

Alpine Tourism in Tropical Africa and Sustainable Development?

Ugandan Rwenzori and Mt. Kenya as Case Studies

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Abstract

Alpine tourism in the attractive, glaciated highlands of Eastern Africa's national parks has traditionally been considered an engine of regional development. The major question this article examines is the significance of this economic sector and whether it can contribute to sustainable regional development. The research area is Mt. Kenya and the Ugandan Rwenzori; the detailed studies were conducted in the most intensively visited tourist areas, i.e. at the foothills of the two massifs: in the Mobuku Valley in the eastern Rwenzori, and at Naro Moru west of Mt. Kenya. In addition to analyses of the current state of the art as well as of official statistical data, our conclusions are derived from own surveys, mapping activities and household observations.

The results show that economic benefits from mountaineering tourism in the Mt. Kenya region are fewer than commonly calculated, mainly because of the low occurrence of tourism. Moreover, existing incomes are low, inconsistent and distributed unevenly. There are clear parallels to the critical structures characterizing the Rwenzori mountains in Uganda: alpine tourism does not reduce regional income disparities and largely fails to promote sustainable development. Nevertheless, community-based tourism, as shown by the example of the Rwenzori Mountaineering Services (RMS) in the Rwenzori National Park and of the Guides & Porters Safari Club (GPSC) in the Mount Kenya National Park, stabilizes the livelihood of rural households and reduces the vulnerability of families. Whereas in the Mt. Kenya area, most of the regional households are involved, in the Rwenzori mountains the favorable effects of alpine tourism are concentrated in just one valley (and support only one twelfth of the entire Rwenzori population). Thus, its contribution to sustainable regional development is negligible.

Keywords: alpine tourism, poverty reduction, sustainable livelihood, Mt. Kenya, Rwenzori

1 Motivation

Since the study of Vorlaufer (1995), international tourism for promoting sustainable regional development and poverty reduction in the least developed countries, specifically in tropical African countries, is being disputed. Not only ecological problems, but also unfavorable socioeconomic effects that are often combined with objectionable dependencies on industrialized countries, are an issue. In the LDC, national airlines, state organizations and big tour operators, with headquarters usually in the respective capital, benefit from international tourism. Nevertheless, in most of these countries this economic sector is considered an engine of regional development. Since the international visitors in the countries of tropical Africa seek, above all, nature experience, it is not surprising that the most interesting tourist areas are located in the nature reserves. Therefore tourism is concentrated - at least in the sub-Saharan regions - largely in the national parks, which makes it nationally controllable through access restrictions.

This applies in particular to the glaciated highlands of East Africa, which, in a top-down process, had all been declared national parks over the past decades. The State National Park authorities of Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda grant extraordinary economic importance to the Afro-alpine tourism in the scenically very attractive, highest elevations of Africa – Kilimanjaro (5,895 m), Mt. Kenya (5,199 m) and Rwenzori (5,109 m) – (cf. <http://www.kws.org> – <http://www.tanzaniaparks.com> – <http://www.uwa.or.ug>).

The objective of the present article is to investigate what role this tourism plays in the tropical high mountains of Africa and whether it contributes to sustainable regional development. The study will also examine the correlations between tourism in national parks and the potential for regional conflicts. Some preparatory work that exists on Mt. Kenya and Rwenzori offers these two massifs as suitable case study areas. For popular climbers' destination Kilimanjaro, however, no relevant research results are available. Recent scientific publications are mostly ecologically and natural-scientifically oriented (cf. Bloemer 2002, Bart et al. 2003, Nüsser 2009). In addition, the tourism-related publications on Rwenzori and Mt. Kenya that have been published in the last two decades are not plentiful. In their anthology, Osmaston et al. (1998) address the problem facing tourism in Rwenzori National Park; the topic is somewhat later continued by Erhard and Steinicke (2006) and Steinicke (2011). In the area of Mt. Kenya, Erhard (2000) examined the subject of community-based tourism. Closely linked to it is a newer representation by Steinicke and Neuburger (2012) of the effects of community-based tourism on poverty reduction at the western slope of Mt. Kenya. Nonetheless, studies specific to the topic of tourism in tropical mountain regions of Africa and sustainable regional development are missing entirely.

