



Travel report

Name

Year and semester for MFS

Lovisa Vitus

VT22

Country

South Africa

Study program

MSc Media Management

## An ethnographic case study investigating the Kayamandi children's possibilities and conditions for digital learning

New perspectives, contributions to sustainable development, invaluable memories, and friends for life – thank goodness I did apply for MFS in South Africa



## **Before departure**

With a great deal of curiosity, a desire to create positive change, and a love for South Africa, I applied to do a Minor Field Study (MFS), as my master's thesis degree project. I wanted to investigate the possibilities and conditions for digital learning amongst the primary school children living in the township Kayamandi in Stellenbosch, South Africa. Amazingly, I got the chance to do this. I had thought about experiencing living in South Africa for a long period of time. I now wished to get insight into the local's life, culture and create an understanding for the people and the socio-economic problems the country is facing today. I wanted to contribute with solutions and knowledge that could help South Africa develop forward and reduce society's unequalness which is still lingering since the era of apartheid. With this MFS I wanted to make something of significance. During a previous holiday in South Africa when I was little, I encountered the heart-breaking scenes of townships sprawling for miles which triggered this desire further. I chose to look into education since I regard it to be of utmost importance for sustainable development. This since an improved educational outlook can minimise poverty as it might provide more job opportunities, which in turn can lead to decreased unemployment and a more equal and inclusive society. Because of the rapid digitalisation happening worldwide – as well as Covid-19 forcing education to be more online – looking into digital learning became of extra interest.

Conducting an MFS very far away from Sweden involved a lot of preparations and prior research. I do have relatives in the North of South Africa, thus making me have some prior background of the country. However, I was being in the South, which was far away from my relatives and where I did not know anyone. Building connections with residents prior to the trip was therefore of utmost importance to form the MFS in the most beneficial way and get insight to the field site. In addition, I had to find a contact person in South Africa in advance of the MFS. Luckily my mother, who went to school in South Africa, had a childhood friend nowadays living in this area, whom I could reach out to. She worked as a university professor within the field of participatory development. By chance it turned out that she had a PhD student named Friday who had done research in Kayamandi, who in turn had several contacts in the township. Furthermore, I had to make sure to consider all logistics, accommodation, safety matters and possible language barriers before departure. Prior to departure, I also had to make sure I had appropriate vaccinations and travel documents. Luckily, I did not need a South African Visa since I was staying less than 90 days in the country. Additionally, I bought and prepared a few Swedish gifts to give to people I would interact with.

## **Arrival**

I arrived in Cape Town, South Africa in the beginning of February 2022 after having to postpone my flight due to possibly having Covid-19. However, I did not have Covid-19 and I could luckily arrive only a week later than planned as well as move forward my rebound flight. I was picked up at the airport by my contact person, driven to my studio which was in connection with her property, and then I was invited to a welcome sushi-dinner with her family. After arriving, I allowed myself to have a few days before the actual field work, for settling into my studio, exploring the field site, and getting to know my contact person as well as other people relevant for my project. I was in South Africa for approximately three months and the field work was ongoing during this time, although with a few breaks in between. I had to be flexible with the visits into Kayamandi due to having to have someone with me, in this case Friday, as well as needing to consider when suiting the schools I visited, and when the interviewees were available. I had two smaller breaks, one in March and one in April due to the schools being closed then for holidays. During this time, I could also take a well-deserved break and explore the country further.

## Akkommodation and economy

As mentioned above, I rented a studio on the property of my contact person. Therefore, I did not live at the direct field site as it would be dangerous for me living in a township due to the high rate of criminality and health issues. However, it was quite near the site. I had to prioritize living in a safe residential area in Somerset West, just outside of Stellenbosch. Prices for renting accommodation were fairly high in the local currency RAND, nevertheless the Swedish crown was much stronger than RAND, making it much more advantageous for me, as well as cheaper than the general monthly rent in Sweden. The living conditions were of good standard due to me living in a good residential area. The studio had a bathroom, bedroom, an outdoor patio, and I had a kitchenette for cooking which was economically beneficial. The only downside was visits of some cockroaches. But this was evened out with the beautiful views over False Bay and Table Mountain and the big pool I had access to in my spare time thanks to my contact person having one at her property.



Onwards, staying in South Africa for a longer period required renting a car. This since the country is big and areas have great distances between each other. In addition, transfer through commuting was not reliable nor recommended by the locals – especially not since I was going into a township where it is much safer going in by car than by foot. I looked up car rentals prior to the departure to South Africa. Local's I was in contact with gave me tips on where to rent a car for a reasonable price. I booked a car which I then got helped to fetch by my contact person a few days after arrival. Lastly, the scholarship from Sida covered a lot of the costs in connection to the MFS but not all, hence I had to also have my own buffer for living costs.

