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# Co-creating enduring practitioner-researcher collaborations in multi-functional landscapes

Collaboration between different disciplines, sectors and society is essential to tackle contemporary sustainability problems. This paper integrates learnings and reflections from a series of workshops and interviews conducted in the Berg-Breede landscape that explored the challenges and enablers to long-term, researcher-practitioner partnerships. We found several, often entrenched and systemic, challenges to working collectively and equitably within complex landscape spaces. From conversations on solutions to these hurdles, we distilled out four key enablers of enduring collaboration, drawing on critical moments of learning and understanding and thinking about how the benefits and values of collaboration can be leveraged and amplified. Our work illuminates how supporting enduring collaborations can help bridge the research-implementation gap to facilitate more equitable and resilient multi-functional landscapes.

**Significance:**

While sustainable and equitable management of landscapes can be improved through intentional efforts to build collaborative partnerships between researchers and practitioners, the longevity and endurance of these partnerships rely on several features, including shifts in the way researchers design and undertake their research, in the values and benefits that collaboration can deliver, and in how research findings are articulated and shared. Third spaces can play an important role in achieving these shifts and enhancing collaboration.

## Introduction

Rapid and unprecedented social and environmental change is creating many complex challenges across social-ecological systems globally that hinder achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>1,2</sup> Finding solutions to these multifaceted and interconnected challenges requires new, more integrated and collaborative ways of working across sectors, actors and knowledge systems.

Collaboration involves actors from different societal sectors and interest groups working together, sharing risks and challenges, and combining their unique resources, strengths, views, knowledge and competencies to find mutually agreed solutions to pressing societal and environmental concerns.<sup>3</sup> Such collective problem-solving and knowledge co-development can facilitate out-of-the-box thinking; reveal innovative, negotiated and sustainable solutions; and promote equity with regard to the range of views, values and voices that are heard. Meaningful collaboration needs to be well aligned to local concerns and needs; broaden the knowledge base by including scholarly, experiential, tacit, local and Indigenous knowledge; and bring disconnected actors, sectors and government institutions together in pursuit of a common goal.<sup>4</sup> Collaboration can also lead to practice that incorporates new evidence regarding what is needed to change the status quo towards greater sustainability and equity.<sup>5,6</sup>

Engaged sustainability science, transdisciplinary research and implementation science are research approaches that advocate for collaboration between researchers and practitioners, and other relevant stakeholders<sup>7,8</sup> to achieve the above goals. Enhanced relationships between these actors are considered critical for ensuring relevant, action-orientated research that helps to bridge the research-implementation (knowing-doing) gap and inform more sustainable and equitable practice.<sup>9,10</sup>

However, in many situations, including in our case study area – the Berg-Breede landscape in South Africa – there are inadequate connections between researchers and practitioners on an ongoing basis, especially within the context of wider landscape resilience. Landscapes are characterised by overlapping and contested land uses and values requiring negotiation of the trade-offs created by these competing interests, as well as ways to conserve the ecosystems that generate the services that people depend on and may compete over.<sup>11</sup> Collaboration to support sustainable and resilient landscapes therefore needs to focus on multiple landscape concerns (wildfires, water quality, agriculture and food security, conservation, livelihood opportunities, rural-urban development conflicts, etc.), which requires regular dialogue between partners in order to pursue multiple solutions and outcomes (e.g. through co-management, collaborative governance, research and monitoring, regional coordination, equity of benefits and burdens) that build on the best available knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

Given this context, we believe that to address such complex interconnected sustainability concerns at the landscape scale and support new research and action that directly responds to these concerns, collaboration that is based on longer-term partnerships and coordinated and regular interactions is required.<sup>5</sup> However, such collaboration is not easy nor guaranteed to succeed and faces numerous barriers.<sup>5,7</sup> For example, bringing together people from different walks of life, who often hold different worldviews and values, can be complex and potentially fraught if there are power inequities and conflicts over resources between actors. In addition, building the trust, common vision and direction that is needed to overcome these issues takes time and resources.