Apart from evaluating the latest research and analyzing the official statistics, this paper is aimed at providing information from a range of sources, including open, qualitative interviews as well as focus group discussions with guides and porters of both case study areas, interviews with experts (authorities, Makerere University in Kampala, tourism cooperatives, and hotel managers), inspection of the visitors books at the gates of the Mt. Kenya and Rwenzori National Parks, and various mapping activities. The detailed studies were conducted in the most intensively visited tourist areas of the two massifs: in the Mobuku Valley in the eastern Rwenzori, and at Naro Moru west of Mt. Kenya.

2 Sustainability and Tourism: Some Theoretical Considerations

Since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the concept of sustainability has had a firm place in almost all documents and discourses on regional development and planning. However, with its diverse and sometimes conflicting use and often strategic functionalization by various political actors, the term has become an empty phrase that does not do justice to the basic intention of the concept (Brand 2004, Kates et al. 2005, Park et al. 2008). To investigate the effects of alpine tourism in tropical Africa in terms of sustainability, we therefore focus here after on the short- and long-term – i.e. sustainable – employment and income effects at the regional level, as well as the impact on systems of livelihood at the household level.

For the analysis at the household level, the sustainable rural livelihood approach is suitable (Bebbington 1999, Chambers 2006, Carney 2002, Scoones 2009).

It puts the focus on three basic items:

- on resources and assets available for each household to secure daily survival,
- on the forms of combining and transforming resources and assets to build households' livelihoods, and
- on strategies of households to expand their access to the respective resources and assets.

Accordingly, this approach begins with the premise that not only monetary income from a variety of sources is available for the everyday management of destitute households, but also the various forms of capital, i.e. social, human, natural, physical, and financial resources, are used by the members of the household in a very complex, efficient, and at the same time dynamic combination (Bebbington 1999, Bohle 2001, Scoones 2009). Sustainability of livelihoods are thus considered established "when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base" (Scoones 1998: 5). Sustainability of livelihoods, access to resources, and opportunities to provide them depend on institutions and organizations, on parent structures and conditions as well as on policy and trends, which generate inclusion and exclusion processes.

This leads to the issue of impacts of alpine tourism on regional development. Generally it can be observed that national and international strategy papers for regional development, specifically for peripheral rural regions, integrate mostly the promotion of tourism, based on the fact that tourism at the global level represents one of the most dynamic economic sectors of the last decades (UNWTO 2006, OECD 2010, Conrady and Buck 2011).

Governments of developing countries, international development agencies and NGOs see these initiatives as an opportunity to initiate development processes particularly in peripheral regions deprived of other resources and potentials (Baumhackl et al. 2006, Telfer and Sharpley 2008, OECD 2010). Scholars as well as politicians, however, hold controversial views on the potential of tourism as a developing factor, since numerous undesirable developments, like increased external dependency by the countries of the global South, reinforced regional disparities and caused social distortions. However, the effects of tourism per se as an engine of development are rarely questioned; the discussion is rather about the "correct" form of long-term economic viability and its social and environmental sustainability (Harrison 2001, Baumhackl et al. 2006). Since the 1990s, the concept of community-based tourism has therefore been applied, and since the 2000s a model that provides for the poor ("pro-poor tourism") has been practiced as a suitable future blueprint for tourism in developing countries. While the former focuses on participation and empowerment of local communities, the latter is aimed at economic distribution processes to improve income of the impoverished population. Experiences gained from the implementation of these concepts within the past decades show a contradictory picture and leave doubts as to their effectiveness (Ashley et al. 2001, Hall 2007, Okazaki 2008). Currently studies on the direct relationship between tourism development and rural livelihoods exist only sporadically, especially in relation to national parks where they assess the relevant projects rather unfavorably (Ashley 2000, Ashley et al. 2001, Goodwin and Roe 2001, Spenceley 2003, Tao and Wall 2009).

