

Linking Neoprotectionism and Environmental Governance: On the Rapidly Increasing Tensions between Actors in the Environment-Development Nexus

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Abstract: *There are rapidly increasing tensions between actors engaged in the governance of environment and natural resources in Africa. This becomes clear when reviewing current trends in the conservation-development debate and combining these insights with trends in environmental governance, most especially the commodification of 'nature' under pressures of neoliberalism. Our argument starts by showing how the conservation-development debate has become polarised due to increasing criticism of community-based approaches to nature conservation and how these unfold in terms of value and scale. We argue that the strong sense of urgency involved in this neoprotectionist turn amongst conservation practitioners has been reciprocated by an equally strong reply from community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) advocates, thereby further straining the choices that must be made with respect to conservation practice. Through a discussion of the current neoliberal turn in environmental governance, we suggest that the potential of actors to promote divergent and ambiguous values in policy and practice across scale has increased over the past decade and will continue to do so. This, in turn, may lead to environmental governance that favours the 'sustained' polarisation of actors' priorities in research and policy concerning*

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conservation-development. We provide evidence for our case with empirical data from research done on the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP) in Southern Africa.

Keywords: neoliberalism, conservation, development, governance, transfrontier conservation, commodification of nature

INTRODUCTION

IN THE LAST DECADE, the debate over how to bridge conservation and development has been sharpened by increasing criticism of the dominant international paradigm of community-based conservation (Kramer et al. 1997; Oates 1999; Terborgh 1999; Terborgh et al. 2002)¹. The core arguments put forward by these critics involve the incompatibility of people and nature, the necessity of strictly enforced protected areas, biodiversity conservation as a moral imperative, the myth of ecologically friendly locals, and that the urgency of the loss of biodiversity legitimates drastic measures (Wilshusen et al. 2002; Hutton et al. 2005). The result of this 'neoprotectionism' has been an increasingly polemic debate whereby these criticisms are either defended or critiqued within the intellectual confines of scientific perspectives in conservation (Wilshusen et al. 2002; Hutton et al. 2005).

However, if we want to understand the full impact of this trend, we must place it within a framework that involves the processes of 'human organisation' that frame and cut across conservation and development (Brechtin et al. 2002). In this article, we aim to investigate the effects of the neoprotectionist upsurge on the policy and practice of environmental governance at the local and regional level in Africa. In fact, the significance of the neoprotectionist upsurge can only be understood in this light, for the apparent human-nature dichotomy sparked by the upsurge is really a dichotomy over *how* to deal with environment-development choices in practice. Hence, the article starts by arguing that examining the environment-development nexus in practice requires greater emphasis on diverging *values* and diverging preferences for *scale* rather than whether one side is either 'pro-people' or 'pro-nature'.

Next, the article advances three hypotheses about (global) environmental governance. Our conceptualisation of environmental governance is based on two different yet, we argue, complementary approaches. The first is about the (organisational) *form* of global governance, for which we draw mostly on Rosenau (1990; 1997; 2003b). Recognising the limits of this work, the second approach is about the *neoliberal substance* of global governance, that is, how global power constellations and actor behaviour are shaped and disciplined (Cox 1992; Van der Pijl 1998; Ayers 2006; Cammack 2006) and how these subsequently impact the natural environment (McAfee 1999; Liverman 2004; Büscher & Whande 2007). In brief, we will assert that the following three hypotheses on environmental governance better frame and situate the influence

of neoprotectionism on the links between conservation and development in Africa: (1) (global) environmental governance is a 'mosaic' of 'spheres of authority' without any 'red line'; (2) actors within this governance mosaic operate in continuously changing networks and alliances that constantly both integrate and fragment; (3) environmental governance must be seen in a neoliberal ideological climate with particular emphasis on the *widening gap between rhetoric and reality* and the increasing *commodification of nature*.

In essence, we suggest that contemporary environmental governance characterised by continuous 'framegration'² of actor alliances and networks, commodification of nature and a gap between rhetoric and reality, creates an environment wherein the competitive behaviour of actors with diverging values and preferences for scale becomes more intense. This leads us to conclude that there are rapidly increasing tensions between actors dealing with the conservation and development nexus. We ground this discussion with recent data that illustrates the neoliberal manifestation of conservation-development in Southern Africa.

THE GREAT CONSERVATION/DEVELOPMENT DEBATE AND THE RISE OF NEOPROTECTIONISM

This section lays out the first segment of our argument, namely that the rise of protectionism should be understood as a trend that has significantly dichotomised conservation in practice, with emphasis on divergent values and preferences for scale. Grasping the full significance of this statement requires a brief review of the 'great conservation/development debate' and how this recently culminated in the rise of protectionism. Historical overviews of the links between conservation and development in Africa abound in the literature (Anderson & Grove 1987; Neumann 1998; Adams & Hulme 2001; Beinhart & McGregor 2003). Many of these reviews describe how colonial *fortress conservation* provided the inspiration for early conservation policies in Africa and how such policies remain pervasive today (Adams & Hulme 2001; Brockington 2002; Cernea & Schmidt-Soltau 2006). This paradigm sees the management of nature as protectionist and exclusionary, based on the belief that nature conservation and human development are inherently incompatible (Hutton et al. 2005). Thus, fortress conservation led to enclaves of nature [protected areas (PAs)], whereby the local (prohibition of) use of natural resources was strictly enforced in a top-down, state-centred fashion. Despite official rhetoric to the contrary, the wave of African decolonisation did little to redress coercive conservation (Nash 2001). In fact, the financial argument of foreign exchange brought in by western tourists wanting to visit African parks ensured that state-led and later private-sector led (Child 2004) fortress conservation lingered as de-facto policy in many African states after independence (Brockington 2002). Nevertheless, during the 1970s, a more people-oriented approach to conservation started to emerge. Western donors and Af-

rican leaders could no longer—at least in rhetoric—keep local people away from the resources they often depended upon for their livelihood (Adams & Hulme 2001). Thus, the seeds of community-based conservation (CBC) were sown.

