OVERLAPPING CULTURAL COMMONS AND DISTRICTS IN THE GREAT LIMPOPO TRANSFRONTIER CONSERVATION AREA: POTENTIALS FOR LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Overlapping cultural commons and districts in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area: potentials for local economic development.

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Cultural commons are defined as the sharing of identity amongst a group of people: that implies not simply language, but also cultural and traditional practices. In the African context, these extend from rites and ceremonies, to story-telling, to the use of natural resources. These intangible values determine the cultural space of African people creating for each a distinct and influential cultural district. Such cultural districts create the socio-economic networks that have trans-national linkages which go well beyond the confinements of state boundaries. Furthermore, such networking and linkages provided by the cultural commons have proven to be stronger than national identity, because they are funded on basic community values of familial and ethnic affiliation. Although informal in most cases, they pose a challenge to local economic development as any state planning and activity will be superimposed and slowly absorbed into the District as a whole.

Southern Africa is constellated by ethnic groups having common cultures and inhabiting cultural districts that have been fragmented by the implementation of the nation-state both in colonial and post-colonial eras. These districts have not only survived time, but have been tightened by induced and natural hardships, such as wars and land-use planning, and climate extremes. The recent design of transfrontier conservation areas has incidentally brought to light the existence of such districts where cultural commons had been surviving in the neglect of remoteness. This has reflected into the study and understanding of traditional socio-economic networks across borders, which are not yet treated as Cultural Districts by planners thus reducing the opportunities for local economic development.

The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (GLTFCA), approved in 2001, spans across South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, via the Sengwe Ecological corridor in the latter. The focal point of the TFCA is the area of Pafuri where the three countries come together on the banks of the Limpopo River. This area has historically been the theatre of many illegal hunting operations and, more recently, of heavy conflicts involving the three countries at different times. Ironically, as the conflicts aimed at scattering and separating both people and communities, the refugee migrations across the borders strengthened the ethnic ties and the cultural commons. Both ethnic groups, Shangaan and Venda, had absorbed their respective refugees, thus improving their family ties and the religious and spiritual ceremonies, which continued to be carried out jointly even when the people returned to their original locations.

This paper explores how cultural commons, within the established cultural districts, has maintained ethnic and socio-economic cohesion in response to external disruptions, such as the implementation of nation states, extended wars, and the creation of the wage labour market. This last phenomenon was actually exacerbated by the establishment of a government agency for mine labour recruitment at the turn of the last century, gathering people from east Southern Africa. Looking at the implementation of the GLTFCA, this paper will then explain the opportunities offered by the Venda and Shangaan cultural districts and the challenges posed by the overlooking of such districts.

**Introduction**

In the plethora of applications of Commons theory, the rise of Cultural Commons, as a specific research field, reflects the acknowledgement that various aspects come together when trying to analyse relationships in a given physical or virtual context. Despite the lack of an agreed definition, one cannot escape the understanding that Cultural Commons are found when identity is shared...
amongst a group of people. This may be classically represented by language, customs and traditions in a given landscape, although new frontiers are opening in information sharing, property rights, such as the Creative Commons, and other fields related to the globalisation of economic and social networks and processes. In the first case, which is the focus of our paper, the idiosyncrasy between social capital and natural capital is so inevitable that the development of factual Cultural Districts seems like the ‘formalisation’ of a natural process, whose resilience to externalities have been tried by historical processes. However, this experience may not be sufficient to promote local economic development when interacting with development projects or centralised planning that occur in the Cultural District, yet outside the sphere of decision-making of the primary stakeholders: the makers of the District.

This paper, based on years of field work (in the East Southern African region), seeks to explore the nexus between Cultural Commons and Cultural Districts on the theoretical level, and suggests the possibility of a new sub-category of Cultural District. The Venda and Shangaan communities, which have been the object of research by the authors, are presented here as cross-border Cultural Districts due to the spread of the communities on the territory. They are used as examples to define what an Ethnic Cultural District is, and to advocate the importance of knowing and understanding such a District in order to mitigate conflicts and promote real local economic development, particularly when this stems from large scale centrally planned projects by national governments and/or international agencies. The first section is a conceptual discussion over Cultural Districts and introduces the idea of Ethnic Cultural District. The second section is the core of the paper as it presents the communities object of our research under a historical and socio-economic perspective. The third section introduces the element of conservation as an externality in the development of the Districts. The last section, (before our conclusion), discusses the opportunities for local economic development and the threats to the Cultural District posed by a major conservation project in the area. The conclusions will re-discuss the requirements for the Ethnic Cultural District in the light of the knowledge presented in the paper.

