

Incorporating traditional cultural knowledge into water management in the Solomon Islands

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Earth Water People

SOLOMON ISLANDS



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Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the First Nations people as the original inhabitants of the land on which we are hosted today, Meeanjin, Brisbane. I recognise both the Turrbul and Jagera nations. I pay deep respects to Elders past, present and future.

Because my work took place in the Solomons I would also like to acknowledge and pay respect to the three Tadaï tribes of Barana community- Taobata, Kakau and Simbo, and the other tribes of the Solomon Islands research participants, who generously and passionately shared their stories and knowledge with me.



Research partnership

This research has been a partnership with Solomon Islands National University (SINU) as well as the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) and the Barana Community Nature and Heritage Park (BCNHP) and Barana community.

This doctoral research was undertaken at the Queensland University of Technology and funded by the Australian Government through the Research Training Stipend, Queensland Women's Council through the International Relations scholarship and QUT through the International Relations Award.



Why we need to understand the way that culture and water intersects



Transformative shifts in the way we communicate

- To protect our water sources into the future, major transformational shifts are needed in the way that we interact with our biosphere, water and oceans locally and globally (TWI2050, UN Gen Sec).
- To be able to meet the complex challenges of our world, we need transformative shifts in the way that we communicate (Harris, 2018).
- The whole of the community needs to be engaged, including women who have a strong role to play in the management of water and food security (Vunisea et al., 2015).



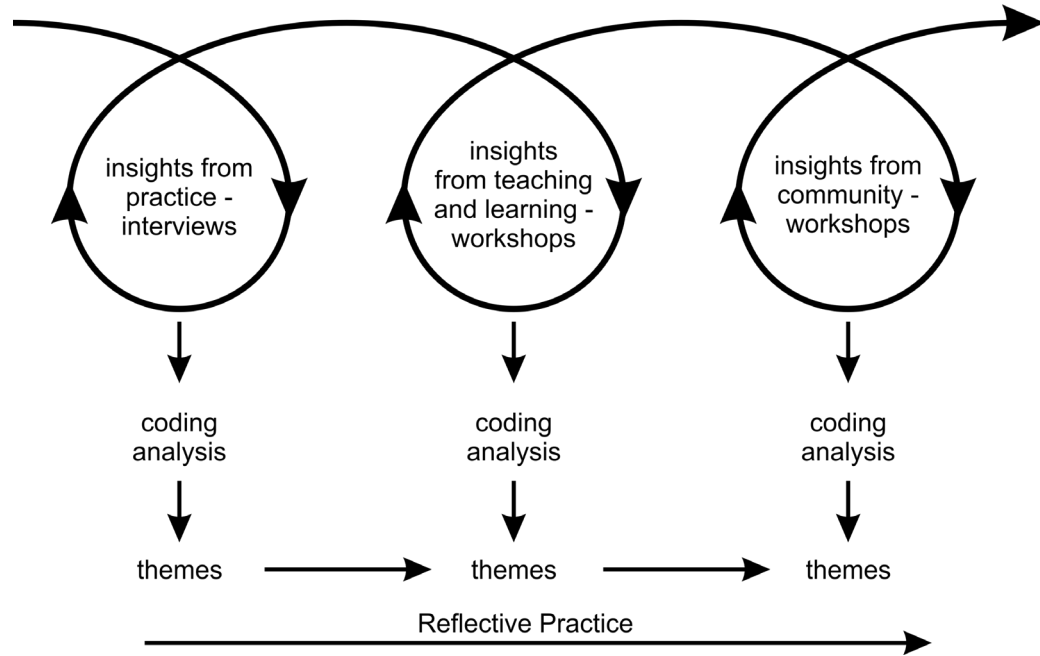
Weaving the epistemic mat

The metaphor of the 'epistemic mat' referred to by Boege (2020) as a metaphor that is appropriate to the Pacific to describe a collaborative and intertextual approach to storytelling and to knowing. Interweaving is dialogical and is not about the extraction of data or knowledge. It is not a matter of appropriating indigenous knowledge or withdrawing it from its context and the relationships in which it is held.

It is not possible to incorporate indigenous knowledge in the absence of indigenous people, it is about creating spaces where diverse voices and knowledges can be spoken and heard.



Research methodology



I undertook three action research cycles- combining insights from water management practice, teaching and learning and community.

Research questions



- 1) How can visual creative methods be used as community cultural engagement processes in community-based water management in the Solomon Islands?
- 2) How can visual creative methods create space for dialogue around sustainable water management?
- 3) How can the inclusion of women and youth be privileged in this process?

The use visual creative methods









Creative processes of photo elicitation and photo story process had two phases—generative and dialogical.

This opened up space for intergenerational dialogue around cultural knowledge and values that traditionally protect the water sources.

