

Power to Protect?

*Participation in Decentralized Conservation Management:
The Case of Kangchenjunga Conservation Area, Nepal*

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Abstract

This thesis is a case study on participation in and decentralized management of Kangchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA) in north-eastern Nepal, with semi-structured interviews as the main data collection method. It analyses the historical conditions for the emergence of new approaches to conservation globally and in Nepal, linking the paradigm shift in protected area (PA) management to the growth of sustainable development as the dominant developmental and environmental discourse, as well as to specific historic developments in Nepal.

The thesis further provides a broad theoretical framework for the analysis of management practices in KCA and potential consequences for the balancing of conservation objectives and local development aspirations, with focus on participation, decentralization, common pool resource theory and a three-dimensional approach to power analysis.

Key findings are that KCA can be considered the most decentralized protected area in Nepal, but that it does not constitute a fully decentralized PA, as substantial powers and rights are withheld by the government conservation authority and the former implementing institution. Moreover, although broad popular participation is achieved in KCA, participation in the area does not amount to the highest forms or ladders of participation presented in theoretical contributions to participation. This is linked to the degree of devolution of power in the decentralized management framework.

Finally, the thesis discusses the links between decentralized management framework and the balancing of conservation and development in the area. It identifies several potential challenges for reconciling conservation and development, and argues that it is too early to assess whether the system is sustainable in conservational, managerial and financial terms.

Keywords: sustainable development, protected area management, conservation, decentralization, participation, power analysis, Nepal, Kangchenjunga Conservation Area.

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Abbreviations

ACA	Annapurna Conservation Area
ACAP	Annapurna Conservation Area Project
CA	Conservation Area
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CFUG	Community Forest User Group
CPR	Common Pool Resources
DDC	District Development Committee
DNPWC	Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forests User Groups Nepal
GCA	Gaurishankar Conservation Area
GoN	Government of Nepal
HMGN	His Majesty's Government of Nepal
ICDP	Integrated Conservation and Development Project/Program
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KCA	Kangchenjunga Conservation Area
KCA-MC	Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Management Council
KCAP	Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Project
KMTNC	King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MG	Mothers' Group
MoFSC	Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation
NPWCA	National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act
NTNC	National Trust for Nature Conservation
OCF	Our Common Future, the 1987 Report of the WCED

PA	Protected Area
SCBD	Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
SHL	Sacred Himalayan Landscape
SLCC	Snow Leopard Conservation Committee
TAR	Tibet Autonomous Region
UC	User Committee
UG	User Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
VDC	Village Development Committee
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WCS	World Conservation Strategy

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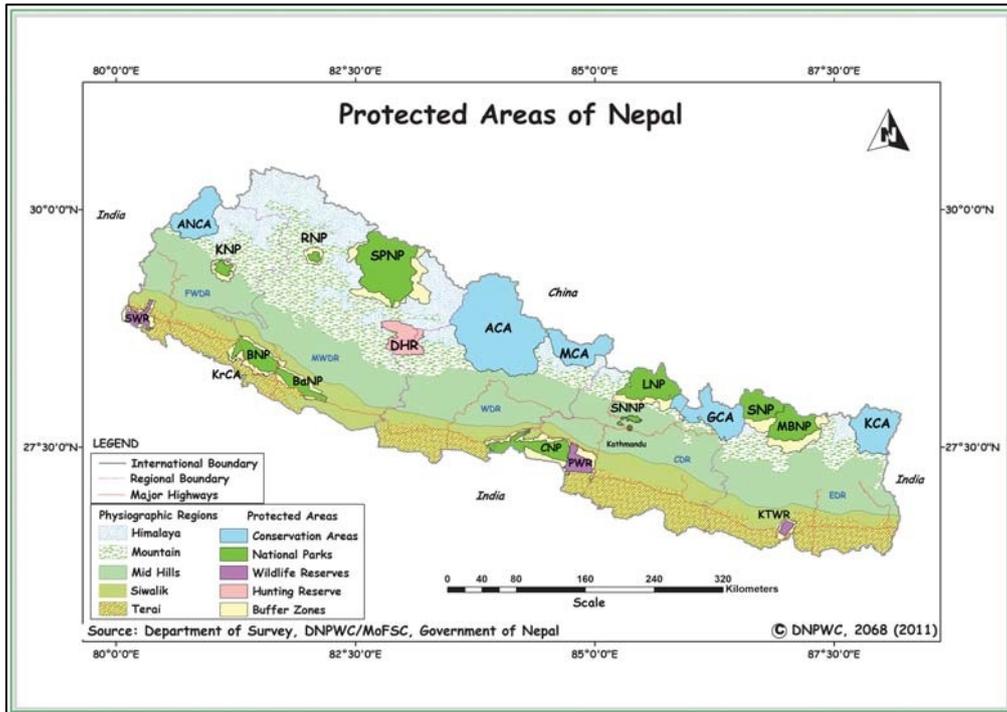
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1. Introduction

Nepal is a landlocked country of about 26.5 million people in South Asia, bordering China in the north and India in the south, east and west (CBS 2013). Nepal's Human Development Index rate ranked second lowest in Asia in 2013, with Afghanistan as the sole Asian country further below on the ranking (UNDP 2013:146). 82.9% of the population still lives in rural areas (CBS 2013). Of the rural dwellers, the majority are subsistence farmers who also rely on natural resources for their daily requirements (Khatri-Chhetri 2008:260).

The country is characterized by remarkable geographical variations, stemming from its location along the joint of two continental plates – that of the Indian subcontinent and the Tibetan Plateau of the Eurasian continental plate (Svensen 2011:156). Its lowest point is just 70 meters above sea level, while the highest is the peak of Sagarmatha (Mount Everest), the world's highest mountain standing at 8848 meters above sea level (CBS 2013). The country can be divided into three distinct ecological zones, the plains of the Terai in the south, the middle hills, and the sparsely populated mountainous areas in the northern Himalayan area (Hunzai et al. 2011:42). This geo-biological variation has led to disproportionately high levels of biological diversity relative to the size of the country. The mountainous areas of Nepal are hosts to 38 major ecosystems, and although relatively less diverse in flora and fauna compared to other areas of Nepal, they have a large number of endemic species (HMGN/MoFSC 2002).

Kangchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA) in northeastern Nepal, the object of study in my case, is the first protected area (PA) in Asia and among the first in the world to adopt a completely decentralized and local management system (Parker and Thapa 2011, 2012). The area was declared to be a protected area

in 1997, and WWF Nepal ran the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Project (KCAP) from 1998. In 2006, the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Management Council (KCA-MC) took over the management responsibilities from KCAP, and the area is today managed through local institutions at area, local district and settlement level (Gurung 2006).

In this case study on KCA, I investigate local participation in conservation management, as well as the decentralized institutional framework of management that enables and conditions such local participation. I analyze the links between local participation and decentralization through a focus on power, rights and accountability relations, with an additional aim to explore the balancing of conservation and development concerns within the decentralized institutional framework.

At the broadest theoretical level, my thesis can be read in the tradition of social science research on human-nature relationships known as political ecology. Political ecology can be understood both as a study of the political economy surrounding and influencing environmental conflicts (Benjaminsen et al. 2009), and of policies, resource use and livelihoods or the political institutions influencing the same areas (Robbins 2004:5). It can also be understood to be about the social and political conditions that surround causes and management of environmental problems (Forsyth 2003:2). Political ecological thought has been used to challenge the former dominant position of conservation biology in the field of conservation (Guha 1997, Adams and Hutton 2007), and more generally “to treat the scientific “laws” and principles underlying environmental policy and debates” with concern (Forsyth 2003:1). Political ecology moreover challenges “Benign but uninformed hopes about common interests” among those concerned with poverty reduction and conservation (Adams and Hutton 2007:168). Although not as critical to protected areas in general as some political ecologists (e.g. Peluso 1993), I

find myself comfortable within this tradition as this thesis is concerned with human-nature relationships and the power struggles and politics that surround and frame such relationships.

1.1 Research Questions and Rationale

The thesis aims at answering the following research questions:

1. How is the local population of KCA participating in the management of the area?
2. How, and to what extent, is the management of KCA decentralized?
3. How is the participatory and decentralized management framework influencing the balance of conservation and development in KCA?

These three questions, despite seemingly targeting different issues, are closely interlinked. Participation in the management of KCA at least partly stems from the decentralized structure of management of the area. Thus, to answer the first question, one must also keep analysis stemming from the second question in mind. Democratic decentralization institutionalizes local participation (Ribot 2002), to a greater extent than what is achieved through for instance more ad-hoc participatory development programs. Furthermore, the balancing of conservation and development, which is the focus of question three, is to a large extent dependent on the management framework characterized by participation and decentralization. Thus, to find the level of “appropriate” decentralization can depend on how one wants to balance these concerns.

The rationale for conducting a study on participation and decentralization of PA management in Nepal is manifold. First, it is the realization that biodiversity, the multiple varieties of life on Earth, is increasingly threatened by human activities (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD) 2004). Second, it is the realization that Nepal is among the least

developed countries in Asia, that the mountain communities in Nepal are among the poorest in that country, and moreover that the economic development of Nepal is closely bound to its natural resources (HMGN/MoFSC 2002, Hunzai et al. 2011:43, UNDP 2013). This is why sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity and natural resources is so critical in Nepal, and an reason why protectionist approaches to conservation have been found to be neither feasible nor justifiable there. Finally, Nepal is an interesting case for the investigation of innovative and integrated ways of managing protected areas and natural resources, as it has a long history of adaptive natural resource management (Ribot et al. 2006).

Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) was the first Nepali PA where community-based approaches to conservation were implemented (Baral et al. 2007). However, there are three reasons why I find KCA to be a more interesting and appropriate case. Firstly, ACA is still controlled by an external organization, the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC). In contrast, KCA has since 2006 been managed by local institutions, albeit with financial and technical support from the former implementing organization, WWF Nepal. Hence, KCA provides a more “extreme” case of decentralization, one possible rationale for conducting single-case studies (Yin 2009:47), and the “complete devolution of management authority to the local population” in KCA provides “an exceptional opportunity to assess integrated decentralized participatory conservation programs”, according to Parker and Thapa (2011:880). Secondly, KCA is comparatively understudied, and more research on the management institutions has been called for (Gurung 2006:145). Thirdly, KCA has been judged the most effective of the many protected areas covering the wider Kangchenjunga landscape, in a study assessing governance and management effectiveness in several protected areas in Eastern Nepal, India and Bhutan (Oli et al. 2013). This makes it especially interesting to

investigate KCA in the search for effective, efficient and equitable management regimes for protected areas.

1.2 Outline of the Thesis

To answer the research questions mentioned above, the thesis is organized in 8 chapters. Chapter 2 explores the global shift in *protected area management* from a “fences and fines” approach to a new paradigm of inclusive and people-friendly conservation, linking the shift to the emergence of *sustainable development* as the dominant global discourse structuring debates and policy resolutions to environmental and developmental issues. Chapter 3 looks at the evolution of *Nepali conservation policies* and natural resource management. While relating this to the global developments outlined in Chapter 2, it also looks at country-specific political developments enhancing the national policy shifts that in turn enabled the establishment of KCA as a locally managed protected area. It also presents the study area itself, as well as the findings of a KCA-specific literature review. Chapter 4 outlines the *methodological approach* utilized in the research for the thesis, discusses relevant ethical considerations and describes the fieldwork conducted. Chapter 5 provides an outline of the *theoretical framework* I use in this study, focusing on participation, decentralization (with emphasis on natural resource and protected area management), and common pool resources theory. An overall framework for power analysis is also presented. In Chapter 6, I address the issue of decentralization and participation in KCA, based on an *analysis* of the data collected through interviews, and of the relevant legal documents, within the theoretical framework provided in Chapter 5. In Chapter 7, I discuss the *balance* of conservation and development as it relates to the management framework and degree of decentralization. Finally, some *concluding remarks* and prospects of further research are provided in Chapter 8.

2. Sustainable Development, Conservation and the New Paradigm

In this chapter, I explore the origins of the term “sustainable development”, and show how it is linked to the concept of conservation. Through this exercise, I analyze how sustainable development and conservation have mutually informed each other and developed in concert over the last three to four decades. Within the field of conservation, a paradigm shift has happened, moving protected area management from a protectionist to an inclusive approach. I argue that the link between conservation and sustainable development has contributed to bring about this shift, dominated by a new paradigmatic concept of nature/biodiversity conservation fundamentally different from earlier conceptions of conservation among conservationists and policymakers. I also briefly look at the debate among conservationists that has followed this change. Conceptually linking sustainable development and conservation also enhances the understanding of what an Integrated Conservation and Development Project (ICDP) such as Kangchenjunga Conservation Area aspires to be. The account of the advent of sustainable development parallel and co-emerging with new approaches to protected area management provides an important backdrop for the establishment of KCA and the management regime there.

2.1 Sustainable Development

The origins of the term “sustainable development” are not easy to discern, and Adams (2009:3) claims that “its roots lie a long way back in the history of European and wider global thinking”, but that it became more widely adopted following the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. Sustainable development was from the start seen as an

unlikely idea, because conservation and development were seen as two directly opposing goals, and the term continues to be labeled an oxymoron (Sachs 1999, Adams 2009:2). At the Stockholm conference, this was evident in that many leaders from developing countries were skeptical towards the Conference's aim of integrating environmental concerns in economic development. But the conference nevertheless stands out as one of the first international attempts to reconcile the development-environment conflict, although without demonstrating how to do so, according to Adams (2009:63). The conference can be considered a "watershed event" in the international approach to environmental issues (Andresen et al. 2012:3).

A few years later, sustainable development became a central concept in the 1980 *World Conservation Strategy* (WCS) (IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1980), an influential publication prepared by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), in Cooperation with the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)¹. Sustainable development became mainstream jargon with the publication of the World Commission for Environment and Development (WCED)'s report *Our Common Future* (OCF), published in 1987, and has been a "buzzword" (Adams 2009:1, Scoones 2007) and perhaps *the* central concept of developmental and environmental thinking since then. This is illustrated by the influential United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, followed up by two "Earth Summits" on sustainable development in 2002 and 2012, in Johannesburg and Rio de Janeiro, respectively.

It is widely acknowledged that the definition of sustainable development most prominently used today still is the one developed in *Our Common Future*.

¹ IUCN and WWF were then called International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources and World Wildlife Fund, respectively.

Here, sustainable development is defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987:Chapter 2 §1). The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), opened for signature at the 1992 Rio Conference, does not define sustainable development as such, but is concerned with sustainable *use* of the components of biological diversity: "The objectives of this Convention (...) are the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources" (United Nations 1992: Art.1). The Convention defines sustainable use thus:

'Sustainable use' means the use of components of biological diversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations (United Nations 1992: Art. 2).

This closely resembles the OCF definition in its focus on the needs of both present and future generations, and as the stated objectives show, the convention is not uniquely concerned with conservation.

Lafferty and Langhelle claimed already in 1995 that there "hardly exists a set of values having achieved a similar degree of political recognition" (1995:15, my translation). Lele frames the joining of environmental and developmental concerns in sustainable development like this: "The question being asked is no longer 'Do development and environmental concerns contradict each other?' but 'How can sustainable development be achieved?'" (1991: 607). Lele predicted that sustainable development would become the development paradigm of the 1990s (*ibid.*). Today, one can add that its role as the dominant development paradigm is continued, not least through the on-going efforts in creating the new "post-2015" development goals to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) whose "deadlines" expire in 2015. At the United

Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (“Rio+20”) held in 2012, UN member states agreed to launch a new process to develop new *Sustainable Development Goals* (United Nations 2012:§246), Also, the Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda states that to “put sustainable development at the core” should be one of five transformative shifts to drive that agenda (United Nations 2013:8).

The OCF was first and foremost concerned with people, “of all countries and all walks of life” (WCED 1987: Overview § 107). This is an important change from the focus of the WCS, and Lafferty and Langhelle (1995:17) argue that the people-centered approach in the OCF can be seen in the light of the criticism that the WCS received, especially its “anti-poor” profile. In the WCS, poor people’s behavior was identified as one main driver of environmental destruction. While linkages between poverty and environmental problems such as deforestation and desertification are acknowledged also in OCF², the report uses this realization to argue that development and environmental concerns are inextricably linked, and that one cannot address one without addressing the other. Moreover, it does not put the bulk of the responsibility for the sorry state of affairs on the shoulders of the poor; acknowledging that serious environmental degradation is happening in many developing countries, the report points to the fundamental unequal global relationship between developing and “industrial” nations as the main problem, both environmental and developmental (WCED 1987: Overview §17).

² “Those who are poor and hungry will often destroy their immediate environment in order to survive: They will cut down forests; their livestock will overgraze grasslands; they will overuse marginal land; and in growing numbers they will crowd into congested cities. The cumulative effect of these changes is so far-reaching as to make poverty itself a major global scourge” (WCED 1987: Chapter 1 §8).

2.2 Diverse Sustainabilities

Our Common Future has become the reference point for every debate on sustainable development, despite the fact that the report actually harbors several different definitions of the concept, according to Lafferty and Langhelle (1995:13-14). Hardly surprising, the popularity and wide use of the term sustainable development by a host of different actors have generated many meanings and values attached to it. The number of definitions of sustainable development is claimed to exceed one hundred (McNeill 2006:335). Smith, discussing value pluralism within green movements and amongst those concerned with environmental protection, claims that “Nowhere is this clash and conflict of values more apparent than in the debates over the nature of sustainable development” (2003:3). The difficulty in joining environmental and developmental concerns was readily acknowledged in the WCS, which noted that “Conservation and development have so seldom been combined that they often appear – and are sometimes represented as being – incompatible” (IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1980:1).

Despite the difficulties inherent in trying to join two formerly incompatible goals, the term’s ability to accommodate to the interests of widely different actors is one important reason for its prominence; the interpretative malleability of the concept is by one scholar regarded as one of the reasons for its success in the policy arena (McNeill 2006:348). But it also means that the term itself stands in danger of losing true meaning. Its plurality of meanings helps explain why there is “no general consensus over the societal goals that would count as sustainable development as a matter of definition, or would contribute to it in practice” (Connely 2007:259). Sustainable development can be termed an “essentially contested concept”, a concept “that combine[s] general agreement on the abstract notion that [it] represent[s] with endless disagreement about what [it] might mean in practice” (Cornwall 2007:427).

As I shall return to later in this thesis, participation might also be seen as such an essentially contested concept.

A reason why so many definitions or understandings of sustainable development exist is precisely because sustainability has become the dominant environmental discourse, making it pertinent for everyone with interests at stake in the environmental and developmental field to try to influence how sustainable development is to be conceived and put into practice (Dryzek 2005:146). A consequence of the tremendous spread of the use of the term is, of course, that sustainability can mean anything and everything. The understanding of sustainable development as an “essentially contested concept” might have different implications for how to treat the term in academic writing. One way of dealing with the ambiguity of the term can be, instead of searching most likely in vain for a definitive meaning, to “recognise the multiplicity of sustainabilities and to analyse in which these are shaped and mobilised in political discourse” (Haughton and Counsell 2004:73, cited in Connelly 2007:262)³.

In this thesis, sustainable development will mostly be treated in relation to how its rise to prominence is linked to the paradigm shift of protected area management, and the subsequent international and national (Nepali) focus on ICDPs and IUCN Category VI protected areas (see Chapter 3 for an elaboration). I will not undertake a thorough analysis of all the different “sustainabilities” and their various political uses, but the reflections above are nevertheless important to keep in mind whenever the term is used.

³ Another approach can be to leave behind the theoretical debates on what sustainable development ideally is to be, and instead look for practical examples in the real world of instances where political practice has come close to what can be deemed sustainable development. This is the approach of Parayil in his article about the ‘Kerala model’, where he argues that this model should be “counted as a possible idealisation of a sustainable development paradigm” (Parayil 1996:941).

2.3 Conservation and Sustainable Development

Concerns about conservation of nature have been important to sustainable development because conservation is central to the idea of balancing human needs and development with nature's capacity to provide services and sinks, and the importance of conserving biodiversity and natural resource pools for future consumption and innovations. But conservation has also been central due to the importance of conservation organizations like WWF and IUCN in the formation of the discourse of sustainable development itself, and for influencing meetings and publishing landmark publications such as the *World Conservation Strategy* and *Caring for the Earth* (Adams 2009). Concepts of conservation and sustainable development have been shaped in concert and mutually influenced each other.

The WCS defined three broad objectives of conservation, of which at least the third one is clearly linked to sustainable development. These objectives are as follows: 1) maintenance of essential ecological processes and life-support systems; 2) preservation of genetic diversity; and 3) sustainable utilization of species and ecosystems (IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1980). It moreover provided a (perhaps surprisingly) broad definition of conservation: “the management of human use of the biosphere so that it may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations” (IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1980:1). The strategy also noted that “Conservation, like development, is for people; while development aims to achieve human goals largely through use of the biosphere, conservation aims to achieve them by ensuring that such use can continue” (ibid.). From the citations above, one can draw a link both to the CBD and to *Our Common Future's* definition of sustainable development, thus showing the influence of the *World Conservation Strategy* on later important documents and treaties. The similarities between the WCS

definition of conservation and the WCED definition of sustainable development coined seven years later are striking.

In the Preface to the WCS, the Director General of IUCN wrote that the intention of the strategy was for it to represent a “consensus of policy on conservation efforts *in the context of world development*” (IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1980:ii, emphasis added). It is thus clear that the strategy aimed at reconciling conservation with development, and go beyond a narrower and purely conservationist approach. The strategy can be seen as a compromise between various actors having contributed in the consultation processes that led to its drafting, such as “conservationists and the practitioners of development, who may differ in their emphasis on maintenance on the one hand and production on the other” (ibid.). The overall aim of the documents was “to help advance the achievement of sustainable development through the conservation of living resources” (ibid:iv). It is however clear that, despite the joint efforts of powerful actors in the field of conservation such as IUCN, UNEP and WWF, there is still no definite consensus on best conservation practices in the context of global development, as dissenting voices from the conservation community, such as Locke and Dearden (2005), Oates (1999) and Terborgh (2004) illustrate. I return to the critics of the new approaches to conservation management at the end of next section, after presenting an account of this shift.

2.4 Conservation Models – A Paradigmatic Change?

Nature conservation has a history that goes much further back than the 1980 *World Conservation Strategy*, and it is a fruit of Enlightenment thinking (Adams and Hutton 2007:154). Strict nature conservation in the modern sense, with a focus on protected areas and the protection of species and ecosystems, can be said to have started in the USA in the latter half of the 19th century,

notably with the establishment of the world's first national park, Yellowstone, in 1872 (Adams 2009:30). In his historic overview of environmentalism, Guha (2000) describes three distinct historic antecedents of modern environmentalist thinking: the "back to the land" movement of British romanticism; scientific conservation, with roots in German forestry that spread for instance to colonial India; and the growth of the American "wilderness idea" that led to the early establishment of American national parks. With scientific forestry an conservation came early notions of "sustainable yield", which at least conceptually can be linked to modern ideas about sustainable development, while the American national parks model became the dominant model for parks creation globally (Adams 2009:280).

For the first century of nature conservation, the practice was dominated by the idea of *preserving* pristine nature without human intervention (at least intervention from other than scientists and tourists). "Nature as wilderness" (Adams 2009: 280) was an important concept of wildlife conservation in the United States and elsewhere. The result was often eviction of indigenous people that did not fit in the narrative of the pristine wilderness created in the US and other settler countries such as Australia (ibid.). A model of *fortress conservation* developed, with a more or less complete separation of humans and the "natural world" or the "wilderness" (Adams and Hulme 2001a:10, Kollmair et al. 2005, Adams and Hutton 2007, Adams 2009:278).

This separation of humans and natural systems has tended to ignore the different ways in which human-systems and natural systems are interlinked, the consequences being that humans often are evicted in order to protect the very same "wilderness" they have contributed to the creation of (Peluso 1993:201, Jeanrenaud 2002:17, Robins 2004:149, Adams and Hutton 2007:155). For example, it has been argued that the East African savannah ecosystems have emerged in co-evolution with the residing pastoralists, whose

cattle have helped shape the open grazing land the wild animals depend on (Pimbert and Pretty 1997:306, Pretty 2002:66). To acknowledge the “dialectical, historically derived and iterative relations” between resource use and political relations on the one hand, and landscapes and “physiographic processes” on the other hand, is a central feature of political ecology (Blaikie 1999:132).

As a consequence of the increasing recognition of the problematic aspects of traditional conservation practices, a new approach to more people-friendly parks gradually emerged in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s (Adams 2009:285). A range of more or less similar terms exists to describe two broad and conflicting conservation paradigms; e.g. “people-centered” (Gurung 2006:1), “people-oriented” (Jeanrenaud 2002), “people *and* parks” (Schild 2008:Foreword), “participatory conservation” or “bottom-up conservation” (Khadka and Nepal 2010), on the one hand, and “protectionist” (Gurung 2006:1, Adams and Hulme 2001b), “fortress conservation”, “people *or* parks” (Schild 2008:Foreword) or “fences and fines” (Adams 2009:278, Heinen and Shrestha 2006) on the other hand.