CBC was based on the philosophy that because local people depended upon and had detailed knowledge of their resource base, granting them the potential to manage and invest in resources would support both livelihoods and conservation (Berkes 1989; Western & Wright 1994; Adams & Hulme 2001; Fabricius 2004). CBC was also economic: African states did not have the financial capacity to strictly enforce PAs. The bottom line, however, was that historical injustices made ‘fences and fines’ enforcement of parks morally untenable. The new discourse fitted in well with the new ‘development climate’ that emerged from the late 1970s with its emphasis on bottom-up approaches, local participation and ownership, decentralisation of power and ‘good governance’. The rapid growth of these approaches paid testament to the inability of centralised conservation to command and control local peoples’ access to and use of natural resources adjacent to and inside PAs. As a result, CBC was increasingly viewed as a win-win solution: good for people and good for nature. In effect, however, one extreme conservation teleology replaced another. But reality is never ideal and failings of CBC, with respect to both development and conservation, were increasingly noted (Barret & Arcese 1995; Wainwright & Wehrmeyer 1998; Wunder 2001). According to Barrow and Murphree (2001: 28) this was due to two factors: the unwillingness of African governments to adapt to CBC and decentralise power and the ‘core motivational direction behind policy, planning and action’ in CBC, which was often still oriented towards fortress conservation. But whereas these critiques mostly came from CBC scholars seeking the limitations of the approach with the aim of improving it in practice, a much more fundamental critique of CBC approaches surfaced during the 1990s. Since then, several scholars have asked themselves whether conservation discourse is going ‘back to the barriers’ (Wilshusen et al. 2002; Hutton et al. 2005).

Wilshusen et al. (2002) and Hutton et al. (2005) identify five overarching themes in the works of authors advocating for a ‘back-to-the-barriers’ approach in biodiversity conservation and PAs management. First, and most important, is that biodiversity conservation adheres to moral imperatives: ‘nature is worthy of protection for its intrinsic value and for the aesthetic pleasure it can bring to many people’ (Oates 1999, xvi). Second, PAs are vital to biodiversity conservation because these are the last ‘safe havens’ where human encroachment cannot be tolerated (Terborgh et al. 2002). The third theme deals with the ineffectiveness of CBC approaches. These approaches have failed to fulfil their promises with regard to conservation as well as development. Neoprotectionists therefore argue that policy and practice need to be realigned towards strict preservation of flora and fauna (Terborgh 1999). Closely connected to this argument is the ‘eco-friendly local’ as a fourth theme. Back-

to-the-barriers proponents argue that local and/or indigenous peoples are as driven by gain as others and were never inherently 'conservationist'. Often long engaged in cash economies, many see little reason to conserve nature in their pursuit of shedding poverty, for they too would sacrifice their resource base for development (Van Schaik & Rijksen 2002). All of this builds up to the fifth theme: of the immediacy of the need for strict protection. Many actors proposing top-down and punitively enforced conservation explicitly note that there is a strong urgency to the issue: unless we act now and we do it forcefully and efficiently, it will be too late and most of the biodiversity will be lost to the world forever (Terborgh 1999). This last theme especially will play a major role in the argumentation of this article.

The discussion on the effects of the upsurge in protectionist thinking in the conservation-development debate has only just begun. For one, the recent criticism of the CBC approach involves the return of a polemic debate that on the surface seems to be between nature versus people-oriented conservation. This is clear from one of the earliest reactions to the rise of protectionist thinking by Brechin, Wilshusen, Fortwangler and West (Brechin et al. 2002; Wilshusen et al. 2002). In their articles, the authors discuss the key themes in the work of back-to-the-barriers proponents and then critique them by pointing out that 'their reasoning is incomplete, not necessarily because of factual oversights but as a result of significant blind spots that overlook the deeply politicised nature of nature protection' (Wilshusen et al. 2002: 18). Paradoxically, however, they then proceed in their second article 'toward a more comprehensive understanding of biodiversity conservation as a social and political process', to suggest the alternative approach of 'conservation with social justice', which they themselves admit they 'discuss mostly in ideal terms', thus leaving out the crux of politics: exercising power and choice in non-ideal circumstances. Although the authors say they are 'fully cognizant' of this, they defy several fundamentals of (environmental) politics and governance that we return to in the next section.

Brechin et al. define their 'conservation with social justice' very close to accepted CBC premises, which suggests that they fail to go beyond their own accusation of neoprotectionists 'frame(ing) the debate in terms that rely on a false dichotomy' of pro-nature against pro-people (Brechin et al. 2002: 45, 51). Yet, the fact that the dichotomy in the back-to-the-barriers upsurge in essence is not about pro-people versus pro-nature cannot be overemphasised. Rather, it is about politics; about the 'human organisational' or governance process that frames and cuts across conservation, and most conservation biologists and CBC proponents agree with this (Johns 2003). The crux, however, lies in the next steps: how to understand governance and politics and how to link this understanding with conserving biodiversity in practice. Here, clear differences arise between the two approaches. Where CBC advocates want the majority of stakeholders involved in the management of biodiversity protection in a specific location for the well-being and benefits of those in-

volved, Fortress Conservation (FC) proponents want 'stakeholders' to step away from the governance of biodiversity protection and leave it up to specialised *experts* (park managers, conservation biologists, etc.) for the well being of global human and non-human life. Hence, this is a problem of *scale* (see Berkes 2004; Cash et al. 2006). Moreover, while CBC proponents see it as (historically) just to include (local) people's needs and knowledge in the process of conservation even if this would produce negative environmental outcomes, neoprotectionists see it as just to nature *and* the global human community to exclude (local) people in conservation even if this would produce negative social outcomes for resource reliant people. This is a problem of *value*. In short, the real dichotomy in the conservation-development debate thus lies in different approaches to the 'how' of the governance process, with particular emphasis on practical conservation-development choices related to value and scale³.

