

chapter 1
introduction

1.1. PROJECT BRIEF

On 22 February 2005 I received a birthday present from a representative of the Knysna Municipality. A thesis project was born along a phoneline between Pretoria and this Southern Cape town. Pledge Nature Reserve is a 10 hectare conservation area situated only 500m from the Knysna CBD. This reserve has developed into an open space of high ecological value due to rehabilitation and management actions. Socio-culturally the reserve is not functioning at its best potential as it does not have good accessibility, as well as having safety and security issues associated with it. Economically the reserve is also lagging as there is a definite need for added financial funding to increase its economic sustainability. The southern portion of the site is currently vacant, being degraded and infested with a number of alien invasive vegetation species. The client's desire is that this portion of the site be rehabilitated and transformed into a socio-culturally, economically and ecologically successful urban open space that integrates the nature reserve into the Knysna urban fabric.

There is the belief that Knysna is a perfectly 'healthy' and prosperous town and many might wonder why time would be wasted on it while there are so many other, more obvious and needy areas in Southern Africa that require urgent attention. To a degree Knysna is a successful, culturally active, vibrant and environmentally-aware town, but like all other assumptions there is an underlying, brewing problem, which only at a later stage comes to one's attention. We need to attempt to take on the method of prevention rather than curing, trying to amend current practices that will most likely lead to problematic results in the future. *Utopias do not exist.* Knysna has issues and constraints related to the socio-cultural, economic and ecological environments, but fortunately a balance of opportunities and positive aspects do exist, making this project a viable and challenging thesis proposal.



1.1. Valuable fynbos specie, *Protea caffra*, inhabits Pledge Nature Reserve (Howard 2005)

Most South Africans have some kind of memory or feeling associated with Knysna. I think back warmly to long December holidays spent camping at Island Lake in Wilderness (60km West of Knysna) and invariably there were days when the weather was not suitable for beaching, sailing or windsurfing. Our family, Mom and Dad, my elder sister, Patricia, and my elder brothers, David and Desmond and I (the youngest by 8 years) would tumble into the station wagon and trek to Knysna for the day. Stuck in the back of the car amongst the beach-bags, cooler boxes and boogie boards, in case the weather turned for the better, I experienced cloudy Knysna with a delayed and backward view, my focus being the lagoon to the left as I dreamt of spending holidays on one of the houseboats gently chugging through the endless water entity, and the lush forested mountainside to the right. We would spend hours perusing the many uniquely-Knysna stalls and shops and then have a picnic at the 'Heads', hypnotized by the waves crashing against the weathered and ancient rocks. This town nestled in its breath-taking environment, with its deeply imprinted history and hosted by interesting and varied people inspired me to come back time and time again.

1.2. WHY KNYSNA?

The thesis study area, Knysna, is situated on the Southern coastline of the Western Cape Province, South Africa. Knysna lies within the scenic Garden Route area and the town's inhabitants boast that it is the most beautiful and popular tourist destination in South Africa. They are not alone in this assumption, as Knysna, and the rest of the Garden Route, become ensconced with thousands of visitors throughout peak season periods, as well as developers and property seekers desiring a share of this Eden.

What does the word Knysna mean to you? Does it bring back memories of glorious December holidays? The over-indulgence of the Oyster festival? Do you think of the forest, the lagoon, the thundering ocean framed by the 'heads', the quaint shops or the eccentric people? Do elephants and romantic stories cloud your thoughts; or are you a realistic kind that with angst remembers the great economic cost of visits and the bottleneck characteristic of the town?

