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Title: Competition over Conservation: Collective Action and Negotiating Transfrontier Conservation in Southern Africa

Running head: Negotiating Transfrontier Conservation

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1. Introduction

Over the past decades the popularity of transfrontier conservation areas (TFCAs) or "peace parks" has grown enormously. On a global scale the number of these conservation initiatives has increased from 59 in 1988 to 136 in 1997 to an estimated 230 today.[1] In southern Africa, the movement has gained similar momentum with no formally recognized TFCAs in 1999 to over 20 at various stages of development in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region[2]. At the core of TFCA popularity lies a basic proposition that cooperation leads to peace[3]. This hypothesis strikes familiar parallels with older arguments in the international relations and especially regional integration[4] literature, labelled "(neo-) functionalism". Gaining recognition in the 1940s and 1950s, functionalists argued that by creating joint institutions based on essential societal (economic, social, environmental) functions, mutual interdependency between states would ensue, making violent inter-state conflict less likely.[5] This argument was premised on shifting loyalties and a de-emphasising of nationalist tendencies: if officials from states would have increased exposure and repeated opportunities to work together on vital functions, loyalty would shift from the nation-state to the international organisation supporting the function, improving international cooperation and friendship.

With hindsight it is clear that the subsequent history of regional integration processes, especially that of the European Union, proved that the automaticity of functionalist integration was not as inevitable as theorists had portrayed.[6] In line with earlier research[7], this paper departs from the premise that the automaticity with which it is assumed that transfrontier conservation leads to international peace and cooperation deserves critical scrutiny and

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[1] D. Zbicz, Global List of Complexes of Internationally Adjoining Protected Areas', In *Transboundary Protected Areas for Peace and Co-Operation*, T. Sandwith, C. Shine, L. Hamilton and D. Sheppard, eds., Gland: IUCN (2001), pp. 55-75; UNEP-WCMC. *Unep-Wcmc List of Transboundary Protected Areas*, 2007. Available from www.tbpa.net/tpa_inventory.html.

[2] M. Van Amerom and B. Büscher, Peace Parks in Southern Africa: Bringers of an African Renaissance?', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 159-182 (2005). The SADC consists of 14 member states in Southern Africa: Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe

[3] M. Van Amerom, *On the Road to Peace? Cooperation and Conflict in Southern Africa's Peace Parks*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Durham (2005).

[4] Especially related to the history of the integration of the European Union and the work of Ernst Haas.

[5] D. Mitrany., *The Functional Theory of Politics*. London: Martin Robertson (1975); B. Rosamond, *Theories of European Integration*. Hampshire: Palgrave (2000), p.32.

[6] S. George and I. Bache, *Politics in the European Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2001).

[7] M. Van Amerom, *On the Road to Peace?*; R. P. Lejano, Theorizing Peace Parks: Two Models of Collective Action, *Journal of Peace Research* 563–581 (2006).

cautionary reflection. While not discarding the potential for improved cooperation through transfrontier conservation, we argue that conflict over conservation agendas due to increased competition is equally likely. As we will detail later, rather than cooperation, we often found competition between "partner" countries over conservation and development goals, conservation agendas, donor funding, and tourists. In line with recent literature, this makes outcomes in terms of cooperation and peace volatile and always up to specific circumstances and actors involved, not the foregone conclusion of peace park advocates.

While we agree with and aim to build on these insights from recent literature and our own case study experiences, we argue that what has been lacking is the identification of the key issues that actually influence processes of competition and cooperation in transfrontier conservation. This is the main aim of our paper. Our conclusions are based on over 200 in-depth interviews with key participants in two prominent southern African TFCAs. We conducted semi-structured interviews with leading park staff, government officials, NGO representatives, and TFCA researchers in each of the countries involved in the two TFCAs – Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. We selected initial interviewees by contacting the lead officials in the TFCAs whom we asked to identify further contacts. As such, we followed a snowball sampling method. Interviews covered a wide range of topics, but all focused on the goals of transfrontier conservation, the levels and areas of cooperation, and the key challenges facing the protected areas. The interviews were complemented by insights from participatory observation techniques: ethnographic interaction with key informants and in key organisations within the two TFCAs over the period 2005-2007. Typically this included project or intervention activities such as meetings, workshops, fieldtrips by project staff, general interaction with 'project stakeholders', and so forth.

By reflecting on the data gathered from these research methods, we have grouped interview responses into three major issues that influence cooperation in transfrontier conservation: 1) the general relationship between the countries involved; 2) the institutional setting; and 3) the conceptual frameworks employed. The first issue entails general historical and contemporary views of the relations between the involved countries. The institutional setting, the second main issue we found, deals with the organisational set-up and the configuration of the rules, norms, and strategies of actors in the transfrontier negotiation process. The third issue, the conceptual frameworks used, goes into the diversity of ideas different actors have with regard to operationalising transfrontier conservation in practice. All three in turn influence actor

behaviour in the collaboration process, leading to varying outcomes in terms of cooperation and peace. A frequent outcome of these three issues, we argue, is increased competition as described below. Although not by definition negative, the paper shows that increased competition often does lead to increased strains on relations in transfrontier conservation making day-to-day cooperation that goes beyond rhetoric ever more volatile.

The two cases we examine are the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP) on the borders of Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe and the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Area (MDTFCA) between Lesotho and South Africa. The GLTP is generally seen as the 'flagship' TFCA of the region, while the MDTFCA has also seen major donor investment and is arguably the only real transfrontier conservation *area* – not predominantly constructed around protected areas – that has seen major development. In what follows, we will first provide a theoretical background for our study. From there, we will discuss the two cases and analyze the three issues we argue are pertinent in understanding cooperation and competition in transfrontier conservation. Next, we will discuss the implications of these findings, leading to a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of the factors influencing the 'cooperation' hypothesis. The article concludes with some final remarks.

2. The dynamics of competition and cooperation in transfrontier conservation

Before discussing the cases, some brief theoretical remarks are in order about the relationship between cooperation and competition in transfrontier conservation and how they relate to our three 'issues'. In this paper, we view these concepts mostly from a collective action perspective rather than a political economy-oriented view. This is not because the latter is not important; to the contrary: "in contemporary times, neoliberal rationality informs action by many regimes and furnishes the concepts that inform the government of free individuals who are then induced to self-manage according to market principles of discipline, efficiency, and competitiveness".[8] Yet, while acknowledging the many particular pressures set by the 'neoliberal world order', competition can be analyzed within different levels of societal interaction. The specific lens taken in this paper - that of negotiating collective action dilemmas between main players in transfrontier conservation in Southern Africa – enables us

[8] A. Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*, Durham, Duke University Press (2006), p. 4.

to focus more on TFCA governance structures.[9] In turn, we hope this will provide some more conceptual clarity within the burgeoning TFCA literature upon which subsequent analyses can build.