Adams and Hulme (2001a) use the term “community conservation” to encompass a range of different conservation models, among them integrated conservation and development programs, which the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Project’s (KCAP) strategy is one example of (Gurung 2006). They define it to be “those principles and practices that argue that conservation goals should be pursued by strategies that emphasize the role of local residents in decision-making about natural resources” (Adams and Hulme 2001a:13). They identify community conservation as a counter-narrative to the older narrative of fortress conservation, while Locher (2006) sees ICDPs to be part of the “New Conservation” having emerged since the 1980s. ICDPs are viewed as one policy solution in the “conservation and

development narratives” developed in the 1980s and influenced by debates on sustainable development (Jeanrenaud 2002).

Sustainable development united two different broad policy goals and practitioners working to achieve these goals, conservation and development, by opening up for the integration of environmental issues in development planning (Adams 2009:6)⁴. One can perhaps say that the dominant paradigm of conservation management today tries to do the same thing, but the other way around – namely to integrate development concerns and human needs into biodiversity conservation and environmental policy, planning and practice. Earlier conservationists beliefs have held that there was an inverse relationship between the wellbeing of nature and human actions (Pimbert and Pretty 1997:297); with the emergence of for instance ICDPs, this is no longer the case, as this approach explicitly aims at combining both development and conservation in the same projects (Adams 2009:290).

Two distinct elements make up the community conservation counter-narrative; the participation in management of conservation resources by people living in or around the protected areas; and the linkage of conservation and local development needs (Adams and Hulme 2001a:13). These are central features of the conservation model used in the conservation areas of Nepal generally, and in KCA specifically (Gurung 2006). As such, this thesis seeks to shed light on one effort to combine conservation and development interests in Nepal.

Adams claims that “By the 1980s, the dominant conservation paradigm had changed to feature social inclusion rather than exclusion” (2009:276). Not coincidentally, the 1980s was also the decennium that marked the larger shift in developmental and environmental thinking towards the joining of the two in

⁴ Notably, “the failure to integrate conservation with development” was listed as one major obstacle to achieve conservation in the WCS (IUCN-UNEP-WWF 1980:VI).

sustainable development. Other observers see the conservation paradigm shift as a more recent phenomenon (Schild 2008). IUCN's policy on the matter has certainly evolved since the publication of the *World Conservation Strategy* in 1980. One important change in the context of community inclusion and the conservation areas of Nepal that is the focus of this study was the establishment of new Protected Area categories at the fourth IUCN Park Congress held in 1992 (Locke and Dearden 2005:3). At this congress, Category V and VI were introduced, as "protected landscape/seascape" and "protected area with sustainable use of natural resources", respectively. The IUCN itself announced the beginning of "A new era for protected areas" in its summary of the fifth Parks Congress a decade later (IUCN 2003:3), and some perceive this congress to mark the definitive paradigm shift with regard to protected areas (Paudel et al. 2011:8).

The counter-narrative of community conservation is taking over for a number of reasons, according to Adams and Hulme (2001a). Undoubtedly, its appeal as "win-win" discourse (c.f. Lerkelund 2011 for an elaboration) has been helpful; community conservation's "win-win"- appeal draws on the same rhetorical strength as the core argument of sustainable development thinking, namely that "We *can* have it all: economic growth, environmental conservation, social justice; and not just for the moment, but in perpetuity" (Dryzek 2005:157). The same appeal of sustainable development was also apparent in the enthusiasm for ICDPs from both development and conservation organizations:

Conservation organizations were enthusiastic about ICDPs because the title contains the word conservation, and bilateral aid agencies liked them because the title contains the word development. Each side could frame projects in their own image (Terborgh 2004:165).

According to Adams and Hulme, "community conservation equates conservation with sustainable development, and hence captures the huge

upwelling of policy commitment arising from the Brundtland Report” (2001a:15). Moreover, it can be argued that the focus on and funding support for “community” approaches to conservation, starting in the 1990s, also was due to these approaches’ links to sustainable development (Adams and Hutton 2007:151). Conservation organizations could tap into huge financial resources when development became part of their projects. This could in turn happen as major donors such as the World Bank and USAID were under pressure to adopt “greener” policies in the 1980s (Terborgh 2004:164). Terborgh (ibid.) argues that ICDPs are the result as the self-interests of development and conservation organizations converged, under the banner of sustainable development.

According to Adams (2009:5), the longevity of the famous formulation defining sustainable development in OCF is due to its appeal both to biodiversity conservationists and to those concerned with poverty and development. I attribute the strength of the community conservation discourse to the same merging of previous incompatible interests; biodiversity conservation and local level development/improved livelihoods, the two main goals of the Integrated Conservation and Development Projects in Annapurna Conservation Area, (NTNC/ACAP 2009), and in Kangchenjunga Conservation Area (Gurung 2006:3). In other words, both terms gain strength from the appeal as “win-win” solutions.

It can perhaps be argued that the paradigm shift from protectionist to inclusive conservation in conservation management was inevitable due to the increased popularity of the sustainability discourse, the political and financial power of the actors that came to support it, and its links to poverty reduction as the emerging overarching goal of global development efforts. The last factor became even more evident with the agreement on the Millennium

Development Goals (MDGs) following the Millennium Summit at the UN General Assembly in 2000).

2.4.1 Critical Voices

The shift towards more inclusive and development-friendly conservation has not happened without opposition. Locke and Dearden (2005) do not want IUCN Category VI areas to be recognized as protected areas at all, because their objectives go beyond the preservation of biodiversity, which by definition is the objective of PAs, according to these authors (ibid:3). They lament the paradigm shift away from the stricter protectionist approaches, and they opine that it has led to a “devaluation of biologists” (ibid:5). They argue that all PAs should put the needs of non-human organisms above those of humans - more than anything they fear that the “vision of humanized PAs presented by the new paradigm will lead to a biologically impoverished planet” (Locke and Dearden 2005:9).

Oates (1999), a primatologist focusing on West Africa, argues that new approaches to conservation, linking development and conservation and emphasizing the communities’ role in conservation are seriously flawed, and can lead to decreasing chances of longtime survival of wildlife populations. In his ominously titled book *Requiem for Nature* (2004), conservation biologist John Terborgh provides a fledging critique of much current conservation practice, and specifically the reliance on community involvement and local development prevalent in ICDPs. He argues against promoting improving rural standards of living at the margins of park boundaries, because it will stimulate increases in population density. Terborgh is also skeptical of the reliance on bottom-up approaches and voluntary mechanisms for conservation, and he argues that “active protection of parks requires a top-down approach because enforcement is invariably in the hands of police and other armed

forces that respond only to orders from their commanders” (ibid:170). In sum, ICDPs represent for Terborgh “little more than wishful thinking (ibid:165).

It is also recognized by favorable observers that integrating conservation and development needs is a very challenging task. ICDPs are for instance, according to Adams, “highly complex and demand high level of skills on the part of project staff. They also demand substantial funds and a realistic (that is, slow) timescale. Their chances of success depend on local perceptions of the project” (2009:290). Terborgh (2004:166) depends partly on the issue of time in his critique of ICDPs; parks are intended to be permanent institutions, while *projects* like ICDPs are almost by definition time-bound. These concerns are undoubtedly relevant for this study of conservation practices in Nepal, but the last concern raised by Terborgh is less applicable to KCA, precisely because of the institutional set-up and reliance on local management. As I shall later discuss in more detail, KCA management has changed from being dependent on the externally managed (and time-bound) Kangchenjunga Conservation Area *Project* (KCAP) to a community managed conservation area, but that its financial sustainability can be questioned.

In a critique of amongst others Oates’ and Terborgh’s works cited above, Wilshusen et al. (2002) comment that although many ICDPs are not working perfectly (for instance efforts in species protection are found to be lacking), that is not an argument in itself to thoroughly abandon the approach and resurge to top-down, protectionist approaches to nature conservation. In fact, they find that “the authors’ conclusions calling for strictly enforced protection are operationally unrealistic and morally questionable” (ibid:18). For example, the resurgence to the use of armed forces put forward by Terborgh (2004) is questionable, considering the history of military abuse of power in many tropical countries (Wilshusen et al. 2002), as well as in Nepal during the civil war (Thapa 2011). Neumann (2001) and Ferguson (2006) provide disturbing

examples of militarized protected area management in Tanzania and the Central African Republic, respectively. As I shall show in Chapter 6, the perceived prospect of army deployment in KCA was one reason why many inhabitants in what was to become the conservation area were initially so skeptical.

Guha (1997:14) laments the hostility of conservation biologists, park managers and conservation organizations towards “farmers, herders, swiddeners and hunters who have lived in the “wild” from well before it became a “park” or “sanctuary”. In his comment to Locke and Dearden’s article, Martino (2005:195) writes that instead of fearing that category VI (and V) PA’s will exclude conservation biologists, they should be viewed as “an invitation for them to participate in the world outside ‘pristine’ land”. Wilshusen et al. (2002:35) sum up their critique with a rhetorical question asking whether rural people should be treated as potential allies or enemies, and conclude:

In the end, we have to broad choices. We can promote a policy shift toward authoritarian protectionism that would most likely alienate key allies at local, regional and national levels and thus precipitate resistance and conflict. Alternatively, we can build on past experience and constructively negotiate ecologically sound, politically feasible, and socially just programs in specific contexts that can be legitimately enforced based on strong agreements with all affected parties (ibid:35-6).

In the next chapter, I give a brief recount of the history of conservation in Nepal, a country that has tried to move from the former to the latter choice in the citation above. As we shall see, Kangchenjunga Conservation Area is one outcome of this shift.

3. Conservation in Nepal

In this chapter, I outline the development of nature conservation in Nepal, describing how the international change in conservation practices has been reflected in Nepali policy changes, while also paying heed to the specific Nepali political and historical context. The purpose of this exercise is to provide a thorough background for the study and understanding of the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area and the decentralized management structure practiced there. Towards the end of the chapter, I present the study site itself, the history of its formation and current management system, as well as the results of a KCA-specific literature review.

3.1 Nepali Conservation: A Brief History

Similar to European imperial⁵ conservation efforts in Africa and India (Wilshusen et al. 2002), nature conservation in Nepal was initially projects of the Nepali Royal family to protect their hunting grounds from human encroachment (Thapa 2009:98). Formal nature conservation in Nepal started in 1973, when the government enacted the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act (NPWCA) (Budhathoki 2011:3), although conservation initiatives by King Mahendra had been implemented in earlier years as well, for instance the establishment of a rhino sanctuary in 1964 in present-day Chitwan National Park (Heinen and Shrestha 2006:44). The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) was also established in 1973, with the power to declare national parks and wildlife reserves (Baral et al. 2007:2905), as was the Chitwan National Park (DNPWC 2014a).

⁵ Nepal has never been colonized, but the country's present day boundaries were settled when Nepal lost a war with British India in 1814-16. Several concessions were later made to please the British, among them inviting the British Royal family on tiger and rhino hunting trips in the Terai (Mahat 2010:3).

The initial approach to nature conservation and protected area management falls within the category of “protectionist” conservation, and the establishment of protected areas in these early years often led to evictions of local people, subsequent loss of livelihood opportunities and thus conflict (Baral et al. 2007, Phuntsho and Chettri 2008, Budhathoki 2011:3, Paudel et al. 2012). Heinen and Shrestha (2006:45-6) label the early years of the NPWCA as the “fences and fines” period of nature conservation in Nepal, as it gave the park wardens extensive police and judicial powers, usurped local control and removed many customary rights in establishing protected areas. According to one commentator, the establishment of Chitwan National Park led to the eviction of 22 000 people (Thapa 2009:99)⁶. Another feature of early conservation policies in Nepal was the lack of involvement of local communities or NGOs in management and conservation work: “Three decades ago, the involvement of NGOs/CBOs in conservation was not in existence and largely unthinkable” (Budhathoki 2011:4).

The Royal family’s tight grip on conservation policy was challenged following the democratic revolution in Nepal in 1990, the first “People’s Movement”. The hitherto unchallenged authority of state officials saw competition from Western conservation ideology, international aid workers, NGOs, and the interests of politicians, according to Bhatt (2003:247). Analyzing the development of conservation policies in Nepal, Budhathoki claims that the subsequent move towards more inclusive conservation management practices in the country was influenced both by national development priorities and international conservation discourses (2011:4). One explanation for the shift from coercive to inclusive conservation in Nepal is simply that the former was seen by the Royal Nepali government as unsuccessful (Agrawal and Ribot

⁶ John Terborgh, a proponent of protectionist approaches to conservation discussed in Chapter 2, puts Chitwan National Park forward as an example to follow, as “one of the brightest success stories in Asian conservation” (Terborgh 2004:88). Specifically, he applauds the deployment of 800 soldiers of the Nepali army to guard the Park’s rhinoceros from poachers and the rigorous enforcement of park regulations against firewood gathering and cattle grazing.

1999:483). Moreover, the shift in protected area management and promotion of participatory conservation policies in Nepal coincide to a large extent with the democratic and decentralization movements in the country that came with the multiparty parliamentary system introduced after the 1990 revolution and the fall of the totalitarian rule of the king (Gurung 2006:40, Budhathoki 2011:4). These political changes have allowed for a rapid increase in civil society activities (Ojha and Timsina 2008:63).

Table 1: Important events in Nepal’s conservation and political history

Year	Event
1964	Establishment of a rhino sanctuary in present-day Chitwan National Park
1973	Passing of the NPWCA, establishment of DNPWC and Chitwan National Park
1989	Third amendment of NPWCA, incorporating conservation areas in national legislation
1990	1 st “People’s Movement” leading to dissolution of the Panchayat political system and legalizing of political parties
1992	Establishment of Annapurna Conservation Area, managed by King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC), now the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC)
1993	Fourth amendment of NPWCA, incorporating buffer zones in national legislation
1997	Establishment of KCA, managed as a WWF Nepal project
2002	Dissolution of local elected bodies in Nepal
2006	Handover of management responsibilities to the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Management Council. The ceremony on 22 September was overshadowed by a deadly helicopter accident in which 23 participants in the ceremony were killed
2006	2 nd “People’s Movement”; Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed between Maoist insurgents and the Seven-Party Alliance
2008	Constituent Assembly elections held, Maoists enter government, monarchy abolished

Sources: HMGN 1973; Gurung 2006, Heinen and Shrestha 2006, Whelpton 2005, Dhungel et al. 2011, von Einsiedel et al. 2012.

However, a gradual acknowledgment of the unfeasibility and unjustifiability of the initial approach to protected area management was evident already before the revolution, and in 1986, the pilot project of what today is Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) was created in Ghandruk (Baral et. al 2007:2905). The pilot project was initiated to test a new concept of protected area management, namely conservation with economic development, local management and popular participation. In 1992, ACA was legally recognized as a protected area after an amendment of the NPWCA (Baral et. al 2007:2905). ACA is today considered a model for conservation and development both nationally in Nepal⁷, and internationally⁸ (Gurung 2006:40, Locher and Müller-Böker 2007:1114, Khatri 2010:35-36).

Interestingly, ACA was gazetted as a conservation area in the very same year as IUCN's Category VI protected area was established in the organization's PA regime, in 1992. ACA was the first conservation area to be established in Nepal, but conservation areas were vested in national legislation already in 1989, with the third amendment of the NPWCA. The four amendments of NPWCA show an effort on behalf of the Nepali government to adapt the management of protected areas in Nepal to changes both of international conservation policy and domestic developments, with increasing concessions towards resource extraction for local communities and a diversified system of PAs, such as opening for buffer zones and conservation areas (Paudel et al. 2011). One important paragraph in the Act has however remained unchanged since 1973, namely the unilateral power of the Government, through the DNPWC, to declare new protected areas in the country or dissolve established ones, with no legal provisions of consultations, let alone free, prior and

⁷ Through establishment of for instance Kangchenjunga and Manaslu Conservation Areas

⁸ The significance accorded internationally to Nepal's innovative approaches to conservation is witnessed by the prevalence of Nepali historical events on the "History" section on WWF US' webpage; here, both the establishment of ACA (mistakenly denoted as a national park) and the KCA are mentioned as key events in the 1980s and 1990s, respectively (WWF US 2014)

informed consent (HMGN 1973:§3 (1) and (2)). According to the Country Representative of IUCN Nepal, this signals that the government only welcomes changes that suit the government (Malla: interview 30.03.2012).

The third amendment defines a conservation area as “an area to be managed according to an integrated plan for the conservation of natural environment and balanced utilization of natural resources” (HMGN 1973:§2e1).

Comparatively, the 1994 IUCN guidelines on Protected Area Categories defines the Category VI PA thus:

Area containing predominantly unmodified natural systems, managed to ensure long term protection and maintenance of biological diversity, while providing at the same time a sustainable flow of natural products and services to meet community needs (IUCN 1994:23).

The primary objective of Category VI PAs, according the new IUCN guidelines, is “To protect natural ecosystems and use natural resources sustainably, when conservation and sustainable use can be mutually beneficial” (Dudley 2008:22)⁹. The category was established as a means of linking conservation and development (Locke and Dearden 2005). KCA and other conservation areas of Nepal are recognized as category VI PAs (DNPWC 2014b). Today, there are six CAs in Nepal, covering a total of 15 425.95 km², making this category the geographically most prevalent in the Nepali PA system (DNPWC 2012). In total, PAs cover 23.23% of the total land area of Nepal (ibid.). Please refer to **Map 1** for a graphic overview. Nepal is today regarded a leader among developing countries in the field of conservation and natural resource management, especially due to the country’s progressive programs and legislation related to these issues (Ribot et al. 2006:1871).

⁹ For a summary of protected area categories, see “IUCN Protected Area Categories System” (IUCN 2014) and Dudley (2008).

Nepal's shift in its conservation management towards more people-inclusive policies happened parallel to an important change in the country's forestry sector. This change can be summarized as a shift from privatization to nationalization, and then to decentralization and local community management (Khatri-Chhetri 2008:263). Most forested areas of Nepal became nationalized with the enactment of the 1957 Forest Nationalization Act (Harper and Tarnowski 2008:36). But the nationalization of Nepal's forests proved a failure, because it undermined already existing local management systems and in fact led to increased deforestation as people began to view the forests as state property (Ribot et al. 2006:1871) and lost their sense of ownership and responsibility for the forests (Malla: interview 30.04.2012). It also lacked effective monitoring and enforcement systems (Agrawal and Ostrom 2001:499) and the Forestry Department's enforcement was susceptible to corruption and inefficiency (Whelpton 2005:144). Deteriorating forest conditions and livelihoods of the poor rural population was the result, as the local people did not support the nationalization reform (Khatri-Chhetri 2008:263).

The subsequent move towards community forestry, which started in the late 1970s, was according to Harper and Tarnowski prompted by international influences from for instance the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2008:37), and these scholars also claim that the 1990s "witnessed an unprecedented increase" in donor agency influence over forest policy in the country (ibid:41). The Forest Act (HMGN 1993) and the Forest Rules (HMGN 1995) opened up for local communities to claim parts of government forest and manage them under the community forestry program (Baral and Stern 2011). Ribot et al. (2006:1871) write that international donor NGOs and their available funds were crucial also for the latter decentralizing efforts. But international influence on Nepali conservation policy started already before the enactment of the NPWCA. The Act was the outcome of a project led by

UNDP and FAO, and FAO was requested by the Government of Nepal to develop a system of protected areas in 1971 (Paudel et al. 2011:4).

In this section, I have showed how both national and international trends and influences have shaped Nepali conservation policy since the late 1960s. In the next section, I present the study area of this thesis, focusing on both human and natural features of the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area as well as the development of its management system.

3.2 Study Area: Kangchenjunga Conservation Area

Kangchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA) is located in the remote northeastern mountains of Nepal, bordering Sikkim, India, and the autonomous region of Tibet, China (see **Map 2**). The area is named after the third highest mountain in the world, Kangchenjunga, which at 8586 meters above sea level also marks the highest point of the conservation area (the lowest being approximately 1200 meters) (Locher and Müller-Böker 2007). The area predominantly consists of rocks, ice and rivers (65% of the surface) as well as different forest types (14%), shrub (10%), alpine meadows (9%) and agricultural land (only 1.6%) (Müller et al. 2008:367). The population was in 2004 recorded to be 5254 people, an increase from the 4941 recorded in 2001 (ibid:368). Sherpa/Bhote (including Tibetan refugees), Limbu and Rai are the main ethnic groups, representing 86% of the population. The remaining 14% are divided between Gurungs and Tamangs, as well as the caste groups Chettris, Brahmins and Dalits (ibid.). The people in KCA live in 35 widely scattered villages (Gurung 2006:60). The population is fairly homogenous in economic terms; most people are quite poor (Parker and Thapa 2011:895). 34% fall below the national poverty line, while another poverty measure based on subsistence requirements and farm income measures the poverty rate to be as high as 75% (Müller et al. 2008:370-1).

KCA was established in 1997, first declared a “Gift to the Earth” by the Government of Nepal on 29 April in support of WWF’s global “Living Planet Campaign”, and then designated as a Conservation Area on 21 July the same year. The initial gazetted area of 1650 km² was expanded in 1998 to today’s 2035 km² (Gurung 2006:49). KCA encompasses four Village Development Committees (VDCs), Lelep, Yamphudin, Olangchung Gola and Thapetok, all part of Taplejung district¹⁰. While the first designated area was based on ecological boundaries, it was expanded to facilitate community involvement in management, and today’s boundaries correspond with the political boundaries of the four VDCs (Müller et al. 2008:370). KCA was initially managed by the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Project (KCAP), a project officially implemented by the DNPWC, but on the ground jointly run by the DNPWC and WWF Nepal, with substantial funding from WWF US and WWF UK (Gurung 2006:79). It became operational in November 1998 (Müller-Böker and Kollmair 2000:326).

The main goal of the project was to “safeguard the biodiversity of the area, and improve the living conditions of the local residents by strengthening the capacity of local institutions responsible for making decisions, which will effect the long-term biodiversity conservation and economic development of the area” (KCAP 1999 cited in Müller-Böker and Kollmair 2000:326). Specifically, the conservation reasons for protecting the area as stated by WWF (according to Müller et al. 2008:369) are the unique environmental characteristics of the Kangchenjunga area – with high biodiversity indices, high density of glaciers, extensive forest areas of the endangered Himalayan larch, as well as presence of endangered wildlife such as snow leopards, red pandas and blue sheep. Other mammals of conservation significance are gray wolf, Himalayan black bear, Himalayan tahr and musk deer (Parker and Thapa

¹⁰ The VDC is the local governance body, while the DDC is the district-level local body. VDCs consist in turn of nine wards each (HMGN 1999).

2011:883). The conservation area also covers parts of two global ecoregions, the *Eastern Himalayan Alpine Meadows* and the *Eastern Himalayan Broadleaf and Conifer Forests* (GoN/MoFSC 2006:11) The global ecoregions is “a science-based global ranking of the Earth’s most biologically outstanding (...) habitats” developed by the WWF international network (WWF International 2014). The representation of habitat from these regions makes the wider Sacred Himalayan Landscape in which KCA is part contribute “significantly towards global conservation targets” (GoN/MoFSC 2006:11). Biodiversity conservation as a main motivation for the designation of KCA follows a global trend in PA establishment rationale (Kollmair et al. 2005:184).

The area was handed over to be managed by the local population through a complex system of local institutions headed by the KCA Management Council (KCA-MC) in September 2006, and is managed as an ICDP (Gurung 2006, Parker and Thapa 2011) and recognized as a Category VI PA (DNPWC 2014b). The management of the area is today regulated by the *Kanchanjangha Conservation Area Management Rules*, enacted by the Government of Nepal in 2008 (GoN 2008). The Category VI designation is arguably compatible with the dual goal of KCA as stated in the 2004-2009 Management Plan: “The biodiversity of the KCA is managed by local communities to ensure the ecological integrity and to bring socio-economic benefits” (Gurung 2006:187).

Although the ICDP approach to conservation management was pioneered by ACA in Nepal, the more substantial devolution of management responsibilities to the local communities of KCA added a new dimension to this approach in Nepal. KCA is today regarded as the “perhaps the most progressive arrangement of community governance of PAs in Nepal and South Asia” (Paudel et al. 2011:18). This shows evolution of the conservation paradigm in

Nepal, and a willingness to adopt new strategies to cope with a changing context (Bajracharya and Dahal 2008:1).

3.2.1 Literature Review of Kangchenjunga Conservation Area

Despite the considerable attention awarded KCA, due to the innovative approach and far-reaching decentralization management system, the area is still not widely studied, especially if one compares it to academic writing about Annapurna Conservation Area and community forestry institutions and practices in Nepal. The most extensive research publication on KCA I have found is Gurung's (2006) PhD-thesis on conservation and livelihoods in KCA. Several studies of the biodiversity properties in the area were done by WWF Nepal both before and after its establishment, and the organization has also investigated livelihood opportunities of the local population. Unfortunately, I have not had access to these resources as they have not been available online.

Apart from these studies, I have through review of the available online literature¹¹ found two recent studies by Parker and Thapa on natural resource dependency in KCA (2012) and on the links between participation and distribution of benefits in KCA (2011). I have found one study on the livelihood strategies and local perceptions on the KCA, conducted shortly after KCA establishment (Müller-Böker and Kollmair 2000), two studies on gender issues in KCA (Locher 2006, Locher and Müller-Böker 2007), and one case study on initial successes and challenges in KCA in terms of biodiversity conservation and livelihood needs published in 2008 (Müller et al. 2008). I have moreover found an evaluation on management and governance efficiency in several PAs in the wider Kangchenjunga landscape, including the KCA (Oli et al. 2013). The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development

¹¹ It should be noted that several different spellings of Kangchenjunga is used in the literature, and I have hence used different wordings in my searches. WWF and the Management Council have used the Kangchenjunga spelling since 1999, as I do in this thesis. This spelling is in line with the Sherpa/Bhote word for mountain; *kung* (Gurung 2006:49).

