



Living out the dream? A contemporary history of mentalities of Moqhaka's water sector workers and users

Johann Tempelhoff

Project participants: S Berner, M Ginster, J Khoadi, K Magape, R Moabelo, IM Moeketsi, M Morotolo, EJ Nealer, TA Qhena, MP Radebe, A Tsotetsi, AS van Zyl,

Research Niche for the Cultural Dynamics of Water
CuDyWat

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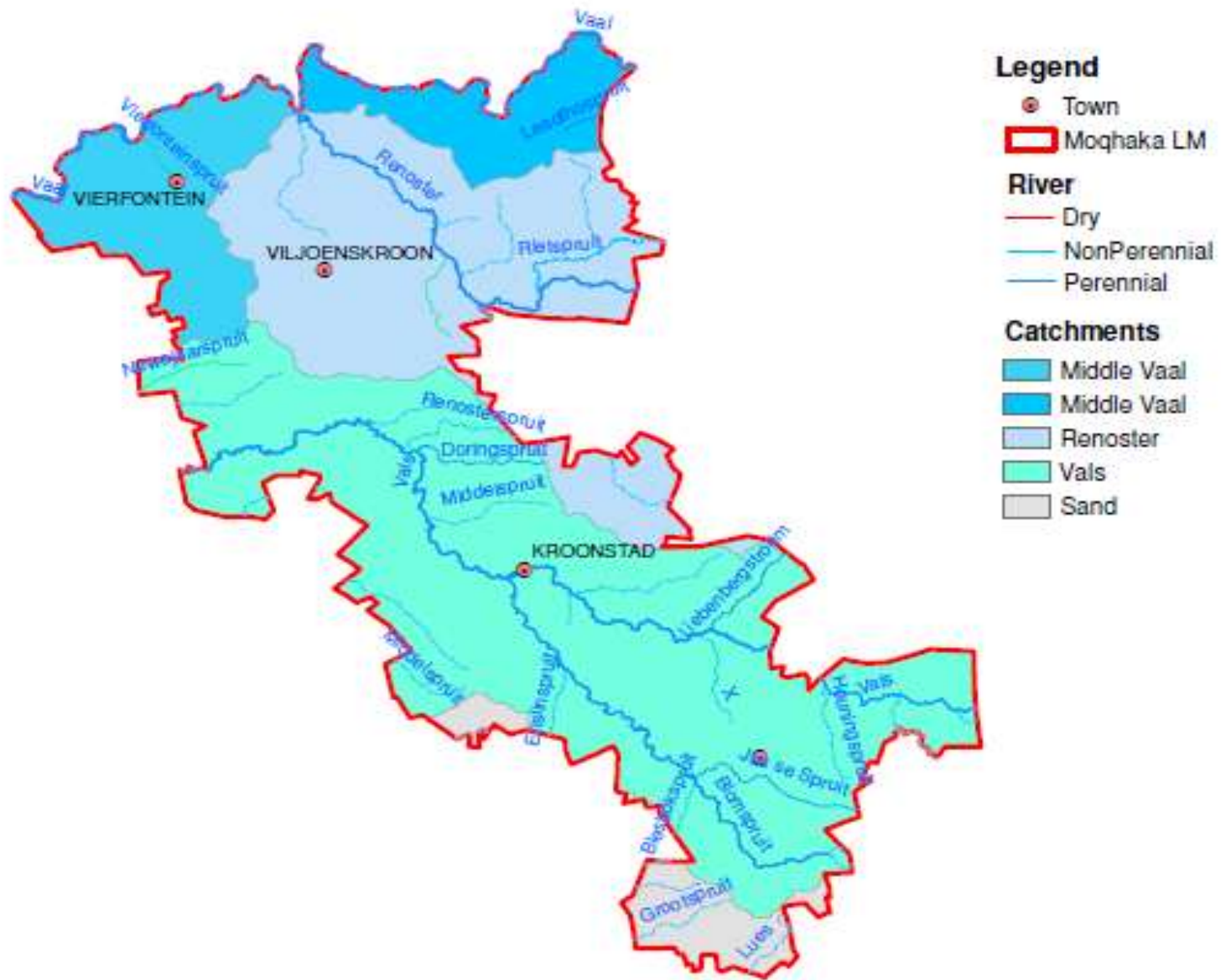
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Introduction: a project under construction

- SA has state-of-the-art legislation supporting a groundbreaking approach to water management
 - RSA, (1996) The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act, 108, Chapter 2, Section 27
 - RSA, 1997, Water Services Act, 108 of 1997
 - RSA, 1998, National Water Act, 36 of 1998
- Evidence that we are not quite there yet
- Especially local authorities in the rural parts of the country
- Moqhaka Local Municipality in the Northern Free State Province's Fezile Dabi District is a prime example



Moqhaka LM and catchments within municipality boundaries



Moqhaka

A background image of a sunset over a body of water. The sun is a bright, glowing orb in the center of the frame, casting a long, shimmering reflection across the water's surface. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds. On the right side, the dark silhouette of a tree is visible against the bright sky.