Competition in transfrontier conservation, then, may emerge for multiple reasons. First, due to the nature of transfrontier initiatives, much of the advances must take place through international negotiations that require great deals of time, frequently necessitate unanimity in decision-making, and increase the transaction costs of reaching management decisions[10]. In a context of limited financial and staffing resources, the additional challenges of cross-border decision-making complicate TFCA management. Without advance agreement on both process and end objectives, disagreement and conflict may emerge rather than the friendship and cooperation envisioned by TFCA planners. Furthermore, multiple level negotiation games, inherent in international policy, take place complicating the process of collective action and providing multiple points for sparking potential conflict and competition.[11] [12]

Second, the process is made even more complex due to the amount of stakeholders involved. Beyond governmental actors on different levels, donor agencies and intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, traditional authorities and local communities and private sector agents play a major role in negotiating transfrontier conservation. The multiple actors lead to a third source of competition – that between the core goals of actors involved.[13] The literature advocating the creation of TFCAs[14] generally lists three primary objectives: improved biodiversity conservation due to the increased size and reduced landscape fragmentation of ecosystems, stimulated regional economic development and the fostering of peace between neighbours. However, the multiple actors in the process do not always agree on the

[9] For a political economy approach to transfrontier conservation, see B. Büscher, *Struggles over Consensus, Anti-politics and Marketing. Neoliberalism and Transfrontier Conservation and Development in Southern Africa.* PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (2008).
[10] R. H. Coase, The Problem of Social Cost, *Journal of Law and Economics* 1-44 (1960).
[11] R.D. Putnam, Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games, *International Organization* 427-60 (1988); R. P. Lejano, *Theorizing Peace Parks*.
[12] Negotiations typically occur at the international level between partners in the TFCA, at the national level, between diverse sectors of the national government (most significantly border security, environmental affairs, tourism, land use, and agriculture), and between local level public agencies.
[13] M. Ramutsindela, *Transfrontier Conservation in Africa. At the Confluence of Capital, Politics and Nature.* Wallingford: CABI (2007).
[14] E.g. T. Sandwith, C. Shine, L. Hamilton, and D. Sheppard, *Transboundary Protected Areas for Peace and Cooperation*. Gland: IUCN (2001).

prioritization of these three goals, and conflict frequently arises over which goals take precedence.[15]

After listing these constraints to cooperation in TFCAs, the question then becomes what are the axes around which collective action in TFCAs revolve? Based on our case-studies, we believe the main axes to be the general relationship between the countries involved; the institutional setting of the TFCA; and the conceptual frameworks employed that operationalise how to deal with the human-environment nexus within the TFCA. Let us now turn to the empirical evidence to see how this work out in transfrontier conservation practice.

3. The Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Area

The MDTFCA has its roots in the 1980s when South African individuals became concerned about the degradation of the Maloti-Drakensberg[16] Mountain ecosystem that runs along Lesotho's eastern border with the South African provinces of KwaZulu Natal (KZN) in the centre, the Free State in the North, and the Eastern Cape in the South. At the time, South Africa was still embroiled in apartheid and Lesotho had become increasingly more vocal in its denunciation of the regime. As a result, cooperation was highly constrained and only possible through intergovernmental liaisons on technical issues. In 1982, the 'Drakensberg Maloti Mountain Conservation Programme' (DMMCP) was established under this banner. According to the negotiators, the main aims of the programme were the conservation of the water catchments and the biodiversity of the mountain range. The DMMCP commissioned various studies on the Maloti-Drakensberg Area, including socio-economic, ecological and hydrological issues, with the aim of understanding what needs to be done to conserve the mountain ecosystem and, what gradually also became an objective, the uplifting of poor communities living in the area.

Due to funding problems, the DMMCP activities 'paused' from the end of the 1980s to 1996 when the European Union started funding a three year programme (with the same name), aimed at conservation and development. The main result of the programme, according to a principle negotiator, was that it created the background for the MDTFCA. Concomitantly

[15] M. Van Amerom, *On the Road to Peace?*.; B. Büscher and T. Dietz, Conjunctions of Governance: the State and the conservation-development nexus in Southern Africa, *Journal of Transdisciplinary Environmental Studies* 1-15 (2005).

[16] Maloti is the Sesotho word for mountains and Drakensberg – dragon mountains - was the name given to the mountain range by the Cape Dutch *voortrekkers* so as to express the spectacular, mystical and untamed character of the range.

with the EU project, World Bank interest in the project grew strongly and according to the same informant this was because of the transfrontier nature of the project, which around that time started becoming a popular new trend amongst donors. The World Bank facilitated a first important workshop in 1997 between Lesotho and South African officials in Giant Castle Nature Reserve in South Africa, where it was agreed that they should work towards a bigger TFCA project. After several years of preparatory studies, a MOU between the national governments of South Africa and Lesotho on the 11th of June 2001 laid the basis for the eventual Global Environment Facility grant that now, through the World Bank, finances the MDTFCA. The actual MDTFCA started at the beginning of 2003 and ended early 2008.

The MDTFCA project area (see figure 1) stretches out over various provinces and districts in South Africa and Lesotho and these also determine the most important governmental actors involved. In South Africa the MDTFCA stretches out over the Free State, KwaZulu Natal and the Eastern Cape provinces and three of the TFCAs five official 'implementing agencies' are therefore the provincial conservation agencies or departments: KwaZulu Natal's Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, the Free State Department of Tourism, Environmental & Economic Affairs and the Eastern Cape Department of Economic Affairs, Environment and Tourism. The other two are the national conservation agency, South African National Parks or SANParks and, the national Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT), as the official receiver of the funding from the Global Environment Facility. In Lesotho, the TFCA covers the districts of Botha Bothe, Mokhotlong and Qacha's Nek. The country's implementing agencies, however, are exclusively national: the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture (MTEC) plays the lead implementing role, supported by other ministries, such as Finance, Forestry and Land Reclamation, Agriculture, Local Government and Foreign Affairs. Important non-governmental actors in the MDTFCA are the local residents of the area (mostly local 'communities' but also commercial farmers and village residents), private companies and NGOs.

In both countries the implementing agencies are supported by relatively independent Project Coordination Unit (PCU): substantive teams of professionals working full-time to support and implement the MDTFCA. As these have de facto done most of the implementation in the project so far, the analysis will focus mostly on them. From the start of the project in 2003, the Lesotho and South Africa PCUs took up the project in opposite directions. The Lesotho PCU focused mostly on involving local communities into the project, while the South African

PCU laid emphasis on bioregional conservation planning and supporting data collection. While doing this, the transfrontier negotiations between them were characterised by rivalry and competition more than friendship and cooperation, especially during the first years of the project. We now delve into the three identified issues outlined in the previous section to further characterise the cooperation within the MDTFCA.

General relationships between South Africa and Lesotho

The general relationship between South Africa and Lesotho has always been contentious. This derives from the history of the region and its resultant regional power structure, whereby the economic and political 'viability' of an independent Lesotho was seriously questioned.[17] According to Ferguson: "it seems clear that Lesotho's sovereign status was accepted by the international community more as a response to its status as a British ex-colony than as an endorsement of any internal capabilities to function economically or politically".[18] Naturally, this enormous dominance of South Africa over Lesotho has implications for actors on both sides of the border, something which also came out when talking to informants. One staff member of Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal Wildlife who has long been involved in the Maloti-Drakensberg cooperation, showed a keen awareness of the problem: "that South Africa can overshadow its neighbouring poor countries is perceived as a threat to their sovereignty, as they can not completely decide on their own future".[19] According to him, many involved in the MDTFCA process, especially on the South African side, do not fully appreciate this and should temper their approach.