One approach to facilitate more continuous communication and knowledge co-production is through the establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms or communities of practice (CoP), both of which can be referred

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to as ‘third spaces’ (for example, see Annan-Aggrey et al.<sup>11</sup>, Cockburn et al.<sup>5</sup> and Roux et al.<sup>13</sup>). The concept of a third space (used mainly in teacher education) is seen as a metaphor for a process where participants from across traditional boundaries form a partnership to collaborate and co-construct knowledge to improve practice.<sup>14</sup> A third space is an interdependent and relational space that is non-hierarchical and generally has some form of permanence.<sup>10,14</sup> We use the term third space to remain open as to what shape the collaboration might take.

In this paper, we explore what might be needed to facilitate enduring researcher-practitioner collaboration in the Berg-Breede landscape. This landscape is the site of multiple, sometimes overlapping research projects, across different institutions, with many designed to address social-ecological sustainability issues. However, coordination across these institutions and projects is often poor, with patchy involvement of non-academic actors. Moreover, the impact of research on more sustainable landscape management is quite fuzzy, and implementation is not always keeping up with the latest science. Where collaboration has happened, this is usually linked to a single research project and comes to an end once funding has run out. Consequently, we saw an opportunity to learn from practitioners’ (individuals from non-governmental organisations [NGOs], local government, provincial departments and conservation organisations; see the [supplementary material](#)) and researchers’ experiences of research and action in the landscape to inform how collaboration could be improved.

To do this, we initiated a social learning process where we facilitated conversations around participants’ experiences of research, research partnerships and participation in multi-stakeholder processes. Specifically, we considered the possibility of a third space for collaboration and the potential enablers that could enhance the long-term sustainability and usefulness of such a space, as well as help overcome some of the challenges and barriers identified.

In the next sections, we commence with a short description of the Berg-Breede landscape context. We then outline the approach and methodology we used in our engaged sharing and learning process, with details available in the [supplementary material](#). From there, we provide a summary of the primary issues that reportedly are impacting negatively on collaboration, and then move to the main findings, which are synthesised and presented as a set of four enablers that are important for enduring partnerships. In presenting and discussing these findings, we also refer to relevant literature.

### The case study: The Berg-Breede landscape

The Berg and Breede catchments (hereafter referred to as the Berg-Breede landscape) are located in the Western Cape of South Africa and consist of the Berg catchment to the north and the Breede to the east of the Greater Cape Town area. The landscape is a critical area for water supply to the city of Cape Town, surrounding deciduous fruit farms and wine estates, and residents, as well as being a popular tourist destination. The landscape is under pressure from these multiple demands, as well as rapid land-use change, plant invasions, deteriorating water quality and climate change.<sup>15,16</sup> The region is also characterised by high levels of social inequality. Many pockets of extreme poverty and wealth exist, and the experience of communities in terms of service delivery, participation in the formal economy and in influencing strategic decision-making processes differs widely depending on their socio-economic status. These high levels of inequality make the catchment a challenging area to work in and heightens various ethical and justice issues.

As for other landscapes, government agents, civil society groups and NGOs have responded to the complex challenges of landscape management through the creation of several platforms and networks. These platforms focus on various aspects of landscape management and cover different geographical areas, often related to catchment and subcatchment boundaries (see the [supplementary material](#)). However, there is no landscape-level forum that specifically brings practitioners and researchers together to collaborate on interlinked landscape sustainability and equity issues.

### Approach and methodology

Our study is based on qualitative narrative data derived from a series of eight (seven online due to COVID-19 restrictions, and one in-person) engaged, learning workshops (see <https://sites.google.com/view/berg-breede/home>) with different landscape stakeholders (some 30 in total for online workshops and 31 for the in-person engagement), followed by in-depth interviews with selected practitioners (Figure 1).

Workshops were widely advertised through our contacts and networks in the Berg-Breede landscape. All of us had prior involvement in research and practice in this space. The participants who attended the workshops were those who were interested in and signed up to the process. We also encouraged key role-players to invite colleagues whom they thought might be interested in attending.