(ICIMOD) published an edited volume on biodiversity conservation in the Kangchenjunga landscape in 2008 (Chettri et al. 2008), but this volume has limited KCA-specific emphasis. Overall, the literature review I have conducted showed that further research into the innovative management of KCA is of great value. In the next chapter, I outline the methodological approach, before I in Chapter 5 discuss several theoretical contributions I apply in the analysis.

4. Methodology, Research Ethics and Fieldwork

In this chapter, I describe the methodology used in the thesis, and reflect upon the potential ethical implications and dilemmas related to the type of research I have conducted. I moreover describe the fieldwork I have done, noting difficulties I met in the field and potential consequences of these on my data and its subsequent analysis. My methodology can be summarized as a single case study with semi-structured interviews conducted in a fieldwork setting as the main method.

4.1 Case Studies and Research Design

Overall, I have chosen a flexible research design for my research project leading up to this thesis. This fits well with the case study's emphasis on methodological flexibility and the importance of being open for getting data from various sources in order to get as full a picture of the case as possible (Yin 2009). It is also in line with Kvale and Brinkmann's views on how to conduct interview studies, viewing research interviewing more as a craft than a mechanistically applied method (2009:82-88), and as a less standardized procedure than survey studies (ibid:100). At the outset, it is also worth noting that field-based case study research is a common approach amongst political ecologists interested in the politics of biodiversity conservation (Adams and Hutton 2007:149).

Yin (2009) argues that a dual or multi-case study if possible almost always is preferable to a single-case study. A comparative study of two or more PAs in Nepal could provide insights into differences and similarities between various management regimes and their consequences for local participation, conservation and development. However, given the short time-frame and the

lack of financial resources typical for research to master theses, I chose to limit the scope of the project to a single case study. Moreover, this enabled me to spend more time and effort on the single case I chose, and provided me in-depth understanding of the case.

This does not hinder me in drawing on research done for instance in Annapurna Conservation Area in my analysis of my own case. As Gerring writes, to do a case study implies that the researcher at least has to think about a broader set of cases; “Otherwise, it is impossible for an author to answer the defining question of all case study research: what is this a case *of*?” (2007:13). As Chapter 1 of this thesis outlines, the study is about local participation in and decentralization of a specific Integrated Conservation and Development Project (ICDP). It is a case study of the KCA and its management framework. Although the findings have limited generalizable value to other ICDPs or to decentralized protected area management regimes, my research provides insights that can be used to enlighten the academic debate concerning the field of decentralization and participation in PA management, as well as the broader debate about sustainable development.

Yin writes that case studies can be used for instance to understand complex social phenomena and to increase our knowledge about political, group and organizational phenomena (2009:4). Yin notes further that “case studies are the preferred method when (a) “how” and “why” questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over the events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context” (2009:2). Thus, the choice of method can be determined by three conditions: The type of research questions posed, the degree of control over actual behavioral events, and the degree of focus on contemporary versus historical events (ibid:8). My research questions consist of “how” questions; I am interested in how a decentralized ICDP with extensive emphasis on local participation work, and how

conservation and development is balanced within such a framework. I have no control of the events whatsoever¹², and I focus on contemporary events¹³.

Moreover, case studies can also be used to develop theory (George and Bennet 2005) and disprove deterministic hypotheses (Poteete et al. 2010:33). The field of natural resource management is one that historically has been shaped by many such theories, perhaps most notably the idea of the “Tragedy of the Commons” (e.g. Hardin 1968). Case studies of common pool resource (CPR) management have helped reshape how social scientists think about these issues (Ostrom 1990, Poteete et al. 2010), and I believe case study research can be useful to address problems and assumptions related to decentralization of protected area management as well. Specifically, my research combines several theoretical contributions and investigates the links between participation and decentralization, through the focus on devolution of powers important for both decentralization and participation to have value.

Finally, a case study can be conducted for its own sake, for the intrinsic value of the particular knowledge produced from the case, “in all its particularity and ordinariness” (Stake 1994:237). The KCA is indeed a unique case, as it is the most decentralized conservation area project in Nepal, and according to Gurung innovative because it is the first project of such size and importance where management has been entrusted fully to a community-based organization (2006:80). In fact, it is precisely the specific and unique characteristics of KCA that makes it a worthwhile subject for a single-case study that simultaneously inhibits generalization of the findings to other ICDPs in Nepal or elsewhere (as opposed to representative or typical cases, to

¹² My study is thus as far from a laboratory experiment that can be – to quote Clifford Geertz as he denounces the notion of a “natural laboratory” in ethnographic research: “what kind of laboratory is it when *none* of the parameters are manipulable?” (Geertz 2000 [1973]:22).

¹³ Although I touch upon the establishment phase of the conservation area, and although the longer history of conservation in Nepal will be taken into account in the analysis, my main period of interest is from 2006 until present

use Yin's (2009:48) parlance, which would be more prone to generalization). In sum, my research project with KCA as the subject and with the research questions outlined in Chapter 1 as the foci of inquiry is well suited for a research design centered on a case study.

4.1.1 Defining Case Study Research

A plethora of definitions of case studies and case study research exists in the literature, corresponding to the many uses it can have. Gerring (2007) and Yin (2009) lists many. I focus here on those that seem relevant for my own research; that its method is qualitative (small-N); that the research is holistic and thick; that it utilizes specific types of evidence (e.g. ethnographic, participant-observation, non-survey-based, field research); that the research investigates properties of a single phenomenon (Gerring 2007:17); that evidence is gathered in a "real-life context"; that it employs triangulation; and that it is difficult to distinguish between the case and the context (Yin 2009:18).

All these definitions can be applied to my case study. I have not conducted a cross-case study in the sense of analyzing and synthesizing data and findings from a large number of case studies conducted by others, as described for example in Potetee et al. (2010). Moreover, my within-case data is also small-N (I conducted 14 open-ended interviews inside KCA). I aim to provide readers with a holistic description of KCA and the participation of local inhabitants in the management of KCA, although my description and analysis of the case will be framed by the theoretical and subject choices I have made in narrowing down the case. I use different sources of evidence similar to the list Gerring (2007) makes, and I thus strengthen my arguments and the validity of my findings. For example, my analysis of the interviews is enhanced by a close reading of the Kangchanjangha Conservation Area Management Rules (GoN 2008), which to a large extent conditions the management and

institutional behavior in KCA. I collected evidence in a “real-life” context – in people’s homes, shops, and fields. It was even difficult to do the actual interviews without the real-life toils and joys affecting the collection of raw data (more on this in the sub-chapter on fieldwork experiences). And finally, it was difficult to separate the case from the context.

The last point above is a central feature of case studies distinguishing them from e.g. an experiment or a statistical analysis (Yin 2009:18). However, limiting the case to a certain extent is absolutely necessary, or one would end up with much more data than one can handle. One must thus try to distinguish data about the subject of the case study (the phenomenon one wants to investigate) from data external to the case (the “context”) (Yin 2009:32). I am setting a time frame for my case. I focused my interviews on people directly involved in the management of KCA. Before I entered the field, I tried to pin down which aspects of KCA I was to focus on in the interviews, and my priorities (participation, decentralized management and decision making, and balancing conservation and development) are reflected in the interview guide (please refer to Appendix III) as well as in the actual interview transcriptions. More important still, in narrowing the scope of the case study and the amount of primary and secondary data to collect, are the theoretical choices I make when choosing points of focus for my research (Yin 2009:18). My theoretical approach is explained in Chapter 5. Here, it suffices to note that my theoretical focus on decentralization, participation, and power also framed my focus during the fieldwork process, although my theoretical understanding of the issues at hand has been greatly enhanced since I conducted the fieldwork nearly two years ago.

The separation of case and context is also a matter of definitions; what is the *context* of the KCA if not the conservation area itself – with its people, landscapes, and wildlife? But these units of analysis also constitute my case.

Some of the choices I have made are consequences of my academic background and training: I have not focused on the wildlife and natural properties of the area itself (as I am no biologist). The wildlife and the conditions for the thriving of wildlife in KCA are thus part of the context in which my case study is situated. However, the natural surroundings profoundly affect the lives and opportunities of the people living in the area, and thus in turn my findings related to attitudes towards the conservation of biodiversity, human-wildlife conflicts, and the balancing of conservation and development interests. I am also not trained in agrarian studies, so livelihood options and consequences of these on land use and natural resource management are part of the context within which my case takes place, rather than part of the case to be studied itself. Thus, in addition to the theoretical choices I make, my academic disciplinary background (interdisciplinary development and environmental studies) inevitably frames my perspective when I study the case, and helps draw the line between case and context.

4.1.2 Challenges of Case Study Research

According to Yin (2009:2), a major challenge for case study researchers is that the researcher has more interesting variables than data points. This “weak empirical leverage” is a common critique of case studies from methodologists preferring other methods as well (Gerring 2007:6). According to Yin (2009:15): “the case study...does not represent a “sample”, and in doing a case study, your goal will be to expand and generalize theories (analytical generalization) and not enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)”. The aim of analytical generalization is to strengthen or weaken theoretical assumptions (in my case for instance links between the management framework and balancing of development and conservation concerns) through the application of case study findings, according to Yin (2009:39). George and Bennett (2005:17) point to the same feature of case studies when they reject

the “degrees of freedom problem” raised by a number of quantitatively inclined scholars having suggested that the main difference between case studies and statistical methods is the number of cases studied. They claim that a major advantage of case studies is the potential to derive new hypotheses, by not having to stick to a certain number of quantifiable variables (ibid:20-1).

A response to the challenge of lack of data points can be to use triangulation to investigate the question at hand from different angles with different sources of evidence. Triangulation makes case study research hard, not soft, according to Yin (2009). My main method¹⁴ and the focus of my data collection efforts have been interviews, but I also use documents such as conservation laws, management rules and international guidelines and recommendations on nature conservation to complement and challenge findings from my interviews. Before I went to the field, I was also hoping to do non-participant observation of meetings in the Management Council of KCA, but this turned out to be unfeasible, as there were no council meetings during my fieldwork period. It would moreover have been a difficult task due to language issues. In addition to “formal” interviews, I have also talked with many inhabitants in the villages I have visited. Field notes based on these conversations and other observations in the field are also part of my data material. Although I see triangulation as something one should aspire to achieve, it is very demanding to conduct a study by using a wide range of different data collection methods. My focus has been on cross-checking facts, anecdotes and statements about practices as much as possible, but I did not aspire to spend equal time and effort on three different methods throughout the study.

¹⁴ Yin (2009:11) categorizes case study as a method, and interviews and direct observations as “sources of evidence”. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) categorize interviews as part method, part craft, depending on the type. I prefer “method” over Yin’s “sources of evidence”, and will henceforth write about interviews and document analysis as methods within the larger framework of the case study. The latter denotes in my view the research project as a whole, more than a specific research method. This is also in line with Stake’s view that the “Case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied” (1994:236).

A final criticism directed at case studies is the assumption that it implies little attention to data collection, management and analysis (Gerring 2007:6). I meet this criticism by ensuring a thorough methodological consciousness and by describing carefully my data collection and analytical approaches throughout my thesis, thus enhancing the transparency and reproducibility of the study.

4.2 Interviews

The main research method I have employed to collect data is semi-structured interviews. The key focus areas of the interviews are reflected in the interview guide presented in Appendix III. I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews as this research method enables a structured conversation that nevertheless opens for improvisation and allows the interviewee to shed light on topics that are important to them. Thus, each interview is shaped by the interests, personality and organizational affiliation of the interviewee, as well as by my foci of interests; data is to a large extent produced in the interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:54).

I used both snowball and purposive sampling to find interesting interviewees (Robson 2011:275-6). The purposive approach was used because I was predominantly interested in interviewing people involved in the management of KCA, and snowball sampling was necessary in order to physically locate potential interviewees in the area, especially in my search for KCA-MC members. Although convenient and in my case necessary, these sampling techniques are also potential sources of bias. Snowball sampling can for instance lead to bias if one is guided from one like-minded interviewee to another and so on. The purposive sampling of interviewees involved in management might moreover have led to a biased sample of overly positively (to conservation) inclined interviewees, for at least two potential reasons: those involved in management could *initially* be more in favor of the

establishment of KCA than those who have chosen not to participate; and those involved in management might *have become* more positive towards the project, regardless of their initial attitudes, for a variety of reasons such as more benefits received from the project (Parker and Thapa 2011) or exposure to management staff and conservation training. Thus, with regard to attitudes to the conservation area, it is likely that my sample of interviewees purely from those participating in management is not generalizable to the larger population. It should also be noted that the relatively powerful positions (as local conservation leaders) of those participating as interviewees in this study might affect the versions of reality they choose to present, so that representing such views in general terms as “local knowledge” might replicate dominant discourses (Gaventa and Cornwall 2006:126).

Moreover, how representative a purposive sample depends to a large degree on the subjective judgments of the researcher (Overton and van Diermen 2003:43). This is important to keep in mind when drawing conclusions and analyzing my findings, especially since analysis also might suffer from the researcher’s cognitive biases, for instance in favor of one’s causal analysis or initial theories (George and Bennet 2005:111), or the temptation to analyze events so that they favor a theory one wishes to “fit” the case with (Moses and Knutsen 2007:133). A final source of bias in this regard is the interaction between the interviewees and me – as an outsider, I could for instance be projected as someone involved in program planning, or at least as someone to whom it was important to portray KCA management in a positive light. I tried to counter such research-situation bias by underscoring my role as an independent master-student from Norway, with no leverage over donor support at all, in order to encourage straight, honest answers as best as I could.

Evidently, one should strive to avoid bias and minimize errors when doing case studies (as in all other research), (Yin 2009:45). The reflections above are

an important first step. Moreover, I challenge or corroborate statements made by interviewees with information in the Management Rules (GoN 2008). Both corresponding and diverging evidence can provide useful insights enhancing the understanding of various aspects of the management of KCA.

I interviewed 14 “non-professional” informants inside KCA (although one of them was the accountant of KCAP and KCA-MC), and I interviewed one female informant twice¹⁵. The gender, geographical location and management roles of these interviewees are summarized in Appendix II. I also conducted five interviews with a total of six “professional” informants, i.e. with informants working full-time with conservation and/or development issues. These interviews are summarized in Appendix I.

The separation between professional and non-professional interviews in this case is not straightforward, and it is perhaps unfair to designate my informants in KCA as non-professional. All my informants were involved in the management of KCA in some way at some level or other, many had been so for many years, and many had also received conservation training either in KCA or elsewhere in Nepal. Seven of the informants were members of the Management Council at the time of research, although many of them saw their terms about to expire. The separation is however useful, as I will use the interviews conducted outside KCA primarily as background information, and treat those performed within KCA as the basis for my analysis. Moreover, the separation makes sense as all but one of my KCA informants were involved in KCA management on a voluntary basis, while all my informants from outside the area worked professionally with conservation and development in KCA or Nepal. Two of my professional informants also figure on my list of references

¹⁵ I interviewed her both early and late in the research process, as I realized she was a key informant whom it would be useful to interview again after I had obtained a more comprehensive understanding of the management of KCA.

(Ghana Gurung and Nakul Chettri, from WWF Nepal and ICIMOD, respectively).

A further difference between the professional and non-professional informants is that I expose the identities of my professional informants (I obtained their permission to do so). In fact, none of my KCA informants insisted on anonymity and were willing to be cited with names, but I have nevertheless chosen not to list their names in the tables or in any appendices. People knowing the area well might however be able to identify many of my informants, as for instance the membership in KCA-MC is quite narrow. Since my informants did not stress anonymity, I have not taken pains to disguise their identities. This has eased the presentation of data and most likely enhanced my analysis as well, since the geographical particularities of each village I visited have consequences for livelihood options and conservation challenges, and consequently for how the inhabitants have responded to my inquiries. It would have hampered my analysis if I, in order to further disguise informants' identities, had had to omit coupling informant statements with their geographical origin. An option could have been to create artificial names for the villages I visited, but again due to the size and light population density of the study area, it would have been transparent for knowledgeable readers.

It should be noted that all professional interviews were audio-recorded, and subsequently transcribed by myself. I also recorded and transcribed most of the interviews conducted inside KCA, except the first five interviews done in Lelep. I thought it should be possible to do these interviews without a recorder (since everything was being interpreted, the "pace" of these interviews was no doubt slower than those conducted in English without interpretation), and I was also concerned about how the presence of a recorder would influence my interviewees. I soon learned that I was in danger of losing parts of the answers without recording them, and also that most interviewees would not be put off

by having a recorder on the table, so I chose to conduct the rest of the KCA interviews “on the record”.

About 92 different languages are officially recognized in Nepal (Yadava 2007). Most members of the several ethnic groups residing in KCA also speak the official language Nepali, as did my guide-come-interpreter, but in KCA, it is usually their second language, the first being for instance Gurung, Limbu, Rai, Sherpa, Tamang or Tibetan (Gurung 2006:61). I, however, speak no Nepali languages, and this was of course a huge hindrance in the field. It made participant observation virtually impossible, and it was a huge challenge in the conducting of in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews as well. One motivation for doing in-depth interviews is to obtain so-called “thick descriptions”¹⁶ of the events or relationships one is studying (Brockington and Sullivan 2003:72). To do this through an inexperienced interpreter is however highly challenging. I quickly understood that much of what could have constituted thick descriptions, such as undertone, body language and other features of the context around the answers, as well as parts of the actual answers themselves, got lost in translation. It was also a challenge in the beginning to get acquainted with the different terms used in Nepali for central features of the management structure of KCA, such as User Groups and Mothers Groups. But the depth and coherence of the interpreted answers improved as both I and my interpreter got more experienced.

A last issue related to language and interpretation is the role of the interpreter himself, and whether this can be a source of bias. I got in contact with my interpreter through a fellow acquaintance in Kathmandu. He is a resident of Kathmandu, of Newari origin, and with no prior interest in the geographical

¹⁶ “Thick description” as used by Geertz in his influential essay *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture* (in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (2000 [1973])), is a way of doing ethnographic research by paying extensive attention to the social or cultural context of the phenomenon one is studying, and not only the raw observable behavior.

area of study. The only obvious link between him and the focus of study is his past experience as an employee at one of the big tourist lodges in Chitwan National Park. I did not experience him interfering in the interview process itself, and I have no impression of him shaping the answers of my interviewees when he interpreted for me. I can of course not rule this out definitively, but there is on the other hand no reason to believe that the interpreter was a source of bias.

4.2.1 Theoretical analysis of qualitative data

In this thesis, I predominantly look at my data through a theoretical lens, aiming at increasing the theoretical understanding of participation, decentralization and power in conservation management through analysis of one particular case. It should be noted that the focus of my interviews when I conducted them was shaped by my initial interest in the practical arrangement of management of KCA after the handover to local communities in 2006. Therefore, many of my interview questions centered on practicalities such as how the management plan was put together, how often the meetings were held, and what was discussed. This came on top of questions related to how decisions are made, the role of external actors, balancing of development and conservation and so on. In my analysis I focus more on critical aspects of participation such as local people's partaking in decision-making processes and the external conditions for the extent of decentralization. I do this while acknowledging the problems related to theoretical analysis of interviews when my theoretical understanding has developed since the interview phase of my research (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:239). I conducted the interviews in the spring of 2012, while the thesis predominantly has been written during the spring of 2014¹⁷. Naturally, my theoretical understanding and knowledge of

¹⁷ I had a one-year temporary contract in-between.

the field have expanded quite substantially as I have learnt and read more theory.

The above-mentioned concerns notwithstanding, my data collection was to some extent informed by two theoretical propositions I had before I conducted fieldwork. They are presented in sub-chapter 6.1, and part of my analysis center on these propositions. This is one of several general strategies of analyzing case study evidence put forward by Yin (2009:130). Yin also notes that the analytical stage of case studies is among the least-developed and most difficult aspects of the case study method; analysis of case study evidence has few fixed formulas that researchers can follow (ibid:127).

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) discuss several different ways of analyzing qualitative data from research interviews, such as discourse analysis, narrative analysis, linguistic analysis and deconstruction, as well as those analytic approaches focusing on meaning and interpretation of meaning. Because of the issues related to translation discussed above, I find it difficult to see text- and language-oriented analysis as appropriate in this thesis. Discourse analysis on how interviewees understand “conservation”, “development” or “participation”, or on how nature is valued by the informants, could no doubt have been interesting, but such questions were not what I had in mind when I drafted the research questions. It would have required more in-depth interviews and a more direct word-by-word translation than what I had resources to obtain. Instead, I focus on what theoretical insights can be drawn from the interviews, and how the information provided in the interviews relates to and complements other sources such as the Management Rules, as well as to research conducted by other scholars. The overall aim will thus be to compare my findings to the broader theoretical and empirical literature on participation and decentralization of natural resource and conservation management.

George and Bennet (2005:116) write about the difficulty of theory-testing based on case studies, and how it partially depends on the causal assumptions in the theories. It is easier to test theories that posit simple causal relations; such theories can be falsified by a single case that does not fit the theory. The theories that are hardest to empirically test are those “that involve the most complex types of causal relations, or what might be called “enigmatic” causality: complex interactions among numerous variables, low-probability relations between variables, and endogeneity problems or feedback effects.” I am of the opinion that it is safe to argue that the theoretical propositions on decentralization offered in the next chapter are of the latter kind; the occurrence and extent of decentralization policies and reforms can be conditioned by a wide range of actors and factors, and their consequences for conservation and natural resource management are not straight-forwardly explained by the theory. To explore this complexity is one motivation for doing this study.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an important aspect of all scientific research, especially when the research involves people (Robson 2011:194). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:70) point out four main ethical issues confronting qualitative researchers, what they call *fields of ethical uncertainty*: Informed consent, confidentiality, consequences and the role of the researcher. They argue that “moral rules, guidelines, and principles should not be applied mechanically, for there are always situational factors that determine when and how they are morally relevant”. They view research ethics pragmatically, rather than something that should be governed by strict rules or guidelines or abstract theories. If one accepts this pragmatic view of ethics in research, where ethical dilemmas should be investigated contextually, it follows that

ethical behavior in interview-based research is something one has to learn, from practice and from colleagues.

Reflections are however possible and necessary before one initiates a research project. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:68-9) provide a list of questions one can ask oneself as a researcher before heading out to conduct interviews. Their list covers their *fields of ethical uncertainty*, and they hold that instead of viewing the list of questions as a checklist to go through and settle before interviews are conducted, they are “problem areas that should continually be addressed and reflected upon throughout an interview inquiry” (ibid:69). The questions I regarded as most relevant for my research before, during and after conducting fieldwork are as follows:

1. What are the beneficial consequences of the study?

The potential beneficial consequences of my study are indeed part of the rationale for the project in the first place. Scheyvens et al. (2003:139) claim that development studies research should be informed by a moral imperative that goes beyond the minimum to ‘do no harm’: “ethical research should not only ‘do no harm’, but also have potential ‘to do good,’ to involve ‘empowerment’” (Madge 1997:114, cited in Scheyvens et al. 2003:139). I hope to through my research to contribute to the body of scientific knowledge about participatory conservation. Depending on the degree of dissemination of findings, and the findings themselves, one can hope that the study will better the management of conservation areas in Nepal and the model of Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDP), and thus both enhancing the possibilities of local socio-economic development and bio-diversity conservation, as well as the meaningful involvement of and empowerment of the local communities of KCA. But even if my research findings are published internationally and read by involved policymakers or stakeholders, such as WWF Nepal workers (which, to be fair, is unlikely for a master thesis), it is

not very likely that it will have a huge effect on Nepali conservation policy and the management of KCA.

2. How can the study contribute to enhancing the situation of the participating subjects, the group they represent, or the human condition overall?

The participating subjects enhance their situation through awareness-raising of their own condition, and their role in conservation efforts in CAs in Nepal. This knowledge might empower them to take actions they otherwise would not have taken, such as trying to join the Management Council or other important management bodies of the KCA. But again, one should be modest when assessing potential benefits of the research for those involved in it. Scheyvens et al. (2003:155) claim that the research usually benefits the researcher much more than the informants. Prior to each interview, I also tried to stress that the interviewee should not expect any benefits arising from their participation in the study¹⁸, and I did not provide any gifts or the like to interviewees. This is a contested issue in research ethics in development countries (Scheyvens et al. 2003:157).

3. How can informed consent from the participants be obtained? and 4. How much information about the study needs to be given in advance, and what can wait until the debrief after the interview?

These are fundamental ethical questions important for all research involving human subjects. Prior to each interview, my interpreter explained the context of my topic, my role as a Norwegian master's student, and why I wanted to talk to the interviewee. I also gained consent from the interviewee that he or she wished to take part in the study, and that I could use the data for my thesis

¹⁸ When interviewing inhabitants in KCA, a recurring theme was the lack of tourism influx they felt hampered the development of the area, and many stressed that they hoped that getting information about Kangchenjunga out would help promote it as a tourist destination. I had again and again to underscore that I could not help them in promoting the area as a tourist destination through my thesis, but that I at least could tell friends and family in Nepal and Norway about the beauty of their homeland.

afterwards. Usually, towards the end of the interview, the conversation drifted off into more general talk about KCA, my project and other stories from the life of the interviewee, which provided a context and opportunity to explain in more depth what my project was about post-interviewing.