As the present study focuses on the impact of tourism on the regional and the household level, it seems rational to apply the livelihood approach which connects the analysis of processes both at the macro and micro levels. At the regional level, we illuminate the sustainability

effects of tourism upon the regional economy (creation of jobs, regional added value, etc.) and upon the internal structuring of the tourism sector (corporate structure, development of upstream and downstream sectors, etc.). At the community and household level we analyze to what extent the Mount Kenya Guides and Porters Safari Club (GPSC) and the Rwenzori Mountaineering Services (RMS), as community-based tourism organizations, contribute to the welfare of the respective community, and also how far the incorporation of the local population into their organization improves the sustainability of the livelihood of households.

3 Alpine Tourism on Mt. Kenya and Ugandan Rwenzori

On a global scale, Africa as a tourist destination has long been one of the least sought-after regions with regard to both international tourist arrivals and tourism receipts (UNWTO2006). Within this context, the East African countries have had a rather small share of the already moderate growth of international tourism to Africa since the 1990s. In the following discussion it is to be considered that both in Kenya and in Uganda, due to political conflicts in the eastern and central African region, the flow of guests experienced strong fluctuations over the last decades.

3.1 Significance of Tourism in Kenya and Uganda

Since the 1990s Kenya as a destination has experienced an expansion of mass tourism, which, in contrast to its neighboring countries, is connected with the successful implementation of government policies to promote a diversified offer. Although this east African country was able to reverse the decline in visitor numbers of the years 2007/2008, and in 2010 with 1.5 million tourist arrivals even reached its previous record result (KNBS 2011), Job and Metzler's (2003) estimation is valid in slightly modified form: Kenya is indeed still in the stagnation phase, but the visitor numbers vary enormously from year to year. Due to domestic political turmoil that reached well into the 1980s, and the civil war in nearby Rwanda and eastern Congo, which in the 1990s impeded the growth of tourism, Uganda remains one phase behind Kenya and has therefore reached the expansion phase. Indeed, the tourist arrivals doubled between 2005 and 2010 from 0.5 to 1 million (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2011). Nevertheless, in Uganda tourism accounts for less than 5% of the national GDP, while in Kenya its share is almost 10% (UNWTO 2006; Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2011). Despite the expansion of attractive offers to tourists, demand in both countries is still focused on the numerous national parks in savanna areas and therefore on game drives (in Uganda specifically Gorilla and Chimpanzee tracking). With 25,600 visitors (2009) in Mount Kenya National Park (KWS 2011) and 1,529 in Rwenzori Mountains National Park (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2011), both are among the least visited national parks of their countries. In both states, barely 1% of NP-visitors reach the two national parks. Consequently there is no doubt that mountaineering constitutes only a tiny fraction of Kenya's and Uganda's tourism (cf. fig. 1a and 1b).

Figure 1a: Number of visitors to selected national parks and game reserves in Kenya 1995-2009

Source: adapted from Steinicke and Neuburger (2012)

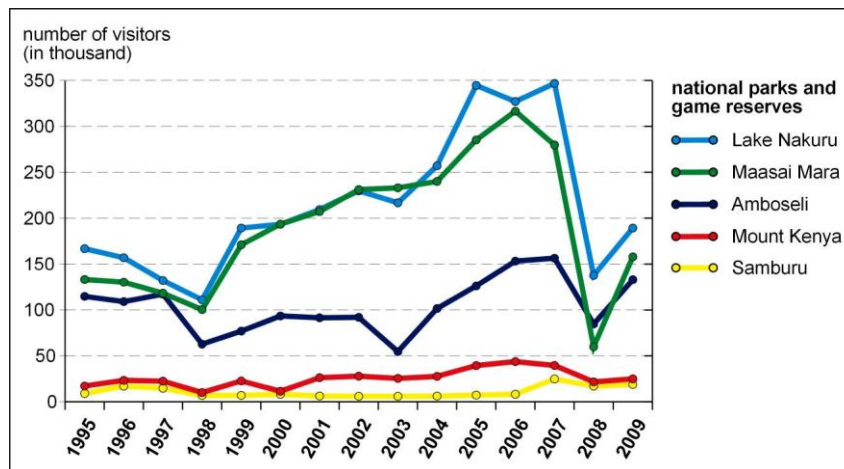
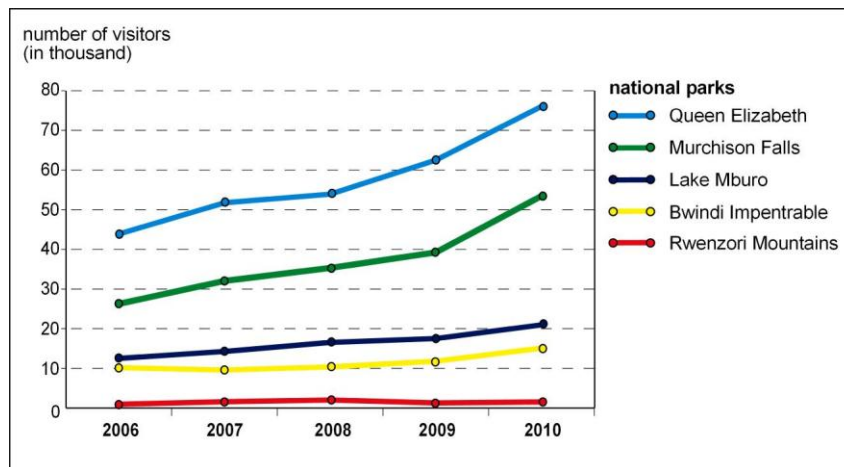