Intergenerational dialogue

Name of Project: Volana Ngadi Stream Group Members: Group 3 (Camera 3)

		
Our future is not looking better so it might be a big problem.	What should we do so that our future generations would not be effected in the future by disaster?	We must ask ourselves in what ways our past generation or ancestors lived with nature.
		
They had rules, respect and cultural ways of living with nature.	My group needs us to think about the past and this present time.	We think that the present really shows us what will happen in the future.



Research findings



Traditional knowledge systems around the protection and management of water sources were reported to exist in most of the provinces in the Solomon Islands that were included in this study.

These traditional knowledge systems are relational, with different knowledge being held by women, men and youth and often with different rules governing behaviour and access to the sites for each group.

These traditional management systems are currently being eroded and becoming lost, which was reported as a concern to most participants.

There exist limited models to integrate these into current water management practice.

Research findings- continued



Stories reveal the connections between people, their natural resources and ecosystems and knowledge systems.

Indigenous knowledge systems are embedded in the landscape, of which *kastom* stories are a part. Often *tabu* or sacred sites were found to have *kastom* stories attached to them, which was part of the Indigenous knowledge systems that protected these sites.

Visual cultural methods such as photography, photo elicitation and photovoice allowed communities to consider their natural environment in past, present and future to embed natural resource management principles in their lived experiences.

Community cultural values mapping

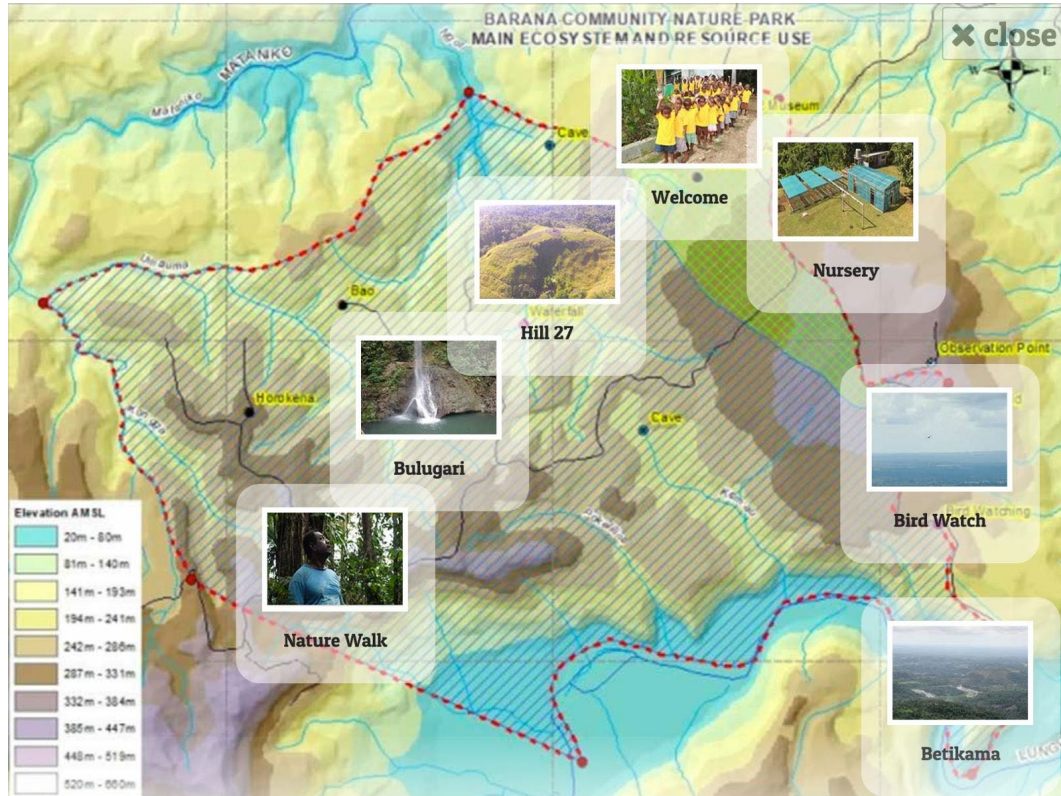


Mapping created ways of understanding and discussing the interconnections between conservation of natural resources and conservation of traditional knowledge or sites. Stories that had already been told of *tabu* sites could be represented spatially and these deeper connections and relationships to place could be discussed and understood in different ways.

The women's story- Bulugari



The community cultural values map



- Video stories documenting cultural and environmental values being protected by the Park
- Cultural stories and knowledge overlaid over conservation mapping data
- Video stories embedded in an interactive Android touchscreen
- Hosted on a Hitnet interactive solar powered media hub at the BCNHP Visitors Information Centre

Creating space for transdisciplinarity and the sharing of cultural knowledge



Incorporating and valuing cultural perspectives and knowledge and community engagement in water projects should not be an optional extra that often cannot be afforded in the rush to get things done. The extra time taken to incorporate this into the project design can be paid back in greater impact and sustainability of these projects, and greater community ownership over outcomes.

Any questions?

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