**African Cultural Districts: an unrealised development potential**

The evolution of the theories related to the 'commons' have more recently been centred not so much on the environment, as the original Hardin tragedy did, but on values that relate to culture and its connection with the physical and virtual environment. The 1992 Earth Summit defined the commons as *the social and political space where things get done and where people derive a sense of belonging and have an element of control over their lives* (The Ecologist, 1993, p.9). This was translated in the developed world into many an application both in the physical and virtual space. Despite the validity of Hardin's Malthusian perception on the commons, in fact, there are

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3 The Shangaan, as discussed further on in the paper, are settled in Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe. In Mozambique, however, the term used to define them is ‘Shangaana’, due to the Portuguese linguistic legacy. As this paper is written in English, however, the English term will be used. Similarly, whenever a difference exists between English and Portuguese terms, both will be give, but the former will be used throughout the text.
many examples in Europe (and elsewhere) that demonstrate how local economic development based on territorial uniqueness, its products and its folklore, exemplify the intrinsic sustainability of commons managed by its own users as a community. This brings in an aspect of the commons which has developed as Cultural Commons, which stresses the importance of a shared culture that is not necessarily related to an ethnic group or a nation, but also to people who share a similar view and understanding of what is common to them. Interestingly, a very apt definition of cultural commons has been provided at the 2009 annual conference of the National Alliance Media Arts and Culture conference, in Boston, where Alvarado stated that cultural commons are firstly:

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\text{something that we create together, whether we are talking about wikipedia, which participants research, write and manage together on-line, or ancient traditions forged and passed along by a particular group such as, say, the Hopi nation. Secondly, we mean a way of creativity that embraces values like sharing, community and stewardship as opposed to privatization, enclosure and exploitation. (Alvarado, 2009)}
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The main challenge to the concept of cultural commons, therefore, is posed by those agents that work against the local culture, particularly when this finds creative ways to generate or boost common enrichment, be it financial, spiritual and mental.

Despite the worldwide trends toward the development of the cultural commons from theory to practices through free information sharing, they have mostly been demarcated by the physical space. The territory has been interpreted as what brings together and unites a group of people, whilst allowing for local economic development through its marketing. The localisation of tourism products based on local features, agricultural and dairy products and local folklore, for instance, is widespread but only survives within the mega-product that is the country. This is because, as pointed out by Drache and Froese, states have invested for decades and centuries in the creation of a national identity, which is reflected by resistance to foreign influence, copyright issues and trade agreements (Drache and Froese, 2005). Cultural commons, therefore, have the potential to become both an economic and a socio-political threat to the status quo. In the first instance, they create economic networks that are funded on the locality and on the local ability to produce and trade goods and services, thus evolving independently from the national context. In the second instance, they strengthen human relations within the locality and may challenge the political sphere if also funded on ethnic, or heritage grounds. Here lies the nexus between Cultural Commons and Cultural Districts: the latter is able to exist and develop only if existing with the former in a given milieu. The real threat, therefore, is that the Cultural Districts are not just limited by use-based categorisation, as posited by Santagata (2005), but develop into real self-governing areas that use their respective national context but exist on its 'borders', funded on the idiosyncrasy between place, people and culture (Santagata, 2005). Such is the case for African rural areas that are remote from the centre of political and economic power, thus cut-off from the main market opportunities, whilst being centred over ethnic affiliations that pre-date European influences in the continent.
The case studies for this paper, as will be discussed in the following sections, are a strong example of these potentials. Both the Venda and Shangaan groups are rooted in their territory from which they derive most of the goods and services required for survival, and exploit their familial relations to create markets alongside continuing traditional practices that are the core of their Cultural Commons. Despite sharing the same cross-border territory, they have developed two separate Cultural Districts that are based on ethnic identity, which supersedes their national citizenship.