Figure 1b: Number of visitors to selected national parks and game reserves in Uganda 2006-2010

Source: Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2011)



3.2 Rwenzori and Mt. Kenya Regions: Demographic-Economic and Ethnic Profiles

In order to evaluate the sustainability of tourism for the respective region, it seems sensible to assess the socio-economic and ethno-political structure. It depends on the economic conditions to what extent tourist activities are intertwined with other economic sectors and how they can be integrated into them, and thus are capable of a long-term development impulse and contribution to poverty reduction. Ethno-social and political conditions are instrumental for conflict potential or acceptance within the local population, both with regard to national parks in general and activities in the tourism industry in particular.

3.2.1 The Eastern Rwenzori

As with most designations of national parks in East Africa, the local population in the extreme west of Uganda was also not consulted regarding the establishment of Rwenzori Mountains National Park (RMNP) in 1992. It was even developed against the express wishes of the indigenous Bantu ethnicities Konjo, Amba and Toro (fig. 2). The residents are prohibited from expanding settlements vertically and to use land above 2,200 m a.s.l. without permission. Areas that were placed under protection solely based on their ecological significance, without participation of the native population, do not conform to a modern view of sustainability. With these restrictions, a population pressure emerged that could be relieved only by migration into the foothills. As a result, social tensions with the ethnic groups outside of the mountain range increase.

Figure 2: Ethnic groups and administrative boundaries in the Rwenzori mountains

Source: adapted from Steinicke (2011)

