

Garden Route Interface and Networking (GRIN) meeting - learning together to care for Earth's social-ecological systems



GRIN-2023, Knysna

What is it?

It is a community of practice, hosted by South African National Parks (SANParks) in partnership with the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), Nelson Mandela University's Sustainability Research Unit, CNRS-UCBL-NMU International Research Laboratory REHABS (Reconciling Ecological and Human Adaptations for Biosphere Sustainability) and Southern African Program on Ecosystem Change and Society (SAPECS).

GRIN is...

- an annual meeting in its 6th year; a neutral place for national and international practitioners and researchers to dialogue, exchange and learn across multiple organisations, themes and social-ecological perspectives within the context of people, nature and conservation.
- designed to promote diversity of perspectives and robust discussion, focusing on latest social-ecological research, practitioner knowledge, and practitioner-scientist engagement in order to integrate knowledge across disciplines, sectors, scales and science-policy-practice realms.
- like the Garden Route bridges – enabling connection across divides to allow flow and exchange between previously disconnected areas without obstructing the flow beneath them to eventually transform newly connected areas by setting a new trajectory into the future. This bridging, connecting and interfacing happens across multiple spheres, including people-nature, theory-practice (or science-management), doing-governing, past-future, organisations-stakeholders, conservation-production-integrated land uses, social-natural sciences.



Bridging recognises the critical importance of identity, inclusivity, confronting bias, plurality, trust, respect and empathy. And, that transformative change is a journey rather than a destination.

A group of people are sitting on a wooden deck in a lush forest. They appear to be engaged in a discussion or meeting. The background is filled with tall trees and dense foliage. The scene is outdoors and well-lit.

Highlights from the 5th GRIN, October 2023

3 days, 40 formal presentations, engaged discussion sessions and dialogue over teas, dinners and in nature, all spanning transdisciplinary ecological and social sciences and practice.

ShareScreen Africa facilitated virtual bridging to other African conservationists (<https://sharescreenafrica.org/video-presentations/>), thus extending reach.

Ever-expanding diversity of the meeting - diversity of understanding and pathways to transformation, of perspectives, of emotions, of new disciplines represented, of demographic representation and intergenerationality.

Heterogeneity of and new interfaces, including cultural-legal, morality-justice, storytelling–data, mind-body.

An energising safe space for practitioners to express themselves and a call for academia to always remain humble and open to co-learning with practitioners.

Dual functions as an arena for social learning and for the wellbeing of GRIN community and its members.

Who attends GRIN and why?

Meetings attract 70-80 delegates annually with an increasing number from abroad, including France, The Netherlands, Brazil, Finland, Spain, Canada, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Nigeria

Attendee benefits include networking, contribute to identifying research needs, partner with scientists and other organisations, share knowledge and concerns, enjoy time with an engaged community of thinkers and managers



Feedback from participants to previous GRIN meetings

“GRIN gave me the confidence to take on a social-ecological study for my PhD” (student)

“Meaningful to find a community of knowledgeable, kind, like-minded individuals offering well-being, support and research ‘shortcuts’” (early career scientist)

“The workshop was an eye opener for me” (manager)

“Appreciate the international flavour and experiences in different countries facing similar challenges in different social framings” (manager)

“The success is based on it being a safe space, the level of engagement and the openness of attendees” (scientist)

“Field expedition was amazing for connecting and self-reflexions” (scientist)

“I have been to a few GRINs and always love it. I learn so much, am so challenged, and leave with a full head and energised for future research. I am so inspired by managers and those working deeply in social-ecological systems” (scientist)

Popular themes of learning, engagement and conversation



human–nature connections

strategies used to promote knowledge exchange among science, policy and practice

sustainable resource use and balancing benefits and conflicts related to (dis)services and contributions from nature

resilience, adaptations and transformations in social-ecological systems

responding to climate and other drivers of change; governance and management approaches for social-ecological systems

monitoring and evaluation approaches for social-ecological systems

lessons from forums and processes that aim to promote co-learning, knowledge sharing and collaboration among diverse stakeholders

methods / approaches for studying social-ecological systems



People, practice and philosophies blend to learn with a GRIN!