In the first workshops, we surfaced some of the important challenges to collaboration from the perspectives of both researchers and practitioners, respectively. In the subsequent workshops (again with researchers and practitioners separately), we discussed solutions to the identified barriers, as well as potential enablers of long-term collaboration for engaged transdisciplinary research. In the final in-person workshop, we focused on the possibility of a third space as an avenue for collaboration.

Following this, we undertook six individual semi-structured interviews with practitioners. We recruited participants based on their involvement with existing platforms in the Berg-Breede landscape (see [Supplementary table 2](#)). Snowball sampling was employed to contact additional participants. In these conversations, we sought to obtain a fuller and

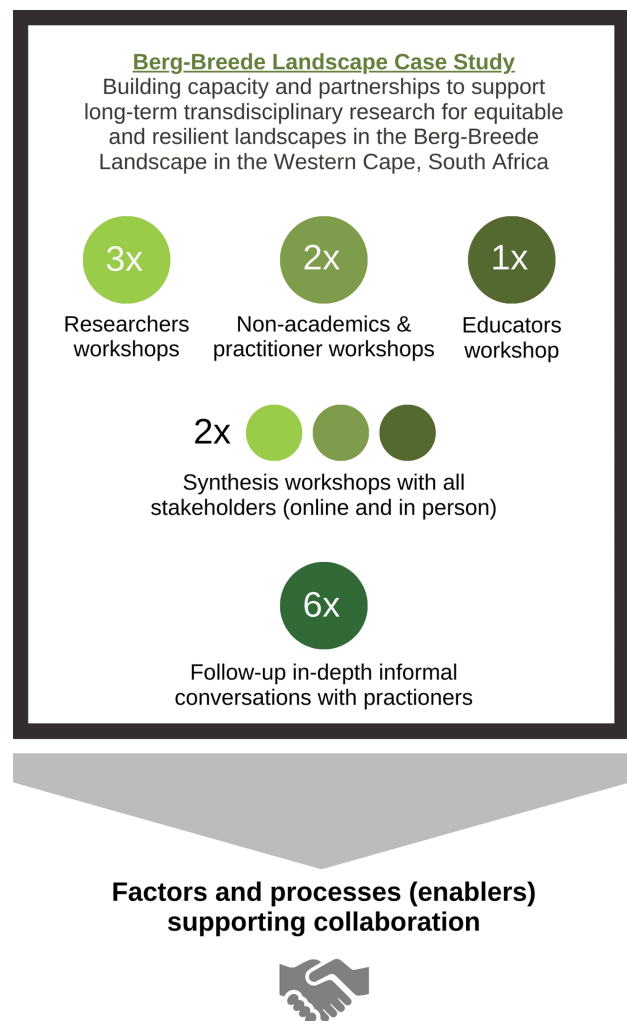


Figure 1: Data collection process using learning workshops and interviews.

more nuanced articulation of the difficulties practitioners face in participating in collaborative efforts and the kinds of values and benefits that would encourage their participation. This methodological approach provided for critical and iterative learning and reflection, from which we were able to distil out key learnings related to what is needed for effective and long-term collaboration between researchers and practitioners. Both the workshops and the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Using our notes and the transcriptions, we spent a day working together as a team to pull out the key insights. For the interviews we undertook thematic analysis using NVivo. More details on the workshops and interviews and their analysis are provided in the [supplementary material](#).

## Reflections: What is needed for effective long-term collaboration?

### *Synthesis of challenges/barriers hindering effective collaboration*

During the first workshops on surfacing challenges (adapted from Theory U), conversations revolved around several issues that can negatively affect participation in collaborative research activities and act as barriers to enduring partnerships.