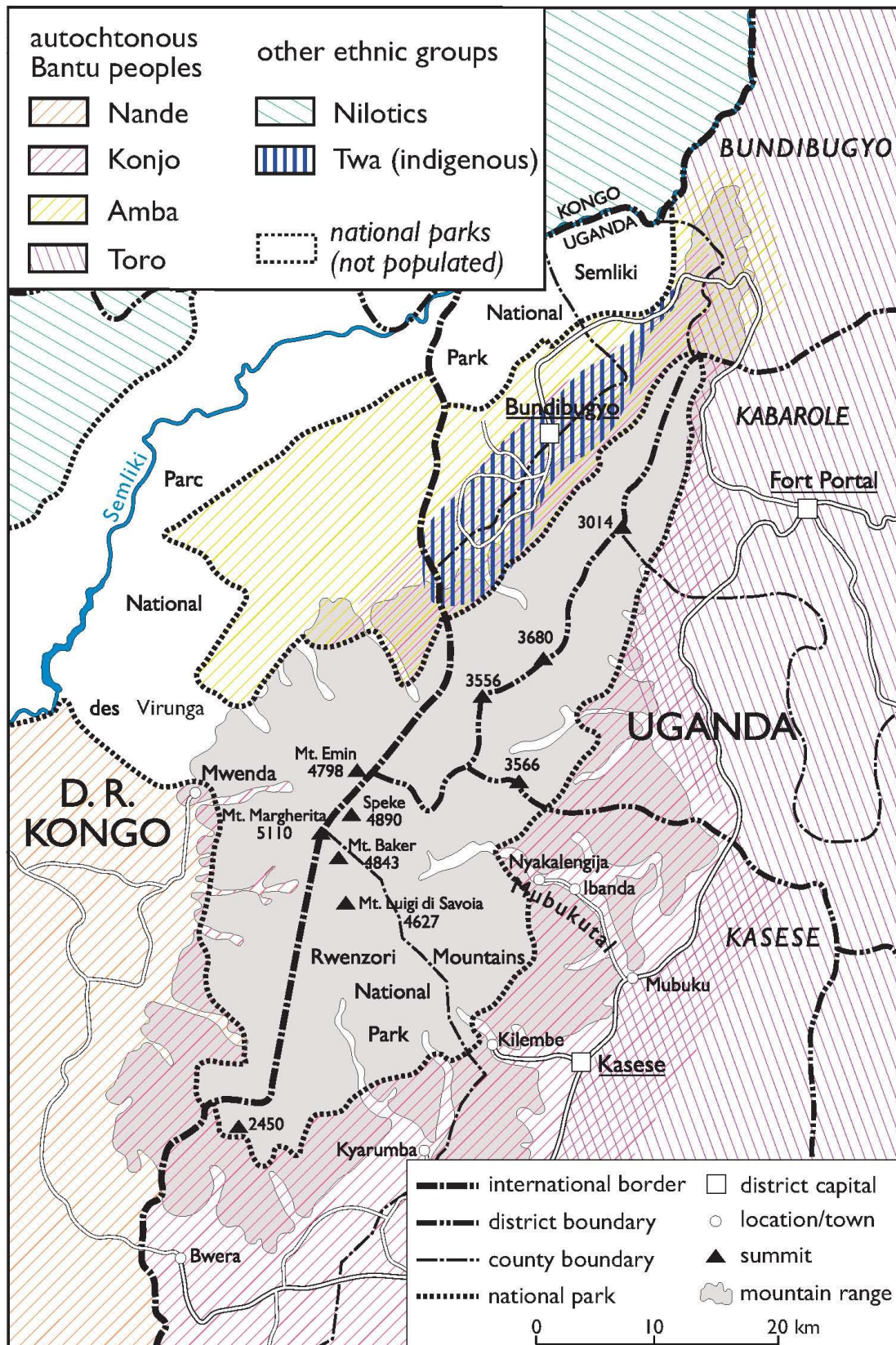