Having to categorise this reality could call for a new definition: an Ethnic Cultural Districts with social and economic components. Socially, this will be is funded on (1) belonging to an ethnic group, (2) under an authority system based on lineage, (3) sharing a common heritage which includes initiation rites as well as other traditional ceremonies and practices that are rooted in the territory, (4) with group specificities and division of roles and tasks between clans. Economically, the District will have (1) traditional ownership of natural resources, (2) knowledge in the use of natural resources for extraction and production of specific goods and services, (3) a trading network based on group belonging.

The knowledge and understanding of an Ethnic Cultural Districts derives mainly from the study of given district in its many aspects: geographical, social, economical and so forth. However, little would be contextualised successfully without a deep historical background, aimed at understanding not just the people and their locality, but their evolution through interactions with externalities.

Venda and Shangaans in the Limpopo valley: a historical background

The eastern part of the Limpopo valley marks the international boundary between South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. One of the older ethnic groups of the border area is the Venda, a Bantu speaking group, which like other Bantu linguistic groups in the region originate from the Congo-Niger deltas (Maho, 2002) of Central/West Africa. The modern Venda groups trace their origins to the Mapungubwe Kingdom that developed in 800AD and declined in 1200AD, the remnants of this kingdom are found on the South Africa - Botswana border. Following the decline of the Mapungubwe Kingdom, however, the Venda fragmented and the splinter groups all trace themselves to a common leader known as Thohoyandou (meaning ‘the head of the elephant’) who had established his zimbabwe⁴ at D’zata, situated in the current area of Thohoyandou in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. Two different branches of Venda groups followed from this first leader: the Eastern and the Western Venda. The latter came to inhabit the areas now concerned with the GLTFCA on the banks of the Limpopo River towards the Mozambican border. Their highly organised and culturally rich society has been maintained in its key elements until modern times, particularly in so far as authority systems and rituals are concerned. The political control of

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⁴ Zimbabwe is a term that indicates the capital of ancient kingdoms.
Limpopo by the Venda ended with the arrival of the white Afrikaaner’s who had “trekked” from the Cape in the mid 1800’s and began initially to establish an economic and then political control over the region along with the Portuguese in Mozambique and the British in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

The Shangaan, also a Bantu group, stem from the Zulu lineage: their leader Soshangaana had escaped the folly of Shaka Zulu in the late 1830s. With his kraals, he moved into Mozambique towards Bilene in the Gaza Province, which was the first established capital, and then northwards along the Limpopo River, where the core of the Shangaan group is now found (Bocchino, 2008). Having reached the northernmost part of the Gaza Province, the Shangaan interacted with the Venda groups but the lineages remained separate. However, due to the remoteness of those areas from the centres of colonial power, the two populations were able to extend their influence or maintain relations outside their borders. This is how linkages between South African and Zimbabwean Vendas were maintained and how the Shangaans spread into Zimbabwe and into South Africa. The last independent Shagaan leader, Ngungunhane was arrested and died in Portuguese custody at the end of the 19th century. At present, the Shagaan have two ruling families: the Chauke (or Cháuque in Mozambique) ruling villages on the Northern banks of the Limpopo River in Mozambique and in Zimbabwe, and the Makuleke (or Maluleke in Mozambique) ruling on the Southern banks of the Limpopo river in Mozambique and in South Africa.

Having always occupied border areas, the two ethnic groups developed linkages within their own social systems, which were ruled by chiefs of the same families and included intra-group marriages and economic sustenance in times of drought or plagues. The

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**The Pafuri hill and its rites**

In the geographical heart of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area, where the Limpopo and the Luvuvhu River meet, lie two traditional ceremonial grounds of the Pafuri people, the Shangaan of the Maluleke clans. One is near the rivers confluence as it is used for the thanksgiving ceremonies after the harvest. The other is a small hill, hidden by the border posts houses, fortified in South Africa and humble in Mozambique, and almost insignificant closed between the heights of the Lebombo Mountains and the vastness of the Limpopo floodplains. The Pafuri hill is the first ceremonial site for the Shagaan-Makuleke group, where the rain ceremonies and the initiation rites are carried out yearly on invitation by Chief Makuleke in South Africa to all his clan members in Mozambique. Because of the introduction, in Mozambique, of state leadership in communities as opposed to the traditional leadership, where the two are not aligned the community leaders recognised by the state have to participate as well. A total of 12 community leaders are invited every year. They meet at the sacred places on the hill, which is said to be cursed by the presence of a big snake because traditional ceremonies are no longer performed as often as required by customs. The snake has never been seen, but his trail has and it is said to be as big as a truck tire.