5. How can the confidentiality of the interview subjects be protected? and
6. How important is the anonymity of the subjects?

I transcribed all the interviews myself, and no one but me has seen my raw data, which has been securely kept on my personal computer and remote online hard drive. As explained in the sub-chapter on interviews, anonymity was not a concern for my interviewees, but despite this, I have chosen not to reveal the identities of my non-professional informants. This is in contrast to research done in the area a few years earlier, when the Maoist insurgency was still going on. For instance, Gurung writes that mistrust among villagers and a tendency to avoid contact with outsiders was observed when he conducted research in the area in 2004 (Gurung 2006:7). As a consequence of the security situation, he had to hire research assistants to conduct the interviews with informants residing within KCA. Clearly, the security situation now is very different from how it was until the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2006, and the Maoists entered parliamentary politics with the elections to the first Constituent Assembly in 2008. I also believe that the enhanced security situation in Nepal has minimized the potential risk of physical harm for the research subjects.

7. How will the role of the researcher affect the study?

I am aware of the potential bias stemming from my initial optimistic attitude towards both ACAP and KCA (partly coming from my initial contact with WWF Nepal workers, “co-optation from above” as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:74) call it), but I believe it can be countered as long as I am aware of it

and reflect upon it, and do not let it influence my analysis. I have no formal ties neither WWF Nepal nor other relevant organizations or actors in the area.

4.4 Fieldwork

During the spring of 2012, I was in Nepal from late March to mid-July, spending most of my time in Kathmandu, preparing for fieldwork and conducting a few interviews with informants in organizations based in Kathmandu (WWF Nepal, IUCN Nepal and ICIMOD). I tried several times to depart for Kangchenjunga Conservation Area in early May, but I was hindered by *bandhs*¹⁹ locking down the capital as well as parts of the countryside as the political situation in the country grew more intense in anticipation of the May 26 deadline for the Constituent Assembly to agree on Nepal's new constitution. This postponed my departure to May 18. It was unfortunate because it pushed the departure closer to the beginning of the monsoon season, which is both a period where mountain trekking naturally is less comfortable than in the dry season, and a very busy time for farmers in Nepal²⁰.

To reach KCA from Kathmandu, there are several options, but all require a long journey. I flew from Kathmandu to Bhadrapur, a border town in southeast Nepal. I met my interpreter-guide in the nearby district center of Birtamod, from where we boarded a jeep taking us to the Taplejung district capital, Taplejung Bazaar (240 km through Illam district up to the hilly regions). We reached the Bazaar early in the morning on the 19th. I spent two days there, interviewing the WWF officer at the district headquarters, together with the

¹⁹ Bandhs are general strikes imposed by political parties or other groups, trying to stop travel and commercial activity in the area where the bandh is called for as a political protest related to one political development or other.

²⁰ Nepali author and essayist Manjushree Thapa explains in her essay "Nepal's Political Rainy Season" (Thapa 2011) why most of the country's big political events have taken place in the spring. This is because Nepal's farmers, the biggest and thus politically most important group in the country, are too busy to be engaged in rallies and other political events in the monsoon and in the "festival season" of the autumn. To avoid being a nuisance to my interviewees, I also wished to avoid the monsoon period.

warden stationed there from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation. Initially they would not let me conduct the study without a research permit²¹, but conceded to grant me permission to enter KCA on a normal trekking permit as long as I did not collect plant or animal samples.

From Taplejung Bazaar it is one day's walk to reach the border of the Conservation Area, and we had to stay overnight in the village of Sinwa before we reached Lelep on the 21st of May. Lelep is one of the biggest villages in KCA, the center of Lelep VDC, and it hosts the headquarters of the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Project and the office of KCA-MC. We stayed several days in Lelep, also visiting the villages Lawajen and Lungthung in the vicinity. We then continued north along the main trekking route to the village of Ghunsa, one of the highest permanent settlements in KCA and one of the few where tourism is an important livelihood strategy (Gurung 2006:66), before crossing a high-mountain pass to Olangchung Gola. Olangchung Gola is a Tibetan settlement close to the border with China (Autonomous Region of Tibet), and the biggest village in Olangchung Gola VDC. After several days in Olangchung Gola, we returned to Lelep, before spending a couple of days in Tapethok, the village center of Tapethok VDC at the outskirts of KCA and at lower elevations than the other villages we stayed in. Finally, we went back to Taplejung Bazaar for the return journey to Kathmandu.

The two main challenges that influenced my fieldwork and data collection to a large extent were language and the geography and demography of the study area. I discussed the issue of interpretation in the previous subchapter on

²¹ Trekking permits are requested from all tourists to enter most mountain areas in Nepal where trekking is common. I tried to obtain a research permit at the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) in Kathmandu before I left for KCA, but after several enquiries both there and in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I realized that a research permit would take about four months to acquire, and would probably not be needed as long as I went with a guide from a trekking company on a normal trekking permit. To this story I also need to add that the time I was in Nepal was a turbulent one, with many *bandhs*, which came on top of the already heavily burdened and little effective Nepali bureaucracy.

interviews. The other main challenge I encountered was the topography and demography of the study area itself. This is illustrated by the amount of time I spent walking from village to village during the 22 days of fieldwork inside KCA - my interpreter and myself walked some 60 hours in total between the different villages – sometimes spending a whole day on the trails to make a single interview. We spanned elevations between around 850 to 4900 meters above sea level. This challenge became even more profound as it could be difficult to get coherent and consistent information on where the intended interviewees actually resided at the time of my visit²², and whether or not they would be in KCA at all²³. It was also virtually impossible to schedule interviews in advance, as there was no mobile phone reception in the area at the time of my visit.

Before I made preliminary interviews with informants in the WWF headquarters in Nepal, I was of the impression that the Management Council members lived and worked at the KCA headquarters in Lelep, and I was therefore planning for and hoping to interview all MC members. This turned out to be impossible. As all positions in the Management Council and other bodies of KCA are voluntary, their members are also spread out living in their respective villages in the Conservation Area. I therefore had to change plans at short notice, and I had to be flexible and adaptive throughout the research period.

When I conducted interviews, it only rarely happened that I was alone with the interviewee and the interpreter. More often, there was a gathering of people in the room or courtyard where we spoke – partly because most people I met

²² An illustrating example of this was when I was supposed to interview an MC member who I was told lived in Lawajen, a village neighboring Lelep. When we reached Lawajen, we were told that there was no MC member currently living there, but that we could possibly meet another member in Lungtung, further up the valley. We ended up conducting an interview in Lungtung, albeit with another interviewee than intended, and returned to Lelep long after nightfall. This is a good example of convenient sampling (Overton and van Diermen 2003:43).

²³ Many of the more wealthy inhabitants of KCA now live part-time in Taplejung Bazaar or even in Kathmandu.

were curious about me and my project, and partly simply because we most often conducted interviews where many people live and work together. On several occasions, I was of the impression that this might have had an effect on the confidence of the interviewees, for instance if an authoritative person, such as the father-in-law or the village medical worker, was present. This could for example be noticeable through side-glances and hesitations during the answers. It is however hard to tell whether it actually influenced the answers, but sometimes it clearly did; when the other people in the room interfered in the interview and I had to struggle to clarify whether the answers I got through the interpreter actually originated from the interviewee, or from some of the bystanders. Sometimes it was just a nuisance that affected the flow of the interview and the quality of the audio recordings (if children or siblings were in the room, the interviewee had to breastfeed or attend to food in preparation etc.).

As a final note on my fieldwork experiences, I want to point out that the realization that council members resided all around the conservation area forced me to visit many different villages, observing a much larger part of the KCA than initially intended. This gave me a more thorough understanding of the different physical conditions people in the area have to cope with in their daily lives, and the corresponding livelihood options they choose to pursue. It also gave me the opportunity to more fully enjoy the beauty of the Conservation Area, stretching from lush, thick temperate forests at lower elevations in the deep river valleys, to high-altitude pastures and mountain landscapes around Ghunsa and Olangchung Gola. I also witnessed firsthand the cultural diversity of the area, as I met, spoke with and stayed in the homes of Tibetan Buddhists, Limbus worshipping their ancient Kirat deities, as well as Sherpas trying to carve out a living based on tourism income. The totality of this experience has, perhaps obviously, been a huge inspiration for me throughout my time working with this thesis.

5. Participation, Decentralization and Power

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework on which I base my analysis. Just as scientific forestry managers in 18th century Germany looked at forests with a tunnel vision through a narrow fiscal lens (Scott 1998:11), so has conservation scientists tended to “perceive ecosystems through the narrow window of their own professional discipline (Pimbert and Pretty 1997:299). As my academic background is multidisciplinary, I use theoretical insights from various disciplines in this thesis, thus trying to broaden my field of vision, rather than narrowing it. The usefulness of an inter-or multidisciplinary approach in the development and environmental field has been defended by many scholars, despite the inherent problems of interdisciplinary research (McNeill 1999, Lele 2011).

Because this case study is largely about participation in an integrated conservation and development program, with focus on management of natural resources, I find it useful to discuss theories on both participatory approaches to development and decentralized natural resource management. First, I look into theories on local participation in development projects (5.1), focusing on White’s (1996) four *forms* of participation and Arnstein’s (1969) *levels* of participation. I then analyze decentralization as a strategy in protected area and natural resource management (5.2), with emphasis on devolution of power, decision-making and accountability mechanisms. I also touch upon the theory of common pool resources (5.3) (Ostrom 1990), discussing whether it is a useful theory in the analysis of protected area management in contrast to general analysis of natural resource management institutions to which it is more often applied. Lastly, I present one contribution to power analysis (5.4) (Gaventa 2006), which adds the dimension of *spaces* to the more conventional dimensions of *forms* and *levels* of power. Towards the end of the chapter, I describe how I link these theoretical contributions together in later chapters.

Overall, my aim will not be to cover all aspects of the theories mentioned above, but rather extract those that are relevant to the analysis of my case.

5.1 The Politics of Participation

Participatory approaches to development became a widely adopted strategy of NGOs, donors and international organizations in the 1980s (Cooke and Kothari 2001:5). It has been promoted for different reasons, but its advocates can largely be separated into two different, but overlapping schools; those promoting participation for instrumental reasons of efficiency (due to the shortcomings of top-down approaches to development and ineffectiveness of external and expert-oriented research and planning (Cooke and Kothari 2001:5)) and cost-reduction (White 1996, Pimbert and Pretty 1997:308); and those who view participation as a fundamental right (Pretty 1995:1251, Khadka and Nepal 2010:352) or as means to involve marginalized people in decision-making concerning their own lives (Cooke and Kothari 2001:5). Robert Chambers outlines three uses of participation; as a cosmetic label; as co-opting practice to mobilize local labor and reduce costs; and as an empowering process “which enables people to do their own analysis, to take command, to gain in confidence, and to make their own decisions” (Chambers 1994:2). Involving more people in decision-making processes is moreover recognized as important in the context of scientific uncertainties in the field of environmental processes and people-environmental change (Jeanrenaud 2002:17)²⁴.

Just as I described sustainable development as a “buzzword” and a malleable concept in Chapter 2, participation can also be described in similar terms (Leal

²⁴ This becomes even more pertinent if one accepts that the production and presentation of environmental scientific knowledge also are shaped by political processes (Forsyth 2003:266), or accepts, the perhaps less radical, argument that “Environmental issues do not only become so (if at all) because of ontologically real changes in nature, but because they are constructed by social processes, successfully represented and launched” (Blaikie 1999:133).

2007, Cornwall 2008:269), or perhaps even as an “essentially contested concept”. Since participation means different things to different people and actors, the term itself should not be accepted without appropriate qualifications (Pimbert and Pretty 1997:308). It is perhaps a too broad concept to be clearly defined in a meaningful or operational manner, but several efforts have been made to create different typologies of participation, focusing on for instance *forms* (White 1996), *levels* (Arnstein 1969) or *types* (Pretty 1995). I explore the two first ones more in depth because the aspect of power is explicitly featured in these. This makes them better suited for my analysis, and they also complement the other theoretical contributions in this chapter. A slightly different version of Pretty’s (1995) typology is presented in Pimbert and Pretty (1997); I comment briefly on this towards the end of this segment.

White (1996) argues that participation must be seen as political. It can be a vehicle for empowerment and changing patterns of dominance, but it can also be used as means for entrenching or reproducing existing power relations. White describes four forms of participation, and links them to the interests of those promoting them, those participating in the projects, and the function they serve. The forms are nominal, instrumental, representative and transformative participation. White discusses the *level* less, but notes that involvement of local people in implementation of projects is not enough: “For a fully participatory project, they should also take part in management and decision-making” (White 1996:7). In the table below, White’s forms are coupled with the interests of those engaging in the various forms of participation, as well as with the function such forms play. White (1996:8) notes that these forms rarely appear in the true forms of her analytical device, and that the interests of the participants and initiating institutions can be varied, mixed and changing.

Table 2: Interests in participation

Form	Top-Down	Bottom-Up	Function
Nominal	Legitimation	Inclusion	Display
Instrumental	Efficiency	Cost	Means
Representative	Sustainability	Leverage	Voice
Transformative	Empowerment	Empowerment	Means/End

Source: White (1996)

Nominal participation is mainly used for legitimation reasons on behalf of those promoting it, and participation in such schemes might be chosen for the sake of inclusion, and perhaps to gain some material benefits associated with for instance a user group. Pimbert and Pretty (1997:308) write that participation in conservation until the 1970s was “no more than a public relations exercise”, corresponding to White’s nominal form of legitimation for display. Instrumental participation is for the sake of efficiency, for example through reducing costs for the donor or implementing organization. This type of participation is according to White (1996:8) often seen as a cost for those participating – they have to provide time and labor. Representative participation provides the participants with a *voice and leverage* in shaping the project, and is pursued from the managers for sake of sustainability: to ensure that one does not try to implement a project its beneficiaries would be uninteresting in maintaining, for instance. Transformative participation is the most profound type, aiming at empowering the participants.

A much older typology of participation can be found in Arnstein’s (1969) article about citizen participation in city planning in the United States. In the article, she sets up a typology of eight *levels* of participation, ranging from the non-participatory practices of therapy and manipulation, through token forms of participation such as consulting or informing, to various degrees of citizen power in partnerships, delegated power and ultimately citizen control.

Table 3: A Ladder of Participation

Steps on the ladder	Characteristic
Citizen control Delegated power Partnership	Degrees of citizen power
Placation Consultation Informing	Degrees of tokenism
Therapy Manipulation	Non - participation

Source: Arnstein (1969)

Arnstein argues that participation is about power and power-sharing: “participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. It allows the power-holders to claim that all sides were considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. It maintains the status quo” (Arnstein 1969:216). Arnstein writes that manipulation is used as “public relations vehicle” for those in power (ibid:218). This is similar to the function of display in White’s nominal form of participation, and to Pimbert and Pretty’s (1997) diagnosis of participation in conservation in the 1970s. Informing can according to Arnstein be an important first step on the way towards legitimate citizen participation, but it is one-way communication and not participation per se. Consultation is one step above informing on the ladder, but will still be “a sham” if not combined with other modes of participation, since there is no assurance that the input from and concerns raised by the citizens will be taken into account (ibid:219). Placation, the last step on the ladder before citizen power, can provide citizens with some influence, but it depends on the accountability relationships, according to Arnstein (1969:220). Lastly, there are three levels of citizen power, in participation characterized as partnerships, delegated power and citizen control, all differentiated by the degree to which power is redistributed.

Of these contributions, Pretty (1995) is perhaps the least political, and his article focuses specifically on participation and learning in agricultural development. His typology ranges from “manipulative participation” to “self-mobilization”. Pretty has a less explicit focus on power than the other authors: even the most far-reaching type of participation in his typology, self-mobilization, “may or may not challenge existing distributions of wealth and power” (1995:1252). This is in contrast to White’s view on participation as a political issue (White 1996:14), where her most radical form of participation, transformative participation, has empowerment of those involved as the motivation both for the institution backing the project in question and the beneficiaries (1996:9). In this regard she also notes the inherent contradiction in top-down commitment to other people’s empowerment; empowerment of the beneficiaries might challenge the power relationship between them and the donor organization, and turn projects in a direction that is against the will of the donor. She therefore claims that for such commitment to empowerment to be genuine, “the process must be transformative, not only for the ‘weaker’ partner but also for the outside agency and for the relationship between them” (ibid:13).

Arnstein (1969) is also explicit in her view of power relationships at different levels of participation: the higher up on her ladder, the more power and decision-making authority in the hands of the citizens at the expense of the traditional power-holders in society. It is perhaps worth noting that Arnstein’s power analysis can seem a bit archaic today, with its simplistic dichotomy between those who hold power and those who do not. In such a situation, one can look at power-sharing and power redistribution as a zero-sum game, where the powerless take power from the powerholders as they move up the ladder. I still find her ladder useful in its clarity, and to Arnstein’s defense, beside the fact that she is an early theorist on the matter, she admits that “neither the

have-nots nor the powerholders are homogenous blocs”, and that have-nots and powerholders are simplistic abstractions (1969:217).

Pimbert and Pretty (1997) provide a similar, but slightly different, typology to the one presented in Pretty (1995), which is explicitly used in the context of participation in conservation. Their seven-laddered typology ranges from passive participation to self-mobilization, and they hold that only beginning at the fifth type is meaningful in participatory conservation. The first four ones “can be employed, knowing they will not lead to action”, while “If the objective is to achieve sustainable conservation, then nothing less than *functional participation* will suffice” (Pimbert and Pretty 1997:308, emphasis added). In “functional participation”, people form groups “to meet predetermined objectives related to the project, which can involve the development or promotion of externally initiated social organization” (ibid:309). The next step, interactive participation, involves local people taking control over local decisions, which according to the authors means that these local actors have a stake in maintaining structures and practices (ibid.). Self-mobilization involves independent initiatives, but not necessarily challenges to existing power-distributions, similar to Pretty (1995).

In sum, participatory approaches to development and conservation can both be viewed as an instrumental strategy to increase the efficiency and legitimacy of development and environmental policies and programs “on the ground”, and as a value in and of itself and a consequence of the spread of democratic ideals. The typologies provided in this section are at least implicitly normative in that they regard “higher” levels of participation, with or without power redistribution, to be better than “lower” levels. In the analysis, I will take Pimbert and Pretty’s (1997) advice not accept claims about un-specified participation at face value, and will make use of the typologies presented above in the analysis of what participation in KCA management entails and

means in the context of decentralized management. I now turn to the next central concept in this thesis, namely decentralization in natural resource and conservation management. As we shall see, this is a field informed by many different theoretical contributions.

5.2 Decentralization of Natural Resource and Conservation Management

Decentralization has emerged as a strategy of achieving development goals and providing public services in a large number of developing countries (Agrawal and Ostrom 2001). It can also be understood as institutional reforms in response to fiscal crisis in the 1980s and collapse of socialist economies since 1989 (Ribot et al. 2006:1864). Importantly for my case, decentralization has become a significant strategy of environmental decision-making in many countries (Ribot 2002, Fauchald and Gulbrandsen 2012).

It is especially pertinent to look at decentralization when writing about development and natural resource management in Nepal, as the country is seen as an innovative leader in initiating decentralization reforms (Ribot et al. (2006:1867). Decentralization efforts in Nepal emerged as a central feature of the country's development strategy already in the 1960s (Bienen et al. 1990:63, Dhungel et al. 2011:39), and it became important in its forestry sector in the 1970s (Agrawal and Ostrom 2001:499). Decentralization in the conservation sector started in the 1980s, and continued in the 1990s with increased focus on local involvement in conservation management in Annapurna Conservation Area and the establishment of buffer zones around national parks (Heinen and Shrestha 2007, Budhathoki 2011, Parker and Thapa 2011).

Decentralization is by Agrawal and Ribot defined as “any political act in which a central government formally cedes powers to actors and institutions at

lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy” (1999:475)²⁵. They further refine the definition by distinguishing between *deconcentration* or *administrative decentralization* on the one hand and *political* or *democratic decentralization* on the other hand:

Deconcentration (...) is said to occur when powers are devolved to appointees of the central government in the local arena. In contrast, *political decentralization* (...) involves the transfer of power to actors or institutions that are accountable to the population in their jurisdiction. Typically, elections are seen as the mechanism that ensures this accountability (Agrawal and Ribot 1999:475).

Thus, deconcentration involves upwards accountability, while political decentralization involves downward accountability to local constituents. Privatization, although often carried out in the name of decentralization, cannot be regarded as decentralization, as it is based on the logic of exclusion, rather than the inclusionary logic of decentralization (Ribot 2004:9). A central theoretical proposition in favor of decentralization is that the decisions made by representative local authorities that are accountable to the local population and have discretionary powers are more effective and equitable than if the decisions were made by central authorities (Ribot 2004:1). Discretionary powers to take decisions without seeking approval from superiors are key to the responsiveness of local authorities. Lack of it is said to weaken the downward accountability (Ribot et al. 2006:1866).

Agrawal and Ostrom (2001:488) define decentralization in the context of natural resource management as “any act by which a central government cedes rights of decision making over resources to actors and institutions at lower levels in a politico-administrative and territorial hierarchy”. They moreover argue that successful decentralization in this field usually results in the

²⁵ It is worth noting, that formal transfer of power might sometimes amount to centralizing if the powers devolved were earlier wielded informally by non-state actors (Ribot 2004:134).

creation of new commons, precisely the opposite development of what Hardin asked for in his (in)famous article (Hardin 1968)²⁶. Their article analyzes different types of property rights over resource-use, focusing on withdrawal, management, exclusion and alienation as particularly important. The right to enter an area and withdraw physical resource units from it can be exercised individually if such a right is granted to the individual, but management rights to regulate use, exclusion rights over withdrawal, and alienation, e.g. the right to sell or lease the other above mentioned resource-use property rights, demand that the rights-holders operate at a collective-choice level of analysis, according to Agrawal and Ostrom (2001:489). The rules that in turn grant them the authority to take such decisions (i.e. the legislative powers around resource use) can be made by a central government or locally (ibid.). Agrawal and Ostrom provide an interesting framework for assessing the degree of decentralization, as well as for analyzing how different resource use property rights have consequences for the use and management of natural resources.

In order to properly analyze the extent of decentralization reforms of natural resource management, Agrawal and Ribot (1999:476) suggest that one has to understand the underlying dimensions of actors, powers and accountability. They distinguish between four types of decision-making powers relevant in this context: 1) the power to create new rules or modify old ones (legislative power), 2) the power to make decisions about how to use a specific resource and 3) the power to implement and ensure compliance to the new or altered rules (executive powers), and 4) the power to adjudicate disputes related to these rules and compliance with them (judiciary power) (ibid.).

²⁶ Common pool resources (CPR) theory (explained in 5.3) can be described as counter-theory to the ideas of the “tragedy of the commons”, developed among others by the biologist Hardin (1968). The central thesis in that strand of thinking was precisely the inability of individual resource-users to take decisions about resource use that aggregated would produce a sustainable outcome. This thus would lead to depletion of commons that under other institutional arrangements could have been harvested ad infinitum. To avoid such an outcome, Hardin argues in favor either of public ownership with allocated user rights or private ownership, i.e. the opposite of what Agrawal and Ostrom (2001) argue in favor of. Ribot (2002, 2004) also argues against privatization of public resources.

Ribot (2002) suggests that three elements are needed to ensure successful/effective decentralization reforms. As mentioned above, downward accountability mechanisms must be in place. Secondly, the powers devolved must be discreet powers; i.e., the actors wielding such powers must be allowed to take decisions without asking superiors for approval at every turn. A final condition for successful decentralization reforms is secure rights, as opposed to insecure privileges. The decision making powers of local decision makers must be viewed by them and the local population they represent as secure rights that cannot be taken away by central authorities with a whim (and they must be treated as such by those central authorities). If not, the local population and decision-making authorities will not invest in the responsible exercise of power (Ribot 2002:6).

Interestingly, decentralization is often justified using similar arguments as those employed to argue for participation in development projects, and can also be organized in instrumental and intrinsic arguments. Just as “participation” can be heralded for public relations purposes and display (Arnstein 1969, Chambers 1994, White 1996, Pimbert and Pretty 1997), are acts of decentralization sometimes performed by governments to appease donors, NGOs or domestic constituencies (Agrawal and Ribot 1999:474). But political decentralization by definition involves transfer of power, and there is thus often an explicit aspiration of democratization in arguments in favor of it: “At its most basic, decentralization aims to achieve one of the central aspirations of just political governance: democratization, or the desire that humans should have a say in their own affairs” (Agrawal and Ostrom 2001:487). Ribot (2002:4) boldly states that effective democratic/political decentralization “is local democracy”. Decentralization can moreover be viewed “as a strategy of governance, prompted by external or domestic pressures to facilitate transfers of power closer to those who are most affected by the exercise of power” (Agrawal and Ostrom 2001:487). In the field of

conservation, the spread of democratic political structures made centralist, unrepresentative conservation projects seem unattractive as well as impractical (Agrawal and Gibson 1999:632).

