creating economic development, it brings an integrated approach, which recognizes the value of our global assets and our people.

In terms of the Act, national government can, where appropriate, strengthen the powers of existing bodies to manage World Heritage Sites. Where conditions are particularly challenging it can however establish new institutions, called Authorities, to manage such sites. The national Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism – the Minister charged with responsibility in terms of the Act – considered St. Lucia to be such a special case that it became the first World Heritage Site to be entrusted to a dedicated Authority.

A Small board made up of suitably qualified representatives from government and civil society and chaired by Mavuso Msimang heads the Wetland Authority. Reporting to the national Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, it is responsible for policy formulation and formal direction of the executive. In a first of conservation in South Africa, it includes local people and traditional leadership living in or adjacent to the park of national and universal significance who

suffered the disadvantages of apartheid are fully represented in the highest decision making body of the park. (Greater St.Lucia Wetland Park Authority Media Information Pack, 2006: 1)

### 2.4.2 Vision

According to Andrew Zaloumis, CEO for the GSLWPA, the Greater St.Lucia Wetland Park is run with a philosophy balancing the relationship between conservation and development with a genuine commitment to social equity and regional economic development. He explains that the one cannot succeed without the other, and that sustainable tourism underpins both.

“The most important is to ensure that progress continues to be made towards putting an end to the paradox of poverty amidst the plenty of nature. The St Lucia Wetlands is a World Heritage national park that is being made, in the true sense, open and available to local and international tourists. In short, government is putting in the money to make this a world-class destination.” (Greater St.Lucia-Wetland Park Authority Media Information Pack, 2006: 1)

### 2.4.3 The Brief

The Greater St.Lucia Wetland Park Authority recognizes its mistake of not identifying the town of St.Lucia as a lead project in the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative Refer to point 3.3.2 and Figure 9 of this thesis.

The client wants to ensure that St.Lucia develops into a world class tourism destination. Making use of all of the opportunities presented to relieve poverty and social neglect.

The focus of the brief is the lands immediately around the lake, and the lake itself. This area is the biggest asset to the town and wetland park and has, up to now, been sparsely developed and have supported little to no economic activity.

The brief calls for reconnecting St.Lucia town with the Lake.

Considering the proximity of the town, the lake and Dukuduku informal settlement the focus of this development needs to be of a socio-economic nature and satisfy the objectives as stated by the Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative:

- Firstly, a commercial program that will create jobs, alleviate poverty and generate revenue from conservation whilst conserving the biodiversity.
- Secondly, to manage the parks eight ecosystems according to the standards set out by government and the Unesco's World Heritage Convention.
- Thirdly, to facilitate communities and land claimants participation in tourism and infrastructural development. This includes communities becoming equity partners in new tourism developments and suppliers of goods and services to lodges and park management.

(Lubombo Spatial Development Initiative, 2006: 3)

## 2.5 THE NEED FOR RESEARCH AND DESIGN

The urgency for landscape architectural research in the St.Lucia area becomes visible when the censures on government initiatives, guiding development in the region, are argued by this thesis. Refer to point 3.3.1 and 3.3.2.

The concerns raised become validated and amplified when the intended implementation of these initiatives are examined - please refer to point 3.4 for the criticism on the Inzingizi Infrastructural Development Project (IIDP) that is intended to guide The Greater St.Lucia Wetland Park's development over the next few years.

### 2.5.1 eKZNW Letter supporting research

To further stave the need for academic investigation, into landscape architecture, is a letter from the eKZNW Ecologist, Dr. Ricky Taylor, supporting the need for research and design for the St.Lucia region.

6 Letter of Support from eKZNW



EcoAdvice: Coastal Region  
Private Bag X 01  
St Lucia Estuary  
3936

February 2, 2006

To whom it may concern

#### The need for landscape research and design in St Lucia

The town of St Lucia is unique in that it is an enclave within the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park which is a World Heritage Site. As such it is important that the town develops in such a way so that it blends in with the natural environment.

St Lucia is a town with an interesting historical context and a strong "sense of place". Many South Africans have come here in the past 70 to 80 years for fishing, and more recently for nature conservation holidays. Nowadays, there are new pressures on the town imposed by the local and international tourists attracted by the World Heritage Site status of the area. The nature of St Lucia is changing, and this needs to be guided so that it does not, with unguided development, lose its character to become a tacky tourist venue.

The discussions Johan van Rooyen has had with me encourage me that developments can take place where there is a closer merging of the urban and natural environments. We in the EKZNW see the need for the type of research and design that Johan proposes, and we encourage him to work in this area. The EKZNW are the conservation managers in the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, and as such will be able to support his project with information and materials relating to the Park.

Sincerely

Ricky Taylor  
Ecologist  
Greater St Lucia Wetland Park: Coastal Areas  
Phone 035 5901436  
e-mail [taylor@kznwildlife.com](mailto:taylor@kznwildlife.com)

P. O. Box 13053, Cascades. 3202. KwaZulu-Natal South Africa. Tel: +27 33 845 1999. Fax: +27 33 845 1699.

Reservations Tel: +27 33 845 1000. Fax: +27 33 845 1001. Email: [bookings@kznwildlife.com](mailto:bookings@kznwildlife.com)

Website: [www.kznwildlife.com](http://www.kznwildlife.com)