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5 The term Trek is an Afrikaans word that signifies move. It indicates, generally, the move from the Cape Colony after the English domination of those Afrikaaners of Dutch and mixed continental-European blood in disagreement with the new anti-slave legislation. The people known as 'Voortrekkers' moved past the mountain ranges in the Cape and settled throughout South Africa, not without fighting the resistance of the native inhabitants. After the Boer War, despite the English victory, the Afrikaaners relatively soon after took political control through the ballot box and in 1948 voted in the Nationalist Party that introduced the policy of Apartheid until a non racial democracy in 1993/4.

6 The term kraal indicates a group of people and its possessions (family and livestock) generally part of the militia of a general or under the authority of a king/Chief. The kraalhead is an official term to indicate a minor leader in the traditional structure in both Zimbabwe and South Africa, here also referred to as headmen.
demarcations between colonial states were never a real constriction because never enforced over the local people, although a reality for the many European poachers that straddled the Crooks’ Corner area of Pafuri, the place where the countries meet at the confluence of the Limpopo and Luvhuvhu rivers (Bulpin, 1954). Without the respective central governments realising this, therefore, the Venda and the Shangaan had developed effective Cultural Districts that fed off each other, whilst being able to take advantage of their national legislation as the need arose. The first real disruption to such system was the introduction of the WENELA (Witwatersrand Native Labour Association, now TEBA) recruitment centre at Pafuri in 1918 (Connor, 2003). Created by the South African mining lobby through the government to control the migrations of mine workers from the region, the Pafuri establishment had a double system that allowed local residents to move across the border to visit families and trade goods, whilst retaining the workers and sending them to the mines in convoy with an ID pass.

The second and more serious set of disruptions came in the 1960s with the anti-colonial movements in Mozambique. The emergence of FRELIMO as the first organised group against the Portuguese rule and the fear that liberation ideologies could spread across the borders led the South African and the then Rhodesian governments to begin the hardening of national borders. A veterinary fence was erected from Pafuri to Vila Salazar between Rhodesia and Mozambique, ‘Protected villages’ were established in Rhodesia which relocated people from the borders and their socio-economic networks. In South Africa, there were forcible land expropriations which led to the relocation of the Makuleke clan and three Venda chiefs in the late 1960s. The defence objectives of such relocations were, however, masqueraded by conservation purposes. In the first case, the simultaneous extension of the Kruger National Park to the Limpopo River resulted in the former Makuleke land to be militarised until the end of the apartheid regime. In the second case, the Matshakatini Nature Reserve was established and taken over by the South African National Defence Force for training purposes and border patrol, which is essentially still the case as the area is not accessible to tourists.

After Zimbabwean independence in 1980, a border war between South Africa and the region to bend and weaken rural peoples by cutting off their socio-economic resources based on their ethnicity, i.e. their culture (Bocchino, 2008). In the face of humiliating, as well as disrupting events, both the Venda and the Shangaan have maintained their ethnic identity and culture. In all three countries, the people have adjusted to exogenous interventions even at time of wars, when for ten years between the 1980s and the 1990s, many Mozambicans went to live with their relatives in Zimbabwe and South Africa, according to family relations, to escape the brutality of the conflict. One might even say that these attempts have contributed to, if not prompted, the fortification of the cultural commons into actual Cultural Districts that are able to shrink and expand on the territory when the need arises. At present, in fact, Venda elderly people come to South Africa to receive
their monthly pension with their ID book, which they have received also because their family lineage is South African. Similarly, between Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe, Shangaan people meet to complete their initiation rites, their traditional ceremonies and to decide on the management of natural resources or on problem community members.

The Great Limpopo TFCA: conservation for Cultural Districts?