The reasons given for this insensitivity to Lesotho's sovereignty are twofold. First, there seemed to be a general lack of experience in dealing with TFCAs and whereas "politicians can be more diplomatic, further down the line, people don't know this".[20] In many interviews with both South African and Lesotho PCU members, it appeared that collective action across international borders was new to them and often very challenging. Misunderstandings abounded and historical and cultural sensitivities were habitually trampled, albeit often unwillingly. A year into the project, external mediators were brought in to analyse the

[17] R. Southall, Between Competing Paradigms: Post-Colonial Legitimacy in Lesotho, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 251-266 (2003); J. Ferguson, *Global Shadows. Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*. Durham: Duke University Press (2006).
[18] Ibid, p.55.
[19] Staff member KZN Wildlife interview 05/2005.
[20] Ibid.

relations between the two PCUs and assist them in finding better ground for cooperation. Their report noted:

> "Interpersonal relations between key staff members on each side of the project are brittle and fragile. There is a readiness to allow relatively minor issues to fester coupled with a tendency to present a misleading façade. There is some mistrust and perceptions of self-promotion when one side initiates an action. Intentions are sometimes negatively interpreted and there is some confusion between what is real and what is expected to happen".[21]

These initial tensions in the project were compounded by a second characteristic in the project, which came down to South Africans wanting things to happen quicker and often thinking they know better. One informant, however, stated that "you might know better, but people *have* to learn themselves!".[22] If this is denied, then it amounts to a "first world mentality", which could "endanger the project, because people in developing countries feel threatened".[23] The merit in this quote was acknowledged by several informants from Lesotho, who described the SA PCU as 'bulldozing' or 'pushing' others in Lesotho *and* in South Africa, while Lesotho had to 'defend' itself. In fact, the Lesotho PCU coordinator felt that one of his biggest tasks was to make sure that Lesotho's approach to the project was accepted by South Africa. When this seemed to be the case around late 2005, he mentioned that 'the hardest battles are fought'.[24]

The institutional level

The institutional embedment and environment of the two PCUs also became sources of strain in their cooperation. Despite the MDTFCA being primarily focused on three out of Lesotho's ten districts, the project coordination unit is housed nationally, within the environment ministry. Physically, it is even located on the same floor as the offices of the minister and the principal secretary. From interviews and participatory observation it is clear that the Lesotho team was much closer to their national ministry than was their South African counterparts to theirs. Various staff members were for example also involved in other work for the ministry; work that was not directly related to the MDTFCA[25]. In contrast, the South African PCU was located on the provincial level (of KwaZulu Natal) and was formally contracted under the provincial conservation authority. They, however, did not physically reside within this

[21] L.S. Matela and D. Fraser, *MDTP Bi-lateral Strategic Planning Workshop (25-28 July). Proceedings*. Howick: MDTP, p.27 (2005).
[22] Staff member KZN Wildlife interview 05/2005.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Lesotho PCU coordinator, pers. comm. 10/2005.
[25] The Lesotho project coordinator was in 2005 for instance assigned with co-authoring and redrafting of Lesotho's 'state of the environment 2002'.

agency, but had their own office space near the regional office for the Drakensberg area. All of this gave them – seemingly – larger independence from the formal structures that in the end needed to take ownership of and carry the project's activities forward.

Although not necessarily problematic, this institutional difference further highlighted the different approaches of the PCUs. Besides being located nationally, the Lesotho PCU identified strongly with the national state and looked at the South African PCU's relative autonomy as problematic and undesirable. According to the Lesotho PCU coordinator, "they [South African PCU] do things without necessarily consulting with Pretoria", which he thought can create a difficult situation. Instead, he felt that "the project should support government policy".[26] And indeed, there were a lot of tensions between the South African PCU and 'Pretoria'. Due to their choice for an operating base for the MDTFCA, the South African PCU ended up in a situation whereby their relationship with the national Department of the Environment, as well as with the KwaZulu Natal Conservation Agency, was characterised by tensions. This weakened their position vis-à-vis Lesotho, but especially within South Africa, as many South African implementing agencies rather agreed with Lesotho's conceptual approach to the project (see below). As a consequence, this made one of the main challenges for the PCU even more difficult: to institutionalise and embed the MDTFCA objectives[27] into the various implementing agencies. South African PCU members were highly aware of these criticisms, but remained firm in their choice of conceptual approach. Though there were other institutional issues in the project, we now turn to the issue that most greatly impacted on the international cooperation in the MDTFCA: the conceptual frameworks employed.

The conceptual level

Arguably at the basis of the different overall approaches of the PCUs towards the MDTFCA one can identify different conceptual ideas about doing conservation and development in practice. In brief, the Lesotho PCU leaned towards a 'Community Based Natural Resource Management' (CBNRM) conceptual approach while the South African PCU was more inclined to 'Bioregional Conservation Planning' (BCP)[28]. Although closely related, they

[26] Lesotho PCU coordinator, interview 10/2005.
[27] The conservation of globally significant biodiversity in the region and to contribute to community development though nature-based tourism.
[28] See B. Büscher, *Struggles over Consensus, Anti-Politics and Marketing,* for a more extensive discussion on the conceptual differences between the two PCUs.

appeared distinctively different in their operationalisation. The South Africa PCUs Bioregional Conservation Planning approach to conservation and development is in line with organisations such as the South Africa National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), the Botanical Society of South Africa and Botany departments of the Universities of Port Elizabeth and Cape Town and individuals around the CAPE project[29]. In sum, BCP comes forth from the natural sciences, leans towards biocentric arguments and espouses a political agenda that emphasises technical expertise in the management of biodiversity. Excerpts of interviews with SA PCU members illustrate their connection with this thinking. One of the - if not *the* - main outcomes of the MDTFCA as fought for on the South African side is a 'Conservation Plan' for the entire MDTFCA bioregion. According to the PCU grassland ecologist, this basically entails a regional biodiversity map indicating what biodiversity had been lost already, what was most threatened and which specific areas needed 'immediate conservation action'.[30] Likewise, the PCU ecologist mentioned that he specifically focuses on the main threats to biodiversity and their spatial dynamics. He believes that together these should form a good underpinning for prioritisation of where conservation efforts should focus.[31] This conceptual framework is shared by most of the South African PCU members. Important hereby is that the use value for people does not have to be direct. Rather, the underpinning philosophy of the SA PCU lies in the long-term ecological benefits that humans should derive from a constructive balance between human needs and conservation of nature.

The Lesotho PCU conceptual conservation and development plan hinges closely to the accepted forms of CBNRM in the Southern African region. It aligns with practitioners and authors around organisations such as the Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) of the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, the Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS) of the University of Zimbabwe in Harare and the Southern Africa regional office of IUCN. Although this is not the place to give an extensive overview of the Southern African CBNRM literature[32], distinctive about this literature is that it developed mostly from the

[29] The CAPE website notes that, "Cape Action for People and the Environment (C.A.P.E.) is a programme of the South African Government, with support from international donors, to protect the rich biological heritage of the Cape Floristic Region (CFR). C.A.P.E seeks to unleash the economic potential of land and marine resources through focused investment in development of key resources, while conserving nature and ensuring that all people benefit" (www.capeaction.org.za).
[30] South Africa PCU grassland ecologist interview 07/2005.
[31] South Africa PCU ecologist interview 09/2005.
[32] There are many to be found already, for instance D. Hulme and M. Murphree, eds, *African Wildlife and Livelihoods. The Promise and Performance of Community Conservation*. Oxford: James Currey (2001); C. Fabricius and E. Koch with H. Magome and S. Turner, *Rights Resources & Rural Development. Community-*

social sciences, leans on anthropocentric and anthropological arguments and often promotes an open political agenda aimed at the emancipation of poor rural communities. These issues resonated quite clearly in interviews with Lesotho PCU members. The socio-ecologist, for instance mentioned that "we put the primacy on the people, they are involved in all we do" and "I think we are conserving to derive benefits from it, which could promote our well-being".[33] According to the District Conservation Officer of the MDTFCA in Mokhotlong, the purpose of extension is that communities see the benefits of conservation.[34] Many similar statements were noted, highlighting the importance that, for the Lesotho PCU, the significance of resource conservation lays first and foremost in the direct economic or use value it brings to people.