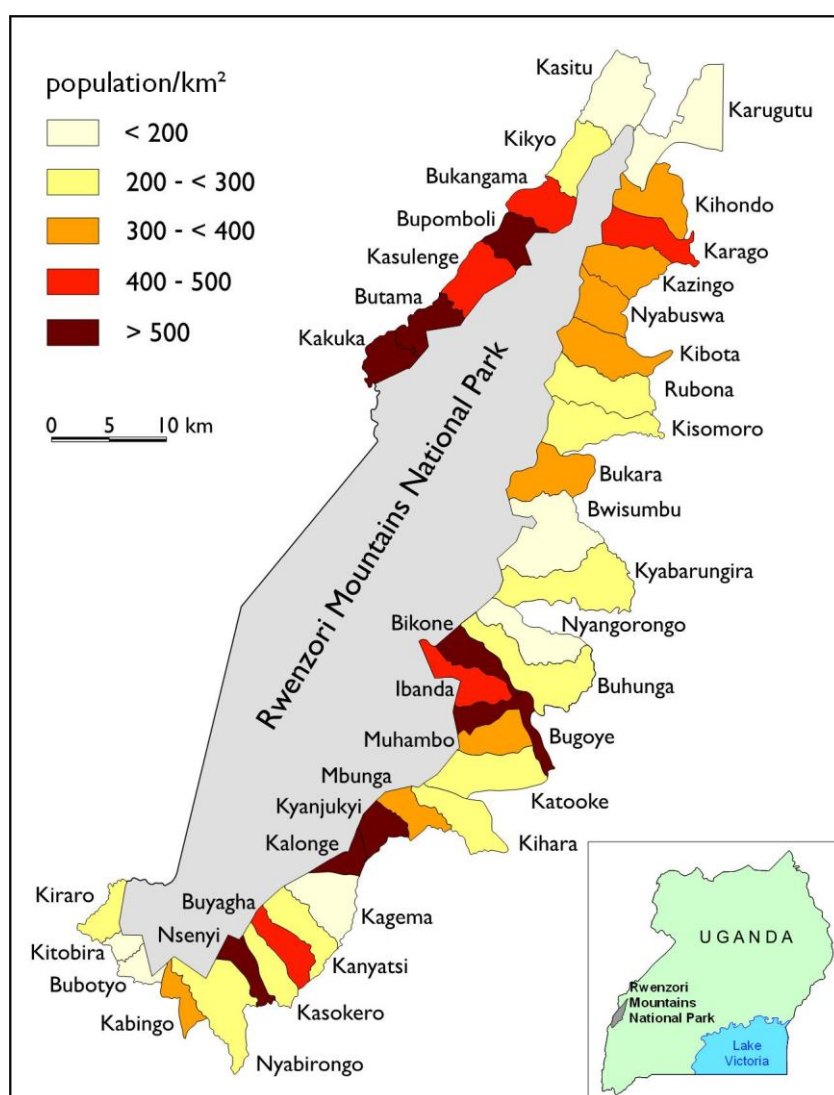