The addition of conservation as a past and present issue in such a conflictual historical context in terms of relations between communities and the state introduces a controversial element to discuss the ability of externally-defined Cultural Districts to develop from their commons. This is because, despite the promoted objectives of conservation for local economic development, most of the general literature refers to opposite implementation achievements. The reasons for this dichotomy are found, as pointed out by Paradiso, in the assumption that conservation benefits local communities directly and therefore can be enforced without previous evaluations. The reasons why this assumption has a real negative impact in implementation are twofold: (1) the establishment of protected areas is less found on scientific grounds than it is on other national aspirations; (2) it is an exogenous imposition over the milieu and its local communities whose cultural commons and districts have already been formed and used (Paradiso, 1995). If such reasons are contextualised in the African continent two main issues come across. Firstly, conservation in Africa has historically been based on an ethic of exclusion and alienation of local ethnic groups, thus ignoring native culture as the identity of indigenous people and their relationship to natural resources. Secondly, the post-colonial political situation is characterised by weak or non-existing democracies which allow for international conservation lobbies to decide the national legal framework and implementation plans. The result of both issues is, of course, all the more damaging for the enhancement of Cultural Districts. In the case study area, as presented above, conservation has been implemented through the decades, particularly in South Africa, as a means to separate cross-border ethnic groups in times of internal struggles for democratisation. The extension of the Kruger National Park and the creation of other protected areas along the borders of South Africa are a clear example, in a historical perspective, of how conservation was used to create buffer areas along national borders with a double benefit for the government: separate communities that were a potential support network for nationalist movements and have extended areas for border patrols. In Mozambique and Zimbabwe, instead, conservation practices allowed for the establishment of protected areas, from which local communities were excluded after removal, and of hunting areas to the exclusive use of the white community.

In the past twenty years, the emergence of Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) as the solution to ecosystem management and protection unexpectedly brought national attention back to
those remote areas because of both the land restitution claims\(^7\) which are preventing full implementation, and the presence of people whose Cultural Districts are very much rooted in the cross-border nature of their socio-economic networks. TFCAs have been accused of creating dysfunctions between the global and national decision-makers, thus impairing the possibilities of inclusion and socio-economic development for affected communities (Duffy, 2001). They have also been accused of disenfranchising local communities (Dzingirai, 2004) by not recognising existing socio-economic networks that are based on cultural heritage and extend across the same borders where the parks exist. They have, finally, been accused of excluding local communities from the planning, establishment and running phases of the process, unless “voluntary” relocations are involved (Ramutsindela, 2005). Originally marketed as TF Parks or Peace Parks, TFCAs were brought to the discussion table when the existence of rural populations in the interstitial areas between national parks could no longer be overlooked, particularly in the Great Limpopo TFCA (GLTFCA). The designation of Conservation Areas suited the concept of bringing socio-economic issues into the programme, whilst maintaining the focus on conservation (Bocchino, 2008). This allowed for the resurgence of a twenty-year old concept: community-based natural resources management. Despite some constructive and innovative theorisation (Bell, 1987; Murphree MW, 1993) had led in the case of Zimbabwe to the implementation of the CAMPFIRE programme for managing the commons, failure to devolve real governance to the communities resulted in failures that called for a reset of both theory and practice (Murphree MW, 2000; Turner, 2008). Turner, in particular, evaluates CBNRM as a type of commons governance, which not only overlaps with indigenous resources management (Ibid., p. iv), but also requires economic viability in the short term, as stated by Bell some twenty years earlier (Bell, 1987) and expresses a real concern about the privatisation of the commons and their deterioration because transformed into open access areas (Turner, 2008). Ironically, considering institutional efforts to avoid

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\(^7\) In South Africa, the post-apartheid government has passed a law allowing communities that had been expropriated by the previous regime for private or public land acquisitions to claim the land back for community development purposes, following a strict legal process. Whereas most of the land claims refers to privately-owned farms, there have been a number of cases concerning church land and state land. The latter particularly concern protected areas, of which the most famous cases were the Nama claim in the Ais/Ais Richtersveld National Park and the Makuleke claim in the Kruger National Park, both resulting in contractual parks being established.