Partially overlapping but at the same time quite distinctive networks made the conceptual differences between the two PCUs even more pronounced. Members of the Lesotho PCU seemed quite receptive and attached to Southern African CBNRM networks revolving around the above named organisations. The majority of members of the SA PCU were much more involved and entrenched in BCP-focused organisations, also mentioned previously. During fieldwork, this point became clear to the first author when he was invited by the SA PCUs bioregional planner to participate in a workshop on 'mainstreaming biodiversity in municipalities', organised by SANBI on four and five October 2005 in Pretoria. There, several bioregional programmes and South African provinces explained how they were engaging "with local government through various projects aimed at integrating biodiversity priorities in land-use planning and decision-making".[35] Of the South African bioregional programmes, only one was transfrontier and this was the MDTFCA. In fact, the MDTFCA was not even really regarded as a TFCA or 'peace park', but indeed as a bioregional planning initiative, just like the others present at the workshop.

Another illustration of how the conceptual differences further reinforced tensions between the two PCUs was the issue of the appointment of a regional planner for the MDTFCA late 2005, early 2006. The mid-term evaluation of the MDTFCA around June-July 2005 had pointed out that cooperation between the two PCUs was difficult and that the countries had drifted apart

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based Natural Resource Management in Southern Africa. London: Earthscan (2004); and publications on www.cassplaas.org.

[33] Lesotho PCU socio-ecologist interview 10/2005.

[34] Lesotho PCU Mokhotlong district coordinator interview 06/2005.

[35] SANBI, *Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Municipalities*. Workshop proceedings of a workshop held 4-5 October 2005, Pretoria. Pretoria: SANBI, p.2 (2005).

in terms of their implementation strategies as a result. According to the evaluators, "the best way to revitalise transfrontier collaboration is by appointing one person to drive the process".[36] This post later became that of a 'bioregional planner', drawing together data collected by the PCUs into an overall planning framework for the bioregion. A call was put out for bids for the post and naturally also landed with members of the PCUs respective networks. The joint PCU evaluation of the candidates led to two candidates scoring nearly equally high: a Zimbabwean (resident in Botswana) and a South African from Cape Town. Perhaps not coincidentally considering the above, these two candidates were very neatly aligned to the respective networks of the two PCUs. The Zimbabwean candidate has been involved for long in CBNRM in the region. The South African candidate on the other hand has had a long history with bioregional conservation planning and had long been associated with members of the SA PCU. In fact, before the issue of a joint bioregional planner had come up within the MDTFCA, the SA PCU bioregional planner had referred me to her as an interesting person and someone who could make useful comparisons between MDTFCA and CAPE.

In the assessment of the candidates, the Zimbabwean candidate scored a tiny fraction higher than his competitor, but no more than 1 or 2 tenths of a point. The SA PCU subsequently objected to the detail in the assessment scores and claimed that both had scored equally high. Though the Lesotho PCU did not agree with this and remained convinced their candidate had won the tender, they ceded to the pressure of the SA PCU. A compromise was reached by asking the two candidates to develop a position paper, after which the best one would be chosen. In the meantime, the Lesotho PCU coordinator had already decided that he would hire 'their' candidate no matter the outcome, if not as the overall bioregional planner, than as a consultant for Lesotho on their part of the planning process. This is exactly what happened in the end. The South African candidate won the tender and started her contract in March 2006 after a seven-month procurement period, while the Lesotho PCU hired the Zimbabwean candidate somewhat earlier. For our argument, what matters is that in the fight over the bioregional planner position many of the fault lines between the PCUs again surfaced: Lesotho chose somebody with a CBNRM background while the SA PCU opted for someone with a BCP background. Moreover, even though technically the Lesotho PCU was right that the Zimbabwean candidate should have been first on the short-list, South Africa again

[36] MDTP, *Mid Term Review of the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Project June-July 2005*. Howick: MDTP, p. 9 (2005).

challenged and pushed the issue with the aim of turning it in their favour. Although perhaps those involved saw this as one of many stand-alone issues or battles to be fought within the project, the incident does seem to reverberate and fortify the fault lines discussed earlier related to the general country relationship and institutional setting that complicated cooperation and in fact led to competition in the MDTFCA.

4. The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park

The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park lies along the borders of Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. The Mozambican section comprises the former Coutada 16 hunting reserve, now re-gazetted as the Limpopo National Park, an area of roughly 10,000 km^2. Kruger National Park, along the eastern border of South Africa, forms the South Africa contribution to the transfrontier park, comprising an area of approximately 20,000 km^2. Zimbabwe adds Gonarezhou National Park and the Sengwe corridor to the transnational effort, with the Sengwe corridor built out of communal land along the Pafuri border region adjacent to both South Africa and Mozambique, adding a further 5,000 km^2 to the transfrontier protected area (see figure 2).

The earliest ideas about a transfrontier park arose as early as the 1920s when Jan Smuts noted the potential for massive conservation areas in the "wilds" of Africa, building on the Kruger National Park, which had been created in 1926.[37] The Portuguese government in Mozambique next broached the subject of transboundary conservation in the 1960s and early 1970s before fading away in the face of civil unrest.[38] Real progress toward a transfrontier park, however, did not appear in earnest until after the end of the civil war in Mozambique in 1992 and the fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa in 1994. Around this time, the Peace Parks Foundation – emerging from World Wildlife Foundation-South Africa and other conservation efforts – became active. This well-funded and well-connected NGO began encouraging and sponsoring governments to start working toward the creation of TFCAs throughout the southern African region. During this same time period, the World Bank, through the Global Environment Facility, funded a feasibility study for a TFCA involving Coutada 16 in Mozambique. These feasibility studies and capacity building exercises continued through funding from KfW, the German Development Bank, the Peace Parks Foundation, and other

[37] J. Carruthers, *The Kruger National Park: A Social and Political History*. Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of Natal Press (1995).
[38] D. Mello, *Intergovernmental Relations in the Management of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pretoria (2007).

donor agencies, ultimately resulting in the creation of the Limpopo National Park in 1999. Shortly thereafter, in November 2000, a Memorandum of Understanding with South Africa and Zimbabwe formed the Gaza-Kruger-Gonarezhou or GKG Transfrontier Park, the precursor to the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.

Since 1997, a vast amount of energy and resources by a great number of actors have gone into the building of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. As shown above, it was in large part due to the involvement of and pressures by many influential actors, that the Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 2000 by the most senior levels of government, including the Heads of State from the three nations. A formal tri-lateral treaty inaugurating and renaming the GKG as the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park followed in December 2002. Other high-level support was provided by such influential people as former president Nelson Mandela and the late Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands. With backing from the highest authorities, the Mozambican Ministry of Tourism, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism in South Africa, and Zimbabwe's Ministry of the Environment began working together for the harmonization of policies and the creation and management of the Transfrontier Park. Day to day operations of the GLTP fall to the National Directorate of Conservation Areas in Mozambique (DNAC), South Africa's Park Board (SANParks), and Zimbabwe's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management (DNPWLM).