Figure 3 illustrates how densely the approximately 300,000 mountain inhabitants, mainly BaKonjo¹, are settled on the Uganda side of the Rwenzori (eastern Rwenzori). In some parishes the population sometimes reaches densities of up to 650 per km², with ecologically unsound consequences for subsistence societies, especially in regard to land use. Overall, due to the very high fertility rates, the population in the mountain villages has increased since 1991 by more than two thirds and since the last census in 2002 by one quarter. In the Mubuku Valley for example, from which the alpine tourists ascend to the well-known Rwenzori summits, the number of inhabitants of 12.805 in 1991 has doubled to the present (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2010a; 2010b).

Figure 3: Population densities in the mountain villages around the Rwenzori National Park (2009)

Source: adapted from Steinicke (2011)



¹The typical prefixes used in all Bantu languages of Uganda are highlighted here, e.g. "Ba-" (people of...), "Bu-" (kingdom of ...), "Lu-" (language of...) or the singular form "M(u) -" (member of ...).

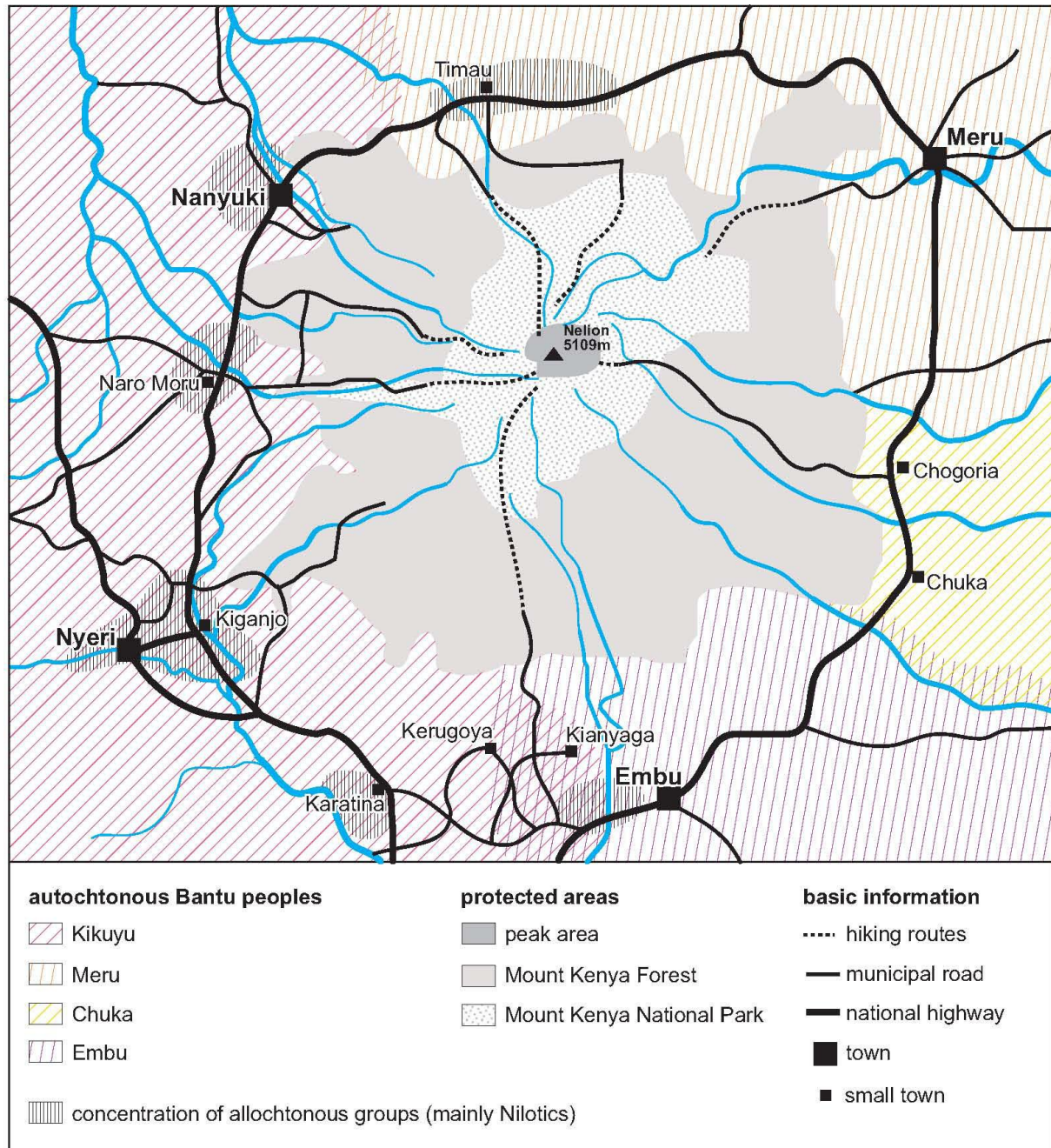
In contrast to the mountains, the eastern Rwenzori foothills form a region of high economic activity in which the commodity-oriented cement and cobalt production of Hima and Kasese, but also tea and cotton production, stand out in the employment structure. The three autochthonous ethnicities who reside here together have been joined by dozens of ethnic groups who have immigrated in recent decades. As previously pointed out, increasingly more BaKonjo also leave the mountain villages in favor of the Rwenzori foothills. It seems to be therefore only a matter of time until the existing social tensions escalate into ethnic conflicts. In addition to that comes the splitting-off of the BaKonjo from the Kingdom of Toro and in 2010 the proclamation of their own Kingdom of "Obusinga bwa Rwenzururu," which covers a large part of the subspace of high economic activity in eastern Uganda. The expectations of the BaKonjo to be favored in pursuits of work over the other ethnic groups in their newly created Kingdom are likely to play a significant role.

3.2.2 Around Mt. Kenya

The lands situated directly at the equator around Mt. Kenya, which were to a large extent claimed by the British colonial powers as the "White Highlands," represent a favored area for agriculture. Fertile volcanic soils, adequate water supply from two rainy seasons, substituted by relief precipitation and to a lesser extent by glacier melting, a smooth landscape and mild temperatures attributable to the high altitude, create an exceptionally favorable agrarian potential for which already in pre-colonial times Nilotic (mainly Maasai) and Bantu peoples competed. The Mt. Kenya region can administratively be well delimited. Like a pie chart, eight districts converge sectorally at its highest peak (Nelion, 5,199m). With the exception of the Division of Kyeni East in Nyeri North District, all seven remaining districts are clustered mainly around the volcanic areas of Mt. Kenya. In ethnic terms the Bantu peoples dominate: in the west and northwest the Kikuyu, in the south the Embu, and in the east and northeast the Meru.