A brief empirical note might illustrate this statement. One significant reaction to the new protectionist upsurge has been a heated discussion, mainly in Southern Africa but also elsewhere, on whether CBNRM, more common in Southern Africa, and often considered broader in scope than CBC, is now in a crisis⁴. In 2004, a detailed email debate among CBNRM practitioners in Southern Africa revealed that on the whole, there is a rather bleak view on the prospects and promises of CBNRM. This was not so much due to whether local communities can take care of their resources or not. Most debaters have a pro-poor stance and faith that communities can and do manage their natural affairs to greater or lesser extent, provided that land and forest-based economies are valued and maintained⁵. Rather, the core of the debate was on whether there is significant place and attention for CBNRM within Southern Africa's current political-economic constellation. This was made clear by an outcry about when 'do we cease to be applied social scientists and become political activists?'⁶ Or the conclusion by Turner (2004) that CBNRM is not so much in a crisis, but rather the enabling supporting structures within which CBNRM takes place: local governance and the support this gets from higher governance structures (see also Ribot 2002). Interestingly, this is no different from how neoprotectionists view the current conservation-development predicament. When Johns (2003) talks of having to make 'new alliances' in order to win the 'battle', he mentions that 'certainly not all biologists want to be engaged in politics, but many are (...) engaged by choice or circumstances, and some have become quite good at it' (Johns 2003: 1235). In sum, the illustration emphasises a strong desire for arbitration of conservation-development values and the appropriate scales of action. Again, we are talking about the vital importance of the politics of environmental governance.

Obviously, this conclusion is not new. Many have probed the links between politics, governance and the environment before. Yet, it has often been lamented that political science and governance studies are not sufficiently integrated with issues of biodiversity conservation (Bryant & Bailey 1997; Keil et

al. 1998). In fact, Agrawal and Ostrom (2006) only recently portrayed the relation between political science and conservation biology a ‘dialog of the deaf’. They state that ‘ultimately biodiversity conservation requires concerted effort at multiple levels. Local actors are critical in the protection of ecological resources, both in the short and long run. The same is true of subnational units of governance. Without acute political analyses that take incentives and actions of multiple actors at different scales into account, there is no effective policy making or governance related to biodiversity and, consequently, no protecting biodiversity’ (Agrawal & Ostrom 2006: 682). Although the latter statement is true, we argue that the nature of environmental governance poses severe challenges to ‘taking incentives and actions of multiple actors at different scales into account’. This is especially the case when those incentives and actions are divergent and subject to high pressures of urgency through the rise of neoprotectionism.

ON THE POLITICAL NATURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

We now turn to the three environmental governance hypotheses outlined above that, we suggest, offer what the current debate on conservation-development demands: acute analysis of scale and value in political terms. By conjoining insights from the above named literatures on the *form* and *neoliberal substance* of global environmental governance, we have come to three hypotheses for discussion. The first two emphasise the multitude of continuously integrating and fragmenting spheres of authority in environmental governance. The third and most important hypothesis asserts that environmental governance must be seen in a neoliberal framework with emphasis on a *widened gap between rhetoric and reality* and the *commodification of nature*. The fact that the first two hypotheses focus more on the general governance forms or *process* between actors, while the third hypothesis links this to power constellations or the *behaviour* of actors vis-à-vis each other and the object(s) of governance (both ‘nature’ and people) shows their complementarity. In other words, the first two hypotheses are about dynamics across and within scale, while the latter is a statement on which values matter when it comes to dealing with the link between ‘nature’ and people. As such, the three hypotheses will form the basis with which to empirically illustrate the real significance of the neoprotectionist surge.

(Global) Environmental Governance: A ‘Mosaic’ of ‘Spheres of Authority’ Without Any ‘Red Line’

‘Global environmental governance’ has become one of the most important buzzwords of our era of globalisation, but is actually a ‘*contradictio in terminis*’. It gives false impressions of spatial all-inclusiveness, effective organi-

sation over a variety of scales and an overall 'red line' through all global governance activities. Perhaps the concept serves to relax the human consciousness with respect to possibilities for global order and stability, but is not at all realistic (Paterson et al. 2003), especially not in Africa (Ferguson 2006). This line of thinking relates to Rosenau's (2001: 1) definition of governance as the activity of every individual or collective that both through formal and informal means tries to create steering mechanisms, set goals, frame demands and develop policy with the intent of bringing these into practice⁷. Central to his notion of governance is continuous relocation of authority, leading to a mosaic of 'spheres of authority'⁸, whereby no one single actor has the overarching say in what transpires in reality (Rosenau 1997; 2003b). In a related development, the central position of the nation-state has been put up for discussion, but more critical literature was quick to denounce this tendency (Van der Pijl 1998; Cammack 2006)⁹. Our point here is not to state that governmental organisations have become 'just one of the actors' in the overall global governance process, but rather to emphasise the increasing relative visibility of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private companies, powerful individuals, communities, etc., in global governance, something which is also generally accepted for (global) environmental governance (Paterson et al. 2003; Biermann & Dingwerth 2004).

The continuous shifting of authority has created enormous possibilities for and diffusion of environmental governance among actors and across scales and as a result tremendously increased its complexity (Sonnenfeld & Mol 2002; Cash et al. 2006). Many individuals, NGOs, private companies and transnational institutions regularly cross boundaries to influence the governance of environmental affairs in a variety of localities. But not only *can* all these actors intervene elsewhere, they often feel *entitled* to do so, morally, economically or politically (Dietz 1996). Of course, this has shown to be true in Africa for over centuries already, but at the moment is taking on a whole different magnitude and pace. Constantly increasing population sizes and thus actors or '*stakeholders*' to take into account coupled with an information, communication and technology revolution in the last decades makes it difficult, if not impossible to align actors in global governance to such a degree that they cooperate in the pursuance of one common goal, for instance that of 'environmental sustainability'¹⁰. Already from this perspective, leaving out the issue of *value*, Rosenau (2003a: 27–28), concludes with respect to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa in 2002:

For the agreements reached in Johannesburg to be translated into effective authority that inches the world toward sustainability, a wide variety of numerous actors, both individuals and collectivities, have to be coordinated and their differences at least minimally subordinated to the interests of their great grandchildren. More than that, given the boundary-spanning nature of environmental dynamics, all concerned have to

recognize that people everywhere have an interest in your grandchildren as well as their own. The chances of such mobius webs being fashioned as effective rule systems seem very slim indeed.

Then again, even if this rather neutral-sounding analysis would be accepted: the whole environmental governance debate needs to be seen in an even wider political-economic context where environmental values are often not a priority, as they are often effectively assuaged by other interests and values (to which will come back below; see also: Hartwick & Peet 2003; Büscher & Whande 2007).

