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Faculty of Humanities, Development
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Action Research is an effective means of engaging with empirical projects and offering researchers a reflexive tool while giving subjects the practical benefits of the investigation



Members of the CCMS Research Team pose outside !Xaus Lodge with some #Khomani crafters

Action Research works wonders

ACTION RESEARCH IS a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people (Reason & Bradbury 2001).

How do we know that action research can work? !Xaus Lodge (www.xauslodge.co.za) is an indigenously-owned development venture situated in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (KTP). The lodge was constructed as a poverty alleviation venture in a remote part of the desert. In 2006 The Centre for

By Lauren Dyll-Myklebust

Communication, Media and Society (CCMS) was invited by lodge operator, Transfrontier Parks Destinations (TFPD) to study lodge operations within a development communication framework. The research examined lodge marketing, strategic positioning and lodge-community partnerships in relation to issues of identity, representation and viability. Action research was applied to shape business decisions to rescue a project that was subject to every costly development mistake in the book. Despite this !Xaus, led by TFPD with research provided by

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Photo: Lauren Dyll-Myklebust



Above: !Xaus Lodge against the Kalahari skyline.

Left: Two of the Mier Staff at the lodge

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CCMS) is a story of development success. !Xaus Lodge won the 2010 Imvelo Awards in the Best Practice: Economic Impact category, having generated more than R5.1 million in income in Gordonia – the extended district in which the Park is located. The short term economic benefit is that Mier and ꞤKhomani individuals comprise at least 85% of the Lodge employees. The long-term benefit is that the ꞤKhomani and Mier are the owners of an asset now worth R11million. Just four years ago, in 2006, the facility was wasting away on a sand dune.

CCMS researchers have published and

presented papers at local (SACOMM) and international media and communications conferences (IAMCR) on the !Xaus Lodge experience and how action research was operationalised, and contributed to the financial success of the venture.



Photo: Lauren Dyll-Myklebust

Further Information at:

Dyll, L. (2009) "Community Development Strategies in the Kalahari - an expression of Modernization's Monologue?" In Hottola, P. (ed.) *Tourism Strategies and Local Responses in Southern Africa*. Wallingford: CAB International, 41-60.

Finlay, K. (2009a) The Un/changing Face of the ꞤKhomani: Representation through Promotional Media. *Visual Anthropology* 22(4): 344-361.

Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (2001) *Handbook of Action Research: Participatory Inquiry and Practice*. London: Sage

Thesis available at: http://ccms.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=985&Itemid=34

Tomaselli, K.G. (ed.) (forthcoming). *Cultural Tourism, Methods and Identity: Rethinking Indigeneity*.

Dyll-Myklebust, L. & Finlay, K. (forthcoming). "Action (Marketing) Research and Paradigms in Partnership: A critical analysis of !Xaus Lodge". In Tomaselli K.G. (ed.) *Cultural Tourism, Methods and Identity: Rethinking Indigeneity* (working title).