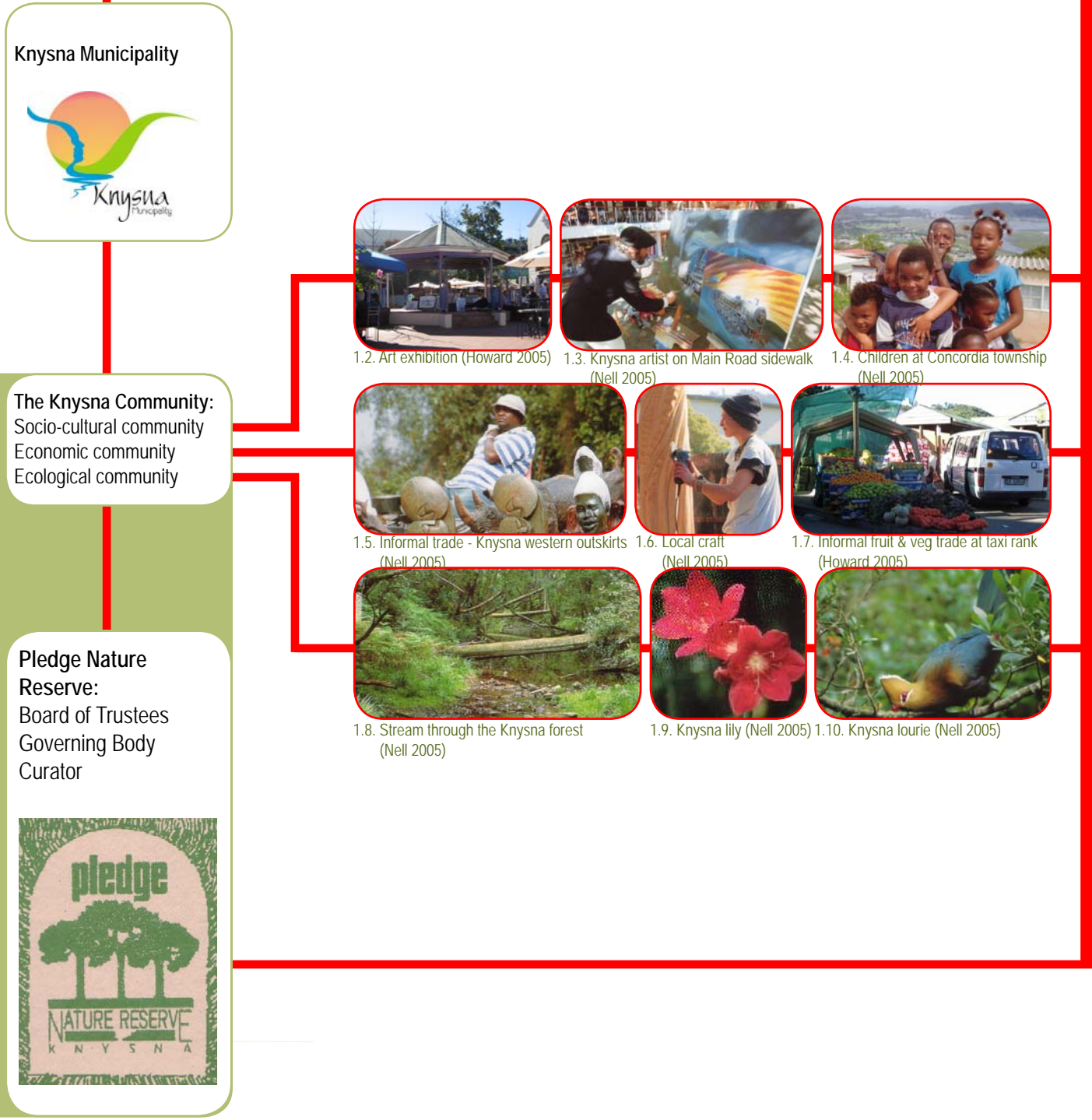
1.3. SITE INTRODUCTION

The reserve is a protected area consisting of primarily endemic vegetation species and is situated within the developed urban fabric of Knysna. There are 3.5km of pathways through a varied indigenous palette of scrub forest and hillside fynbos, with striking vistas of the natural features of Knysna from the site's higher elevations. This area has become a sanctuary for more than one hundred bird species and has become a place where local fynbos diversity is well represented.

The value of this reserve lies in the fact that even though it is surrounded by urban land-uses, processes, elements and functions, precious ecological habitats and niches still function successfully. (Ukubona Development 2005) Pledge Nature Reserve is often named as the best kept secret of Knysna, but this is unfortunate, as it has so much potential as an educational and socio-cultural development tool.

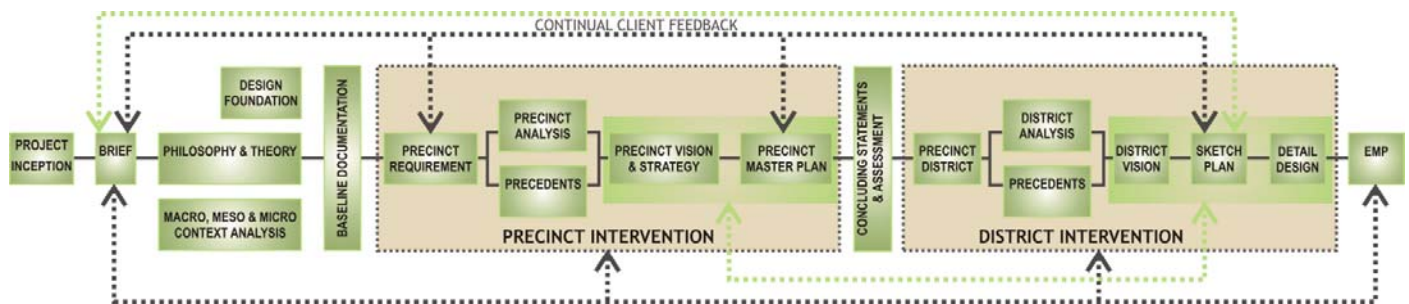
1.4. CLIENT

An integrated and multi-faceted client consisting of:



1.5. METHODOLOGY

A systemic approach to the thesis research whereby all research topics are integrated and connected, therefore creating an all-encompassing system that aids in the effective and thorough solution and response to the problem statement and vision. The general thesis development is linear with continual feedback cycles referring to previously gathered information and decisions made.



1.11. Methodology diagram (Howard 2005)