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INSTITUTIONS AND TRANSBOUNDARY PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT:

THE CASE OF MT. ELGON, UGANDA AND KENYA

JÓN GEIR PÉTURSSON

INSTITUTIONS AND TRANSBOUNDARY PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT: THE CASE OF MT. ELGON, UGANDA AND KENYA

Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes institutional challenges related to the transboundary protected area management (TBPAM) policy strategy, with a special focus on the role of local communities. TBPAM is an influential biodiversity conservation strategy that suggests joint management of adjoining protected areas across national boundaries. The thesis uses Mt. Elgon in Uganda and Kenya as a case for analyzing the TBPAM strategy in East Africa. The work is rooted in contemporary classical institutional theory used to generate subsequent theoretical frameworks and methodological tools for the individual studies presented. The thesis comprises four individual but interrelated studies that address distinct aspects of the TBPAM institutional challenges.

The findings revealed that protected area governance on Elgon involves complex formal and informal institutional structures, with significant interplays between institutions at different levels of governance which has had major impacts on both policy goals and outcomes. In the colonial period, external agents used quite decisive coercive powers to gazette the protected areas. The protected area regimes have evolved over time in path-dependent trajectories where institutions have been constituted and reconstituted, reflecting the multiple actors' asymmetric powers and interests. There is a distinct historical evolution that has strong bearings on the present-day TBPAM considerations. There are currently five different formal protected area regimes on Elgon that have quite different and partly conflicting management goals and capacities. There are clearly quite disparate strategies towards local community involvement and their access to resources within these protected areas. In addition to the formal protected areas regimes, there is a multitude of other institutional arrangements at different levels on Elgon that shape, and are shaped by, human activities in the area. This complex institutional arrangement is an outcome of an evolutionary process of power struggles beginning long before the colonial period.

The thesis concludes that bringing protected area governance in the two countries to a joint integrated TBPAM regime is a highly challenging institutional exercise and the perceived gains seem vague. TBPAM is driven by the interests of powerful international pro-conservation actors, a top-down driven process, where there is a great risk that local community interests will be further neglected. This might include stronger focus on conservation enforcement and further deprivation of local community rights and livelihoods. The thesis suggests an institutional disaggregated view on TBPAM. This implies disaggregation of the protected area governance by the type of activities and role of stakeholders, unfolding the properties of the resources itself and the heterogeneous interests of the actors involved. TBPAM is thus no panacea, even if two protected areas happen to adjoin. These issues demand careful analytical scrutiny.