As the brief history outlines, much of the initial impetus toward the creation of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park arose through NGOs and international organizations. One legacy of this beginning emerges subtlely behind the concepts used by the main actors. Publicly, all of the actors working toward the creation of the GLTP espouse the same three main goals – biodiversity conservation, regional economic development, and the fostering of peace between nations. In reality, however, it is clear that they have diverse prioritizations and that these have led to conflict and the pursuit of interests at cross purposes with others.[39] The original focus of the World Bank efforts, for example, centred on regional economic development and the improvement of local livelihoods. By contrast, NGOs like the Peace Parks Foundation and Conservation International, foremost serve to promote biodiversity

[39] See W. Wolmer, Transboundary Conservation: the Politics of Ecological Integrity in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 261-278 (2003); M. L. Schoon, Do Parks Harm More Than They Help? The Role of Peace Parks in Improving Robustness in Southern Africa, In *Institutional Analysis for Environmental Decision-making Workshop*, Lee Lamb., ed. Fort Collins, CO: United States Geological Survey Scientific Investigations (2005); M. Van Amerom and B. Büscher, *Peace Parks in Southern Africa*.

conservation. These disparities have led to some of the major challenges currently facing the governmental actors in their general relationships between each other, in the institutions designed for transfrontier governance, and most fundamentally at a conceptual level.

General relationships between Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe

Historic relationships between the three countries have waxed and waned over the years due to political upheaval in each of the countries. The civil war in Mozambique, which ended in 1992, and South Africa's role in funding and supporting rebel combatants served to weaken relationships between the two nations. At the same time, the Mozambicans supported the underground ANC resistance to the apartheid era government, further complicating ties. The end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 and the subsequent rise of democracy opened up official lines of communication that had stagnated during the previous regimes. Zimbabwe meanwhile proclaimed its independence from the British in 1980 but has since fallen under the increasingly repressive regime of Robert Mugabe. Currently, Zimbabwe's ruling ZANU-PF party has very tenuous relations with South Africa's governing ANC party, and – despite public appearance - relations between Mugabe and the South African president at the time of the study, Thabo Mbeki, were notoriously weak. One consequence of this fragile relationship between Zimbabwe and South Africa, as it relates to the Great Limpopo, is that GLTP partnerships have moved ahead rapidly between Mozambique and South Africa, while initiatives involving Zimbabwe have stayed behind.[40] Another consequence for the GLTP of the current Zimbabwean 'situation' concerns donor funding. Many donor organizations refuse to provide grants that can be used in Zimbabwe since they are afraid it might be used as implicit backing of the current regime. As a result, the Peace Parks Foundation has stepped into the gap and, according to Mozambican officials, 'provided a transparent process of channelling grant money to the transfrontier park without worries of corruption, misallocation of funds, or other forms of financial debauchery' that had hampered Mozambican input in the GLTP earlier.

A second, recurring issue in the relationship between South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe – as in fact also with Lesotho - concerns the different levels of capacity – including financial, technical, political and human capital – of the three countries. Because of South Africa's greater capacity on all of these fronts, concerns have been raised frequently by

[40] R. Duffy, The Environmental Challenge to the Nation-State: Superparks and National Parks Policy in Zimbabwe. In: *Journal of Southern African Studies* 441-451 (1997).

government officials, critics of the transfrontier park, and local community representatives; levelling charges of forcing the common agenda to South Africa's terms, neo-colonialism, and blatant land grabs by conservation groups.[41] As a regional power, South Africa often faces charges of playing the 'big brother', and, according to their transfrontier partners, they often do push for their own agenda. Not all is negative, though. Relationships, particularly between Mozambique and South Africa have improved at various points during the development of the park. For instance, SANParks and DEAT now freely acknowledge all that they can learn from their neighbours, including CBNRM programs from Mozambique and multiple land use regimes and sustainable development from CAMPFIRE[42] in Zimbabwe. Over time, Mozambique has also seen the advantages of leveraging South Africa's strength, whether to build technical capacity through partnerships or to help raise funding for park development. Yet, unequal capacities and perceptions of coercion often still lie near the surface in the day-to-day planning, management, and operations, of the GLTP.

A third issue often raised between the three partners stems from their colonial pasts. South Africa and Zimbabwe both emerged from British or British-Afrikaner colonies while Mozambique is Lusophone. A consequential problem is therefore on language. Most documentation in Zimbabwe and South Africa is in English, while the legal language in Mozambique is Portuguese. In international negotiations, translation is needed in both languages. Legally, disagreements are settled in the 'source' language of the document – whoever prepared it often wins. Matters get further complicated by the multitude of languages in general. South Africa has 11 official languages and multiple unofficial languages. Mozambique has one official language with the majority of the population speaking other languages as their native tongue. Zimbabwe also has one official language with two predominant unofficial languages.[43] In addition to the legal problems of different language at a bureaucratic level, ground-level partnerships between rangers in South Africa and Mozambique also prove challenging if no common language exists. The problems with language gaps are further compounded at an operational level where translation services are impractical and virtually non-existent.

[41] M. Van Amerom, *On the Road to Peace?*.
[42] Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources.
[43] South Africa's official languages are: English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho, Tswana, Swazi, Ndebele, Tsonga, and Venda. Mozambique's official language is Portuguese, but many rural communities speak dialects of Shangaan, itself a version on Tsonga. Zimbabwe's official language is English, but most of the country's population speak either Shona or Ndebele.

Beyond the issue of language, however, the legacy of colonial occupation surfaces in the bureaucratic structures of each government, in which different functional authority resides in different ministries within each country, and how responsibility falls within departments and ministries. As a result, harmonization of policy, such as the gate fee issues discussed in the next section, and even finding the appropriate cross-border counterpart to consult often lead to difficulties and take a great deal of time.

The institutional level

At an institutional level, one of the most challenging differences faced by the management of the GLTP lies in the institutional set-up and related financing of the park. Both SANParks and Zimbabwe's National Parks group are parastatals. By contrast Mozambique's parks group, DNAC, is a government directorate. This seemingly trivial difference, however, creates many problems. Because the parastatals are semi-autonomous from the government and predominantly self-funding, revenue sources generate the majority of the money they require for their operations. Gate receipts and revenue earned through tourism can flow directly into park budgets. In turn, park budgets can push revenue into the areas most in need. Decisions can be made quickly and modified as needed. Working through government departments, however, means that revenue from gate fees or tourism flows directly back to government coffers. The money necessary for park maintenance and development then comes from the allocated budget from the past year. Ideally, these two sources of financing would not create problems, but the reality is far more complex. It has led to different priorities in the operation and management of the national parks. Even more importantly for the transfrontier park, it has generated friction and confrontation over financing.

For instance, SANParks pushed for the harmonization of gate fees, which by itself was very contentious. For a period of time Mozambicans entered South Africa's parks at a local rate, but South Africans were charged a more expensive international rate to enter Mozambique's park. This led to bickering and contention on both sides until the matter was resolved through the eventual harmonization of gate fees. But fee harmonization was only the first step. In discussions on revenue-sharing arrangements, the parastatals, particularly SANParks, were reluctant to share revenue and profitability. South Africa pushed for revenue sharing based on tourism levels. In the Great Limpopo, tourism levels in Kruger are on the order of 1.3 million per annum. By contrast, in Limpopo National Park, current levels are roughly 10,000, and in

Gonarezhou closer to 2,000.[44] In short, the parks would keep the gate revenues that they collected. Mozambique and Zimbabwe argued that as equal partners in the GLTP, the revenues should be evenly split to allow for the build-up of capacity and improve development throughout the whole transfrontier park, not just Kruger. In this case, South Africa held out for their agreement. One of the side outcomes were discussions that would ensure that any revenue sharing involving Mozambique would allow the Limpopo National Park to use the money directly for the park, rather than funnelling back into the central treasury.