Many of the issues raised could be partly the result of not having an existing means for regular interaction between practitioners and researchers, but also relate to how researchers position themselves and their research, their skills and capacities for engagement, and on having access to adequate funding; a major barrier mentioned by all participants. Inadequate communication, recognised by both groups, was said to result in the duplication of ideas, knowledge and work, placing greater demand on practitioners and leading to research fatigue. Further, it was mentioned how students and researchers are often inadequately prepared and poorly informed on the landscape context and the range of actors involved in landscape management and governance, which can create unintended outcomes that can potentially damage relationships among stakeholders. Researchers mentioned how there is limited training and university support for this type of engaged research, and most researchers “have to find their own way” (discussed further in Shackleton et al.<sup>17</sup>). Poor alignment between research and the knowledge needs of practitioners – something that is touched on in other cases<sup>5,7</sup> – was also highlighted. Practitioners are generally most interested in research that helps them do their jobs better. A lack of reporting back of research findings and follow-up was stressed as also being a demotivating factor and, even when this was done, it was often in ways that were not easily accessible to non-researchers, nor were the practical implications of the research for practitioners’ day-to-day work often pointed out. Additionally, a lack of time, funding, mandate and skills to work closely together and difficulties ensuring continuity and sustainability of any collaborative platform were stressed.

### *Enablers (factors and processes) supporting enduring collaboration*

Drawing on the discussions related to what is needed to support collaboration, overcome the barriers mentioned above and establish an effective third space, we distilled out four key enablers, with several subcategories (Figure 2). While a third space is considered critical to bridging the research-implementation gap, the other enablers, which are all closely interconnected, are needed to ensure that such a space endures and fosters long-term collaboration. For each enabler, we propose potential ways forward based on what emerged from the conversations with stakeholders. We do this alongside some of the insights and recommendations from the literature regarding how collaborations can be enhanced and made sustainable.

#### **a) Co-create safe and neutral third spaces for collaboration**

Convening neutral third spaces (potentially a combination of digital and in-person meetings) for researcher-practitioner dialogues, relationship building and co-learning was recognised by participants as critical for engaged scholarship and knowledge co-production that focuses on joint problem-solving and actioning of research.<sup>13</sup> Hosting these meetings in neutral venues in the landscape such as schools, community centres or

natural areas changes the dynamics and allows stakeholders to connect around mutual concerns, surface and negotiate contentious issues, and move towards collective action to address the multi-faceted challenges faced in the landscape. It was also highlighted in the social learning process that traditional ways of engaging such as sitting around a table talking, no matter how well facilitated, may result in a loss of interest or some people being more comfortable and outspoken than others.

Workshop participants suggested that at times it may be necessary to look for exciting and innovative ways to engage that can also change the power dynamics between stakeholders and open the doors to more creative thinking. For example, one suggestion was organising floating seminars along the Berg River to get people out of their comfort zone and to observe the landscape from another perspective. Other examples mentioned included tours and site visits, demonstration sites and mini conferences with ample social space and activities built in as is the case for the Garden Route Interface and Networking (GRIN) meetings.<sup>13</sup> Regarding the latter, conversations over lunch and tea were mentioned as key to relationship building and cited as a source of new and spontaneous collaborations. However, practitioners shared how they were facing increasing time and resource constraints that can hamper their participation. For regular interaction, online meetings were said to be more easily accessible, require fewer resources to attend and also allow for more focused work to be done. However, for relationship building, it was noted that “nothing beats an in-person meeting”. A balance between both would be ideal.