There are several instrumental arguments in favor of decentralization as well, and they are more often put forward by decentralizing policy makers (Agrawal and Gupta 2005). The rationale for decentralization can be based on critiques of centralized, top-down management (Khatri-Chhetri 2008, Dahal et al. 2014). Donors and governments often justify decentralization reforms as a means to increase efficiency and equity of development activities, as well as by the intrinsic arguments of promoting democracy and local participation (Ribot 2002:4). It is argued that moving decision-making authority to local actors improves efficiency, since such actors have better time- and space-specific information that in turn leads to better-targeted policies and lower transaction costs (Ribot et al. 2006:1866). It is also believed that moving decision-making closer to citizens might improve accountability and thus efficiency (ibid.). Moreover, in the field of conservation and protected area management, it has proven very difficult to coerce people into unpopular conservation programs, especially if these people depend on access to fodder, fuel wood, fish and wildlife for their livelihoods (Agrawal and Gibson 1999:632). Protests against centralized regulations can force authorities to reconsider such regulation and concede powers to local communities, as happened in Kumaon in northern India in the 1920s (Agrawal 2005:85). Agrawal and Ribot (1999:483) understand legislative reforms of natural resource management in Nepali protected areas to come from the realization of the failure of coercive exclusionary conservation.

Participation of stakeholders and inclusion of local communities in conservation or natural resource management can be a way of enhancing compliance and thus reducing costs related to enforcement of rules (Paudel et

al. 2011:17). In Nepal, the move towards increasing involvement of local people in forestry management came as the government realized that forests could not be managed without cooperation of the local communities (Khatri-Chhetri 2008:264). Khatri-Chhetri (ibid.) moreover writes that there are parallel 'pushes' from governments and donors who wish to reduce costs in service delivery and 'pulls' from local communities who wish for increased control over local resources, both forces working in favor of increased decentralization. Baral and Heinen (2007) hold that efficiency, equity, effectiveness and sustainability of programs, donor influence and demands from local communities are all factors that partly explain why states choose to devolve managerial responsibilities to local communities, but that recent research on the matter is not conclusive.

In Nepal, it has been claimed that justification for decentralization was to increase local participation in planning and implementation, to mobilize local resources, and to increase accountability of officials to the citizens (Bienen et al. 1990:65). Another motivation in the Nepali context can be the lack of capacity of the government authority to adequately manage protected areas (Baral and Stern 2010), a potentially increasingly important factor as the PA system in Nepal rapidly expands. A WWF officer told me in an interview that participatory approaches to conservation in Nepal are successful and also necessary simply because the government presence in mountainous areas is either weak or non-existent (Bhandari: interview 25.04.2012).

Not surprisingly, criticism exists in the field of decentralization as well, both in terms of academic argument and because of implications for natural resource management. One reason for why many decentralization reforms have failed to deliver its promises is simply that the reforms often are incomplete. This can be because of resistance of central actors to relinquish their powers – due to fear of losing economic privileges and rent-seeking

opportunities, or more general concerns about for instance standards, social and economic wellbeing, or political stability (Ribot 2002:7). In the Nepali forestry sector, there is a clear geographical pattern in the extension of the community forest system: so far, the community forest system has mostly been limited to the middle hills, and has not been extended to the commercially more valuable forests in the lower Terai. This shows a limited willingness of the forest department to devolve powers when commercial interests are at stake (Ribot et al. 2006:1872).

Agrawal and Ostrom (2001:486) are concerned with the lack of attention to the political motivation behind decentralization reforms and the nature of property rights in academic writing about decentralization of natural resource governance. Early calls for increased involvement of local communities in conservation and natural resource management were marked by their simplistic assumptions about the composition and internal coherence of communities. Communities were regarded as territorially fixed, small, and homogenous, while observes thus failed to pay attention to differences within them (Agrawal and Gibson 1999:636). Jeanrenaud (2002:22-24) notes that “Ideas about what constitutes a community in natural resource management are frequently disputed and are often tied to dominant political interests at local levels and beyond”. Agrawal and Gibson (1999:636) argue that paying attention to the detailed differences and diverse interests within communities is critical for sustainable and equitable outcomes of policy changes on behalf of the community.

In Nepal, despite the long experience with community forestry, there are still concerns regarding the equity of distribution of benefits and burden-sharing and of marginalized communities not gaining as anticipated (McDougall et al. 2007:50). Cornwall (2002:14-5) argues that it is important to situate the new spaces for participation opened through decentralization reforms within

existing power-relations, and also how the “rules of the game” delineate the boundaries of public involvement in decision-making and deliberation.

Another assumption Agrawal and Gibson (1999:636) criticize for being simplistic is the idea that because local communities are dependent on the long-term sustainability of their resource-base, and because having more accurate knowledge about these resources than other potential actors, communities are regarded as the best managers of the resources in “their” area. This line of argument can be refined by adding the assumption that if communities are *not* involved in the management of their natural resources, then they will act destructively (Agrawal and Gibson 1999:633), or that communities are more likely to follow rules that they have had a say in making (Ribot 2004:24, Locher 2006:268). Interestingly, this assumption has some merit if one studies the historical developments in the Nepali forestry sector from nationalization of forest resources to community based management, as I touched upon in Chapter 3. Locher (2006:268) holds that local support for nature conservation is greater if more responsibilities are granted to the local actors, while Ostrom (1990:101) argues that users are more likely to manage commons (see next section) sustainably when their rights to devise institutions are not challenged by central authorities.

The concerns over assumptions about local communities’ capabilities and interests in sustainable resource use and conservation management are linked to the debate over appropriate levels of decentralization, which is especially critical to address if national and local interests are diverging. The Fifth Conference of the Parties (COP 5) to the CBD, held in 2000, endorsed the so-called “Ecosystem Approach” to biodiversity conservation and called upon States Parties as well as other governments and international organizations to apply this approach in implementation efforts (UNEP 2000). It is “a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that

promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way” (UNEP 2000:103). The approach was acknowledged by the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development as an important instrument for enhancing sustainable development and alleviating poverty (SCBD 2004:34). Principle 2 of this approach is worth quoting at length:

Management should be decentralized to the lowest appropriate level.

Rationale: Decentralized systems may lead to greater efficiency, effectiveness and equity. Management should involve all stakeholders and balance local interests with the wider public interest. The closer management is to the ecosystem, the greater the responsibility, ownership, accountability, participation, and use of indigenous knowledge (UNEP 2000:105).

The quote is illustrative in its defense of decentralization for both instrumental and intrinsic reasons, but it is also worth noting the qualifier *may* in the rationale. The decisive question is of course to decide on “the appropriate level”, especially as it relates to the balancing of local and wider public interests if they are assumed to be divergent. Fauchald and Gulbrandsen (2012:205) hold that in policy fields with high levels of conflict over policy design and implementation, more centralized control is needed to ensure compliance with international and national goals. An example of high levels of conflict can be the decision to establish a protected area itself, as witnessed in Nepal (Paudel et al. 2012) and elsewhere (e.g. Falleth and Hovik 2008, Zachrisson 2009).

Ribot has argued for the use of so-called *environmental subsidiarity principles* as guiding principles of power transfers in decentralization of natural resource management (Ribot 2002, 2004). The principle of subsidiarity says that decisions are to be taken at the lowest possible level; as understood in EU policy-making, it means that the EU shall only take action when this is more effective than taking action on the national, sub-national/regional or local level

(Store norske leksikon 2013). Although Ribot (2004) does not refer to the ecosystem approach specifically, there are clear similarities between his notion of environmental subsidiarity principles and the ecosystem approach to the CBD, but Ribot's subsidiarity principles are more elaborate than the ecosystem approach's "decentralization to lowest possible level" maxim. For a complete list of the proposed environmental subsidiarity principles, see Ribot (2004:81). Those principles most closely related to the ecosystem approach are creation of discretion, providing significant power, and matching powers to scale (the last point including the transfer of power to the most-local level).

Ribot (2004:54) gives several examples of decentralization reforms that have led to detrimental environmental consequences, for instance in recent reforms in Indonesia or in Kumaon in India before the situation was stabilized there (cf. Agrawal (2005) for a historical analysis of local forest management in Kumaon). Ribot (2004:54) provides the perceived insecurity of user rights as one explanation for some negative consequences of decentralization; if people believe that their newly granted resource user rights might be taken away, they will tend to overexploit the resources in the window of opportunity that emerges after decentralization. Terborgh (2004:x) argues that the relaxation of central control following the fall of Suharto "unleashed a free-for-all on Indonesia's remaining primary forests", and that a succession of weak governments have been "unable to reassert central authority and has yielded to pressure to transfer administrative control over provincial lands to corrupt local officials, ensuring further degradation of remaining forests".

Lastly, it should be noted that even a staunch defender of decentralization such as Ribot acknowledges that certain regulatory limits must be in place, if there are values that the government or the society at large want to protect: "Nobody reasonably advocates devolution of all powers. Local discretion *with* a minimum regulatory infrastructure must be established to bound and protect

local freedom” (Ribot 2004:24). This is even more obvious in the context of a protected area – where there are clear established interests in the conservation of biodiversity, protection or restoration of forest cover and so on. Writing about Langtang National Park in Nepal, Fox et al. (1996) point out that even when rules and regulations are followed, securing both livelihood needs and biodiversity conservation might be incompatible, to the point that it “will be necessary to choose between farmer livelihoods and the preservation of biodiversity” (ibid:569). Commenting on the findings in the study by Fox et al. (1996), Locke and Dearden (2005:97) state that although the governance of Langtang National Park would achieve high marks for its participatory approach, it is failing in delivering biodiversity objectives. Besides, decentralization without capacity building can have negative consequences (Dearden et al. 2005:98). But as Ribot (2004:24) notes, the public good should not be used as an excuse to avoid decentralization. As discussed earlier in this sub-chapter, political decentralization is ultimately a political question, and so is the question of the regulatory boundaries of the powers devolved as well.

5.3 Common Pool Resources

The influential common pool resource (CPR) theory can provide insights into decision-making about natural resource management at the local level, and can thus be of interest when discussing decentralization in this field. The theory of common pool resources is most famously described by Ostrom in her seminal work *Governing the Commons* (1990). CPRs share two important characteristics: They are rival, and to some extent non-excludable; Ostrom (ibid:30) defines them to be large enough to make it costly to exclude potential beneficiaries of the resources. Typical CPRs can be fisheries, grazing land, community forests and groundwater basins, but also urban elements such as parking lots and bridges (Agrawal and Gupta 2005, Ostrom (1990:30). Ostrom (ibid.) further refines the definition of CPRs by distinguishing between the

resource *systems* (such as fisheries) and the flow of resource *units* (such as fish). It is the latter units that are rival, in the sense that for instance a given amount of firewood (a unit) from a forest (the system) cannot be used by one user once another has obtained it.

There is a distinction in the literature between public goods and CPRs, as the former is characterized by its non-rival character (Fauchald and Gulbrandsen 2012:205). Therefore, to assess the applicability of CPR theory on protected area management analysis, one must consider what type of goods or resources that are managed in protected areas. In the Norwegian context of decentralized PA management, Fauchald and Gulbrandsen write that

The goods to be safeguarded through protected areas are more often public goods (...) than they are of a common pool type (...)
Assessments of protected areas management must therefore take account of national and international protection objectives, including the protection of mankind's common heritage (2012:205).

Therefore, CPR theory is perhaps of less value in such a context than when discussing management of natural resources with closer resemblances to typical CPRs. Another contribution in the Nordic context *has* however adopted CPR theory as one framework for analysis of protected area management in Sweden (Zachrisson 2009). For the sake of analyzing PA management in Nepal, I would argue that CPR literature can be of use, because the recent trend of community involvement in conservation, especially through integrated conservation and development programs (ICDPs), is so prevalent in PAs in Nepal. KCA and other mountain conservation areas in Nepal such as ACA, Gaurishankar and Manaslu Conservation Areas are recognized as IUCN Category VI PAs, in contrast to the stricter protection and management regime of Norway's mountain national parks, categorized as Category II PAs. Conservation management in Nepal is therefore to a large extent concerned precisely with common pool resources

like grazing land and community forests, and the significant emphasis on (sustainable) resource use *within* PAs underscores this. Notably, this is also an important aspect in the CBD, where sustainable resource use is one of three main objectives (United Nations 1992). This is in turn reflected in Nepal's Biodiversity Strategy, in which a main goal is the "protection and wise use of the biologically diverse resources of the country" (HMGN/MFSC 2002:1).

The management model in Kangchenjunga Conservation Area is a recent effort in the continuing search for an appropriate institutional framework for protected area management in Nepal. Moreover, the partial shift in academia from looking at the commons through the lens of tragedy (Hardin 1968), to the more positive outlooks provided by Ostrom and others, also coincides with major changes in natural resource management in Nepal (especially forestry), and the later move towards increasing local control over protected area management in the country. Regarding the global trend towards devolution of control over CPR to local users, Agrawal writes that "Although it would be hard to sustain a claim that research on common property by itself is responsible for policy shifts, it has surely informed how many policy makers think about resource management" (2001:1650).

5.4 New Spaces of Power

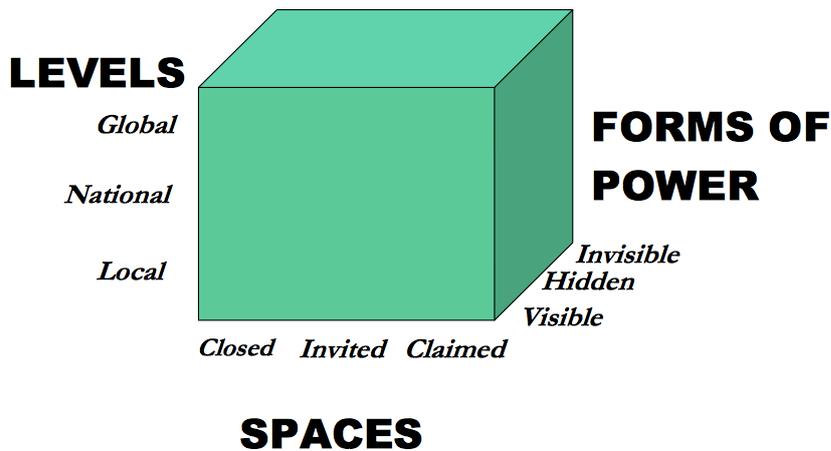
I showed in above sections of this chapter that earlier theorizing about participation in development projects and decentralization of natural resource management have been criticized for not paying heed to power dimensions at local, national and global scales. Associated with the inadequate understandings of power are problems of elite capture and continued marginalization. Therefore, it is pertinent to include a framework for power analysis in my theoretical chapter, which later will be used to complement my analysis of the decentralized structure of management of Kangchenjunga

Conservation Area and the local participation in this structure. I will focus this section on the work done by Gaventa (2006) on the different “spaces” available for participation and citizen engagement in policy processes.

As Arnstein (1969), White (1996) and Cornwall (2008) underscored, power is (or should be) a central feature in all participatory approaches to development in particular, but also to governance in general. Political decentralization *is* about transfer of decision-making power and new accountabilities. Therefore, it is vital to investigate how power is wielded by whom in the “many new democratic spaces or opportunities for participation” (Gaventa 2007:xiii) that are created by NGOs or donors who support civil society in developing countries, or the movements towards “deepening” and more deliberative democracy in countries both north and south (Gaventa 2007). The management institutions in Kangchenjunga Conservation Area are arguably such new spaces for participation, but as Gaventa (2007:xv) writes, “we cannot assume that the institutional design of ‘new democratic spaces’ will in fact mean that these will automatically become ‘spaces for change’, especially in ways that normative democratic theory assumes”. Whether the creation of new institutional arrangements results in greater inclusion or pro-poor policy change depends on the nature of power relations that saturate and surround the new and potentially more democratic spaces (Gaventa 2006:23).

Gaventa has developed a three-dimensional framework for analysis of power and “the potential for transformative change”, along axes of forms, levels and spaces (Gaventa 2006:25). He argues that the *forms* (visible, invisible and hidden), *levels* (global, national and local) and *spaces* (closed, invited and claimed/created) of power are “separate but interrelated dimensions” (Gaventa 2006:25).

Figure 1: Three dimensions of power



Source: Gaventa (2009), see also www.powercube.net

It is important to bear in mind the different *levels* in which power relationships are formed and executed also when one primarily discusses local participation and decentralization, as I do. Power relations at various geographical levels are according to Benjaminsen et al. (2009:425) an important focus for much current research in political ecology. Gaventa warns against an exclusive focus on the power dynamics at the local and national level, as globalization shifts “traditional understandings of where power resides and how it is exercised” (2006:26). In the case of nature conservation in Nepal, it could be argued that as Nepal ratifies international treaties like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the CITES convention against trade in endangered species, or for that matter the ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, the places of decision-making and agenda-setting power shift towards the international or global arena, just as decentralization reforms shift power to more local levels. Paudel et al. (2011) hold that Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) strongly influence PA management in Nepal. This is for instance witnessed in the current Interim Constitution, where language from the CBD has been incorporated in § 35, “Principles of the state”, article 5: “The State shall make arrangements for the protection of, sustainable use of,

and the equitable distribution of benefits derived from, the flora and fauna and biological diversity” (GoN 2007). Paudel et al. (2011:3) argue that Nepal has endorsed most MEAs “in order to present itself as a deserving and committed member of the UN and other international organizations, and of course to attract aid”, and moreover that the aid channel is the “major route through which international agenda enter into national policy and legal framework” (ibid:4). In the case of KCA, there is as well a strong link to international conservation interests through the influence of WWF Nepal, which is part of the international WWF network. Although WWF Nepal formally has relinquished their management powers in KCA, their influence as the major donor is arguably still strong and the organization has been instrumental in the current institutional set-up of the area. The global/international influence on environmental decision-making at the local level in Nepal can be interpreted as aspects of “the globalization of environmental discourses” (Benjaminsen et al. 2009:425).

Gaventa distinguishes between three already mentioned *forms* of power. Visible power is the domain of observable decision making, and the formal rules, structures, authorities, institutions and procedures that make up this domain (Gaventa 2006:29). The hidden power is about controlling the political agenda, and who has access to the decision making being done in the visible world of power. Invisible power “shapes the psychological and ideological boundaries of participation” and influences “how individuals think about their place in the world” (ibid.).

In the context of participation and citizen action, Gaventa sees *spaces* as opportunities, moments and channels through which citizens can act and potentially influence policies, discourses and decisions that affect their lives and interests. These spaces are moreover not neutral, but themselves shaped by power relations (Gaventa 2006:26). Gaventa distinguishes between *closed*

spaces, where decisions are taken behind closed doors out of reach of the ordinary citizen, *invited* spaces where citizens might be invited to participate in decision-making by various kinds of authorities, and *claimed* or *created* spaces, often created by social movements and community organizations and other less powerful actors autonomously from the power holders (2006:26-7).

Although perhaps rather abstract, I believe also the last dimension of power can be valuable in the analysis of power in participation and decentralization of natural resource and conservation management in Nepal. The spaces that have opened up for the local inhabitants of KCA to participate in and influence decision-making that in turn affects their lives are arguably invited spaces created by actors external to the local communities. This has created both opportunities for empowerment, but also for unequal distribution of benefits and for elite capture of these new spaces, just as with the creation of forest user groups during decentralization of forest management in the 1970s (Whelpton 2005:144).

5.5 Conclusion and Synthesis

In this chapter, I have shown that both participation in development projects and decentralization in the field of natural resource management are defended using similar arguments, which in turn can be divided into instrumental and intrinsic defenses. I would argue that despite the similarities of the arguments in favor of both participation and decentralization, these are two different processes that depend on different actors to be successfully implemented. The arguments of White (1996) and Arnstein (1969) about the inherent political character of participation notwithstanding, political decentralization is, as the term suggests, more directly involving transfers of power, and will thus more often involve political struggles. Decentralization of natural resources is more complex than reforms of service provisions, as the former are sources of

revenue for the state and for livelihoods to the local people and it requires thus devolution of control over productive resources (Agrawal and Ribot 1999:474, Baral and Heinen 2007:521). Decentralization in natural resource management, although often promoted by actors external to the state such as international donors, development banks or specialized UN agencies, ultimately depend on the political will of those in central power positions to relinquish some of that power to other actors. The process must be endorsed by the central state. Decentralization will also often create new accountability mechanisms and property rights over common pool resources that have consequences for the efficiency and functioning of the new governance institutions.

Participatory approaches, especially those on the less transformative side of the spectrum, can be promoted by NGOs or other actors working inside the boundaries of the nation-state to some extent regardless of national policies related to participation and decentralization²⁷. This depends, however, on the policy field and degree or level of participation; participatory approaches in natural resource management would more often be depending on concessions by the state, and participatory approaches high up in the various typologies demand relinquishing of control by those in power, be they the central state, local government institutions or NGOs. Participation can, as the typologies presented in this chapter illustrate, be driven both from above and from below. This is in turn linked to the different spaces of power; participation taking place within claimed spaces will perhaps more often have empowering characteristics, in contrast to those participatory processes that are circumscribed by an externally set framework as seen in invited spaces.

²⁷ At least as long as the state in question has a friendly attitude towards civil society and national and international NGOs. Note the growth of non-state actors' influence on conservation policy and management in Nepal following the "1st People's Movement" in 1990, described in Chapter 3.

Ribot (2002) explicitly links participation in natural resource management to decentralization and democratization. He holds that democratic decentralization is an institutionalized form of community participation, because decentralization reforms ideally create a more lasting institutional framework for participation that goes beyond the spatially and temporally restricted experiments with community-based natural resource management. Bearing in mind the critical question of which powers to devolve to what level of management discussed earlier in this chapter, there seems to be a potential trade-off between the democratic potential of decentralization reforms and the need to safeguard national and international conservation interests, at least in cases where local resource use interests and national/international conservation interests are in conflict. This again relates to the broader balancing act of development and conservation discussed in Chapter 2, which also is the basis of one of the research questions posed in the introductory chapter.

In this chapter, I have presented various bodies of research that are not often utilized together, especially research on participatory approaches to development on the one hand and decentralization of natural resource management on the other. KCA as an ICDP, with focus on development as well as resource use and conservation and with an institutional framework that emphasizes both of the above aspects, provides an interesting opportunity to jointly apply these theoretical strains. This is the focus in the next two chapters.

6. Decentralization and Participation in KCA

Having established a theoretical framework for analysis, I shall in this chapter look further into the research questions established in the introduction. I start by laying out two propositions I had before I conducted the fieldwork, before looking into participation in KCA institutions, linking such participation to the typologies explored in the theoretical chapter. Further, rather than taking claims about the “complete devolution of management authority” (Parker and Thapa 2011:880) in KCA or KCA being “fully managed through participatory conservation approaches by local people” (Oli et al. 2013:29) at face value, I aim at critically discussing and analyzing the features of and conditions for decentralization in KCA and the nature of powers devolved. This is important, because as the theoretical deliberations in Chapter 5 showed, the nature of powers devolved and the ensuing institutional framework have consequences both for the efficiency and equity of management, as well as for the balancing of conservation and development concerns. In the next chapter, I discuss this balance and the conditions for a sustainable future in KCA.

Arnstein stated in her article that “citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the *redistribution of power* that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future” (1969:216, emphasis added). The citation shows how participation in conservation and decentralization are interlinked, if one recalls the definition of decentralization presented in Chapter 5 as transfer of power to lower-level actors or institutions or ceding of power on behalf of the central government (Agrawal and Ribot 1999). Although I presented the theoretical contributions to participation and decentralization in separate sub-chapters in the theoretical framework, I will in this chapter pay closer attention to this important link. To meaningfully analyze the degree of participation, for example by placing participation in management of KCA in

the typologies presented in Chapter 5, I have to identify the powers of the participants and their institutions. This requires a thorough look both at the practice of and legal framework for decentralized management of KCA.

In this chapter, I refer extensively to my two most important empirical sources, namely the interviews I conducted while doing fieldwork, and the Kanchanjangha Conservation Area Management Rules (GoN 2008) regulating the management of KCA. Where relevant, I also refer to other legal sources. When referring to anonymous interviews, I use *#number* to signify which interview the information or quote is taken from. Information on the role of the interviewee, gender, date and location is presented in Appendix II.

An analysis of the legal and regulatory framework is important for at least two reasons. Firstly, analysis of the legal framework for protected area management in Nepal is relatively scant in the literature (Paudel et al. 2011:3). Secondly, and more importantly, the legal and regulatory framework is of great importance because it shapes the everyday practice of resource management, as well as the relationships between different actors and institutions involved in protected area management (ibid:5). Therefore, the analysis of participation in and decentralization of management in KCA would have been incomplete without it.

6.1 Initial Propositions

Before I visited KCA myself, two theoretical propositions had emerged based on my preliminary readings. The first was the assumption that conservation interests would be weakened as the management council took over. I expected to find this outcome because I presumed that conservation interests would not be sufficiently grounded in the local management institutions, notably the KCA-MC, to be preserved when external pressures on this subsided. For instance, Fauchald and Gulbrandsen (2012) hold that if there are conflicts of

interests between the national and local level, then the central decision-makers must keep some control over management to ensure that the national interests are protected. The assumption that conservation issues predominantly are of concern for national and global stakeholders is grounded in the literature (e.g. Müller et al. 2008:394, Fauchald and Gulbrandsen 2012). However, as we shall see, my findings suggest that the weakening of conservation priorities has not happened as predicted. I discuss several possible reasons for this in the next chapter.

