

## **Institutional Copying in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: The Role of 14,000 British Colonial Officers**

By Valentin Seidler\*

### **Abstract**

Did individual British officers determine the institutional development of former colonies? The article presents a new research program into institutional reform and economic development based on a new dataset of 14,000 biographical entries of senior colonial officers in 54 British colonies between 1939 and 1966. The rich data permit a new methodological approach towards the question of how institutions are copied into countries. It puts a radical focus on the individual actors involved in the institutional reforms before independence. The article discusses fundamental information on the British colonial service and presents preliminary analyses from within the new research agenda.

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### **1. Introduction: A Research Agenda Around Institutional Copying and Bricolage**

In 1927, the British established the East African Governor's Conference with the aim of harmoniously exploiting the fisheries in Lake Victoria. Under this umbrella representatives from Tanganyika (today Tanzania), Kenya and Uganda met once or twice a year to discuss fishing quotas (Tvedt 2010, 117).

In hindsight, the relevance of this body vastly exceeded the management of fish stocks. The cooperation between the three colonies gradually evolved into the East African High Commission, a predecessor of today's East African Community, which coordinated a broad portfolio from veterinary research to railroad traffic in the three colonies.<sup>1</sup> Somewhat neglected by economists and historians alike, the East African High Commission's headquarters in Kenya

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\* Ludwig-Boltzmann Institute, University of Vienna, Nußdorfer Str. 64, 1090 Vienna, Austria. The author can be reached at [valentin.seidler@univie.ac.at](mailto:valentin.seidler@univie.ac.at).

<sup>1</sup> In this article, the term 'colony' is used for all types of dependent territories (such as protectorates) which were under the administration of the Colonial Office in London.