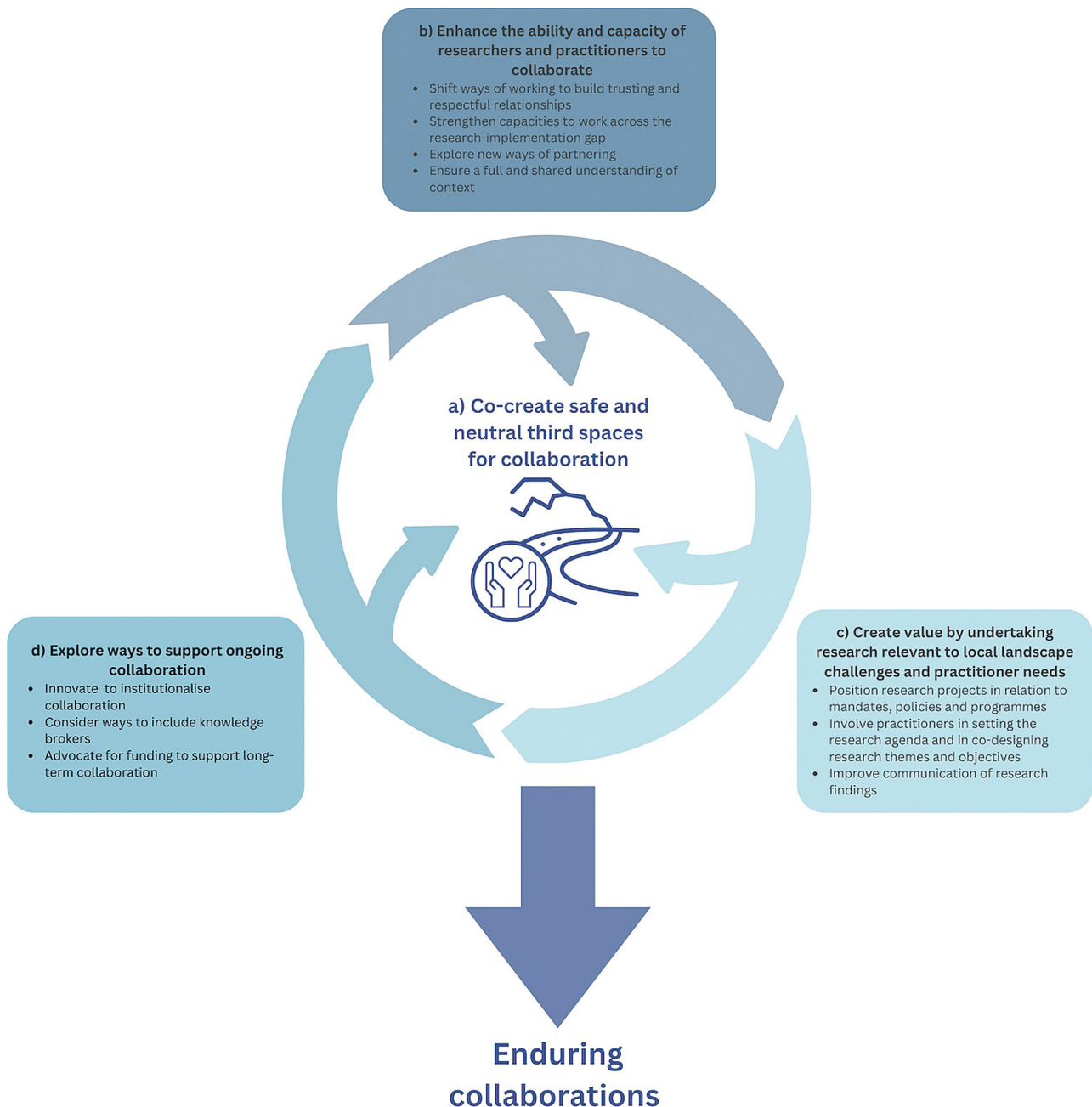
With time, the ambition is that third spaces become long-term platforms that meet on a regular or annual basis, thriving CoPs, or even networks.<sup>5</sup> Participants in the final workshop agreed that a researcher-practitioner collaborative space, perhaps linked to other multi-stakeholder platforms in the Berg-Breede landscape, could be a way forward. They agreed that its function should be to support research on social-ecological sustainability, provide neutral ground for researchers and practitioners to build a shared context on the research needs of the area, facilitate engagement in social learning, co-develop transdisciplinary research projects, build capacity for joint work, and provide a forum to share and explore the implications of research findings. Since the last workshop, the new Cape Floristic Region Partnership (CFRP) has taken on this role. They organised a further researcher-practitioner workshop, created a working group and designed a session for a researcher-practitioner engagement at the annual Fynbos Forum.

#### **b) Enhance the ability and capacity of researchers and practitioners to collaborate**

It has already been noted that collaboration can be challenging. Developing a safe, relational and interdependent third space that can build trust and respect among participants requires (self-)awareness of what it means to work collaboratively<sup>10</sup> as well as a set of skills to better navigate the research-practice interface. Collaboration cannot happen without changes in the way both researchers and practitioners approach their work.

