

**Institutional Arrangements for Conservation, Development and
Tourism in Eastern and Southern Africa A Dynamic Perspective**

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Institutional arrangements for conservation, development, and tourism in Eastern and Southern Africa: A dynamic perspective

Edited by René van der Duim, Machiel Lamers, Jakomijn van Wijk. Springer <www.springer.com>, 2015 xx + 265 pp. (figures, tables, bibliography, index), €21.40 Hb. ISBN: 978-94-017-9528-9.

This book is a solid contribution on an important topic. It is essentially about the practicalities of ecotourism in Africa from a local, community perspective. The contributors seem a bit hung up on so-called “critical studies” and repeat pejorative terminology such as “fortress conservation”, but the book does present factual case studies with chronologies of who, what, when, and sometimes why.

The theme, as outlined in the Preface, is the diversity of institutional arrangements among the various players: residents, tour operators, government agencies, and others. There are 21 authors and 13 chapters, one or two each from Botswana, Kenya, Namibia, and Uganda, and another five crossing frontiers. Thirteen of these are from six African nations, and five from Europe. The book does not claim to be comprehensive in scope, and as noted in the preface, there are many models not included here, but those that are included are presented in detail.

There seems to be three main cross-case conclusions, none of them new but all of them well worth re-emphasizing through these new case studies. The first is that larger-scale political contexts almost always trump local-scale arrangements for tourism and conservation. Examples include: safety and security, corruption or incompetence, land rights and wildlife ownership laws, and capital-intensive developments such as mining. The second is that tourism is a market-driven sector. Most tourists will go to places with high wildlife diversity, offering the best chances to see iconic species with the least amount of time and effort. Good intentions alone are not enough for successful community ecotourism, unless the tourist attractions are also there. The third conclusion is that self-interest is more common than benevolence or equity, at any scale and in any organizational structure. In particular, many community organizations soon become dominated by a small number of powerful individuals who are able to appropriate most of the gains. As noted by the editors (p. 36), local ownership does not equate to equal shares.

These themes reoccur in case studies from the Tsiseb Conservancy in Namibia (Chapter 3), Chobe in Botswana (Chapter 5), Madikwe in South Africa (Chapter 7), sport hunting in Uganda (Chapter 8), the Selous-Niassa Transfrontier Conservation Area in Tanzania and Mozambique (Chapter 10), the African Wildlife Foundation in Kenya (Chapter 11, Chapter 12), and other examples. The strength of this volume is that it provides the local historical, geographical and human personal details that show why different cases studies adopted different institutional governance arrangements and how they evolved in different ways.

This volume is not only about tourism, but tourism is a central aspect of every case study considered. Some of the authors set their discussions in frameworks of neoliberalism, economic colonialism, and nature commoditization, whereas others restrict themselves to reiterating local circumstances. All of them, however, do identify the factors and provide the chronologies that yielded the various outcomes reported, whether successful (by various criteria) or not.

Whether your interests are in tourism development, poverty alleviation, ecotourism, conservation, post-colonialism, or politics more generally, you will find new and intriguing information in this volume. Some of the chapters have been published previously as journal articles; others have not. In either case, the comparative approach adopted here is a valuable one. The authors and editors have not attempted to generalize beyond the specific case studies presented, so the reader does not learn how these cases compare with other African conservation tourism enterprises written up elsewhere, such as Spenceley (2008) or Buckley (2010). In addition, we see each case study from the perspective of an outside researcher. In some cases the reader is given useful and illuminating quotations from individual stakeholder interviews. It would be fascinating to read how donors, tour operators, and local community members or organizations, would present their own perspectives, in their own words, on the same individual cases. That, however, will have to wait for a future volume.

References

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