- Surface area of jurisdiction in Northern Free State: 7892km²
- Population about 200 000 residents
- 96% of population rely on municipal water supply
- In 2011 Moqhaka prominent in the news

Critical pointers



- 2011 National Municipal election
- Sanitation issues in the 'Toilet Election'
- Makhaza Western Cape and Rammulotsi, (Viljoenskroon) prominent focal areas of intense political discourse
- Sanitation in metropolitan and rural municipal areas in SA
- Gatvol Campaign (Kroonstad) campaign

The 'toilet election' of 2011



Unenclosed toilet in Kroonstad



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Dignity?



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Gatvol Protest: Kroonstad May 2011



CuDyWat Project in Moqhaka

- 2011 Fezile Dabi funded a research project on the environmental health of water and sanitation in its local municipalities of Mafube and Moqhaka
- Focus in Moqhaka project:
 - Geohydrology (Nealer)
 - Water and sanitation infrastructure in urban areas (Ginster & Berner)
 - Environmental health (Van Zyl)
 - Perceptions of stakeholders on water and sanitation

Subsidiary focus: a contemporary history of mentalities

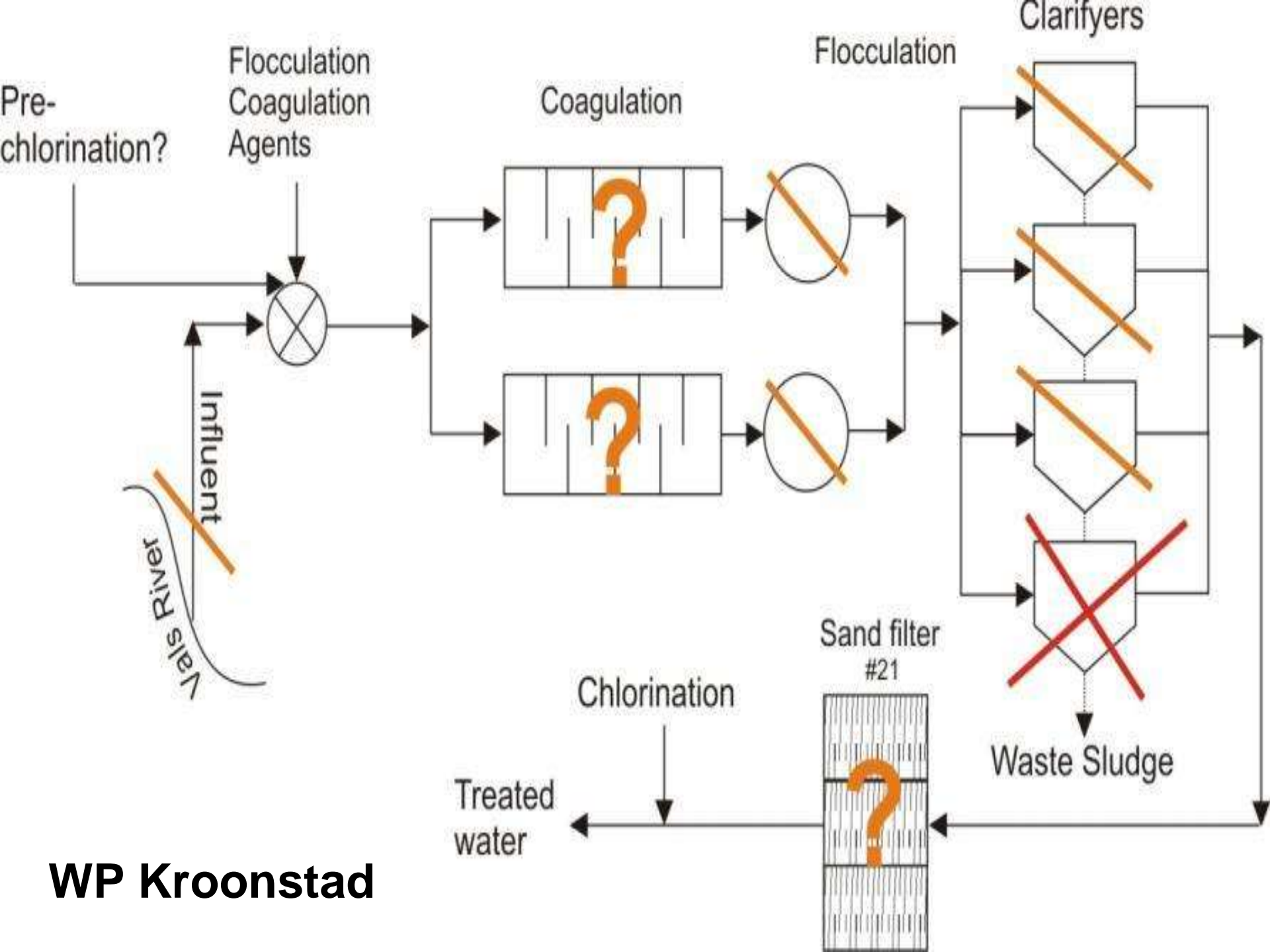


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Potable water resources management

- Moqhaka and the Blue Drop 21.76% for MLM Ranking 14 of 20 local authorities in the Free State Province
- Kroonstad: 20.9%
- Viljoenskroon: 31.5%
- Steynsrus: 16.35%





WP Kroonstad



Sewer overflow in residential area





WWTW Oxidization pond:
Steynsrus

Viljoenskroon water purification works



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Mentalité

- French Annales School.
- Phillipe Ariès (1914–1984) exponent of *histoire des mentalities*
- Pre-modern and pre-industrial and modernising societies in Europe.
- Definition: A prevailing state of mind that evolves over an extended period of time in communities.
- Shapes the behaviour of individuals and groups of people.
- Sometimes considered a derogatory term.
- Mental processes existing in communities that manifest in many of their actions.
- Influenced by assumptions about truth and tradition.
- Extension of the customs people observe.
- Rites, ceremonies, symbolic acts and forms of religious worship
- Agency: comprehending how human communities think and respond to events in their daily lives.

Value of a contemporary history of mentalities

- In the case of water and sanitation service delivery:
- Micro-historical exploration of macro-historical problem
- History of the present-approach (Foucault)
- Critics – Chin (2010):
 - Wary of generalisation
- Advantage for this project:
 - Can open potential transdisciplinary routes to knowledge on problems of water and sanitation service delivery

Water users: *Mentalité de déconnexion*

- Perceptions of local residents:
- Town (Kroonstad) described as 'broken and increasingly becoming more broken'
- Vals River: a 'coffin, carrying the carcasses of dead animals and raw sewage'
- General mentality
- Social ecological disconnectedness
- Low sense of morale
- Loss of self-respect and dignity
- Loss of good-neighbourliness and hospitality
- Living lives, as if dazed, as a result of apparent chaos and disorientation.



Metaphorical expression

- Seeking a literary device for comprehending local mentalities
- TS Elliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), major 20th C poem
- Therapeutic intervention to recover from a nervous breakdown
- Describes environment, the setting in which people find themselves; the overpowering sense of loss; and the inability to connect with other people and the environment in which s(he) is living
- Comparison?
- A human condition similar in South African society as a result of dysfunctional water and sanitation.



Water workers: *Mentalité de l'idéalisme ironique*

- WWs live their everyday lives, stunted; a sense of passion to perform task
- Realisation: unable to produce the required end product.
- Outside views: 'carelessness, 'oversight' and 'neglect'
- Cause: procurement, under-maintained infrastructure, non-responsiveness of sectoral management to workers in the workplace.
- Frustrations: external interventions (trade unions) insensitive to local conditions.
- Mentality? ironic idealism (*mentalité de l'idéalisme ironique*).
- Some workers employed in the water sector for long time.
- Memories of good times when supply was sufficient and service was 'outstanding' – more than often in the era before 1994.
- Sometimes: work from day to day, sometimes to just to pass the time.
- Other times: able to respond to external pressure
- Existential condition that is ironic to the extent that in some contexts the observer sees the humour in many of the everyday things being done.

Self-perceptions

- Steynrsus: 'In 1999 the town suddenly collapsed'
- Examples: 'If only our water supplies could be improved'.