Actors within this Governance Mosaic, Operate in Continuously Changing Networks and Alliances That Constantly Both Integrate and Fragment

In pursuing their goals, actors align themselves with other actors in order to gain more critical mass (Hajer & Wagenaar 2003)¹¹. But these alliances or networks are heavily subject to change (Rosenau 1997). Sometimes it seems as though a critical mass of actors agrees on the pursuing of one goal, for instance as with the epitome of all ‘mobilising metaphors’ (Mosse 2005), ‘sustainable development’, at the 1992 world summit in Rio. But when it comes to how to operationalise the common goal (f.i. sustainable development) and how to bring it into practice, opinions and actors fragment again or appeared never to have been coherent in the first place. This process of integration and fragmentation does not only work in strict sequences, however. Actors and interests are constantly both integrating and fragmenting in the pursuance of their respective goals. Rosenau invented the term ‘framegration’ to capture these constantly diverging and converging dynamics in global (environmental) governance¹². What is important is that framegration occurs ‘multi-level’ or across scale. According to influential International Relations (IR) scholars such as Hooghe and Marks (2003) and Rosenau (2003b), authority, and therefore governance, seems to increasingly focus around ‘shared values’ (Rosenau 2003b: 400) or ‘functions’ and ‘tasks’ (Hooghe & Marks 2003: 13) rather than a particular scale (spatial, institutional, jurisdictional).

A number of far-reaching consequences may be noted. A noticeable point is the seemingly unproblematic linking of very different actors into ‘partnerships’ for environmental governance, so desired by donors and multilateral agencies. Some authors hold that ‘the speed, diversity, and legitimacy of global networks and partnerships hold great potential for effective governance’ (Ivanova 2003: 24), albeit with some regulating help from national governments to get the instrumentalities right. Other scholars are more sceptical. Poncelet (2001: 22) for instance notes that partnerships are often conceptualised as non-confrontational, which, he argues, may lead to less attention for important yet ‘inherently contentious issues’ and, more importantly, ‘may encourage the delegitimation of conflictual approaches to environmental ac-

tion'. This latter point is especially poignant for organisations that 'devoted considerable time towards and achieved considerable success in developing skills and strategies based on adversarial modes of relations' as 'the suppression of conflictual behaviors in the partnership setting (...) places such organizations at greater risk of co-optation and domination by more powerful business and governmental actors' (Poncelet 2001: 22). 'Partnerships' between widely different actors are thus often promoted without giving due regard to differences in power base, resources, connections and networks, ideas and values, scale, expectations and knowledge systems (see also Spierenburg et al. 2006). This perhaps makes the idea of frammegration all the more convincing, but certainly does not aid a 'red line' in (global) environmental governance.

Many, however, are aware of this and have tried to come up with 'solutions' to the frammegration problem. Often advocated in conservation-development circles is the idea of finding 'best practices' and 'institutionalising' them. This seems to be a logical effect of the renewed attention within political science given to the importance of institutions (Keman 1998; George & Bache 2001), which in itself was a reaction against the 'behavioralist' movement in political science circles in the 1950s in the United States. Behaviorists pointed towards the importance of the actions of actors in order to understand political processes and understood institutions to be neutral. 'New institutionalists', however, subsequently pointed out that institutions—understood as formal *and* informal rules, habits, policy networks, etc.,—are not neutral and have over time even become actors in their own right. They argued for a 'historical institutionalism' that puts emphasis on the effects of institutions over longer periods of time. The most well known concept from this movement is 'path dependency', which holds 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" (George & Bache 2001: 22). What this comes down to is that frammegration is not solved by 'institutionalising' 'best practices', because both best practices and institutions *are themselves inherently frammegrative*. All of this makes environmental governance incredibly complex, which, logically, has given rise to calls for acknowledging and incorporating complexity in dealing with the conservation-development nexus (Berkes 2004; Cash et al. 2006). However, although this seems like a justified progression in thinking, the current governance climate can not adhere to frammegrative complexity. This is because its underlying ideology is based on neoliberal values.

Environmental Governance Must Be Seen in a Neoliberal Framework Which Emphasises a Widening Gap Between Rhetoric and Reality and the Increasing Commodification of Nature

The only way then, or so it seems, to obtain a shadow of a 'red line' in environmental governance is to create a standard to which widely different ac-

tors—consciously or sub-consciously—conform their actions or decisions. In political science literature this is also often referred to as the ‘third face’ of power (Lukes 1974) or ‘discursive power’ (Arts 2003). This has certainly been tried in the past decades and it seems at least for issues of development and environment that there exists some kind of coherent global environment-development governance agenda with well-known buzzwords, such as sustainable development, participation, good governance, ownership, public-private partnerships, etc. (Mosse 2004, 2005)¹³.

While the existence of certain notions might seem understandable from a historical point of view—for example, the emphasis on participation is based on a just analysis of the fact that local people often did not participate meaningfully in the planning and shaping of their ‘conservation’ or ‘development’—their subsequent implementation in practice almost never works out as hoped, planned or theorised, often because of the fact that political realities are left out of the equation (Ferguson 1994; Bebbington 2005). Why then, if ‘conceptual and discursive systems link up with social institutions and processes without even approximately determining the form or defining the logic of the outcome’ (Ferguson 1994: 275), are we increasingly laying greater emphasis on this whole discursive process? Ferguson himself provides part of the answer by arguing that it makes bureaucratic and institutional sense from a development institution’s point of view to leave out political realities during implementation of a development project, but that this necessarily leads to more emphasis on the bureaucratic process instead of what is happening ‘on the ground’¹⁴. The logical consequence is a widening gap between rhetoric and reality in (global) environmental governance. This point, however, must be taken still further.

Combining the superficial legitimising consensus in the development-conservation donor discourse and the pressures donors exert to comply with this ‘consensus’ (if only often discursively) with Ferguson’s argument, we suggest that rhetoric has become such a ‘layer of discursive blur’, that it makes sense that many people are not *able*, do not *want* to or do not *have* to bridge the gap between rhetoric and reality. If information and communication or the third face of discursive power is the most important source of power in our global marketing era (Klein 2000), it is logical that people compete with each other within this reality of the ‘layer of discursive blur’, and so staying far away from other more grounded realities. It thus becomes less important whether something is correct in grounded reality, as long as it makes sense to the discursive reality that many of us are in (see Mosse 2005¹⁵). Hence, from this perspective it also makes sense that more energy is spent by donors, NGOs and individuals in conservation-development on producing documents that try to ‘institutionalise best practices’ with each other rather than creating solutions for complex realities ‘on the ground’.