#### **Shift ways of working to build trusting and respectful relationships**

Researchers often take on multiple roles in third spaces, for example, that of researcher, facilitator and connector. But they are seldom equipped with the necessary skills to do this as these are rarely part of their traditional training. Consequently, researchers may attempt partnerships without the preparation that could enhance the success of collaboration.<sup>7</sup> More ‘soft’ skills training is required to build confidence in undertaking engaged research, in liaising with practitioners, in facilitating multi-stakeholder spaces and in dealing with trade-offs and conflict.<sup>17,18</sup> In addition, greater (self-)awareness of what it means to work in a relational way is needed among both sets of partners.<sup>10</sup> This means moving from being self-focused and independent to being other-focused and interdependent so partners respect, trust and avoid speaking past one another.<sup>10</sup> A caring and open demeanour, the ability to listen, reflexivity (related to how the process unfolds and of one’s own positionality), respect for other knowledge systems, understanding partners’ constraints and the ability to negotiate cultural differences, among others, can assist in this. Creating this type of mindfulness can be facilitated through interactive coaching



**Figure 2:** Key enablers supporting enduring collaborations.

and dialogue. That said, it is also important to recognise when an expert neutral facilitator may be needed.<sup>6</sup>

**Strengthen capacities to work across the research-implementation gap**

Capacity strengthening around how to use evidence in implementation<sup>19</sup> and, conversely, how to produce such evidence, can assist in making collaborations more valuable. It is often unclear to both researchers and practitioners how research results can be effectively translated into action. Frequently, the role of research is quite opaque and indirect, while practitioners are looking for outputs that more directly assist them in their daily work. Capacity strengthening to better understand what is needed by practitioners and how this can be delivered by researchers and then adopted by practitioners could help in producing more actionable science. Researchers need to find ways to generate immediate workable findings rather than waiting until later in the research process, particularly after papers have been published, as is often the case. An example of a capacity strengthening initiative related to this is

the *evidence-informed policy-making (EIPM) training course* offered by the African Institute for Development Policy. Much of the learning can also be related to practice.

**Explore new ways of partnering**

Another way to address the concern that researchers and practitioners seldom get the opportunity to interact is by engaging with one another beyond the usual roles. This can improve understanding of each other's contexts and ways of working and ultimately lead to deeper and more trusting relationships. This engagement could include involving practitioners as co-teachers in university courses and curriculum processes, involving researchers in community engagement activities and training, embedding researchers in local structures for the duration of their research (e.g. in municipalities or NGOs)<sup>20,21</sup> (see above) or vice versa, and bringing students into service learning in the landscape. Furthermore, practitioners suggested that while undertaking projects, researchers should live in the landscape and engage in various landscape activities to further build trust and relationships. By embedding in the





landscape, it is more possible to continue engagement outside of project cycles and strive for continuity in further research.<sup>22</sup>

### **Ensure a full and shared understanding of context**

It was also pointed out that collaboration can be enhanced by ensuring a common understanding of the context. To explore research options that will provide useful evidence for practitioners, it is necessary to understand the complexities of the context within which the research and implementation will take place, something that can be part of third space discussions. Context is generally understood as the social, political, governance and environmental settings in which the investigated 'real-world' sustainability problems emerge.<sup>22,23</sup> Understanding context requires a holistic approach to identifying the key drivers that shape important local conditions and processes.<sup>22</sup> Joint examination of what research has been done before, including where in the landscape and who was involved is essential. It is also important to explore the perspectives, roles and knowledge of key actors within the landscape, as well as their relationships (with each other, and with the landscape itself). Tools such as stakeholder and power mapping can greatly assist in this.

### **c) Create value by undertaking research relevant to local landscape challenges and practitioner needs**

The points highlighted below are all areas that should be part of the conversations that happen in a third space. If time is given to these, collaboration is more likely to deliver value to partners and be more sustainable. Interviewees who regularly participate in practice-related multi-stakeholder spaces mentioned how important these are for capacitating the next generation of practitioners, for facilitating effective coordination, and for assisting with more efficient use or saving of resources. Researchers and practitioners need to work jointly on providing similar values in their collaborations. Below we highlight some ways to do this.