One official owns a shebeen in town and was drunk on the job

Metaphorical expression

- John Steinbeck novels *Cannery Row* (1945) and *Sweet Thursday* (1954)
- Dr Ed Rickett, a marine biologist of Monterey, California
- Human condition of experience of degradation and collapse, with the ever-yearning hope that the situation will change once again to one of vibrancy

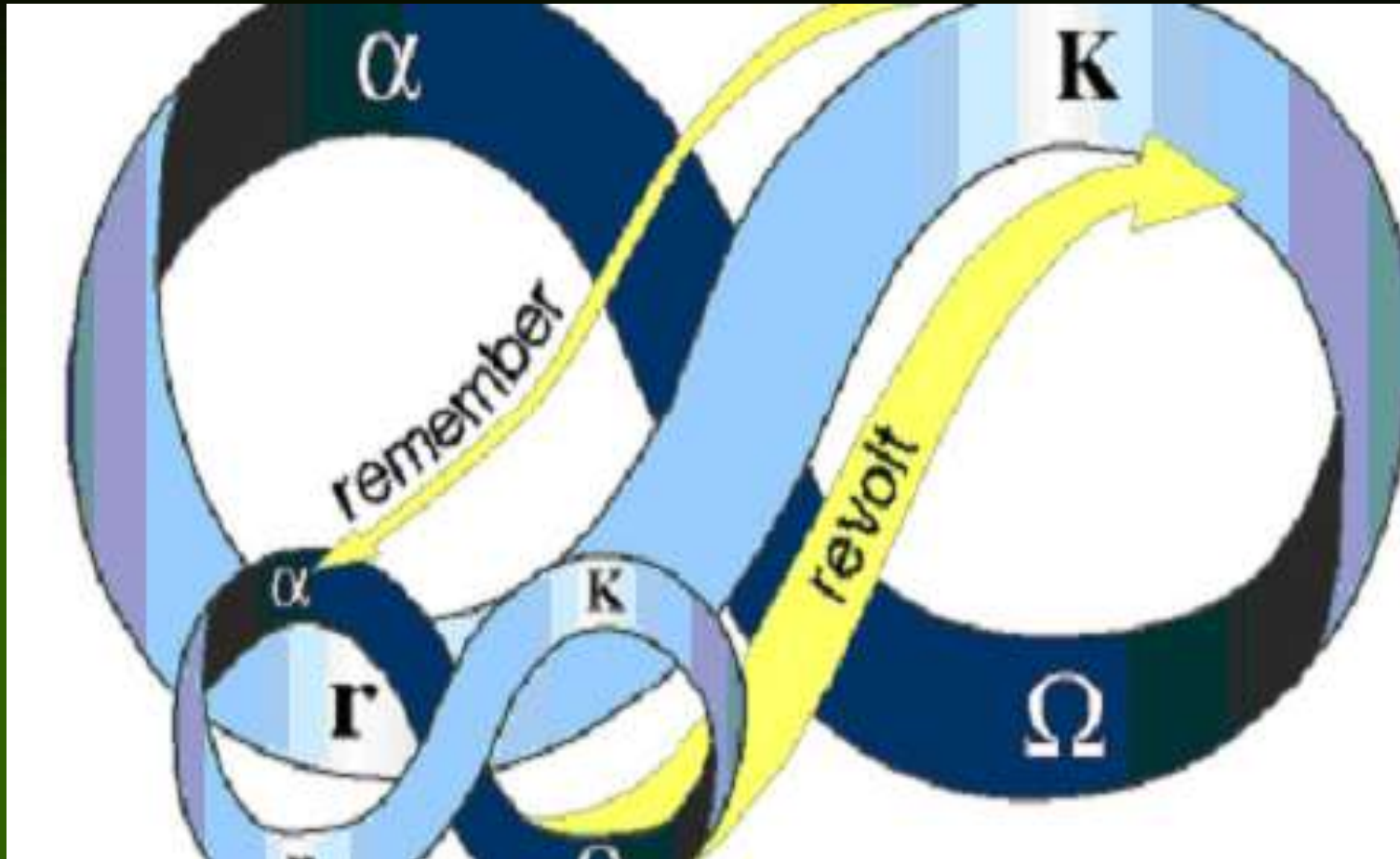


Addressing the human condition: *Mentalité de la condition humaine*

- H Arendt, *The human condition* (1958)
- Also part of thinking in SA's National Planning strategy
- Realisation of our fragility and that of the world in which we live out our lives
- Need to become aware of our long evolutionary history as amphibians focused on leading resilient lives in a hydrosphere where the essential life-giving source of water requires constant care and nurturing.



Panarchy (Holling & Gunderson 2001)





Objective:

**Develop an indigenous discourse
Self-disclosure and
interaction with local knowledge**

Recover sense of local patriotism

Restore dignity and self-respect



Thank you