But many actors realise that when the gap between rhetoric and reality grows, it also leaves more space for them to try to ‘govern’ part of the public

sphere according to their own values, thereby often influencing material realities in contentious ways (Büscher & Dietz 2005; Ayers 2006). Here we get to the essence of this hypothesis: contemporary environmental governance has become yet another neoliberal project. With no 'red line' in (global) environmental governance and constantly fraying actor networks across scale, it is clear that there is no centrally regulating governance system in place (in Africa or globally). In fact, dominant global actors such as western donors, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have consistently promoted the self-regulatory system of governance of neoliberalism, with its emphasis on *market* and *competition* as regulatory principles for behaviour (Sonnenfeld & Mol 2002; Harvey 2005)¹⁶. But, according to Harvey (2005: 165), 'to presume that markets and market signals can best determine all allocative decisions is to presume that everything can in principle be treated as a commodity. Commodification presumes the existence of property rights over processes, things, and social relations, that a price can be put on them, and that they can be traded subject to legal contract'. Hence, neoliberalism has turned land, fauna and flora into *natural resources* whereby their principle value and right to existence lies in what the market is willing to pay for them in monetary terms (McAfee 1999). According to Liverman (2004: 734), 'this move to commodify nature and market its services is a massive transformation of the human-environment relationship and of the political economy of regions and landscapes'. Three of the many effects of this transformation lie in the issues of value, scale and urgency.

Regarding value, commodification of nature means the preference of the economic value of nature above other values (cultural, social, intrinsic, etc.) (McAfee 1999). Most poignant here is the downgrading of the value of 'natural' life support functions to 'environmental services', in fact stating that the purpose of life is economic transaction. Regarding scale, commodification of nature is likely to lead to a preference for continuous increase or 'growth' of scale. This means two seemingly contradictory things: the increasing scale of our 'consumption' of nature (i.e., the amount of resources that we need in order to keep our economies growing) and grandiose conservation schemes, such as transfrontier conservation areas and bioregions to 'save' nature from being consumed. What this enlarging of scale means is that the externalisations of these endeavours also become grander, especially in terms of the consumption of nature for the privileged few and the ensuing social and cultural deprivation (Neumann 1997).

In turn, the paradox between use and conservation of 'natural resources' further stimulates the urgency so characteristic of neoprotectionists. As stated before, many neoprotectionists, both in theory and in practice, agree that there is little time left to save biodiversity (Kramer et al. 1997; Terborgh 1999; Oates 1999). They would argue that what is left in terms of biodiversity must be saved before it falls prey to extractive consumption. Johns for instance states that 'we know that the next 5 to 10 years are critical' (Johns 2003:

1233–1234). The conservation agency ‘African Parks Foundation’ declares that ‘most of Africa’s national parks are in rapid decline and, within a few years, they will be lost to Africa and the world forever. We work with a strong sense of urgency that something must be done now, before it is too late’.¹⁷ Thus, what neoprotectionists have effectively done is to place the political choices over environmental scales and values at the crossroads of time: the ‘right’ choices must be made, and they must be made now.

LINKING NEOPROTECTIONISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE: SCALE, VALUE AND URGENCY IN TRANSFRONTIER CONSERVATION

How, then, does the neoprotectionist turn in the conservation-development debate in Africa and the three environmental governance hypotheses conjoin in practice? As is clear from the foregoing discussion, the central connecting issues can be found in the concepts of *scale*, *value* and *urgency*. The recent trend of transfrontier conservation in Africa illustrates this well. In particular, the case-study of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP) between Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe in Southern Africa shows how actors (and their values) within the GLTP seems to be diverging across scales, while the ‘official’ or dominant environmental governance values are converging around the commodification of nature through tourism. In addition, the GLTP shows how neoprotectionist urgency further frammegrates values and scales, thereby fuelling polarisation between actors.

The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park

The showpiece of Southern African transfrontier conservation is undoubtedly the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. The GLTP links up Kruger National Park (KNP) in South Africa, Limpopo National Park in Mozambique and Gonarezhou National Park, Manjinji Pan Sanctuary and Malipati Safari Area in Zimbabwe, as well as the interconnecting areas between Kruger and Gonarezhou: the Makuleke region in South Africa and Sengwe communal corridor in Zimbabwe. Together, the transfrontier *park* encompasses some 35,000 km², while the larger transfrontier conservation *area* adds a staggering 100,000 km²¹⁸ (Figure 1).

Like all transfrontier conservation areas, the GLTPs objectives are to conserve nature, stimulate (local) economic development through nature-based tourism and bring forth international peace and cooperation. Major actors in the GLTP are various departments of the three governments¹⁹; donors such as the World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development through Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW); NGOs such as World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Netherlands, the African Wildlife Foun-

dition, Peace Parks Foundation and the Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation; private companies such as Novamedia, the Dutch National Postcode Lottery, Deutsche Bank, Southern Africa Initiative of German Business (SAFRI) and DaimlerChrysler (www.sanparks.org) and the local communities living next to or inside the transfrontier park.

The Great Limpopo and Scale: Divergence or Convergence?

Due to the enormous size of the Great Limpopo, the historically contested nature of many of the parks involved and the power struggles between many of the actors involved, the results of the aforementioned objectives so far have been mixed at best (Van Amerom & Büscher 2005; Van Amerom 2005; Büscher & Dietz 2005). Although conservation objectives have certainly been given a boost by the Transfrontier Park (TFP), international cooperation has

Figure 1
The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park



been characterised by as much conflict as cooperation (Van Amerom 2005); local communities have been inadequately consulted (University of the Witwatersrand 2002; Grossman Interview 2003), have received few economic benefits (Van Amerom & Büscher 2005; Spierenburg et al. 2006) and several are even threatened with eviction from the transfrontier park's Mozambican section (Huggins et al. 2003; Spierenburg et al. 2006); tourism revenues are highly skewed due to South Africa's superior tourism infrastructure and the involvement of Zimbabwe is highly erratic due to political turmoil in that country (Wolmer 2003).