#### **Position research projects in relation to mandates, policies and programmes**

Support for the implementation of policy (i.e. practice) was mentioned by practitioners as more important than creating new policy. Practitioners volunteered that there are many good policies to support sustainability – the challenge is the implementation of these policies compounded by the slowness of the bureaucracy and a range of complex governance issues. It was suggested that researchers should connect with government department staff (practitioners, managers and decision-makers) to understand what the implementation needs are and where the blockages are and then work with stakeholders to understand and tackle these.<sup>24</sup> Odume et al.<sup>25</sup> in research in several African cities, found that 'explicitly conceptualising and communicating research projects in relation to mandates and policies' as well as programmes (including those of NGOs) provided an important pathway for supporting interactions.

#### **Involve practitioners in setting the research agenda and in co-designing research themes and objectives**

To improve the relevance and value of research, it is essential to engage with its end users to understand their knowledge needs and priorities. Regularly updated, co-developed research agendas can provide the insights that researchers need to raise appropriate funding, direct researchers to the relevant landscape actors for further discussions and inclusion in proposals, respond timeously to funding calls and identify research projects for postgraduate students. This need for jointly identifying research priorities and questions was highlighted by Cockburn et al.<sup>5</sup> in their work on building a science-action partnership for local land-use planning and management in the city of Durban, South Africa. The authors mention how potential research projects were jointly developed by partners but were driven by the management and decision-making needs of the eThekweni municipality.

#### **Improve communication of research findings**

Co-developing knowledge products helps to ensure that they are tailored (e.g. in terms of language, framing, delivery and visuals) to

implementation needs. The typical briefs written by researchers do not always gain the traction desired.<sup>26</sup> Increasingly, we are seeing other forms of sharing research findings within collaborative spaces, with boundary organisations, playing a role in this.<sup>27</sup> Work on regional multi-stakeholder landscape platforms in Uganda and Kenya demonstrated clearly how knowledge sharing, usually the first part of any meeting, made a real difference in supporting policy and practice.<sup>3</sup> Another example mentioned were the dialogues at the end of projects funded by the Water Research Commission (South Africa) where critical research findings for enhancing water sustainability are shared with local and national stakeholders. Sharing findings in an accessible way is a key activity that could be coordinated through a third space.

### **d) Explore ways to support ongoing collaboration**

Long-term collaboration cannot happen without funding and coordination support. Stories of failed collaborative efforts were shared in the workshops. Below we explore what could assist in providing stability to a third space as well as adequate funding for coordination, workshops, meetings and other events.

#### **Innovate to institutionalise collaboration**

The ability to collaborate is often limited by poor recognition of the value of researcher-practitioner collaborations in the wider workplace, especially in government. This type of collaboration is seldom part of government officials' job description and may not be recognised as legitimate work by their managers. This limits the incentive and ability to collaborate. Greater advocacy of the value of engaging with research is needed in the implementation space.

Furthermore, participants shared that previous efforts to initiate means for researchers and practitioners to collaborate beyond a single project had limited lifespans due to short-term funding and/or the champions leaving (sometimes the result of a lack of funding in soft-funded research or NGO positions). A lack of permanence and the continuity needed to keep relationships going is a persistent barrier that has no simple solution, especially without adequate funding.

Ideally, researcher-practitioner third spaces should be supported by either or both universities (in terms of building partnerships for undertaking research related to these institutions' immediate context) and/or government. Regarding the latter, one problem is the siloed nature of government departments which do not cater for the wide range of linked sustainability challenges that need attention to ensure more equitable and resilient landscapes. However, there are examples of successful government-hosted platforms to address integrated climate change adaptation at both national and local level. In the case study by Acosta et al.<sup>3</sup>, the responsibility for collaboration was transferred to government entities (in Tanzania and Uganda) after initiation under a donor-funded project. The authors emphasise that 'embedding the platforms within government structures provided those official bodies with convening power, a greater sense of ownership over the process, and ultimately offered the platforms a pathway to sustainability'. One of our participants mentioned that sometimes all it requires is for collaboration to be seen as a priority by the government leadership. In addition, in the Tanzanian and Ugandan examples described by Acosta et al.<sup>3</sup> meetings happened quarterly and started with the sharing of research and experience, followed by a decision-making process using participatory engagement approaches. The authors highlight how such knowledge sharing helped to build trust, agree on common goals and foster unified action. In another example, the GRIN third space, long-term partnerships and sustainability was achieved by having a champion, who worked for SANParks and was associated with a university, coordinate the annual research and practice meeting with the support of different stakeholders on a rotational basis.<sup>13</sup> To help cover costs, a basic fee was charged for the three-day knowledge sharing get-together.