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Chief Makuleke is Mozambican

In 1969, when the South African National Defence Force arrived with the trucks to remove the Makuleke, Chief Makuleke was there. He was trained to be chief by the traditional school, made of initiation rites, of respect given to and expected from the elders of the community and the chief: a school where family lineages, especially the chief's, meant power and authority. Chief Makuleke is one of the very small iconic figures in South Africa due to the victory of the Makuleke Land Claim and their agreements with the Kruger National Park for continuing the conservation programmes in their former *milieu*. For anyone, Chief Makuleke and the Makulekes are Shagaana from South Africa. They lived on the border, true, near Crooks' Corner at Pafuri, true, but their nationality was never argued. And yet, in a Mozambican village on the Limpopo river, there is a man who looks exactly like Chief Makuleke, with the same soul-digging eyes but in a skinny body. He is the brother of Chief Makuleke, and the village leader (Chief James Lisenga Maluleke) is his cousin. They told us, and the young guy who was sitting with us under the Tshalo tree, that the Maluleke family originally comes from Mapai, some 100Km south along the Limpopo River and have some Chope descendants, a group from the coast in the Quissico district of the Inhambane Province.
this debate, TFCAs straddle borders which are well established Cultural Districts based on ethnic affiliation, instead of nationality. This is not say that people do not feel national affiliation, especially in Mozambique where the post-colonial governments have struggled to create a Mozambican national identity at the detriment of ethnicity (Bocchino, 2008). However, the ethnic community is where socio-economic support has been and is found, where tradition and family ties exist and bond people, thus creating a much stronger sense of belonging. Yet the implementing organisations are both unable to see and value this reality, and not willing to uses such Districts as a solid foundation for conservation. Soft boundaries are being re-established to separate the districts, all the while peace and reconciliation are being advocated at a regional and global scale.

The Great Limpopo TFCA, in the case study area, is the flagship of Transfrontier Conservation in Southern Africa. The GLTFCA covers approximately 100 000 square km and is a complex mosaic of land uses and international boundaries. An international treaty for the establishment of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP) was finally signed in 2002 by Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South Africa. While the Peace Park Foundation, the main liaison for the establishment of the TF Park, defines it a model for cross border conservation projects (Ramutsindela, 2007, 75), the primary motivation for the treaty is biodiversity conservation based on a wildlife tourism market (Cumming, 2004). The treaty, in fact, refers to a plethora of international and regional protocols on nature conservation, yet makes no mention of any such pieces of regional and international law on socio-economic and political rights (Ramutsindela, 2007). This is, intrinsically, an explanation as to the failure of the projects to effectively work with and for human development in its densely populated interstitial areas. It is no wonder, therefore, that conservation objectives are requiring the relocation of local communities and settlements in both Zimbabwe for the Sengwe ecological corridor (a minefield area) and Mozambique for the establishment of the Limpopo National Park. Whereas the newly gazetted Sengwe Corridor is compliant with what was negotiated by local communities through the intervention of an CESVI, an Italian NGO, only after a report over the lack of community consultation (Wits Refugee Research Programme, 2002), have the Limpopo National Park authorities have began a full consultation process with the communities to be removed from the park. Such decision-making and implementation strategies suggest either an unwillingness (supposedly based on ignorance) to accept and work with the existing Cultural Districts which extends to the southern border of the Limpopo National Park for the Shagaan, or perhaps an attempt to dismantle those Cultural Districts by separating communities due to their perceived non-alignment with national and global conservation policies. This, in itself, is a major threat to the survival of the Venda and Shangaan districts as the creation of ecological corridors separates cross-border communities further in-nation, and disrupts these systems instead of implementing the concept of linking conservation to livelihoods for rural communities.
Threats and opportunities for the Venda and Shangaan Cultural Districts in the GLTFCA

TFCAs have therefore stemmed from a conservation ideology that wanted to prevent Hardin's scenario from happening by dedicating land to the protection of ecosystems and its species, excluding its traditional users and keepers. Furthermore, this conservation concept per se clashes with the local realities in that land that is not cultivated is not, in the minds of communities, considered abandoned, rather it is being held by communities for future use or use in its current state. The creation of conservation areas and the subsequent alienation of local people is in effect a punishment for their maintaining wild lands. This establishes a perverse incentive for conservation and is particularly evident in Mozambique in the case of the Limpopo National Park where people have been removed from even settled land for the purpose of conserving biodiversity. In South Africa the situation is one of communities reclaiming land that was expropriated for conservation or other purposes – this also is fraught with its own problems in trying to re-establish the link between conservation and the Cultural Districts. A major challenge in all three countries is that the subsistence economy which is practised in the rural areas cannot afford to give land for conservation without having a short-term financial return, thus spoiling the cost-benefit analysis of TFCAs, which see conservation as a long-term sustainable use plan via tourism-related activities (Bell, 1987).