Despite these challenges, the GLTP remains the flagship Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA) and 'make it or break it case' in the region (Collins Interview 2003). As a result, many actors have exerted considerable pressure to ensure a faster pace of development of the GLTP. Recently, for instance, former South African Minister for Environmental Affairs and Tourism Valli Moosa, wanted to see the GLTP come to fruition before the end of his term in 2004. In 2000, he demanded that the GLTP International Technical Committee prepare a draft conceptual plan, a draft action plan and a draft trilateral agreement for the Great Limpopo within a year. The International Technical Committee, however, had proposed a minimum of 2 years for proper stakeholder consultation, especially with the many local communities in and around the proposed transfrontier park (Grossman Interview 2003; Braack Interview 2003). Although the Zimbabwean and Mozambican ministers accepted Moosa's demand, technical issues around border security and control led to the signing of the international treaty for the official establishment of the GLTP only on 9 December 2002, at Xai-Xai, Mozambique. Currently, the fixation on transfrontier conservation as South Africa's main strategy to distribute benefits of the 2010 Soccer World Cup to the wider Southern African region adds even more to the already existing immense pressure on the TFP.

While the Great Limpopo was being established, changes in South Africa's governance strategy with respect to its portion of the GLTP, the KNP, greatly influenced future developments in terms of scale and value. This boils down to how policies of decentralisation and privatisation have supported changes in conservation policies at KNP and the GLTP. The idea was to horizontally scale out governance responsibility for KNP to the private sector and to vertically scale down governance responsibilities to local communities. We argue that this led to an overall environmental governance strategy that is increasingly geared towards service sector industries (i.e., tourism) under the guise of CBNRM.

In 2000, tourism infrastructure in Kruger, largely owned and operated by the then South African National (SAN) Parks Board²⁰, was transferred to the private sector. The takeover unfolded because 'private operators were considered to be more qualified and equipped to run ... facilities than SANParks' (Spencely 2005: 13). SANParks' commercialisation process offered concessionaire's rights to use land and infrastructure for tourism inside the park, and

revenue from tourism concessions would fund economic empowerment and conservation objectives at the local level (Spencely 2005: 13). However, as Kruger staff themselves wrote, these opportunities are a far cry from the 'genuine' empowerment (Moore & Masuku van Damme nd: 70). Commercial concessions injected revenue back into tertiary markets and short-term jobs for maintaining tourism infrastructure (Moore & Masuku van Damme nd: 70). CBNRM programmes, however, received limited funds for strengthening the land-based economy.

How, then, did state agencies and managers use tourism as a near-substitute for CBNRM within the management frameworks of Kruger and the GLTP? Some answers to this question are found in how Kruger's policy trajectory intersects with the GLTPs management, since the transfrontier park encompasses and works toward dove-tailing CBNRM policy with Kruger. Hence, the CBNRM policies of both PAs (and associated departments) influence one another to some degree, and most importantly in regard to private sector investment. For example, one of the GLTPs main management objectives parallels Kruger's earlier management shift: *'frameworks and strategies whereby local communities can participate in and tangibly benefit from the management and sustainable use of natural resources within the GLTP'* (GLTP 2002, emphasis added). Could CBNRM-based tourism development fulfil this last objective?

Probably not, as in South Africa, grand economic plans rooted out wildlife for tourism development in support of regional and local economies—an objective paralleling the management agendas of KNP and the GLTP. With the KNPs CBNRM platform overhauled for private sector investment, the GLTPs official plan of using tourism for conservation and development reached out further to the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) agenda of economic reform and regional development. Neither of the two neoliberal economic policies was conducive to land-based livelihoods. A regional overview of 'people-oriented' conservation projects, further from or near the buffer zone of Kruger and the GLTP, offers evidence of how private sector initiatives shaped CBNRM objectives. From 2003–2005, an inventory of seventy-five projects near both PAs shows that 79 per cent (fifty-nine of seventy-five) are tourism-based in the provinces of Limpopo and Mpumalanga.²¹ Few of these projects support reinvestments in natural assets (goats, pigs, land, fuelwood, etc) that reduce livelihood vulnerability. In this way, the potential of private sector investments begin to override CBNRM policies and strategies that directly support rural livelihoods.

Given this background, it is clear that there is a big gap between the rhetorical objectives of the GLTP and the realities on the ground, and that the environmental governance values and incentives across local, national and regional scales are diverging within the GLTP. Both points are further strengthened by the way in which CBNRM projects associated with the GLTP skirt around supporting the livelihoods of resource-reliant households.

The Great Limpopo and Value: Commodification of Nature in Welverdiend

The case of Welverdiend village in South Africa offers local evidence of how decentralised environmental governance and private-sector investments in commercial ‘ventures’ support a version of CBNRM that incorporates rural people into service sectors even though many depend on natural resources. We suggest that as the private sector supports CBNRM in the form of micro-enterprises based in the service sector economies of the South African elite, rural people are less likely to actively use *and* reinvest in common property resources. By attempting to pull people off the land and into tourism, new spaces are opened up and commodified as landscapes for consumption.

Located in Bushbuckridge, Limpopo Province, the community of Welverdiend receives a deluge of programmes and projects that aim to support various local ventures, from cultural villages to weaving mats for tourists. Flanked by KNP and game reserves to the east and agribusinesses to the west, the community has become a practitioner-project ‘gate way’. Numerous donors have sponsored programmes and projects involving CBNRM in and around the western edge of the GLTP and Welverdiend in particular. Most projects that have come and gone claim to support some version of CBNRM, but most especially projects that involve tourism activities. Many of the projects that claim to be resource based, however, only brush sides with the type of capital households need to reduce livelihood vulnerability.

Divided among government and NGO sector initiatives, the number of projects that involved local users in CBNRM was relatively low given the community’s population and diverse resource needs. Of the 172 households surveyed, only twelve household heads had participated in the *sole* CBNRM project funded by the transfrontier conservation initiative. Funded by the USAIDs ‘Transboundary Natural Resource Management’ initiative in 2001-2002, the project introduced Shangaan (Tsonga) women to ‘resource-based, small-scale enterprise development’. Known as the *Tipfluxeni Women’s Empowerment Project*, the project came under the purview of the NGO Development Alternatives Incorporated/ Resource Africa and sought to enhance the value of natural and financial capital already in use by households. One other resource-based project was funded by USAID, Wealth from Waste, but fell short of meeting its objectives of livelihood support. No other GLTP-funded projects focused on enhancing the use of natural capital (or any other type) in Welverdiend or Limpopo province. The most prevalent projects were public-private sector investments in cultural and ecological tourism packaged and promoted as local development nodes. Tourism facilities jointly funded by government and private resources sat on the periphery of community habitations or within the nature reserves. By occupying the edge of reserve land, many tourism facilities remain peripheral to the community’s centre and/or are managed by local elites who already know reserve owners. Unfortunately,

few tourists travel into communities similar to Welverdiend and, if they do, it is infrequent or with a prearranged tour.