#### **Consider ways to include knowledge brokers**

Knowledge brokers as individuals (also referred to as boundary spanners and facilitators) or in a collaborative third space structure, such as a CoP, platform or boundary organisation, are increasing being recognised

as crucial enablers of effective collaboration and systemic change (an example from the Berg-Breede was the NGO Living Lands which unfortunately is no longer operating).<sup>28</sup> The ideal would be a dedicated coordinator/knowledge broker for the third space structure who could help with synthesising research, matching researchers and practitioners on new projects, facilitating workshops, supporting engaged scholarship, liaising with universities and dealing with administrative needs. Similarly, having knowledge brokers embedded in local universities (such as in their research offices) who could take on similar roles could help close the research-implementation gap. Such knowledge brokers need to communicate in a multilingual, multicultural, multi-level and multidirectional context which requires a specific set of skills and expertise.<sup>6</sup> Specific funding thus is often required for this role as outlined below.

#### **Advocate for funding to support long-term collaboration**

We are seeing more national funding for engaged and collaborative research, for example, through initiatives like the Expanded Freshwater and Terrestrial Environmental Observation Network (EFTEON), but often funding does not include resources to build the relationships needed within the lifetime of the project, never mind supporting the actioning of the knowledge generated. For research to have an impact, longer-term collaboration beyond single projects is needed to solidify relationships, enable project findings to be properly synthesised, communicated, and acted on, and ensure some continuity between projects.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, at a landscape level, integration and understanding across different research projects is needed to address complex sustainability challenges. Funders interested in impactful research should think beyond funding only projects or researchers and boost the continuity of engaged work by valuing and financing brokers as well as the collaborative spaces that are needed for building resilient and equitable landscapes. In addition, universities should consider hiring knowledge brokers to serve as central points of contact for all researchers and practitioners working within the greater university space.

#### **Conclusion**

The findings from this case study show that building enduring partnerships between researchers and practitioners is not easy as there are multiple hurdles to effective collaboration. For example, it requires adequate and sustained funding to support ongoing collaboration through third spaces. It is also critical that stakeholders have the time to engage, especially given the often-slow process of knowledge co-production and translation of findings into action. In addition, collaborative activities need to be included in practitioners' job descriptions and be seen as legitimate work. Similarly, university and research institutions need to make working with external partners part of a broader strategy to support decolonised research and to respond to local sustainability concerns. Third spaces need the wide support of not just participants but also those to whom these stakeholders are accountable. The interactions between partners need to be respectful and produce real benefits that go beyond learning to actions that improve landscape equity and sustainability. Practitioners need tangible results for their time. The four enablers of collaboration outlined in this paper provide some insights on how to do this. They have been helpful in guiding the CFRP with their initiative for researcher-practitioner collaboration in the Berg-Breede landscape, as well as in the NASA-funded BioSCape project.<sup>30</sup>

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#### **Data availability**

The data supporting the results of this study have not been made available by the authors in any format.

#### **Declarations**

We have no competing interests to declare. We have no AI or LLM use to declare. Both the workshop series and interviews were approved by the UCT Science Faculty Ethics Committee (Workshops: FSREC 036-2021; Interviews: FSREC 073-2023).

#### **Authors' contributions**

S.S.: Project leadership, funding acquisition, conceptualisation, data collection, data analysis, writing – the initial draft, writing revisions. Pd.P.: Data collection, data analysis, writing – initial draft, writing revisions. N.S.: Conceptualisation, data collection, data analysis, writing revisions. C.F.: Data collection, data analysis, writing revisions. N.M.: Conceptualisation, data collection, data analysis.

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