A second colonial legacy that creates institutional challenges for the transfrontier park stems from the different governmental structures that regulate the park. While SANParks reports directly to South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, DNAC in Mozambique is physically housed within the Ministry of Tourism. These governmental departments at first seem somewhat similar, but, by examining specific rules and regulations, we begin to see the challenges inherent in even the simplest rule harmonization. For instance, Mozambique's national parks are based under Tourism, but the wildlife is actually governed within the Department of Agriculture. In South Africa, both wildlife and parks are controlled by DEAT. Even the most basic rule change can thus involve multiple ministries in every country involved. Rather than lead to improved friendships between neighbours, the long delays, misunderstandings, and ordeals in finding the appropriate person or organization to contact keep requiring time to resolve whereby friendship and/or increasing international understanding is not always an automatic given.

The Conceptual level

Like in the Maloti-Drakensberg TFCA, perhaps the greatest source of contention in the Great Limpopo arose at a very early stage in the negotiations at a conceptual level, and it continues to serve as a source of discord, particularly in the broader group of stakeholders. The initial feasibility studies conducted in Mozambique regarding a transfrontier project in the Gaza Province all focused on the development of a transfrontier conservation *area*, not on a transfrontier *park*. According to Sandwith et al., transfrontier conservation and development areas *"are areas of land and/or sea that straddle one or more borders between states,*

[44] A. Spenceley and M. L. Schoon, Peace Parks as Social Ecological Systems: Testing Environmental Resilience in Southern Africa, In *Peace Parks: Conservation and Conflict Resolution*, Saleem Ali, ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 83-104 (2007).

autonomous areas and/or areas beyond the limit of national sovereignty or jurisdiction, ***whose constituent parts form a matrix*** *that contributes to the protection and maintenance of biological, natural and cultural diversity,* ***as well as the promotion of social and economic development****, and which are managed co-operatively through legal or other effective means".*[45]

However, in a similar fashion to the CBNRM versus BCP debate in the MDTFCA, when South Africa entered the TFCA discussions, they immediately pushed for a transfrontier park which holds a similar definition to a TFCA *without* the two parts shown above in bold. This shifted the discussion from an IUCN category VI protected area, with the multiple-use conservation area managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems to a Category II level park which is managed for ecosystem protection and recreation.[46] Social and economic development no long played a central role in the planning, and the land had a single fundamental use: conservation. What appear to be subtle, contextual differences drastically changed the TFCA development and caused backing for the project from several stakeholder groups to evaporate quickly. Instead of a multiple use zone comprised of parks, communal areas, and private landholdings such as the Maloti-Drakensberg TFCA, this matrix of land tenure regimes shifted to a single, non-consumptive land use – a transfrontier park. As a result, consternation grew between the governments of South Africa and Mozambique, and goodwill morphed into competition.

What were the reactions to this and how did it happen in the first place? Initial Mozambican responses were quite negative.[47] The shift enraged Mozambican local communities, turning many against further conservation initiatives. Protests from local NGOs and the scientific community lamented the lack of self-governance, the lack of transparency, and the lack of recourse in the decision-making process. A clear conflict of priorities existed between the two governments. Mozambican government officials realized that South Africa's stance was intransigent and any further progress would require concession on this point. Many

[45] T. Sandwith et al, *Transboundary Protected Areas for Peace and Cooperation*, p.3.
[46] IUCN. Guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories. C. w. t. a. o. WCMC. Gland, Switzerland (1994).
[47] DNAC official interview, 5/2005.

Mozambican's outside of DNAC seemed to be at odds with the perception of a shift in focus from development through conservation to conservation at the expense of development.[48]

It is unclear, however, what the long-term effects on conservation efforts will be due to this initial phase of park development. From the South African side, however, the only way forward required the creation of a transfrontier park. This decision to concentrate on a transfrontier park rather than a transfrontier conservation area stemmed from a few key assumptions. First, some key decision-makers felt that financially sustainable ecotourism would only work in a park setting. For them, tourists would not pay for the "privilege" of seeing a "degraded" landscape with cattle, goats, and peasants.[49] Second, the tearing down of fences between a national park in South Africa and a multiple-use zone across the border was believed to lead to high levels of poaching and a rapid die-off of Kruger's wildlife. Third, border officials were convinced that it would lead to an increase in illegal immigration, and thus high risks to border security.[50] To circumvent these barriers to the project in 1999, the then South African Minister of DEAT, Valli Moosa, forced the change from the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area to the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.[51]

In summary, what started off as a donor-driven, Mozambican-led initiative to create a multiple-use area conflicted with the South African agenda. At this stage of development, officials in charge support the current initiative toward the creation of a transfrontier park. It remains to be seen if the two countries can resolve their early conflict by agreeing to work toward a potential second stage of development – for the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area, spanning a further 65,000 km^2.

With this background, many felt that the creation of the transfrontier park moved too quickly. Naysayers, those that perceived the unequal levels of capacity across the border, and those that perceived stakeholder groups to be in different stages of preparedness, quickly felt the pressure from senior-level officials. This pressure resulted in an exodus of operational managers, consultants, and project advisors in 1999, which took time for the project to

[48] B. Child, ed, *Parks in Transition: Biodiversity, Rural Development, and the Bottom Line,* London: Earthscan, (2004).
[49] See also M. Draper, M. Spierenburg and H. Wels, African Dreams of Cohesion: Elite Pacting and Community Development in Transfrontier Conservation Areas in Southern Africa. *Culture and Organization* 341–353 (2004).
[50] South African environmental consultant interview, 9/2006.
[51] B.Büscher and T. Dietz, *Conjunctions of Governance*.

recover. Many felt that the striving to push the project along so quickly happened only for the political gain of a few.[52] At this stage, much of the competition over conservation, or at least the planning for the GLTP, occurred within South Africa, while Zimbabwe felt increasingly isolated as park developments went on around and in spite of them. Mozambique also felt pressure for continued progress, having to rush the creation and gazetting of the Limpopo National Park, at least on paper, by the end of 1999, in time for the signing of the GLTP treaties. The emergence of another paper park, however, brought a new set of challenges for Mozambique and a whole new competition over conservation.

At this stage in Limpopo National Park's progress, contra to IUCN Category II National Park status, over 28,000 Mozambican citizens reside in several villages along the main waterways running through the park. One of the conditions for the creation of the GLTP required the creation of the LNP, but this requires the relocation of all of the people to outside the protected area. This requirement reinforces the power behind the shift from a conservation area to a park, directly impacting tens of thousands of lives and livelihoods. Community relocation has begun, and a disheartened acceptance has set in. In what has been described as an "induced" relocation, due to the choices of living with ever increasing vulnerability to life and livelihood through potential confrontations with predators, crop destroyers, and disease vectors, communities reluctantly opt to move and start over. South Africa did not directly advocate for the relocation of any communities in Mozambique, and each partner country in the GLTP has taken a laissez faire approach to community issues outside of their national boundaries. The reality, however, is that everyone knew the ramifications of any switch from TFCA to TFP would require relocations.