The other proposition I had was that the successful management of the area would be under threat as external agents and donors withdrew. This assumption stems from my reading of Gurung, who claims that past experience has shown that local institutions tend to fail to function when external project support diminishes or is depleted (2006:145). However, as WWF was still present at the time of research, it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions on this matter now. Also, the KCA-MC was working to broaden its donor base when I visited, and tap into more resources. One informant, although concerned about the potential consequences of WWF pulling out, was convinced that the institutional set-up would be strong enough to handle it: “In the beginning, it will be difficult, but they will manage to get more donors after a while and it will stabilize (...) The system has already been fixed, so even if WWF leaves and they have problems, they will work it out” (#14). But there is a concern that the projects are very much depending on continued external financial support, even as some of the locally managed funds are supposed to be financially sustainable (such as livestock insurance schemes). Thus, it could be argued that the findings presented in this thesis do not rule out the concerns about dependence of external support - but the state of affairs at the time of research inhibited investigations into the potential problem, as the proposition remains a forecast of future events.

A Note on Management Efficiency

Before I initiate the discussion on participation in KCA institutions, some reflections on management efficiency is warranted. Oli et al. (2013) report KCA to have the highest management efficiency of the protected areas surveyed in the wider Kangchenjunga landscape, and also the management system most inclusive of local people. The PAs using “traditional” approaches of exclusionary management scored lower than the inclusive KCA model. In KCA, community based conservation and development initiatives have increased local people’s sense of ownership towards the CA (ibid:30). Several of my informants expressed that the management of KCA has become better after the locally based Management Council has taken over the responsibility. For instance, one informant told me “Before 2006, officers from outside the area were managing KCA. Now, there is better management because the officers come from the villages themselves” (#1). This was however contested by another informant, who told me that the Council is less effective than the former KCAP staff in working for the development of the area and addressing issues such as reconstruction of infrastructure after a recent earthquake (#7).

6.2 Participation in KCA Management Institutions

Popular participation in KCA institutions is certainly widespread – it follows from the management approach taken in KCA and the extensive capacity-building undertaken by WWF Nepal in the early years of KCAP in anticipation of the management handover. WWF Nepal was according to the Conservation Director committed and worked towards the management handover since the establishment of KCA and the inception of KCAP (Gurung: interview 08.05.2012). Indeed, the management system is based almost exclusively on local managers and volunteers. This was by Müller et al. (2008) considered an important reason for the successes achieved in KCA, and its effectiveness is also reflected in Oli et al. (2013).

As discussed in the methodology chapter, I tried to interview as many management council members as I could, and I managed to interview seven of 15 KCA-MC members, of which two of the four female members. I can thus assume that my sample of KCA-MC members fairly well represent the KCA-MC in general, with the notable exception of views from members from Yamphudin VDC, as I did not visit that area. The total number of KCA-MC members has expanded from the 12 described in Gurung (2006) and Müller et al. (2008). The most important change in composition is that the quota of female members has doubled from two to four members. The composition of the management council is carefully described in the Management Rules, and the description corresponds to the information I received from my informants. There are seven members from each of the UCs in KCA, and there are four female nominees from MGs in each VDC. Moreover, the area's Community Forest User Groups (CFUG) nominate one member to the Council, and there is also one person nominated from Taplejung District Development Committee (DDC). Finally, the elected Chairperson nominates two members; one from the "underprivileged caste, class", and one that is "making special contributions or role for the conservation" (GoN 2008:Rule 10 e) and f)).

Participation in the lowest level of management institutions in the KCA, the UGs and the MGs, was by two of my informants regarded as almost compulsory (#2, #9). According to the Management Rules, household participation in these institutions *is* in fact compulsory²⁸, and Gurung (2006:83) and Müller et al. (2008:386) report that each household was

²⁸ The unfortunately poor translated version of the Rules available at the Nepali Law Commission's website, reads as follows: "A consumer group or consumer groups [user groups] shall be formatted by making representation of each household which has been resided under concerned Village Development Committees within the conservation area, to make active participation in the protection activities of the conservation area and get direct benefit from that area" and mother's groups "shall be formatted by making representation of women (...) to ensure the active participation of women in the protection and management of conservation area" (GoN 2008: Rule 13.1 and 13.2, respectively).

represented in each group by at least one member. However, research conducted in 2008 reports that only about three-quarters of the households participated in such groups (Parker and Thapa 2011:891). Moreover, the dominant groups households participated in were the MGs (71% of the surveyed households participated in MGs, with only 8% of households maintaining memberships in other groups) (ibid.). Two of my informants participating in MGs reported that the number of households represented in these groups had been increasing recently (#4 and #5), because more people had realized the benefits of membership and that the membership fees were put to good use. This is in line with Auld and Gulbrandsen's (2010:100) argument that transparency about decision-making can facilitate buy-in from a broad base of participants in voluntary arrangements.

Membership in the MGs entitles the members to apply for micro-credit loans, and the MG also caters for funerals to members (#5). This corresponds to findings by Parker and Thapa (2011) on distribution of benefits based on household participation in management bodies. Their study investigates the relationship between participation in management bodies and distribution of benefits, understood as access to savings accounts, loans and capacity building training (ibid:892). Their findings suggest that access to big loans is a function of participation: non-participants were excluded from access, and households holding leadership positions in the institutions were granted bigger loans than those with ordinary membership positions. Moreover, these households also participated more in capacity development training programs (ibid:894). Thus, there is a strong instrumental motivation to participate in the lower-level management groups. Although I have no data on increase in participation in the UGs, the other lowest-level body where "all" households supposedly participate, there is reason to believe that participation has increased also here. I was told in an interview (Shrestha: interview 19.05.2012) that there are now 46 UGs and 35 MGs in KCA, an increase compared to the 44 UGs and 32

MGs reported by Gurung (2006). The KCAP and KCA-MC accountant I interviewed in Lelep (#2) confirmed this information.

Parker and Thapa (2011:896) argue that if equal benefit-sharing is a priority for KCA management, then increased promotion of participation is important. Khadka and Nepal (2010) report that the overwhelming barrier to participation reported in Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) was lack of free time to participate in conservation activities because of other obligations, and 95% of the informants reported availability of free time as what was needed for them to participate or participate more often. I did not record complaints about lack of free time as a hindrance, although substantial amount of work is done in these groups. For instance, one interviewee told me how the MG she was involved in come together every month to decide on which projects related to trail renovations, village cleaning and tree plantations to undertake next (#8). This is in line with White's (1996) view on instrumental participation as viewed as cost for the "beneficiaries" of development programs, but in the case of KCA, benefits are clearly seen as outweighing the costs of participation. For instance, the interviewee referred to above did not have any negative things to say about the conservation area at all, despite the workload she undertakes in the MG. This was the predominant view of the female informants in Locher (2006:276) as well, but she also noted that women from poorer and geographically marginalized households participated less in MGs because of their existing heavy workloads.

The fact that I did not record complaints about time-consuming activities among the female interviewees can be due to the fact that I only interviewed people already involved in the management at some level, who thus supposedly have decided that participation is to their benefit (White 1996:12). One MG member informant told me that it was "worth it" to be part of the group (#5), while many others expressed their satisfaction with the

conservation area in more general terms. Of the 14 informants I interviewed in KCA, only one explicitly told me that the workload related to being a member of the KCA-MC was too much, when I asked him why he initially decided to become involved in the CFUG:

He thought it would be an opportunity to work, because they didn't have many job opportunities. He thought he could earn some money. But after spending ten years he found out that it's just voluntary work, and to be able to do it, he has to leave other work in the house. He got busy, spent ten years but earned nothing, so that's why he wants to leave and give the responsibilities to someone younger (#10)²⁹.

One possible conclusion to draw from this is that the current management system rewards participation in management (but not through direct payments, as management is based on voluntary work). This has positive effects in terms of increasing participation, which in turn can be an explanatory factor for the relative effectiveness of KCA management compared to other PAs in the region, as measured by Oli et al. (2013). The negative effect of this is that benefits accruing from the projects (micro-credit and capacity building/training opportunities) are not equally distributed in the population, as ascertained by Parker and Thapa (2011). This “system” of rewarding participation encourages participation for instrumental reasons for the “beneficiaries” in KCA, and it has obvious instrumental benefits for the DNPWC and WWF Nepal as well, related to reducing costs and tapping into local labor resources, for instance. It seems thus to be a trade-off between instrumental efficiency and equitability. This trade-off could tip further in favor of efficiency if Council members start to receive payments for their voluntary work. This was suggested by Gurung in my interview with him, because he was concerned about the long-term viability of a voluntary system (Gurung: interview 8.5.2012).

²⁹ This quote illustrates the role of my translator in sometimes mediating the answers of the interviewees, seen in the use of pronouns in the transcription.

A related, but separate discussion is the role of women in the higher-level management bodies, especially the KCA-MC. Today, female participation is ensured through the quota of one female representative from each of the four VDCs. The quota has been considered to “not count for much” by Locher (2006:226-7), because it only ensured one sixth of the seats for women. Now, however, the female quota has doubled, and the minimum number of women is thus four out of 15. I interviewed two of these four women, and they had to some extent diverging opinions on the ability of women to actively take part in discussions and influence decision-making there. The younger of the two (#13) did not regard her status as a (young) woman as a hindrance at all, while the older interviewee felt that there was still a long way to go before women could participate on an equal footing. She said that the other women in the KCA-MC were shy and did not easily participate in the discussions, but she also conceded that this state of affairs was rapidly changing:

But now they [the women] think they are equal, and have started talking, making demands. We, the women, can even do better than men, but if we keep silent, we will continue to be backward. One of the reasons why we are shy and don't speak up so much might be because of lack of education³⁰ (#3).

I will return to the issue of female participation in the sub-section on accountability mechanisms in KCA.

6.2.1 Decision-Making

Another important feature of the management system in KCA is how decisions are taken in the different institutions. Ribot (2002, 2004) claims that democratic decentralization is contributing strongly to local democracy. But this, I would argue, depends to a large degree on the actual processes of

³⁰ Note that the exact wording stems from my handwritten on-the-spot transcription of the interview, as I did not tape-record this interview.

decision-making in the empowered institutions. In fact, the degree of “democratization” stemming from decentralization would depend on the decision-making in the institutions, but also on characteristics of electoral accountability, which I return to in 6.4.1. With regard to decision-making in the management institutions, my findings point in different directions, and it is difficult to conclude strongly that decisions are either democratic or undemocratic. In this sub-chapter, I discuss my findings related to decision-making in two instances – how decisions are made in the Management Council, and how the 5-year Management Plan is put together.

Management Council Decision Making

The Management Rules have clear procedures for meetings of the User Committees, which shall be presided over by the Chairperson and in his/her absence by the vice-chairperson. Decisions are to be made by simple majority, and if the vote has been equally divided, the person chairing the meeting has the decisive vote (Rule 17.4 and 17.5). Strangely enough, no such formal rules prescribe meeting procedures in the Users’ or Mothers’ Groups, and the Management Council meeting procedures “shall be as determined by the council itself” (Rule 12.2). A straight-forward reading of the rules regarding KCA-MC meeting procedures thus opens up for a diverse range of decision-making procedures, and this ambiguity might explain why it was difficult to get clear answers as to how decisions are being made in the Council.

The general procedure in the meetings seems to be to come to an agreement about decisions and priorities through discussions/deliberations, in line also with the decision-making procedures in the MGs I was told about by MG member informants. But if an agreement could not be reached, the role of the Chairman seemed to be quite powerful. One informant told me that if the Council could not agree, the Chairman would force his opinion through, and

the other members could not but agree with his final decision (#3). A quote from another interview illustrates the same feeling:

Q: What do you do if there is a big disagreement in the Council?

A: They sit down and discuss about it, and act according to the discussion: What should be implemented early, what can wait for some time. So they figure it out after discussion. During his period up till now, they have solved everything by discussion, no voting has been necessary so far.

Q: What is the role of the chairman in these discussions?

A: Whenever there is a discussion in the Council, the chairman forces his opinion to be implemented, or so he feels. In most of the cases he forces his opinion through, whenever there is disagreement (#14).

This quote points to a potentially important challenge in the KCA-MC, namely the degree of democratic decision-making. It is not a problem as long as consensus-based decisions can be made, but it is reason to believe that in a system where the members are elected from geographically based constituencies, all with their different priorities, such consensus-based decision-making will not hold very far. This issue is especially crucial to address as the Council is the most important local institution in KCA, delivering in the conservation field, but equally importantly as a local development institution.

The Management Plan

The other issue of decision-making I analyze here is related to the process of creating the Management Plan. The Management Plan is a five-year plan that encompasses the whole conservation area. The Management Rules give a detailed account on what is to be included in the plan, listing 15 components in "Schedule 1". In addition to physical and demographic descriptions of the conservation area, including details in forest land and potential community forests, the plan shall include details on conservation and forest development

programs, programs related to the protection of indigenous and traditional knowledge and skills, a program on “community conservation area tourism development, protection of wildlife, vegetation and environment, Historical and Natural heritage preservation”, an annual program for collection and use of forest products, and details on collection and utilization of herbs.

The Management Plan has to be approved by the DNPWC, and the Council can also draw on technical support from the Department as it sees necessary. The Management Rules spell out how the Plan is to be put together, emphasizing the central role of the KCA-MC, while noting that the Council shall “[coordinate] with the concerned consumer [user] group and committee for the protection and management of the conservation area” and “make discussion on drafting of management work plan and collect the opinions by calling meeting of chairpersons of the groups and committees and the management plan shall be drafted on the basis of the opinions collected as such” (GoN 2008: Rule 6.1 and 6.2).

All interviewees discussing the Management Plan agreed that there is a strong emphasis on participation from the grassroots organizations. This participation is however mediated by the User Committees, which in this regard function as gate-keepers to the Council. This was explained as a way of not over-burden the Council with too many suggestions, by rather taking some discussions and making priorities in the UCs, before deciding on which proposals to bring forward to the Council. The informants had diverging opinions on the proceedings of the drafting of the Plan. One informant (#2) said that the management plan preparations start with discussions in the MGs and the UGs, and then the Council has a workshop with submissions from these meetings as starting point. This view was supported by another informant (#14) who stated that the process starts at the grassroots level, then the discussions continue in the User Committees before the Council drafts the Plan. A third informant

(#3) said that the Council makes a proposal first, and then discuss it in a meeting where all the members of all the management groups are invited (as well as the DNPWC and WWF). The Council also has social mobilizers walking around in the villages collecting information before they have a meeting in the Council. This happens before the first draft is made. #3 also mentioned the role of the UCs in deciding upon which proposals to bring before the Council. One informant articulated the role of the UCs thus:

The Committee will see all those problems and they will decide which can be sent to the Council to discuss and which cannot. Because when you get so many views and problems, it would not be appropriate to take all those issues to Council and discuss about it. So the Committee is the one working as a coordinator with the villagers as well as the Council (#12).

Informant #9 provided a slightly different story than many others: he said that the Council decides on different discussion themes (5 themes), which the grassroots organizations then can discuss. Again, the role of the UCs as gatekeepers was emphasized: “The User Committees decide on the suggestions coming from the UGs and MGs, which ones are good, and which ones can be omitted”(#9). This is done by mutual understanding (i.e. consensus) in the UCs, according to the interviewee.

WWF has no formal role in the preparations mentioned in the Rules. There were different opinions regarding the involvement and influence of WWF and DNPWC on making the plan, but in general, the interviewees were of the opinion that this influence was rather limited. The subtle influence of WWF as the most significant donor was emphasized by one informant (#13), who stated that although WWF has no influence in *making* the plan, they figure out after the plan is made what they can support. One informant also conceded that the KCA-MC is not independent at the moment, because of its dependence on financial and technical support from KCAP/WWF (#2). Another informant

(#12) also stated that WWF did not have a role in making the plan, but that the organization nevertheless have their own priorities related to species conservation and climate change that they were concerned about. One informant (#6) also noted the involvement of local politicians in the DDC, saying the Council also discusses the draft with DDC politicians. Interestingly, the interviewee claimed that the DDC politicians usually urged the Council to pay heed to the recommendations made by the villagers. Finally, it should be noted that one informant granted the DNPWC a bigger role than most of the interviewees:

the DNPWC is supporting the Council in legal matters, to give legal help to facilitate them to work. (...) Because people demand a lot. So the Department works to coordinate between the people and the Council, giving legal advice, making it easier to work (#9).

Moreover, after the Council finalizes the plan, it is sent to the DNPWC for approval. The Department can then make amendments before approving it, albeit in consultation with the chairperson of the KCA-MC. When the plan is approved, “It shall be the duty of the council and all the concerned to follow the management plan” (GoN 2008: Rule 6.8).

To sum up, the Management Plan is made through a collaborating exercise involving a range of actors. The final decisions before sending the Plan to the DNPWC are however squarely in the hands of the Council, and the DNPWC has the power to approve it. The hierarchical structure of management institutions in KCA functions as a way of mediating and censoring the proposals from the local population, thus enhancing the capacity of the Management Council to handle the process of drafting the plan. This illustrates the importance of viewing the decision-making in *all* the institutions in KCA. The role of WWF in the deliberations could moreover be interpreted as a form of “hidden power” (Gaventa 2006); the organization’s conservation

interests might be subtly protected by Council members who have frequent and direct contact with both WWF and the representative of the DNPWC.

6.3 Decentralized Conservation Management in KCA

Ribot (2002:8) notes that it is difficult to measure outcomes of decentralization, as a host of other factors usually also affect the outcomes of institutional design. Moreover, he asserts that it requires historic base-line data for before-and-after comparisons. I do not intend to measure or “judge” the outcomes of decentralization in KCA; I have neither access to historic base-line data nor necessary quantitative data on current social and environmental issues to perform such an analysis. It is perhaps also too early to do so, even if data was available – Ribot (2004:72) urges to give decentralization reforms time before judging them as good or bad. I conducted my fieldwork in KCA five and a half years after management handover, which meant that I for instance could not investigate the succession of elected members in the KCA-MC, as most terms were about to expire while I visited, and the process of succession had yet to take place. In this sub-chapter I rather look at some of the *characteristics* of the decentralization of management in KCA. I look at accountability mechanisms as stated in the Management Rules (GoN 2008) as well as accountability linkages observed while I conducted fieldwork. I then discuss the decision making powers and resource property rights devolved to the various bodies in the KCA institutional system, relative to each other and to the DNPWC, also discussing to what extent they are secure powers or not.

6.3.1 Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability is always relational (Agrawal and Ribot 1999). In the context of decentralization in KCA, several accountability relations are relevant, and the picture is complicated by the intricate system of management in KCA itself. To start at the top of the hierarchy, there is the relationship between

KCA-MC and DNPWC. Then there are the various relationships between the different management bodies in KCA, and finally between these bodies and the constituency, i.e. the inhabitants of the conservation area. As discussed in Chapter 5, effective political decentralization requires *downward* accountability, while delegation of power to upwardly accountable institutions is in fact deconcentration, not political decentralization (Ribot et al. 2006). Therefore, to consider whether the delegation of powers to local institutions is a case of decentralization or deconcentration requires a critical look at the accountability mechanisms in and between these institutions.

Downward Accountability

The most important downward accountability mechanism in KCA is the election process in the different institutions³¹. This means that whether this channel of accountability is effective or not hinges on those elections and their degree of democratic character. Critically, if the downward accountability mechanism of elected representatives in the various bodies ensured through electoral accountability is to be effective in terms of enhancing local democracy, then the election processes must be democratic and ensure representation of different strands of society. If not, those bodies are more likely to reproduce existing local inequalities, be it along gender, socio-economic or ethnic/caste lines. Here, the danger of elite capture is present, because several factors might hinder broader participation in the higher-level institutions (the UCs and the Council). The issue of hindrances to participation has been explored elsewhere in Nepal (Baral and Heinen 2007:527, Khadka and Nepal 2010:356, Dahal et al. 2014), but to a lesser extent in KCA. Dahal

³¹ Agrawal and Ribot (1999) note that electoral accountability is only one of a wide range of accountability mechanisms, and claim that elections in itself is not sufficient to ensure that actors are accountable to their constituencies. Transparency understood as openness about e.g. decision-making and adjudication can be another mechanism that enhances accountability of decision-makers (Auld and Gulbrandsen 2010). However, I focus discussion in this thesis on this specific mechanism as the most prominent. An interesting question, which I have not posed in this thesis, is whether the elaborate institutional framework created in KCA actually *inhibits* the growth of an independent civil society that could enhance constituencies' ability to hold their local leaders accountable. This is a possibility because the *invited* spaces, to use Gaventa's (2006) parlance, perhaps subdue possible action in *created* spaces.

et al. (2014:227) write that female participation in Management Committees in Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) is hindered by their low levels of education and a subsequent lack of confidence to speak up in meetings, while Khadka and Nepal (2010) consider lack of time to spare to be the most important barrier. In an analysis of three CFUGs in Nepal's middle hills, Lachapelle et al. (2004) identify inferiority (based on caste, gender and literacy skills), vulnerability and lack of transparency as the perceived reasons for lack of ability to exercise power by the community forest users³².

As noted, it is too early to tell whether succession processes are functioning well, but several remarks can nevertheless be made. Several of my interviewees in the KCA-MC whose terms were about to expire at the time of research conceded that they would have to go through the elaborate election processes again if they wanted to stand a new term in the MC. Several interviewees explained the procedure for me, and their answers were fairly well in line with the processes described in the Management Rules (GoN 2008). As noted elsewhere, most households participate in one or more of the lower-level bodies, the MGs and UGs. Elections of Chairpersons in the UGs were presented to me as de facto elections to the UCs (#6), although this is not in line with the Rules' description of formation of the UCs, which states that chairpersons of the UGs are to select five persons among themselves to the UC of their groups (GoN 2008: Rule 15). In most cases, there are more than five UGs per UC, as there are 46 UGs and seven UCs. Elections of Chairpersons of the UCs *are* however de facto elections to the Council; this finding is clear both from my interviews and the reading of the Rules. Interestingly, the Rules (ibid: Rule 15.5) state that selection procedures in the Committees are to be determined by the Committees themselves (but interviewees referred to the process as an election process).

³² In this regard, they use the understanding of power provided by Agrawal and Ribot (1999), discussed in Chapter 5.

As the evidence from other parts of Nepal cited above suggests, despite a formally functional electoral system in the KCA institutions, the informal barriers both to stand as candidates in these elections, and to speak up in the institutions in which one is represented, can be quite substantial and in fact hinder broader popular participation. One of my female informants (#8) said that she was not capable of doing the job in the Management Council if she was to become a member there, because she would have to speak up, to speak Nepali, and to be educated. Another female informant (#5) said she would like to stand for election in the MC, but she saw lack of education as a hindrance, and she did not know how to proceed. She would like to join a literacy program. The informal, and sometimes self-imposed, restrictions on who can participate in the higher echelons of management in KCA can be understood as aspects related to Gaventa's (2006:29) invisible form of power.

At the time of research, the only four female members in the Council were those voted in through the quota of direct representation of one female member from the MGs in each VDC. The Rules state that three MG chairpersons should be members in each UC; they are in principle eligible for leadership positions in the Committees and thus for Council membership (GoN 2008: Rule 15.1b and 15.4). However, one interviewee (#6) stated that no more than four women could be members of the Council, although he later qualified his statement by saying that it is unlikely that female participation will increase beyond the quota, due to the low female participation in UGs and UCs. Another interviewee (#3) said that the Chairperson of the Council must be elected from the seven UC chairpersons in the Council, although this is wrong according the Management Rules (all Council members except the DDC representative and the person nominated because of his or her special contribution to conservation are eligible (GoN 2008: Rule 10.2)). These two statements could be interpreted as signs of a lack of understanding of the

Management Rules, even among Council members³³. Although the KCA management system by some is regarded as progressive in terms of female participation (Locher 2006, Locher and Müller-Böker 2007), there is obviously still a way to go before men and women are equally well included in the management structures. Although there are no formal barriers for women to go through the normal election procedures in the UCs to become MC members, the statements by the female informants referred to in the paragraph above point to some important barriers to this.

Mothers' Groups are considered the most effective of the local groups (Locher and Müller-Böker 2007:1131, Müller et al. 2008:391), and female participation in natural resource management in general often have positive effects (Locher 2006). Therefore, it could be argued that donors and managers alike should promote the further enhancement of female participation in the institutions higher up in the management hierarchy, also for the sake of efficiency.

It should be noted that there are no downward accountability links between the Department and the Council, as the Department is the overarching government institution of all protected areas in Nepal, and a sub-division of the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation (MoFSC). Thus, the power relationship between the Council and the DNPWC is unambiguously tilted towards the Department. As I shall discuss in the next chapter, this is one of the factors that can be interpreted as influencing the balance of development and conservation in KCA.

³³ Moreover, they also point to a potential downside of creating gender-specific groups and quotas; it can limit female participation to those specific arrangements made to enhance such participation. One informant (#5) stated that those who participate in the Mothers' Groups usually are only concerned about that group.

