INTRODUCTION

Natural areas are integral to the wellbeing of human communities (Maller, Townsend & Brown, 2002). The Vredefort Dome World Heritage Site is a unique area with great tourism potential, but faces serious water pollution problems.

Inhabitants of the area are the key role players in tourism development. It is therefore important to determine how the pollution of the Vaal River (Fig. 1) has influenced the wellbeing of the inhabitants.

Figure 1: A view of the Vaal River from the farm Eerstegeluk

AIM OF STUDY

• What does spending time in nature add to an individual’s life?
• How does damage (pollution) to the environment make an individual feel?
• What effect does the pollution have on the lifestyle of inhabitants?

STUDY AREA

• Vredefort Dome World Heritage Site (Fig. 2)
• Total area = 30 111 ha consisting of 149 farms
• Economic activities: agriculture and tourism
• The scenery, geological features and rich history make this World Heritage Site an ideal tourism destination

METHODS

• Mixed methodology
• Convenience sampling (inhabitants of Vredefort Dome living next to the river)
• Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Humans have a natural instinct to desire contact with nature (biophilia hypothesis) (Bird, 2007, White & Heerwagen, 1998). Participants in this study attach a high personal value to nature. They, therefore, spend most of their free time outdoors (Fig. 3).

Figure 3: Reasons participants spend time outdoors

Because inhabitants value the river, the pollution is certain to influence their feelings. Results indicate that participants experience feelings ranging from anger to sadness (Fig. 4). Bohm (2003) and Edelstein (2002) say that direct experience of environmental degradation, such as pollution, can lead to concern, anger, despondence and pessimism.

Figure 4: Feelings caused by pollution

CONCLUSION

• Unspoilt nature plays an important and irreplaceable role in individuals’ lives.
• Experiencing pollution of the environment can cause negative feelings such as sadness, loss, concern and shock.
• The pollution can have a negative impact on the quality of life of inhabitants and consequently affect their lifestyle.

REFERENCES