## The project

This Minor Field Study (MFS) had a focused ethnographic approach and investigated the digital learning possibilities and conditions for the primary school children living in the South African township Kayamandi. Three public primary schools where Kayamandi children were enrolled, namely; Ikaya Primary School, Kayamandi Primary School and A.F. Louw Primary School (two in Kayamandi and one just outside), as well as the after-school program Khulani at The Legacy Centre, were visited to collect observations and qualitative data within the scope of the thesis. The Western Cape Education Department Circuit 10 has also been included in the qualitative data collection as being in charge of the public schools in Stellenbosch. In addition, two focus groups with the children living in Kayamandi were executed with help from The Legacy Centre, as well as a survey. The analysing, finalising, and writing of the actual report took place mostly when back in Sweden.



An example of a normal day during the fieldwork was waking up around 6:15 am, making breakfast and getting ready to drive to Stellenbosch. Outside of Kayamandi I picked up Friday who went into the township with me for safety reasons. Then we drove to one of the schools in Kayamandi and I participated in the class periods and observed and took notes. I communicated with the staff and children during breaks and executed an interview with either the principal or a teacher. Then when school ended for the kids – around 2:30 pm – we left, and I dropped Friday off and went home to have a late lunch and reflect on the day's experiences. During the first visit at each school and at The Legacy Centre my contact person came with to gain the trust of the principals and managers more easily.



The aim of this MFS was to give first-hand insight into: (1) the current technology adoption in the schools and amongst the children, (2) the children's and the teachers digital literacy, and (3) the opportunities for digital learning. This MFS also had the objective to fill the gap in previous literature on smaller South African townships as well as to contribute with literature on digital learning in Kayamandi which shines with its absence. Among the findings of the MFS: an ongoing digitalisation, an uneven accessibility to digital technologies and data, a lack of digital literacy, positive effects from using edtech programs, opportunities for personal learning and gamification and the need for a digital strategy was noted. A conclusion that could be made was that there are possibilities for digital learning, but that the conditions are complex and various contextual factors need to be addressed in a collective and mindful manner.

Before leaving South Africa, I met up with all the schools to say goodbye, give a bouquet of the South African national flower Protea as well as an own made thank you card. I also promised all stakeholders and everyone who helped me along the way of the MFS to send my degree project when done. At the time of writing this paper, I am working on distributing my master's thesis through emails and zoom calls. Onwards, during the MFS I reached out to contacts I had at Swedish Edtest to just let them know that I was executing an MFS highly connected to edtech (educational technology). This resulted in them wanting to write about my project in their monthly [newspaper](#) which they send out to the Swedish edtech sector. Other possibilities now when the work is completed is that my contact person – who has connections with a South African newspaper – suggested to Friday and me, to work on an article about development issues in Kayamandi together with her. In addition, my examiner complimented my work and suggested that it could work to publish a version of the thesis academically as a publication in a journal. He suggested I could work on this collaboratively with my supervisor. I am looking into these possibilities right now.



### The area and the country

The Western Cape had stunning nature with fantastic fauna, breath-taking mountains, miles-long shorelines, and a very welcoming atmosphere. South Africa is a destination with a rich cultural life. Many cultures were blended – different African ethnicities as well as influences from Europe due to a past of colonialisation. The hospitality was high and there was an emphasis on politeness. South Africa is furthermore a land of great contrasts. There are big differences between rich and poor. While driving in

the Western Cape you often drive along wealthy wine estates and then suddenly a township where people live in poverty appears.