5. Results and discussion

In reviewing the similarities and differences across the two cases, we aim to further debate by pushing for a better conceptual understanding of the most important factors influencing cooperation in transfrontier conservation. With respect to the general relationship between the countries involved, the most obvious point of contention is one that has been pointed out many times: the enormous inequality in terms of human, financial and institutional resources and capacity between South Africa and its neighbours. What our research shows, however, is that in itself this does not always have to be a major problem in terms of cooperation. In the

[52] Idem.

case of the Great Limpopo, we noted that Mozambique in fact started viewing and using South Africa's strengths to its own benefits. Hence, rather than simply reiterating the 'big brother' syndrome as such – which is a common habit in the current literature on TFCAs - we contend that the main problem with unequal capacity lies in how actors deal with this, particularly the stronger partner.

We argue that a major factor in transboundary cooperation is the long time it takes to build trust in new regional settings of collective action, whereby inexperience with respect to diplomacy, sovereignty and historical relations – especially on the side of the more powerful – can easily lead to friction and set-backs[53]. Higher level politicians and diplomats are often more aware of and accustomed to dealing with historical and diplomatic sensitivities[54], while those actors on the lower operational levels often 'lack' the historical involvement or simply do not have time to develop the diplomatic skill and awareness. We saw this most clearly in the case of the MDTFCA, where the South African PCU tried to 'take up' their Lesotho counterparts and convince them to follow their lead in terms of operationalising the plan for the MDTFCA. This was not done from a conscious big brother strategy (although it was perceived as such in Lesotho), but from a drive to 'lift' Lesotho to South African standards. In the process, however, they were trampling on sensitivities related to Lesotho's sovereignty, culture and the two countries' joint history. At the same time, senior officials often fail to recognize the inherent challenges faced in operationalizing their grand visions. Grand and vague discourses often make for easier diplomacy than operational details do.

Although not as pronounced as in the MDTFCA, it is clear that in the GLTP great expectations for the future are not grounded in an analysis and awareness of the past.[55] Policy-makers and advocates work to reshape the current historical context so that its main purpose was to lead up to the present 'peace parks', which according to the Peace Parks Foundation "epitomize harmony between humans and nature by using resources to create prosperity".[56] And although these essentialised versions of history serve to attract the necessary donor funds

[53] S. Kuhnert, An Evolutionary Theory of Collective Action: Schumpeterian Entrepreneurship for the Common Good." *Constitutional Political Economy* 13-29 (2001).
[54] An important exception to this argument is the action by former South African Environmental Affairs and Tourism minister, Valli Moosa, described above where he seemed to bulldoze his Mozambican and Ziimbabwean colleagues in accepting his plans for the Great Limpopo Park.
[55] A point that is commonly noted about development and conservation interventions. See for example: D. Mosse, *Cultivating Development. An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice*. London: Pluto Press (2005).
[56] Http://www.peaceparks.org. Last viewed: 17 June 2008.

and political support to make the project work, our research shows that it can have adverse impacts on transfrontier cooperation, as historical sensitivities and nuances are not easily forgotten or forgiven over broader levels of societies.[57] Contrasting with the grand visions of politicians and TFCA advocates, the implementing agencies struggle to turn these visions into reality. The clearest example distinguishes between the ongoing land restitution to evicted communities in South Africa's parks and the current evictions of communities in Limpopo National Park in Mozambique.[58] With respect to the general relationships between countries, the disjuncture between the idyllic visions of policy-makers and the implementation challenges faced by actors to achieve these policy goals influence practical transfrontier cooperation to a large extent.

Regarding the second major factor, the institutional setting of transfrontier conservation initiatives, the cases show that many actors in the two TFCAs rely on *formal* institutional alignment, thereby overlooking the importance of *informal* institutional behavior (norms, history, language, etc.). In the Maloti-Drakensberg TFCA, we saw a lot of emphasis on the position of the TFCA project in the formal public institutions, organizational structures, and whether these were in line with national government priorities. From the GLTP it is clear that a lot of time in the project is spent on connecting the right institutions to get them to agree on policies and the formal harmonization of rules and management structures. Yet, the literature on collective action has long stressed that a mere eye for formal institutions runs the risk of missing 'the forest for the trees'. The problem is twofold. First, in differentiating between de jure rules and actual rules-in-use, Ostrom notes that informal, working rules may simply fill in the gaps of formal institutions, but they may contradict official law[59]. Neither project has resolved the imbalance between formal and informal institutions. Second, both the MDTFCA and the GLTP have a disproportionate level of well-defined policies (collective choice rules) compared with on-the-ground (operational) rules.

Moreover, so-called 'new institutionalists' argue that institutions are never neutral (although often perceived as such) but outcomes of political struggles, that history matters in institutions and that informal institutions, as patterns of individual and organizational behavior, often

[57] Cf. R. Southall, *Between Competing Paradigms*.
[58] M. Spierenburg, C. Steenkamp and H. Wels, Resistance of Local Communities against Marginalization in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, *Focaal* 18-31 (2006).
[59] E. Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge, MA, Cambridge University Press (1990); E. Ostrom, *Understanding Institutional Diversity*. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press (2005).

greatly influence cooperation and integration.[60] From the empirical evidence presented it is clear that transfrontier conservation in Southern Africa is struggling with exactly these issues. Formal institutions are often seen as neutral without much awareness of the implications of the political struggles that created them and the effects this still has on international cooperation.[61] The concept of 'path dependency' within historical institutionalism further explains this. It argues that "once one decision was made it tended to block off some potential avenues for development of policy and made it more likely the policy would continue to develop in the same direction".[62] Obviously, this goes for present institutions within the countries concerned, but also for new institutions created. In the MDTFCA for instance, the initial agreement made to focus the project on bioregional planning blocked off avenues for more 'on the ground' community conservation, despite the pressures of many actors to do so. It is clear that this has affected the cooperation between South Africa and Lesotho in many ways, predominantly negative, and made the project much more complex.

The third issue discussed – the conceptual frameworks employed within the TFCAs – shows that nuance, in terms of understanding discursively subtle, but practically far-reaching, differences in operationalization of discourses matters. Even though in both TFCAs most actors have a similar conceptual understanding of transfrontier conservation (based on the three pillars of conservation, development and international cooperation), the operationalisation of seemingly similar conceptual frameworks may differ quite substantively. In the case of the GLTP it was clear that actors differed in their view of what the most important of the three objectives is. In the MDTFCA, the picture was somewhat more complicated. Both PCUs employed very similar discourses based on community conservation. But here also, they were operationalised quite differently and in their cooperation, they missed each other in these nuances. In short, because of the pressures for employing seemingly similar discourses within transfrontier conservation - those based on community conservation[63] - actors often lose sight of the finer (and bigger) nuances in the operationalisation of these discourses. Thus, while actors think they are speaking the same language, they might in actual fact be talking passed one another. As such, these nuances can

[60] S. George and I. Bache, *Politics in the European Union*.
[61] See also R. Southall *Between Competing Paradigms*.
[62] S. George and I. Bache, *Politics in the European Union*, p. 22.
[63] W. Dressler and B. Büscher, Market Triumphalism and the so-called CBNRM 'crisis' at the South African Section of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, *Geoforum* 452-465 (2008).

create complications for international collective action, because when put into practice, the operational differences often appear bigger than first thought.