Upward Accountability

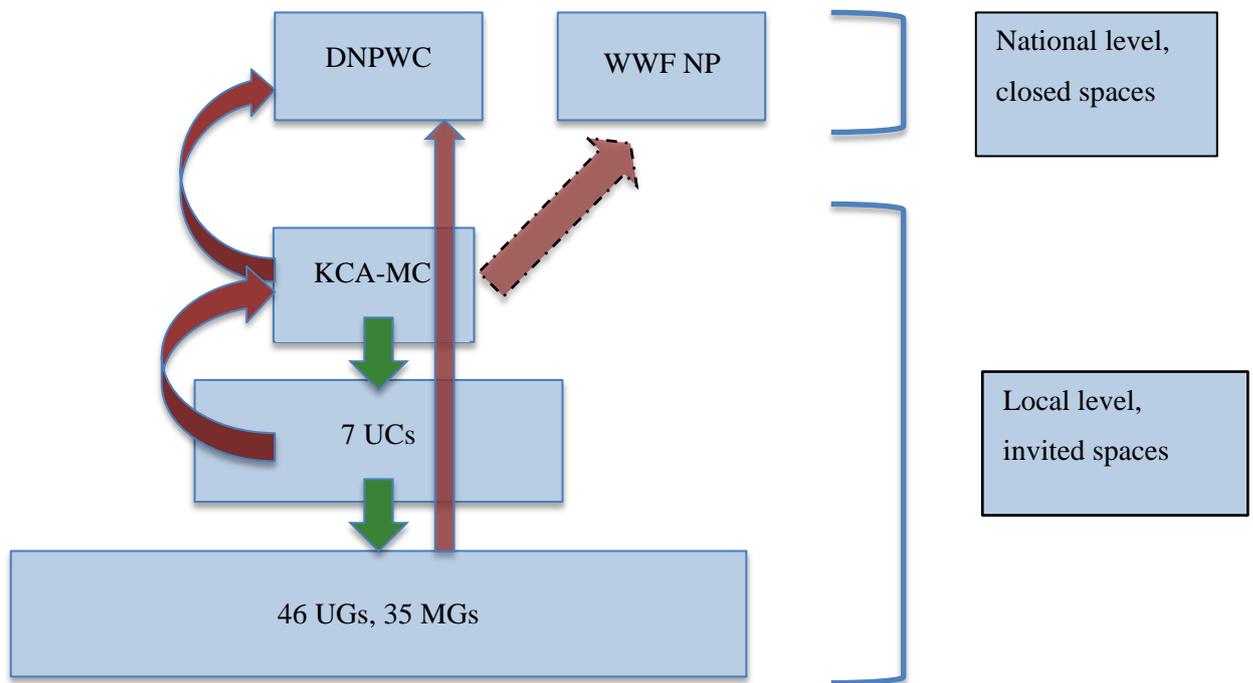
As explained above, elections of representatives in the various institutions in KCA is one important downward accountability mechanism. However, there is an important upward accountability mechanism as well, namely the possibility of dissolution of the various institutions that goes through the managerial hierarchy from DNPWC to the grassroots groups. Although this was not mentioned as a concern by any of my informants, a reading of the Management Rules suggests that it puts important limits on what activities the different groups undertake. Rule 60 explains the circumstances when the DNPWC can dissolve the Management Council; if the Council has conducted activities contrary to the Management Plan, has failed to perform the functions and duties prescribed in the Rules; if it is found that it has misappropriated funds; or if two thirds of the Council asks for its dissolution (GoN 2008: Rule 60.1 a – d). The KCA-MC in turn has the right to dissolve the User Committees in similar circumstances; if functions are performed without approval in the work plan or against the work plan; if functions, duties and responsibilities of the UCs as laid out in the Rules has not been performed; if funds are misappropriated; if any other assigned responsibilities have not been performed; or “If any actions has been performed against the interest of the local consumers [users] or failed to protect the interest of the consumers [users]” (GoN 2008: Rule 20.1 a-e)³⁴. The Council also has the power to withdraw community forests from CFUGs (GoN 2008:Rule 37). In all the above circumstances, the Rules spell out the procedures for investigations and possibilities for clarifications, but it is the power-holding institutions that have the final call. This is an example of how institutions at different levels have clear, visible power (Gaventa 2006) over institutions further down in the managerial hierarchy, and that this power at least potentially can be used to

³⁴ The last possibility in fact constitutes an additional downward accountability mechanism between the Committees and the inhabitants of the conservation area.

force these institutions to undertake activities according to decisions taken further up in the system. However, the Rules does not spell out how or whether User Groups or Mothers' Groups can be dissolved. Moreover, the wording of the Rules suggests that these groups are self-constituted, while it is clearly the KCA-MC that is responsible for constituting the UCs.

The figure below provides a graphic illustration of the relationships between the different bodies. The green arrows signify downward electoral accountability between local management institutions. The bended red arrows illustrate the upward relationship established by the powers to dissolve institutions further down in hierarchy, while the straight red arrow signifies the upward accountability relationship established by the regulatory framework that permeates the management structure in KCA. The stippled arrow illustrates WWF's donor influence (discussed further in the next chapter).

Figure 2: Accountability relationships in KCA



Source: Compiled by author, inspired by Agrawal and Ribot (1999), Ribot (2004), Gaventa (2006), Gurung (2006), and based on information obtained in interviews and in GoN (2008).

Relationship to Other Local Bodies

Ribot (2002:11) writes that “In many instances governments, donors, and NGOs avoid local elected bodies as being too “political”, or as being inefficient or lacking in capacity”. He goes a long way in arguing for the establishment of local resource use committees that are accountable to elected local government, to ensure (indirect) downward accountability to the local population (ibid:12). However, the accountability mechanisms within the KCA institutions circumvent local government – as lower level institutions are upwardly accountable to higher level institutions within KCA, and the KCA-MC being directly accountable to the DNPWC. The DDC and VDC representation in the KCA-MC and UCs is limited, and the officials from these local government institutions are not eligible for leadership positions in KCA institutions. In the case of Nepal, however, the accountability of local government itself could be seriously questioned, and thus Ribot’s proposal to use such government as an accountability link between the local population and the management bodies should be regarded with caution here. In Nepal, local elections have not been held since 1997 (Dhungel et al. 2011:163), and the terms of those officials elected then were terminated in 2002. Since then, the VDCs and DDCs have been managed by government employees with advice from a so-called all-party mechanism (ibid:52)³⁵. Dhungel et al. (2011:17) note that the

absence of elected representatives in the [local bodies] is widely believed by all categories of informants to be the main reason for their poor functioning. Although local politicians through [the All-Party Mechanism] are involved in decision-making processes, no mechanism exists to hold them accountable to the population for those decisions.

³⁵ Since the successful November 2013 elections to the national Constituent Assembly, there has been talks of new local elections in Nepal, and according to newspaper articles, the Nepali election committee is now preparing for such elections (New Indian Express 2014, 9 March). The Nepali newspaper *Republika* noted excitement and expectations for local elections in the districts already in December last year, following the national Constituent Assembly elections (Bhattarai 2013, 12 December).

In other words, the lack of downward accountability mechanisms in local bodies (VDCs and DDCs) is considered the main reason for these bodies' poor performance in delivering development and social services. A recent report conducted by the Nepali NGO *MIREST Nepal*, referred to in the newspaper *Rebública*, finds lack of accountability and absence of local elections to be important reasons for the poor service provision and inefficient management of local bodies in the country (Rawal 2014, 28 March). Interestingly, one of my informants (#1), himself VDC Chairman in one of the VDCs I visited, was of the opinion that the KCA-MC now conducted much of the work that otherwise would have been the responsibility of the VDC. This was attributed to the lack of funds in the VDC and relative wealth of the Council. Thus, in KCA one can observe a tendency to sideline those local bodies that in other circumstances could have been the most important local institutions. However, since these bodies overall in Nepal are regarded as ineffective, and since the electoral accountability mechanism is non-existent, at least for the moment, this is unsurprising (see also the discussion on security of rights at the end of the next section).

6.3.2 Powers and Rights of the Institutions

In Chapter 5, I examined several theoretical contributions related to decentralized powers and rights. A summary of some of these contributions is represented in the table below.

Table 4: Aspects of decentralization

Decision-making powers (Agrawal and Ribot 1999)	Property rights over resource use (Agrawal and Ostrom 2001)	Conditions for successful decentralization (Ribot 2002)
Power to make rules	Withdrawal	Downward accountability
Power to make decisions over resource use	Management	Discretionary powers
Power to implement and ensure compliance of rules	Exclusion	Secure rights
Power to adjudicate conflicts	Alienation	

I shall in the following look at how these resource use rights and decision-making powers are entrusted to the various institutions in KCA. It makes sense, in assessing the overall degree of decentralization, to give most weight to the powers devolved to the KCA-MC. After all, the KCA-MC is supposed to represent the inhabitants of the conservation area, ensured through elections of the officials. Moreover, these powers embody the extent of willingness of the central government authority (in this case the DNPWC as well as WWF) to relinquish *their* powers, which is a central feature of the definitions of decentralization presented elsewhere in this thesis. A second task can then be to see how management is decentralized *within* the institutional hierarchy in KCA. However, as the Management Rules (GoN 2008), which are imposed to a large degree externally on the KCA institutions, shape the formal power relationships between the institutions, decentralization within KCA does not necessarily stem from a willingness to relinquish power from the KCA-MC's side.

It is not easy to provide a clear overview over the rights and decision-making powers devolved, because of the intricate system of management and the

elaborate (but poorly translated) Management Rules. Moreover, the Management Rules more clearly states what is *not* allowed than what is required to do, and the lists of functions, duties and powers of the KCA-MC, the UCs and the UGs/MGs, laid out in Rule 11, 16 and 14, respectively (GoN 2008) are arguably more focused on functions and duties than on powers. In sum, the different responsibilities and rights show a clear prioritization of conservation responsibilities, rather than user rights.

It is also difficult to assess whether the rights that can be observed today are outcomes of decentralization reforms related to the management system of KCA, where rights are allocated to individuals or institutions as part of a move towards more decentralized management, or if they constitute some pre-KCA usufruct rights remaining also after the imposition of new rules and regulations following the establishment of the conservation area. Such remaining user rights could be of a nature that opens up for interpreting them as a result of a decentralization process (customary access rights to grazing areas that are upheld, for instance), while the opposite, centralization of control, could have happened (Ribot 2004:134). There are examples in the literature on how central governments and power-holders use the expansion of the PA system to enhance for instance territorial control (e.g. Peluso 1993 and Neumann 2001).

If WWF Nepal was still in control, one possible interpretation of the establishment of KCA could have been to denote it as privatization to a non-commercial actor (in this case an NGO) (Ribot 2004:52). However, in the following I shall investigate the property and decision-making rights in the context of decentralized conservation management, which makes sense especially when investigating a case where the initial manager of the protected area (WWF Nepal) has relinquished its control to such a great extent. I will not initiate a wider historical discussion around rights existing pre- and post

the establishment of KCA, but it can at the outset be worth noting that Gurung (2006:85) holds that none of the traditional institutions existing prior to the establishment of the conservation were dissolved, and that for instance *kipat*³⁶ and grass-cutting institutions continue to function within the framework of the new institutions. To further investigate the indigenous institutions and the consequences for these of the establishment of new protected areas goes well beyond the scope of this thesis.

In KCA, the power to create new rules is vested in the Management Council, but this power is limited to creation of new prohibitions (GoN 2008: Rule 31). The power to make decisions over resource use is vested to various degrees in different bodies, but it is the KCA-MC that is the strongest authority, as this is the institution that can allocate national (government-owned) forests as community forests to be entrusted to CFUGs, for instance³⁷. According to one informant, the KCA-MC also makes decisions related to which areas to open up for collection of herbal products, which areas that should be restricted from grazing to be restored and so on: “In the summer anyone can graze their animals everywhere above 3700 meters except in the restricted areas. In the winter, the Council has separated the land in patches” (#9), but according to the Management Rules, this is a power held by the UCs (GoN 2008: Rule 16 e) and f)). UGs and MGs can make decisions among themselves on how to allocate and prioritize funds for development activities, and interviewees often mentioned this as an important topic of the meetings in these groups. This can

³⁶ Kipat is a traditional system of land ownership dominant among Limbus in Eastern Nepal. Although officially abolished in 1968, it has been practiced also since then, especially for regulation of grazing rights and collection of forest products (Regmi 1976, Müller et al. 2008).

³⁷ This is according to Rule 36 and 37 of the Management Rules, and these rules has in effect sidelined the District Forest Office, who by the Forest Act (HMGN 1993) has legal powers to declare new areas as community forests and help establish new CFUGs. According to Ananta Bhandari, program officer in WWF, the KCA-MC also has the power to endorse the operation plans of the CFUGs, usually the power of the government (Bhandari: interview 25.04.2012). Moreover, if the grant is withdrawn, and the concerned group complains, it is the DNPWC who adjudicates the dispute, not the Regional Forest Director as is the case for such disputes in other CFUG matters (as per §27 in the Forest Act).

be interpreted as decentralization of fiscal powers, one aspect of decentralization of powers to make decisions (Agrawal and Ribot 1999:477).

The Management Rules allocate a host of duties related to management, conservation and local development work to the UGs/MGs, but no specific powers related to natural resource use. Despite this, one of my informants told me that her Mothers' Group taxed use of grazing land in the area, thus wielding what can be interpreted as exclusion rights over those resources: "Whoever takes their livestock to graze within Olangchung Gola who comes from outside, sometimes from Tibet, they charge them some money for the grazing. They keep the money in the MG fund" (#8).

Right to withdrawal of certain types of natural resources for household consumption is in principle allocated to all the inhabitants of the area, but such rights have been regulated since the establishment of KCA. Collection of herbal and other non-timber forest products is the right of any member of the community, but in community forests it is regulated by the CFUGs. Elsewhere, it is regulated by the UCs who "prescribe the procedure of consumption of the required forest product for the daily use of the residents" (GoN 2008: Rule 16f). Oli et al. (2013:30) report that the local people are satisfied with its management and mechanisms for distribution of benefits seem to be satisfactory (however, recall Parker and Thapa's (2011) concern about unequal distribution of benefits).

Several of my informants were of the opinion that access to *resources* have become more equitably distributed since the conservation area was established: "Before it was the powerful people's right in terms of access to timber, herbal products and other forest products", one informant told me (#1), while another said "In the past there were no rules or regulations, so it was the mighty's right to get whatever they felt like, because there was nobody to look after these things. But since KCAP started, this has changed." (#9). Another

informant (#14) provided a slightly different view on the matter, simply stating: “Before conservation, people had access to the jungle at any time, and they could get whatever they felt like, as there was nobody to look after these things. When KCAP and the Council started, they implemented rules and regulations to collect woods and herbal products”.

Naturally, fear of losing access to natural resources was one reason for initial skepticism mentioned when I asked interviewees about what people thought at the time when KCA was established (#12, #7), in addition to fears about the prospect of army deployment (#7) (these fears turned however out to be unfounded, as the Nepali army is not used for patrolling CAs). The restrictions imposed caused resentment in the beginning, especially with regards to the lucrative timber trade; the decision-making powers over one important resource, namely timber, is heavily restricted in the conservation area. Two interviewees (#9 and #10) recounted how timber exportation to Tibet used to be an important source of income for people living close to the Tibetan border. Timber exportation had been completely stopped following the establishment of KCA, and this still caused some resentment among those who before relied on this as a source of livelihood, according to one interviewee (#9), despite the promotion of carpet-weaving as a substitute livelihood option³⁸. Private owners of forestland can obtain permission from the Council upon recommendation from the relevant UC to export timber out of KCA, but under no circumstance out of Nepal, according the Management Rules (GoN 2008: Rule 40). It seems to be no openings in the Rules for out-of-area sales of timber from Government-owned land, be it managed as community forests or not. This policy was confirmed in an interview with Gurung, who said that the main difference between community forests within and outside conservation

³⁸ The concerns about the timber trade illustrate how geophysical variations and implications for livelihood options and opportunities influence how different communities are affected in different ways by the same restrictions and regulations. It underscores the importance of not using “the community” lightly raised by various authors referred to in Chapter 5.

areas is that CFUGs outside conservation areas can sell timber, whilst this is not an option for CFUGs located inside conservation areas (Gurung: interview 08.05.2012).

Powers to take decisions over resource use is an important feature of decentralization, because it enhances the discretionary authority of local bodies and affects the use of resources (Agrawal and Ribot 1999:477). However, whether the resource use decision-making power of for instance CFUGs can be regarded as *discretionary* powers, important for the effectiveness of decentralization reforms (Ribot 2002, 2004, Ribot et al. 2006), could be questioned. For instance, one informant held that the MGs had to consult with the KCA-MC about the use of the funds they get from the Council, and that the Council can give advice and direct the MGs if they plan to conduct activities the Council disagrees with (#1). For household consumption of forest products, the CFUGs seem to have such powers, but for any exportation of forest products outside the conservation area, a written approval from the Council must be obtained (GoN 2008: Rule 42 and Schedule 12).

The right of alienation, i.e. the right to sell or lease withdrawal, management, and exclusion rights, is to some extent allocated to the KCA-MC, as it can give such rights over patches of forest to local institutions in KCA, but as noted elsewhere, the alienation right over the whole area is controlled by the DPNWC (as of the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act (HMGN 1973)).

Finally, the powers to enforce compliance of new or altered rules and to adjudicate disputes arising around such rules (Agrawal and Ribot 1999) need to be briefly commented upon. Legal power to prosecute people having breached the NPWCA (e.g. poaching) is still the power of the warden, the

representative of DNPWC³⁹. The MC can dissolve the UCs if they breach the Management Regulations, after investigations. If any person conducts operations in community forests that are contrary to the work plan of the concerned CFUG, the User Committee covering the concerned community forest may take action against this person as prescribed by the work plan (GoN 2008: Rule 54).

Monitoring and the Making of Environmental Subjects

Several informants told me about how the Council is responsible to monitor the forests to deter poaching and irregular harvesting of forest products, and one MG informant explained that her group was involved in awareness-raising activities to combat poaching and forest fires. Many informants also noted that conservation issues in general were high on the agenda in the various fora in KCA. However, since the rule-making powers of KCA institutions are fairly limited, the power to enforce rules necessarily mainly involves rules created externally. Importantly, the power to create rules and regulations for the whole conservation area resides with the Government of Nepal, as of section 33 of the NPWCA (HMGN 1973), recalled in the preamble to the KCA Management Rules (Gon 2008). It is doubtful whether this can be understood as a feature of decentralization; rather, it can be interpreted as a way of external actors, in this case central conservation authorities (DNPWC) and the WWF, to ensure compliance with conservation regulations with minimal costs.

Neumann (2001:326) holds that local participation in buffer zone management in protected areas in Tanzania, especially as it relates to monitoring and surveillance duties, internalizes introduced ideologies of wildlife conservation and shifts the burden of wildlife protection towards the villagers. Agrawal

³⁹ This is in line with one of Ribot's proposed environmental subsidiarity principles, to separate and balance judicial, executive and legislative powers (Ribot 2004:81).

(2005:14-15) writes that in a wide range of countries “national and state governments are striving to make rural populations accomplices in environmental and their own control”. He moreover argues that decentralization policies are about new technologies of government, among them making of “environmental subjects” (ibid:7). According to Agrawal, the success of the different forest councils in Kumaon in northern India partly depended on the production of environmental subjects, defined loosely as “individuals who see the generalized need for environmental protection of in some form and whose practices and words bear the mark of this acceptance, if not of personal conversion” (ibid:18).

The making of environmental subjects is a necessary condition for successful decentralization according to Agrawal, because “Attempts to change how people act, when based solely on coercive threats in hierarchical organizations, are either formidably expensive or evidently impractical” (2005:17). Several of the instrumental arguments for decentralized PA management can be seen as at least partly depending on the creation of environmental subjects or the internalization of values related to environmental protection imposed from outside. If one accepts such a line of argument, the empowerment of local institutions and their participants coupled with upward accountability links is an effective means of controlling local behaviour for the benefit of conservation objectives. Pimber and Pretty (1997:308) write about how participation for material benefits (e.g. encouraging local people to sell their labor in return for food, cash or materials) in conventional rural development can “give the misleading impression that local people are supportive of externally driven initiatives”. Another interpretation of the lack of dissenting voices, in my data evidenced by the unanimous support for the conservation area, can be that this is due to the internalization of dominant views and values (Gaventa and Cornwall 2006:126), part of the successful creation of Agrawal’s (2005) “environmental subjects”.

Arguably, the creation of environmental subjects, or at least WWF's continued focus on capacity-building and training, can be related to invisible power, if the reader recalls that invisible power influences "how individuals think about their place in the world" (Gaventa 2006:29). Thus, whether one understands the devolution of monitoring responsibilities as decentralization depends on one's understanding of power, and different observers can therefore have widely different interpretations of this issue.

Are the Rights Secure?

As discussed in Chapter 5, it is important that those achieving rights and powers over natural resource management issues regard such rights as secure⁴⁰; if not, chances are that resources will be over-exploited as the local population do not trust that they will keep rights to withdraw or sell resources for long (Ribot 2002:16). Insecurity can also discourage local people from investing in decentralized rights or related institutions. Ribot (ibid.) distinguishes between three different means of transfer of rights, each with different levels of security. These are constitutional, legislative and transfer through ministerial decree or administrative orders (ibid:15). Recalling that the rights and powers discussed in this chapter stem from the Management Rules (GoN 2008), these rights are arguably transferred by means of ministerial decree (the least secure transfer in Ribot's distinction), as the power to create rules is held by the Government of Nepal as of the 1973 Natural Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act (HMGN 1973:§33). Thus, no legislative decision is

⁴⁰ The proposed withdrawal of management rights previously regarded as secure caused much tension when Gaurishankar Conservation Area was to be established in Nepal in 2010. The opposition came mainly from the Federation of Community Forests User Groups Nepal (FECOFUN), who feared the establishment of the area under the authority of NTNC, and based on the Management Rules applicable to the other NTNC-run conservation areas in the country (Annapurna and Manaslu) (HMGN 1996), would deprive the CFUGs in the area of their rights and responsibilities to manage the community forests (Paudel et al. 2012). The reliance of these rules constitute decentralization to a much lesser degree than what is achieved in KCA, as the apex body is not envisioned to be local in the former rules. The protests and ensuing political process led to the negotiation of new Management Rules, assuring the status of CFUGs and establishment of a management council similar to the one in charge of KCA. The process moreover challenged the "conservation hegemony" in Nepal wielded by NTNC and the central Nepali government (ibid.). However, the new rules has so far not been endorsed and approved by the Government, and civil society organizations are worried about the slow response of the Government in implementing the agreed-upon rules (Khatiwada 2014, pers. comm.)

needed to make such rules; they can be regarded as executive powers of the government. Moreover, it can be argued that the security of rights in practice also is influenced by the upward accountability mechanisms discussed above. The possibility to dissolve local institutions by other institutions further up in the administrative hierarchy can be interpreted as increasing the insecurity of rights. However, mechanisms of adjudication exist, presumably to avoid arbitrary or unfounded dissolutions, and my findings suggest that this has not so far had detrimental consequence for the management of the conservation area.

Another issue related to the security of the transferred rights is the overlap of natural resource management rights and obligations held by managing conservation organizations vested in the NPWCA and the Management Rules on the one hand, and parallel rights and obligations held by local government bodies such as the DDCs and VDCs vested in the Local Self-Governance Act (HMGN 1999) on the other hand. The Act entitles the Village Development Committees (VDCs) to tax commercial exploitation of natural resources and heritage within the village development area (HMGN 1999: §55j). It also requires the VDCs to prepare programs related to conservation of forests, vegetation, biological diversity and soil conservation, and on environmental protection in general (ibid: §28h 2 and 3, respectively). This has created conflicts between local governments and conservation organizations (Gurung 2006:46), and difficulties in coordinating effective management of biodiversity and ecosystem services at the local level, according to IUCN Nepal's 2013-2016 program framework (IUCN Nepal 2013:5). Gurung (2006:46) argues that there is a need to resolve legal conflicts and reform policies to allow for effective and efficient management of natural resources, especially in protected areas, as well as creating a collaborative management framework at the local level between KCA-MC and the DDC (ibid:84).

As long as the service provision and accountability-induced legitimacy of the local government bodies are found to be lacking, the management institutions in KCA will have the upper hand. But if/when local elections are held, it can be reason to believe that the newly elected political officials in these bodies (the DDC and the four VDCs in KCA) will want to re-establish themselves as significant actors both in the development field and in natural resource management. As long as legislation is not aligned, it remains to be seen what consequences this might have for the effective exercise of the so-far uncontested, but not very secure, rights of the KCA institutions.

6.4 Participation Typologies in KCA

As I argued in the introduction to this chapter, participation and decentralization are interlinked to the extent that it is difficult to assess the degree of participation without an understanding of the decentralized framework, as the former depends on devolution of power. Having analyzed the degree and nature of power devolution through the decentralization of management in KCA, I shall now discuss participation as it is practiced in KCA in relation to the typologies I discussed in Chapter 5.