The GLTFCA has not successfully managed to maintain the direct involvement of the first stakeholders, the local communities in their Cultural Districts, despite their main objective of co-existence between people and animals (Peace Parks Foundation, 2010). The existence of the strong Venda and Shangaan Cultural Districts has never been taken into consideration by national and regional planners, yet could have provided an opportunity to realise both the conservation objectives of the state and conservationists and the development aspirations of local communities. This said, it is obvious that the TFCA project poses more threats or constraints to the development of the Cultural Districts, than opportunities. The problem refers back to the failure of national and regional planners to include the communities in the planning.

Confronting harsh realities

On the North bank of the Limpopo River is the little Venda village of Chikwarakwara. South of the Limpopo River, on the other side of the Madimbo Corridor is another little Venda village called Bennde Mutale. The people, in each of the villages, know each other well: many are related and sacred religious sites and burial grounds are shared between the two communities. Every day, a stream of people crosses the fence lines in South Africa and ford the crocodile infested Limpopo River. Women from Chikwarakwara come to Bennde Mutale with fresh vegetables and home-made beer, returning home with processed goods bought at the local store in Bennde.

One afternoon, in December 2009, a young man from Chikwarakwara was returning home after spending time in Bennde Mutale. He was stopped by the Zimbabwe Army Border Patrol: he was searched for South African goods. Having none, they proceeded to beat the young man unconscious. The friends and family immediately carried him back across the river and the Madimbo Corridor to Bennde. There he was taken care of by South African friends and relatives. This is not the first time that people of Bennde have come to the aid of their Zimbabwean kin. As this is not the first time that daily border crossers fall victims of ill treatment and corruption both by the South African National Defence Force in the Madimbo Corridor and by the Zimbabwean Army.
process, thus denying the most important stakeholder consideration in the decision-making and implementation process. Only if a real participatory approach is set in motion to know the Cultural Districts and to use them to the advantage of the GLTFCA, through endogenous economic initiatives related to the existence of the GLTFCA; only if a significantly different approach (such as found in parts of Europe) to the use of commons and the development of Cultural Districts is adjusted to the rural African reality, then will the GLTFCA become an opportunity for local economic development through commonage. Should macro planning like the GLTFCA begin to realise the importance of the Cultural Districts in planning and decision making then the opportunities, would actually be many and sustainable, mainly because the rural communities would be able to interact with other stakeholders in a less conflictual environment.

Conclusions

African Cultural Districts exists, unlike their European counterparts, primarily in the reality of the territory and are founded on ethnic identity and management of natural resources for survival. The two case studies presented within the GLTFCA justify the proposal for a new category of Cultural Districts based on ethnicity, which could better suit developing countries in general, despite being founded on an African reality as shown by the Venda and the Shagaan. Referring back to the definition of Ethnic Cultural Districts, in fact, the knowledge of the groups and of the territory demonstrates the need for such a category in order to prevent major national and regional development to destroy, rather than enhancing, such District.

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<tr>
<th>Ethnic Cultural Districts</th>
<th>Shagaan</th>
<th>Venda</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social requirements</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Ethnic integrity</td>
<td>They all originate from the original group that left Zululand with Soshangaana. Through the years the cross-border linkages have been maintained and enhanced: people walk across the Zimbabwe-Mozambique – South African border just to visit friends and family, trade and work.</td>
<td>All are descendents of the Mapungubwe Kingdom. Venda of the GLTFCA are part of the eastern Venda found in Zimbabwe and South Africa. They have very strong kinship and cultural ties across the border, with a correspondingly high level of economic interdependency and interaction.</td>
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<td>2 Authority hierarchy</td>
<td>Although partially disturbed by post-colonial systems, the traditional families maintain authoritative position at least for traditional matters.</td>
<td>There are very influential traditional authority structures in both South Africa and Zimbabwe. The Venda in South Africa have a well structured traditional leader ship to paramount chief level (often referred to locally as the King).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Common heritage</td>
<td>Language varies slightly due to Portuguese being used in Mozambique. The ceremonies at not only the same but leaders from the same family lineages (Makuleke and Chauqwe) are called periodically for the joint performance of rites, in locations that are on the borders and shared.</td>
<td>There are no linguistic distinctions between countries. The Chieftaincies are recognised across borders. Common traditional rites and ceremonies often held jointly. Kinship linkages through the “Matupo” (clan/totem) system common to southern Bantu groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 Specificities