Cutting across and framing these three factors, the case studies point out that there is one common thread that affects cooperation within TFCAs: transfrontier conservation often enhances competition between countries and actors involved. The literature tells us this is often for donor funding and tourism markets.[64] We add to this that the intergovernmental negotiation challenges within the above three issues also provide levers for enhanced competition. As time goes by and actors become more aware of the importance and effects of nuances in the general relationship between the countries concerned, the institutional setting and the conceptual frameworks employed, chances are likely that many of them would want to influence these factors in their favour. For example, it has been pointed out that more conservation minded actors in both the GLTP and the MDTFCA are trying to influence formal *and* informal institutions. Arguably the most important manner in which this is tried is by favouring conservation over community issues by adhering to community-based discourses on policy level, while pursuing fortress conservation in practice.[65] Naturally, the above exercise of identifying and spelling out the nuances are not meant to increase competition, but considering that some authors argue that TFCAs are increasingly operationalized in a neoliberal and market-oriented way[66], the chances for competition to become more intense are to be expected. After all, it seems highly likely that competitive market-based incentive schemes such as 'payments for environmental services' and tourism – that are already being introduced in both the MDTFCA and the GLTP - reinforce rather than defuse the competitive tendencies within TFCAs we have described above (f.i. around donor funding, tourism, and so forth). Hence, instead of viewing transfrontier conservation projects as a simple means of building friendship and stimulating cooperation, we see these projects as potential catalysts for competition. Together with all the intergovernmental challenges mentioned, this dynamic of increasing competition, we argue, will make transfrontier conservation negotiations harder and might negatively impact on their longer-term success and viability.

[64] W. Wolmer, *Transboundary Conservation: the Politics of Ecological Integrity*; M. Van Amerom, *On the Road to Peace?*.
[65] See also B. Büscher and T. Dietz, *Conjunctions of Governance*.
[66] W. Dressler and B. Büscher, *Market Triumphalism and the so-called CBNRM 'crisis'*; B. Büscher *Struggles over Consensus, Anti-Politics and Marketing*.

5. Concluding remarks

While debate around transfrontier conservation as the new hype in conservation, development and international cooperation continues, its analysis will become more refined. This paper has tried to pursue this goal by expanding on the accepted understanding in the literature that cooperation and 'peace' in transfrontier conservation are no certainties, but fragile outcomes that may arise in certain places. We note that the reason most often given for tensions and conflict within TFCAs, the big brother syndrome, is not always as straightforward as depicted, and sometimes not even problematic at all. Based on extensive field research, we have argued that three issues in particular, the general relationship between countries involved, institutional setting and conceptual frameworks employed, provide important axes around which a more nuanced understanding of the elements impacting on cooperation and friendship in transfrontier cooperation can be built. In the light of TFCAs as an international 'trend' within the hegemonic ideological framework of neoliberalism, both of which pervade inherent tendencies to discard historically aware and nuanced analyses of collective action, we argue that this is an important contribution to the literature.

Perhaps, then, it is apt to once more draw a parallel with development of the European Union. For the last 60 years, the EU countries have not experienced international war or armed conflict, a major anomaly considering the centuries before. This has been achieved despite the fact that collective action in the EU has often been agonisingly slow and fraught with set-backs. And although this might dismay certain actors that want to get things done quickly, it is also a message of hope: that indeed over time mutual understanding and cooperation can grow. The major challenge in terms of cooperation - which admittedly is much easier said than done - is to reject neo-liberal pressures that lead to short-term competition and not let these stand in the way of this longer-term objective. If proponents of TFCAs can critically embrace these oft-forgotten lessons and take serious the actual challenges involved in collective action, then 'peace parks' might be able to do justice to their name one day.

Figures.

Figure 1: the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Area. Source: MDTFCA. (*Higher resolution available on request)*

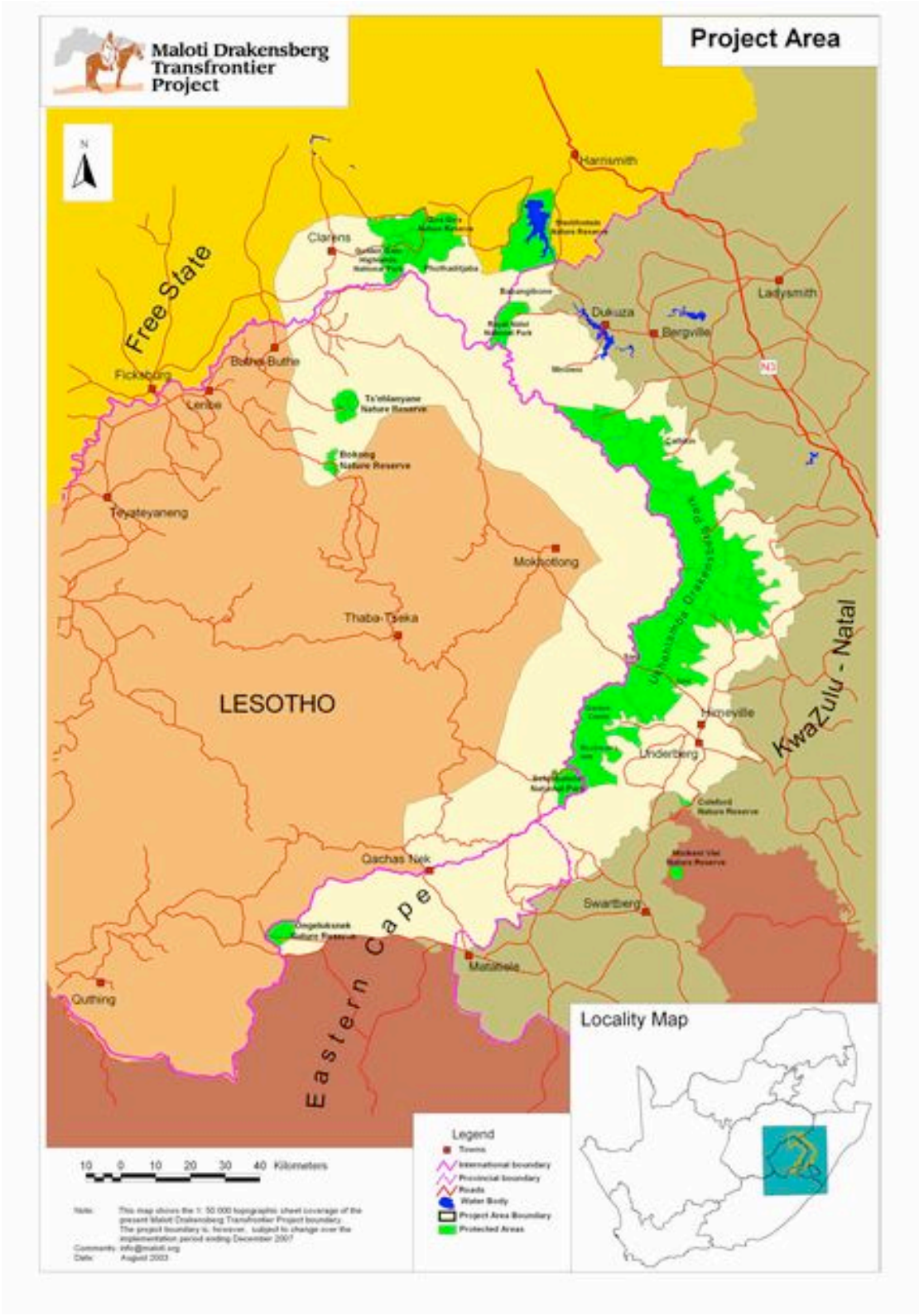

Figure 2: The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. Source: Peace Parks Foundation.