The so-called 'Spatial Development Initiatives' (SDIs) further support the development of tourism facilities in small economic hubs outside Welverdiend. The Phalabora SDI (Norton & Associates 1999) slightly further north, for example, placed emphasis on investing in tourism in economic hubs in a way that would allow the revenues from nature-based and cultural tourism to extend horizontally to the economies of rural communities such as Welverdiend (horizontal economic scales). Rather than have revenue 'trickle out' to communities, the tendency is that most revenue simply flows back to centres of economic dominance (see Hughes 2005). By scaling upwards, one finds Integrated Rural Development Programmes supporting the use of SDIs as tool for stimulating the growth of tourism infrastructure further way from 'homeland' villages. In short, because rural communities generally have poor infrastructure, 'public-private partnerships' often sponsor small-scale tourism near 'modern' infrastructure far from the poverty of the mixed-economies of rural areas. Regional conservation and service based sectors have thus bridged neoliberal forms of 'conservation and development' under the tenets of CBNRM and devolved governance.

Projects that attempt to pull local users into tourism development do so with the objective of offering alternative livelihoods under the assumption that rural people do not desire or should not use local natural resources. Underpinning such assumptions is that local 'dependencies' on natural resources are supposedly reduced as villagers become guides and rangers for tourists who paradoxically consume local natural resources (directly *and* indirectly). However, reality suggests otherwise. Rural black South Africans living around the GLTP depend on a vast array of natural resources for livelihoods that cash from tourism will probably only supplement (see Cousins 1999; Dovie et al. 2002; Shackleton & Shackleton 2004).

All in all, tourism as the 'commodifier of nature' that ought to have combined rural livelihoods with conservation of nature simply worked in parallel with dominant economic structures to further pull local resource users into asymmetrical economic (and political) relations. This once again emphasises our suggestion of different values across scales within the GLTP, while making clear that certain values (such as land-based CBNRM activities) are clearly subservient to environmental governance values that commodify landscapes through tourism investments.

The Great Limpopo and Urgency: The Rise of Neoprotectionism in the Guise of Community-based Conservation

The preceding sections have already demonstrated a great sense of urgency involved in the GLTP due to political opportunism and the pressures to capitalise on the 2010 World Soccer tournament²². It is clear that the initiative of

the GLTP to capitalise on the World Cup in 2010 to draw tourists further demonstrates how planners rely on private sector ideals in tourism to promote regional conservation and development. A recent strategy paper regarding TFCAs illustrates this well (DEAT 2005: 12):

If Southern Africa is to compete as a global tourism destination, a new approach to tourism development is a requirement. It is believed that through the development of TFP's and TFCA's, the competitive advantage required to deliver growth can be achieved. The extent to which TFP's and TFCA's have been prioritised at national and international levels across a diversity of countries in the region demonstrates the determination of the involved countries to succeed. The vision of a "TFCA route" for Southern Africa can provide the necessary critical mass to deliver a premiere international tourism destination. With the exposure that Africa has, and will continue to receive through the hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the time to act is now. The 2010 World Cup bid is not just about South Africa, it is about Africa as a whole. The opportunities available must be capitalised upon if the vision for Africa is to be realised.

Neoprotectionists easily align themselves with these pressures since 'enhancing the critical mass' through 'international tourism' can easily enhance the commercial value of regional (and local) landscapes for and through apparently 'non-consumptive' activities. Funding from World Cup induced tourism development could facilitate the conversion of communal areas into green spaces adjacent to the GLTPs spatial extent. Moreover, it is clear that other sources of urgency with respect to the GLTP come from actors with values close to that of neoprotectionists.

Regarding the GLTP, the most important organisation is an NGO called the 'Peace Parks Foundation' (PPF), founded to stimulate the development of TFCAs in the Southern African region. Although its public relations suggest that its values are aligned with accepted CBNRM premises, its actions actually convey a more neoprotectionist vision of biodiversity conservation and protected areas management, something which they are able to push through in the management of the GLTP. This is most evident by the PPFs backing of the removal of the local communities from Mozambique's part of the GLTP (Spierenburg et al. 2006), but also in its other less publicised communications. For example, in a presentation about TFCAs to the Dutch Embassy in Pretoria, South Africa in March 2005, Prof. van Riet, PPFs chairman, began by proclaiming that 'after a while you find out that people are more important than the environment', while the remaining presentation spoke of issues of veterinary diseases and translocations of animals. In fact, when talking about future priorities, van Riet mentioned that veterinary deceases, especially

within the GLTP, will become *the* most important issue in the coming decade for the PPF. Other examples abound (Tanner 2003).

More important, however, is that the PPF can use its enormous financial resources and fund-raising capabilities to translate its sentiments into direct action. Having direct access to state leaders and international private sector barons and its funding of 'TFCA staff members' within Southern African ministries of environment and tourism, few question the aspirations of the PPF. By consolidating its patron-base, the PPF further consolidates the neoprotectionist practice under the guise of CBC through its influential role in the TFCA movement in the Southern African region (Büscher & Dietz 2005). To say that this has led to strained relations between key actors in the GLTP, such as communities, states, private sector agencies and NGOs, is an understatement.

Again, the key to understanding this latter statement is to look at how regional development projects in the GLTP area are used to 'modernise' rural areas *en masse*. The state's rhetoric of using spatial economic development initiatives to employ the poor is a hard sell, for most rural people still remain disenfranchised and partly dependent on using natural resources to supplement cash incomes (Dzingirai 2004). In this sense, the speed at which the markets of the tertiary sector employ people will probably not outpace rural population growth and the 'reliance' on natural resources for livelihoods.

CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to analytically bring together and empirically illustrate current trends in the conservation-development debate in Africa and environmental governance more broadly. An overview of the conservation-development debate emphasised the recent trend of neoprotectionism. This resurgence of 'back-to-the-barriers' thinking, we argued, has led to a growing dichotomy between protectionist and community-based conservationists, albeit not in terms of 'pro-people' versus 'pro-nature' but with respect to conservation values and scale. Furthermore, neoprotectionism has brought forth a renewed sense of urgency to the debate, increasing pressure on the choices that have to be made in practice with respect to conservation scales and values. This led us to posit three hypotheses on environmental governance that aim to reflect the trends in the current practice of making these choices. We argued that due to the diffusion of authority in all directions, there is no 'red line' in environmental governance (hypothesis one), which is further exacerbated by the continuous cross-scale integration and fragmenting of alliances and networks (hypothesis two). In turn, we stated that this self-regulatory and therefore extremely complex reality of environmental governance has stimulated a retreat to discourse: whereas governance realities become more complex each day, consensus over governance rhetoric seems to be growing (hypothesis three).

This, however, does not mean that all environmental governance is complete chaos. Part of hypothesis three was that environmental governance must be seen in a neoliberal framework: the self-regulatory governance philosophy that emphasises markets and competition as regulatory principles. The consequence has been the commodification of nature through tourism as *the* preferred solution to reconcile the objectives of conservation and development. This is not to say that all neoprotectionists want to resort to market logic and profit as the means to 'save' nature. It is often the only politically acceptable way. Our case-study of the GLTP has shown, however, that the commodification of nature also did not turn out to be the great solution to bridging rhetoric and reality. If anything, rhetoric and reality in the GLTP are growing apart ever faster. As a consequence, actors with a neoprotectionist leaning have been given more space to implement their policies in practice, while planners seem to retreat into a 'layer of discursive blur' that more than anything seems to function as a 'policy haze' that offers greater levels of security than complex regional and local issues.

The GLTPs case further exemplified the ways in which divergent conservation-development values unfold at various scales of governance, from international planning down to local users in Welverdiend. Yet, despite this, the pressure on the GLTP remains high and the urgency with which it is implemented acute; even further increasing the space between rhetoric and reality. It is this space that allows the competitive behaviour of actors in conservation and development to expand and become ever more intense. This, in turn, may lead to an overall configuration of environmental governance that favours 'sustained' polarisation between actors engaged in research and policy concerning conservation-development.

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Notes

1. In this paper, we will use CBC to refer to a group of related concepts promoting a people-centred approach to nature conservation, while CBNRM is used to specifically refer to the debate in Southern Africa where this term is most common.
2. Term coined by Rosenau (1997) to capture the continuous interactive dynamics of integration and fragmentation in governance.
3. This latter issue is resonated by several articles in a special issue of *Global Environmental Politics*. The editors note that they 'show the salience of environmental values, specific or general, and especially their importance in relation to other values (particularly economic ones), determines the success or failure of governance mechanisms' (Paterson et al. 2003: 8). The issue of scale has recently been the focus of a special issue of *Ecology and Society* (Cash et al. 2006) wherein the editors note that 'understanding cross-scale interactions in the human-environment system is seen as increasingly important'.

4. See <http://www.cassplaas.org/CBNRM%20Crisis%20Debate%20Archive.pdf> for a summary of the debate.
5. See particularly (<http://www.cassplaas.org/CBNRM%20Crisis.pdf>) by S. Turner and V. Dzingirai.
6. <http://www.cassplaas.org/CBNRM%20Crisis%20Debate%20Archive.pdf>: 9.
7. We are aware that there has been much criticism on Rosenau's thinking, but we will come to this in the section on environmental governance in the neo-liberal framework.
8. According to Rosenau (1997: 39) our current world is 'not so much a system dominated by states and national governments as a congeries of spheres of authority that are subject to considerable flux and not necessarily coterminous with the division of territorial space'.
9. In fact, Van der Pijl (1998: 162) understands global governance as 'the world-wide integration of economic, social and political organisation into a mediated complex of state and quasi-state authority'.
10. That is, if of course there would be consensus on what is exactly meant with this concept, which in itself is impossible to reach.
11. According to Hajer and Wagenaar (2003: 3) 'there is a move from the familiar topography of formal political institutions to the edges of organisational activity, negotiations between sovereign bodies, and interorganisational networks that challenge the established distinction between public and private. The disparate actors who populate these networks find nascent points of solidarity in the joint realisation that they need one another to craft effective political agreements'.
12. See Rosenau (1997), chapter six for a more elaborate explanation of this concept.
13. According to Mosse (2004: 663): 'policy discourse generates mobilizing metaphors ('participation', 'partnership', 'governance', 'social capital') whose vagueness, ambiguity and lack of conceptual precision is required to conceal ideological differences, to allow compromise and the enrolment of different interests, to build coalitions, to distribute agency and to multiply criteria of success within project systems'.
14. See also Mosse (2004: 663) who argues that 'ideas that make for 'good policy' — policy which legitimises and mobilises political and practical support — are not those which provide good guides to action'.
15. Mosse (2005: 17) has convincingly shown that 'despite the fact that the logic of practice routinely contradicts policy models, development projects are constrained to promote the view that their activities are the result of the implementation of official policy'.
16. Which usually favours the already powerful (Harvey 2005).
17. See www.africanparks-foundation.org. Last viewed: 12 November 2006.
18. The transfrontier *area* includes the Banhine and Zinave National Parks, the Massingir, Corumana and interlinking areas in Mozambique and several private and state-owned conservation areas in South Africa and Zimbabwe.
19. Such as environmental affairs, foreign affairs, economic affairs, home affairs and security and border control services.
20. Currently 'South African National Parks' (SANParks), which is a parastatal or 'statutory body' under South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism.
21. This inventory was conducted by the second author and staff of the Transboundary Protected Areas Research Initiatives (TPARI) through an extensive review of relevant policy documents and interviews with government staff. The list is near exhaustive. CBNRM projects are those that involve the enhancement of natural assets used by local households.
22. Many regard urgency related to 2010 as 'positive' while others would state that urgency related to neoprotectionism is 'negative'. In this paper, however, we argue that any urgency, regardless of its value connotation, works to put pressure on decisions that have to be made in conservation-development practice, thereby intensifying the nexus. We thank Marja Spierenburg and Harry Wels for pointing this out to us.

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