The roles within the communities are given according to lineage and position within the community (as the case for the Ndunas or elders). Specific tasks are shared by groups such as women, children, young adults and adult men. Village headmen are appointed by chiefs based on individual village leadership criteria. Kinship to chieftaincy lines may be important factor in appointment of headmen. However, succession to the chieftaincy is complicated in the Venda system and often leads to lengthy disputes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Traditional ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land with specific value has been allocated by previous leaders and the distribution may not be challenged: this is the case for Ilala Palm forest where the plants are harvested for wine-making (a traditional beverage) and basket making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land is allocated by the Chief or headman and non Venda people including whites are able to apply for land in the communal system. Natural resources are considered open access although there are indications that on issues such as fuel wood collection informal demarcations are made. Where land is “vacant” disputes over control and access are common between headmen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Knowledge of natural resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Although a wild semi-dry environment, the communities knows the natural resources deeply and still resort to berries and leaves for survival throughout the year. Not all flora is indigenous, yet it has been there for long enough to be part of the food and services resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level of local knowledge about natural resources and use. With the area being one of low rainfall and generally poor soils there is a high demand for and dependency on natural resources one example is grazing areas for livestock that have become scarce. In times of stress people rely on a range of forest products for dietary supplement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Economic networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Shagaan trade locally produced goods within the community and across the borders with other members of the group. People who have moved to South Africa in search of work send back remittances in the form of goods and money. Some have set up small business in Mozambique to sell goods that would not otherwise be available due to remoteness, including fuel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is significant trade between Zimbabwe and South Africa. Much of this is in the form of barter trade. The Zimbabwean Venda have been very reliant on kinship support in South Africa with the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy. Strong formal and informal labour market linkages. Remittances from urban areas and commercial farms is a major source of cash for the local economy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Requirements for an Ethnic Cultural Districts, exemplified by the case studies.

Table 1 clearly shows that the very existence of these Culture Districts is rooted not just in history but in the territory and its management, thus creating unique opportunities for local economic developments. The few examples of goods that are produced or harvested in the area already compile a relevant marketable variety, such as cashew nuts in Mozambique, mopane worms in South Africa and Zimbabwe, ilala palm wine in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Generally speaking the arts of mat weaving, basket making, drying fish are being lost, due to the job migrations undertaken by the young generations and due lack of export opportunities. If the products are used locally only, there is in fact no need for an superfluous production. Furthermore, to introduce exogenous development projects that are based on the territory yet fail to include the communities in the Cultural Districts are doomed to fail in their purpose and may generate conflicts that will be difficult to pacify. To adapt and adopt a ‘European’ approach to the enhancement of Cultural Districts based on the territorial and cultural commons would provide a...
more effective opportunity (1) for empowerment, (2) to test their resilience to positive exogenous inputs, (3) to create a fertile ground for sustainable natural resources management, (4) to diversify in the use of natural resources and income-generating activities.

To conclude, it is worth reminding that many paths for sustainable rural socio-economic development have been taken in Africa, mostly deriving from large scale programmes that had little knowledge about the locality. One commonality, however, is that all such programmes were based on the use of natural resources as a commonage, thus implying that the enclosures and exclusions of access were not a solution for development, a key issue in development theory of the commons in understanding where history went wrong on sustainability trends (Andelson, 1991). The development of Cultural Districts, therefore, provides an alternative that is local, in that it is an endogenous process based on the locality and requires, from the implementers, a great knowledge and understanding of the territory and its people. Where Ethnic Cultural Districts are established this knowledge is all the more easy to acquire as the participatory planning continues. In the context of wider projects such as the GLTFCA, the use of the Venda and Shangaan Cultural Districts would not only contribute to conflict mitigation but add value to the TFCA as a tourism product *per se*. However, it is important to remember, as Ostrom states, that

We do not yet have the necessary intellectual tools or model to understand the array of problems that are associated with governing and managing natural resource systems and the reasons why some institutions seem to work in some settings and not others. (Ostrom, 1990).

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