If one aims at placing participation in the typologies presented in Chapter 5, some clarifications are necessary. The first is that the typologies themselves necessarily are mere abstractions of a much more complex reality, where participation in development projects, decision-making and political processes cannot be readily placed in either category. Following from this, real-life, non-abstracted participation is likely to have aspects of more than one typology (Cornwall 2008:273). The second is that talking about “participation in KCA” as *one* coherent concept has little meaning or value. This is because the powers of the different institutions differ widely, and thus the power devolved to the individuals participating in them also varies, depending on which

institutional level one is participating in. In fact, it could be argued that the different “levels” in the hierarchy of management in KCA could be described as the different levels where power is exercised in Gaventa’s (2006) “powercube”. As it makes little sense to discuss power and power-struggles solely at the local level if the important decisions are being taken at the national or global level, so can it be equally unfruitful to solely analyze the power-struggles and decision-making at the grassroots level (in the UGs, MGs and CFUGs) in KCA, if the important decisions are taken further up in the system (e.g. in the Council). The participation in decision-making, management and implementation corresponds with the different management *levels* in the hierarchical structure of management in KCA; the most important decision-making and distribution of resources take place in the KCA-MC (Müller at al. 2008), and powers in the lower levels are conditioned by those further up in the managerial hierarchy. Some general observations related to the participation typologies can nevertheless be made.

Participation in KCA involves taking part in both management and decision-making in addition to implementation, thus complying with White’s (1996) necessary level for a fully participatory project. This depends however on which institutional level of management the individuals participate in, and the decisions one can make are limited by the Management Rules. For example, the grassroots level institutions in KCA have quite extensive autonomy in their planning and implementation of local development work (for example through fiscal decentralization as discussed in 6.4.2), but less control over decisions regarding local conservation issues or resource use. In fact, much of the conservation work in all the institutions in KCA is imposed on those institutions through the management plan and the Management Regulations, as they put extensive duties on the shoulders of the different institutions. Also, as the institutional set-up of KCA was envisioned by KCAP and put into place through extensive capacity-building, the “spaces” that has been created for

participation in PA management in KCA is arguably of the invited type in Gaventa's (2006) parlance. As a comment on degree of autonomous decision-making in KCA, I quote White (1996:13):

however participatory a development project is designed to be, it cannot escape the limitations on this process that derive from the power relations in wider society. That people do not express other interests does not mean that they do not have them. It simply means that they have no confidence that they can be achieved.

Participation in the MGs and UGs can be interpreted as instrumental participation to use White's (1996) typology. Instrumental participation in this regard refers to participation as means to increase efficiency and reduce costs of achieving the pre-determined goals of a project (recall the reasons stated for ensuring participation in UGs and MGs in the Management Rules cited in footnote 28). It can be interpreted as instrumental on behalf of the "beneficiaries" as well, as participation in management comes with certain benefits (Parker and Thapa 2011). However, this instrumentality is only one aspect and motivation for participating in KCA management; as White (1996) discusses, there are usually more than one motivation behind participatory arrangements, and the participation in KCA has both representative and transformative aspects as I see it. Representative participation allows the participants a voice in the making of a project, thus ensuring sustainability through avoiding inappropriate or dependent projects (ibid:8). Transformative participation aims at empowering the participants, and requires an honest willingness on behalf of the organization in control (WWF Nepal in this case) to relinquish power. This willingness was clear from my interview with the conservation director in WWF Nepal, who stated that "For us it is not about control (...) WWF as an institution believes in people's power, and their ability to manage their own resources" (Gurung: interview 08.05.2012).

Pimbert and Pretty (1997) claim that functional participation is the minimum sufficient type of participation if the objective is to achieve sustainable conservation. I argue that at least this level of participation has been achieved in KCA since management responsibility was devolved to the Council, but it is important to differentiate the analysis to the different institutions in the hierarchy. For instance, participation in MGs can be said to be interactive, as it involves people that make priorities and take decisions of their own, if analyzed in itself, not related to the broader institutional framework, but it is always limited by the overarching framework of KCA as an ICDP imposed externally. Using Arnstein's (1969) typology, I argue that KCA has moved above the "partnership" ladder, as both the KCA-MC and lower-level institutions have decision-making powers over various aspect of management adjusted to the managerial level. Her ladder called "delegated power" is characterized by such independent decision-making power. Participation in the decentralized management structures of KCA does not however amount to Arnstein's highest ladder, "citizen control", since the independence of KCA institutions is limited by the regulatory framework granting the DNPWC the power to dissolve the institutions and amend the management plan.

Participation in protected area management as practiced in KCA does not amount to the "highest" level in either of the typologies presented, as I see it. For this, the structures in which people participate are too strictly set by external actors and rules, and the importance of attracting continued donor funding for activities limits, consciously or unconsciously, what activities or agendas people choose to pursue. But it is still fair to characterize KCA as a conservation area with an innovate and meaningful participatory approach to management, with substantial benefits ensuing from this approach with regards both to those participating in the projects, and for the achievement of conservation goals.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have showed how the local population in KCA participates in the management of the conservation area they live in, with specific focus on decision-making and representation of the various institutions. I have moreover analyzed the decentralization of this participatory management framework, with a focus on accountability mechanisms and the powers and rights that are devolved. The discussion has shown the importance of paying attention to the various levels of management when analyzing participation and decentralization, as well as to see participation and decentralization as interconnected phenomena. This also has implications if one aims at placing participation in KCA in the typologies I presented in the theoretical chapter.

It can rightfully be claimed that KCA is the most decentralized and locally managed protected area in Nepal, because of the unique management structure where a local body have become the top-most institution in the local management hierarchy. Nakul Chettri, Program Coordinator in ICIMOD for the Kanchenjunga Landscape Initiative, regarded KCA overall to be a successful model in terms of decentralization of conservation activities at the local level, and also in empowering people to be responsible for conservation (Chettri: interview 29.06.2012). However, I argue that all the time the central authority in charge of protected areas in Nepal has unilateral powers to dissolve the Council and amend the locally negotiated management plan, it is not a *fully* decentralized protected area. In the next chapter, I discuss the implications of the management structure for the balancing of conservation and developmental concerns. There, I argue that a certain level of control on behalf of the central government might be necessary to ensure continued protection of conservation interests.

7. A Fine Balance?

In Chapter 2, I discussed how sustainable development and the emergence of new approaches to protected area management have evolved together. I also pointed to the inherent problem of ICDPs in trying to bridge or integrate the two goals of conservation and development, by some regarded as irreconcilable. In the following, I look to some potential problems for the integration of conservation and development related to human-wildlife conflicts in KCA. I also discuss some factors influencing the balancing of conservation and development in KCA, as they relate to the decentralized management framework.

7.1 Development and Conservation in KCA

To provide a comprehensive assessment of development and conservation goals and achievements in KCA is beyond the scope of this thesis, and would have required access to written sources I do not have⁴¹. However, some broad observations based on available literature can be made, before I turn the attention to the links between the management framework and the balancing of development and conservation concerns.

Gurung (2006:82) lists two overarching objectives for the initial phase of KCAP (1998-2005), namely nature conservation and sustainable development. Research, awareness raising and programs focusing on forests and wildlife protection, such as encroachment control and monitoring and anti-poaching activities are main features of the former objective. The latter objective, broad in scope as it is, features gender mainstreaming and sustainable development

⁴¹ For instance, I was initially hoping to compare the current Management Plan (covering the years 2012-2017) with the former, and identify possible changes in priorities between development and conservation issues. Unfortunately, it has not been possible for me to obtain a copy of the current management plan (it is also uncertain whether it has been translated to English), and I only have a summary of the former.

awareness, capacity building and technology transfer, as well as improvement of central social services such as infrastructure, health and education services, income generation (alternative livelihoods), promotion of tourism and alternative energy (ibid.). The education system in KCA has vastly improved since establishment, according to Parker and Thapa (2011). Local people express that their economic wellbeing has improved since establishment (Oli et al. 2013). This corresponds to my findings; my interviewees in KCA expressed that they were in favor of the conservation area, many stating that their lives had bettered since the establishment.

Oli et al. (2013) report that User Committees in KCA have been active in conservation activities that have helped reducing the over-harvesting of resources and wildlife poaching. This is also in line with interviewees' views on the matter – most interviewees reported on conservation activities being implemented, and nothing in my findings suggests that conservation is no longer a priority in the management of the area. Perhaps surprisingly, the conservation director in WWF Nepal seemed satisfied with the status of conservation work in KCA – he was of the opinion that conservation work was going well, but lamented the status of the health and education sector, (Gurung: interview 08.05.2012). He also echoed the concern of many of my informants in KCA that the tourism industry and associated infrastructure was still poorly developed. Tourism development is often regarded as a way of integrating development and conservation, and was framed as such by officials from DNPWC and WWF visiting the area prior to the establishment of KCA, according to one informant (#7). The logic is as follows: if the local people participate in the protection of nature and wildlife, the area will be more attractive to tourists and tourism business can become an important livelihood option for the inhabitants. However, so far tourism influx has not lived up to its promise.

7.1.1 Human-wildlife conflicts

Conservation practitioners recognize human-wildlife conflicts to be an increasing challenge in achieving conservation goals, especially those concerning the conservation of large, dangerous animals (Nyhus et al. 2003), such as the snow leopard in KCA. Indeed, several interviewees mentioned typical human-wildlife conflicts such as depredation of livestock and crops as significant problems in the communities, and it has also been recognized as a challenge by other researchers (Gurung 2006, Müller et al. 2008). However, increasing problems related to wildlife depredation is also a sign of successful conservation of the wildlife in the area; it is linked to the reduction of hunting and retaliatory killings of wild animals and corresponding increases in wildlife populations (Gurung 2006:119). One informant (#7), himself heavily involved in snow leopard conservation and monitoring work, explained that numbers of snow leopards most likely have increased since the establishment of the conservation area, as they witness increasing numbers of domestic livestock killed by snow leopards. The number of yaks killed by snow leopards had reportedly increased from around 10 a year in his community to around 30.

While depredation of livestock is the most important problem in high altitude areas, the depredation of crops by other animals is the main issue in lower areas⁴². In Tapethok, crop depredation by for instance deer, bears and monkeys was considered a major concern (#12, #13). Moreover, despite crop depredation becoming more and more common, a compensation scheme was seemingly still not in place at the time of research. Information on this was diverging, some claimed in informal talks that a system was in place, but not functioning well, while an interviewee from KCA-MC said that such a scheme was not in place and probably would not be established either, because it

⁴² Crop depredation was not mentioned as a significant issue by informants in Ghunsa and Olangchung Gola, because in these higher altitude villages they grow potatoes and vegetables inside the villages, not in areas in or close to forests (#7 and #8).

would be impossible to find a system that could establish whether claims are false or genuine (#13).

In contrast, four Snow Leopard Conservation Committees (SLCCs) have been established in various high-altitude communities, to administrate livestock insurance systems and monitor snow leopard populations. Compensation for livestock killings was regarded as one important factor for the reduction of retaliatory killings, in turn contributing to increasing numbers of snow leopards (Shrestha: interview 19.05.2012). However, the system is not fully developed yet, and the financial sustainability of the system is a concern – as with other conservation and development activities in KCA, the Council is still dependent on external financial support (ibid.).

Wildlife depredation is a good example of the inherent problems of trying to integrate conservation and development – good conservation practices directly cause problems for those depending on core livelihood activities of KCA: livestock herding and farming. For conservation and local livelihood needs to be reconciled, complicated and costly compensation mechanisms seem to be needed. If tourism takes off in KCA, it can become an example of an opposite dynamic, namely that successful development initiatives cause problems for nature conservation. The environmental downside of massive tourism is witnessed in the Annapurna (Nyaupane and Thapa 2006) and Everest regions (Stevens 2003, Whelpton 2005:150).

7.2 Balancing Decentralization

Norwegian experiences with decentralized protected area management suggest that when local municipalities are entrusted with management responsibilities, they tend to prioritize the interests of landowners, resource users and the tourism industry higher than what is usual in protected areas traditionally managed by central authorities (Falleth and Hovik 2008:9). But in Norway,

the local management boards that have been established due to the decentralization of PA management are composed of local politicians, and not of local stakeholders or professional expertise. This has led to a politicization of nature conservation, as management is moved from the bureaucratic to the political arena (Fauchald and Gulbrandsen 2012:215). In KCA, however, the management council is predominantly made up of local stakeholders, with limited membership from the VDCs and the DDC. The prioritization of resource user interests witnessed in Norway as a consequence of the *politicization* of PA management is thus not likely in the management of KCA, but this is however not to say that local user interests are not prioritized higher by local-level decision-makers in KCA than by national authorities (considering that they are downwardly accountable to their constituencies).

The direction of accountability relationships might be an important factor when it comes to balancing conservation and development concerns. The regulatory framework described earlier works as a check on the empowered local institutions' presupposed drive to prioritize local development over national or global conservation interests, as does the accompanying upward accountability relationships such as the threat of dissolution and the extensive reporting requirements and pre-set themes in the Management Plan. This retention of some control by the central conservation authorities can be seen as a security measure to uphold the "wider public interest". A second factor is the continued dependence on WWF Nepal as the major donor⁴³, sometimes witnessed as *visible power*, as WWF decides which proposals laid out in the plans of the local institutions they can support, and sometimes as *hidden power*, where the recognition of the donor dependence frames what decision-makers in KCA regard as possible and thus shapes the agenda of the

⁴³ WWF Nepal spending on KCAP in NRs: Fiscal Year (FY) 2008-09: 34 288 539; FY 2009-10: 28 464 039; FY 2010-11: 28 930 309; FY 2011-12: 42 925 107; FY 2012-13: 51 043 864 (WWF Nepal 2013:41). The increase in KCAP expenditures in the last two fiscal years corresponds with substantial increases in WWF Nepal's general expenditures.

institutions (Gaventa 2006:29). Also *within* the management framework of KCA, the financial dependence of for instance the MGs upon the Council was mentioned by one interviewee (#1) as a way for the council to control the institutions further down in the hierarchy.

Moreover, the balancing of conservation concerns and development needs is also to some extent depending on the mitigation of human-wildlife conflicts, which when not tackled can pose fundamental challenges to the reconciliation of human and conservation needs immanent in ICDPs. As discussed above, several systems are established or are planned to be established to tackle human-wildlife conflicts, but it remains to be seen whether these systems are sustainable in the long term, or whether an increasing level of conflict might be witnessed in the future. A final issue that might influence the balance is the change in perceptions among the villagers themselves, what Agrawal (2005) calls the making of environmental subjects. However, it is too early to tell whether such a change in perceptions has happened among most villagers in KCA or not (and if so for, for which reasons), and in view of the sampling methods I used in the research process, it would be reckless to generalize my findings on environmental values and perceptions to the wider KCA population.

It can perhaps be argued that the two last issues discussed in the paragraph above might lessen the burden on the regulatory framework and upward accountability relationships in sanctioning behavior in KCA. If human-wildlife conflicts increase, with huge impacts on people's livelihoods with insufficient compensation systems, it is possible that enhanced capacity of monitoring groups, external or locally organized, will be needed to check poaching activities for instance. Likewise, if the perceptions of the local inhabitants do not change despite the efforts of capacity building and "buying in" on local inhabitants by financing local development work and promoting

tourism, or if funding for development projects dry up and income from tourism does not materialize, sanctions might be needed. This is a risk as the participation in and positive attitudes towards the conservation area discussed in the former chapter is linked to the development improvements that has materialized as a consequence of WWF Nepal's heavy investments in the area. It is moreover enhanced as the expectations for further improvements of local infrastructure and livelihood opportunities increase among the local population (Müller et al. 2008).

Chances are that sanctions, if imposed by the local institutions, might create local-level conflicts. Despite the promises of ICDPs to reconcile local development aspirations and conservation goals, whether established by national policy goals or international commitments, it is a fair assumption that conflict can arise between these two interests. Fauchald and Gulbrandsen (2012) hold that public policy implementation studies assume that the local governance institutions' ability to implement national policy goals depend on the type and content of policy, and moreover the degree of conflict over the particular policy. They expect that policy fields with high levels of conflict require more centralized control if national or international policy goals are to be implemented (ibid:204-5). This can be related to the discussions on appropriate levels of decentralization reforms raised by Ribot with his "environmental subsidiarity principles" (2004) and the ecosystem approach as a framework for implementing the CBD (SCBD 2004). The ecosystem approach acknowledges many different communities of interests, at different levels, with different capacities to take action. It also acknowledges a difference between local and wider public interests. Because of a broader set of acknowledged stakeholders, and more concern for the public good (parallel to Fauchald and Gulbrandsen's (2012) concern for the protection of public goods in PAs, in contrast to the management of CPR goods), the ecosystem approach, when applied, is likely to be less radical in its decentralization

recommendations than Ribot's environmental subsidiarity principles. After all, the corresponding principle in the ecosystem approach (principle 2), is only one out of 12 principles, while the motivation to decentralize management and decision-making power is very central to Ribot's principles.

7.3 Conclusion

At the beginning of Chapter 6, I presented two initial propositions I had before visiting KCA. This discussion has provided some possible explanations for why conservation efforts have been upheld despite the assumption that the opposite would be expected. However, as the discussion has shown, it is too early to state that development and conservation have been reconciled in KCA; only future observations will tell whether the decentralized and participatory management framework is financially sustainable and can manage to deliver on all its promises.

8. Concluding Remarks

Throughout this thesis, I have explored the gradual move towards more inclusive approaches in protected area management parallel to the emergence of sustainable development as the dominant discourse on developmental and environmental issues, the increasing focus on local participation among those involved in both development and conservation work, and the move towards decentralization of natural resource and conservation management. I have also analyzed the internal political shifts in Nepal that facilitated this change in the Nepali context, while noting the considerable external pressures that moved in the same direction. However, I have also discussed the opposition towards the “new” approaches in PA management by some conservation practitioners and scholars who see this as detrimental to the core objectives of PAs to conserve wildlife and biological diversity, and some inherent problems of reconciling development needs and conservation goals in PA management.

I have further provided a detailed analysis of various aspects of local participation in the management framework of Kangchenjunga Conservation Area. I have shown how participation is linked with and partly dependent on decentralization reforms, as the latter opens for devolution of powers and rights to local stakeholders and decision-makers, devolutions that give participation in the management substance and meaning. Although the participatory approach to the management of KCA does not amount to the highest levels of the various typologies of participation, analysis has showed that participation in KCA is substantial. Further attention should however be afforded to the issue of power within the various institutions, and the degree to which equal opportunities to participate also in the higher levels of management are ensured. Some problems related to this have been identified.

Further, analysis of the extent of decentralization of management in KCA has illustrated the importance of looking at the different levels of management and the power relationships between the local bodies and external institutions such as the WWF and the DNPWC. Although substantial powers and rights have been devolved to local actors in KCA, significant limits are specified in the Management Rules of KCA, and upward accountability relationships further condition the freedom of action of the local institutions. Although KCA arguably is the most decentralized PA in Nepal, I would not describe it as being “fully managed through participatory conservation approaches by local people” (Oli et al. 2013:29) or having a “complete devolution of management authority” (Parker and Thapa 2011:880).

Lastly, I have discussed how some aspects of management in KCA affect the balancing act of conservation and development inherent in ICDPs. Overall, KCA in my view represents a good example on how to balance conservation and development at the local level, through participatory conservation and development efforts, but it remains to be seen if the good practices witnessed so far in KCA are sustainable in financial and managerial terms. The reservations noted in the above paragraph notwithstanding, the responsibility to conserve biodiversity and natural resources *is* to a large extent handed over to the local communities in KCA, in line with Ribot’s (2002, 2004) environmental subsidiarity principles as well as with one of the principles of the Ecosystem Approach for implementation of the CBD (UNEP 2000). More research is needed to assess the overall achievements in biodiversity conservation since the establishment of KCA, the results of which might shed more light on the issue of finding the “right” level of decentralization as it relates to balancing different and diverging interests in KCA.

8.1 Prospects for Further Research

KCA is part of a wider transboundary Kangchenjunga landscape, encompassing parts of India, Bhutan and China (Tibet Autonomous Region). In Nepal, it also forms part of the Sacred Himalayan Landscape (SHL) (GoN/MoFSC 2006), under which WWF Nepal continues its financial support to KCAP (WWF Nepal 2013). Concerns about the viability of isolated PAs (“conservation islands”) in ensuring long-term protected conservation of species have led to an increased focus on regional cooperation and a landscape-level approach to conservation, inspired by the Ecosystem Approach adopted by CBD States Parties and discussed elsewhere in this thesis (Chettri et al. 2008, Shakya and Joshi 2008, Chettri: interview 29.06.2012). What implications the emergence of transboundary cooperation and a wider landscape approach to conservation in Nepal might have for the participatory approach and decentralized management structure in KCA is one potential interesting focus for future research in KCA and PA management in Nepal and the wider region generally.

In this thesis, I have briefly discussed the notion of “environmental subjects”, coined by Agrawal (2005). As noted, no firm conclusions could be drawn on the basis of my empirical material whether a change in perceptions and environmental values has taken place among the local population in KCA, but this constitute another potential subject for further research. How are environmental norms spread among those living in or close to protected areas? What implications can this have for the management of PAs, and for the degree of decentralization appropriate when different interests and concerns are to be protected and taken into account?

A third issue of interest for further research is the motivations behind decentralization, why central authorities choose to pursue decentralization reforms and relinquish power. Agrawal and Ostrom (2001) regard the lack of

attention to the political motivations behind decentralization reforms as a lacuna in much research on decentralization. An especially interesting case in this regard is the recent establishment of Gaurishankar Conservation Area (GCA), where NTNC has been granted management responsibilities for 20 years (NTNC 09.06.2010). Established in 2010, when Nepali conservation authorities had had several years of experience with decentralized conservation in KCA to learn from, it is a puzzle worth further investigation why the central authorities regarded a 20 year tenure to NTNC to be an appropriate way forward for one of the newest protected areas in Nepal. Api Nampa Conservation Area, established in the same year, is managed by DNPWC (DNPWC 2014c); this is also a potential case for research into the political motivations behind choices to decentralize or not to decentralize.

As this thesis has shown, KCA has proved that participatory decentralized conservation management, although far from perfect, is a viable strategy to ensure politically feasible and socially just conservation programs, to paraphrase Wilshusen et al. (2002:36). Speaking on behalf of the women participating in management groups in KCA, one of my interviewees urged me to tell friends and family about the women performing important conservation work in the communities in the far north-east of Nepal: “We are happy and feel pride about our work” (#3). It would be a pity if KCA were just a single outcome of a short window of opportunity; therefore, further research into the political motivations behind the management choices made for the new PAs in Nepal is warranted.

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Appendices

Appendix I: List of Professional Interviews

Name of interviewee	Organization	Background of Interviewee	Date	Place
Gurung, Ghana	WWF Nepal	Conservation Director	8 May 2012	Kathmandu
Bhandari, Ananta	WWF Nepal	Program Officer, Sacred Himalaya Landscape	25 April 2012	Kathmandu
Chettri, Nakul	ICIMOD	Program Coordinator, Kanchenjunga Landscape Initiative	29 June 2012	Kathmandu
Malla, Yam	IUCN	Country Representative	30 April 2012	Kathmandu
Shrestha, Sujeet, and Singh, Gangaram	WWF, DNPWC	Program manager, Warden	19 May 2012	Taplejung Bazaar
Limbu, Kulbahadur	Himali Conservation Forum	Field Technician	10 June 2012	Taplejung Bazaar

Appendix II: List of Interviews in KCA

Number	Gender	Location	Role of interviewee	Date
#1	Male	Lelep	Lelep VDC Chairman	22.5
#2	Male	Lelep	Accountant for KCAP and KCA-MC	23.5
#3	Female	Lelep	MC member, Lelep VDC MG Representative	23.5 and 7.6
#4	Female	Lelep	MG secretary	24.5
#5	Female	Lelep	MG treasurer	24.5
#6	Male	Lungthung	MC member	25.5
#7	Male	Ghunsa	Chairman of SLCC Ghunsa, Sekathum-Ghunsa UC and Ghunsa hydropower project	29.5
#8	Female	Olangchung Gola	MG member	1.6
#9	Male	Olangchung Gola	MC member	3.6
#10	Male	Olangchung Gola	MC member, CFUG representative	3.6
#11	Male	Lelep	Former MC treasurer, UG member	7.6
#12	Male	Thapetok	MC member	8.6
#13	Female	Thapetok	MC member, Thapetok VDC MG representative	8.6
#14	Male	Thapetok	MC member	9.6

Appendix III: Interview Guide

1. Please tell me about your role in [the institution you participate in]
 - a. How long have you been active in [the institution you participate in]?
 - b. What are your responsibilities?
 - c. What issues do you raise?
2. Can you describe the development of KCA activities over the last six years, since the handover? (or for as long a period as you have information/experience on)
 - a. What kind of activities do you conduct?
 - b. Has it changed since 2006?
3. How is the Management Council put together?
 - a. Who gets to work/volunteer there?
 - b. How do the different members cooperate with one another?
4. How are decisions being made?
 - a. Does everyone speak during the meetings?
 - b. Are there any barriers for participating in the discussions?
5. How is the management plan for KCA put together?
 - a. Who are involved in the process?
 - b. What is the role of WWF in the process?
 - c. What is the role of the DNPWC in the process?
6. How would you describe the relationship between the Management Council, DNPWC and WWF?
7. Has the financing of KCAP changed since 2006? (If so, how? Does it affect the independence of the KCAP administration?) Where are the main bulk of financial inputs coming from?
8. What challenges/problems do you face in your community?
9. Do you remember anything regarding the establishment of KCA?
10. I am now finished with the questions I wanted to ask you. Is there anything else you want to add?

I also recorded the gender and age of the interviewee, and asked about education level, mother tongue and how long the person had been involved in the relevant institution.