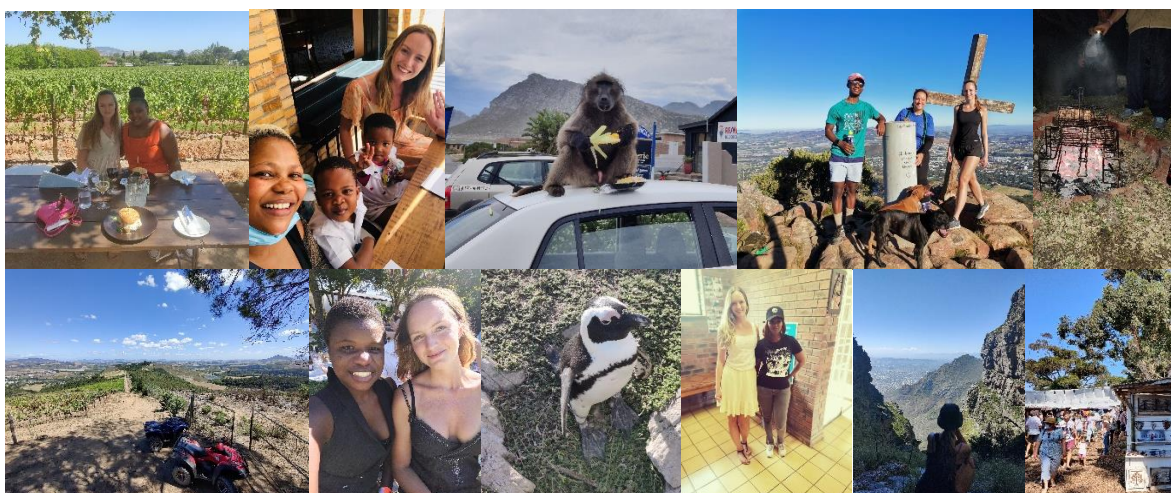
Onwards, some cultural differences could be noted between the people I interacted with and myself. For example, they tended to think that being alone was something that one never wanted to be, where in fact this is something I find important once



in a while. I felt a bit overtaken as they happened to plan for me without asking me if I wanted to do a certain thing. With the South African people in Kayamandi I got to learn about different customs when greeting each other, beliefs and about rituals for special occasions like weddings – cultural aspects that vary heavily with the culture I am used to. However, I would not say that the cultural differences were a big problem for me. I tried to be as open minded as possible, to follow the customs wherever I went and be as polite as possible. My focus was on building strong trustful relationships and gaining friends.

### Spare time and activities

There was a great variety of sports and culture, and in general a lot to do and explore. Rugby, cricket, and soccer were big sports in South Africa. I was supposed to go to a rugby game but ended up not being able to. What I did end up doing was swimming in pools and the sea, exploring the wildlife and hiking with newfound friends. I hiked up Table Mountain as well as the Stellenbosch mountains. I also went to a few concerts with local bands, food- and craft markets, as well as museums and a castle. In general, South Africa had a big café culture and a wide cuisine to explore as well as historical vineyards to visit (e.g., Vergelegen with its exhibitions showing previous slavery once taking place). At another vineyard I got the chance to drive a quad bike through the vine fields because I asked if it was possible to get a view over Kayamandi from their wine estate, whereas they offered to show me a place reachable with quad bikes. I also had fika and dinner with locals from Kayamandi and in general people who I had gotten to know. Having South African braai (BQQ) was also a regular feature in the daily life. During Easter I went on a smaller road trip to Hermanus and the southernmost tip of Africa (Agulhas). Getting to know people in the country became quite easy since my field work involved socialising with many different people. In general, meeting one person often resulted in getting to know more people. Since I interacted a lot with the school's staff, and other organisations I got great contact with these people. Many of these I hung out with in my spare time and friendships were built. These newfound friends I have contact with even now after the study.



### Sustainability

When it comes to sustainability this master's thesis provides further understanding for how to achieve the United Nations's Sustainable Development Goals SDGs: 4. Quality Education, and 10. Reduced Inequality. The MFS is profoundly aligned with sustainability issues and the data collection showed that both SDG's need to be enhanced in South Africa as well as findings indicated how at least the township

Kayamandi's education can develop further in a more sustainable manner including digital elements. Furthermore, regarding my sustainability efforts during the MFS, I unfortunately had to travel by car due to long distances in need of a vehicle, commuting not being recommended, as well as due to security issues (safer to drive a car when approaching a township). However, there were many opportunities for me to live sustainably, for instance cooking my own food, buying local products, using tote bags when shopping as well as boiling my own water for drinking instead of buying bottles in the store.

### **Recommendations and other reflections**

Firstly, ask for help when needed. Do not be afraid to ask when not understanding something. What I came to learn is that people want to help and like to be of help. Secondly, getting in contact with stakeholders and interviewees might not be the easiest in a low- or middle-income country. Many times, you must neglect the western ways of sending emails or calling, and instead personally search up the place or person and introduce yourself. Thirdly, focus on building true relationships with the people you meet, and do not just be there to execute your study. Care about the people who are investing their time and sharing insight with you, as you will then learn so much more and it can also result in friends for life. Fourthly, prepare well in advance and have a preliminary plan to follow. This will make it easier to keep the focus needed and will make sure you are on track in accordance with your MFS. But do not be afraid to go off track occasionally since MFS projects also needs to be flexible. Finally, do it! Take the chance to do an MFS and something that can help provide positive change in the world at the same time as you will grow as a person. I can guarantee you that you will not regret it.