Figure 4: Ethnic groups in the Mt. Kenya region (after decolonization)

Source: Sim (1979), Nurse and Tucker (2001), Lewis (2009); expert interviews by the authors (2011)



Unlike in the Ugandan example, the national park has currently little conflict-enhancing effects, due to the fact that in 1949 Mount Kenya National Park was established by the British colonial power much higher at an altitude of 3,300 m a.s.l. (Erhard 2000). It is not documented in the literature whether at that time conflicts arose in connection with the designation and demarcation of the protected area. In 1978, the National Park and the surrounding forest protectorate became a UNESCO Biosphere reserve, and in 1997 – three years after the Rwenzori – it was declared a World Heritage Site (UNESCO 2011).

Still today, some 70% of the over 1.7 million residents around the Mt. Kenya NP make their living from the agricultural sector, whose contribution to household income amounts to approximately 80% (Kenya Ministry of State for Planning 2008; KNBS 2010). This area of Kenya, like the Ugandan study site, is advantaged in the macroeconomic and transport sector. It is therefore not surprising that this is also a popular in-migration area. Particularly in the north and west, the high rates of current population influx have been highlighted in all surveys. While the Kikuyu still constitute the majority of the population there, several experts interviewed consider it already a multi-ethnic demographic structure.

The population of these regions (administrative divisions of Kyeni East and Timau) increased from 133,600 to 178,000 between 1999 and 2009, and thus grew by one third in the two census periods. In addition to small-scale subsistence farming and minor business enterprises in the small towns, the medium- and large-scale horti- and floriculture in the division Timau has offered substantial job opportunities since the early 1990s (Schuler 2004). In the north and west of Mt. Kenya are also the most important gates to the National Park from where the most popular mountain climbing routes originate. Therefore tourist activities, as well as lodges that cater to the requirements of the (affluent) foreign visitors, are concentrated around these entry points. In this part Naro Moru is located.

3.3 Rwenzori and Mt. Kenya: Importance of Alpine Tourism

In Uganda, after the civil war and Y.K. Museveni declared himself president in 1986, alpine tourism seemed to present an attractive development opportunity. After a boom in the early 1990s, the Rwenzori mountaineering tourism nevertheless collapsed, and between 1998 and 2000, caused by the war in eastern Congo, the access was blocked completely. After the reopening in 2001 of the RMNP for tourists, visitor numbers increased only slowly (fig. 5a). The records of the Rwenzori Mountaineering Services (RMS)² show that up to 1998, Germans and Austrians represented the largest contingent among the mountaineers. In the present, however, regional concentrations in the origin of visitors can hardly be discerned any more, even though numerically tourists from the European Alps still predominate slightly. Since 2005 guided walks have been offered in the lower levels of the National Park in the Mubuku Valley and at the Ugandan northwest side at Bundibugyo. While this caused the visitor numbers to soar upward, the total revenues from park entry fees are far from sufficient to cover the operating costs of the National Park, whereby opportunity costs are not even taken into account. The RMNP is therefore still dependent on substantial government subsidies (Erhard and Steinicke 2006). The development impulses for the region also remain very limited as only 10% of park revenues are paid out directly – a share of 8% toward development projects, which will benefit the local population, and the remaining 2% to the District.

The visitor numbers of Mount Kenya National Park, with approximately 25,000 annual entries, are significantly higher than those from the Rwenzori National Park. However, the variations are very much larger, more abrupt and unpredictable, whereby especially the collapse in 2008, characterized by political riots, is to be emphasized (fig. 5b). During the last ten years, Europeans (51%) and Africans (30%), followed by North Americans (10%) have dominated the nationalities of visitors to the Mt. Kenya National Park. The African visitors are predominantly Kenyans traveling in large groups; school excursions are a substantial part of domestic visitors. The British account for half of the European tourists; a significant part is associated with the military base of the British army at Nanyuki that regularly organizes trips

²As a cooperative, the RMS was awarded a 30-year license as an exclusive supplier for tourism in the park by the Uganda Wildlife Authority.

to Mt. Kenya. Other large visitor groups originate from Germany, the Netherlands, France, Austria, Switzerland, and the Czech Republic.

Figure 5a: The development of alpine tourist numbers in the Rwenzori Mountains National Park

Source: Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2010a); Erhard and Steinicke(2006: 262); Steinicke (2011)

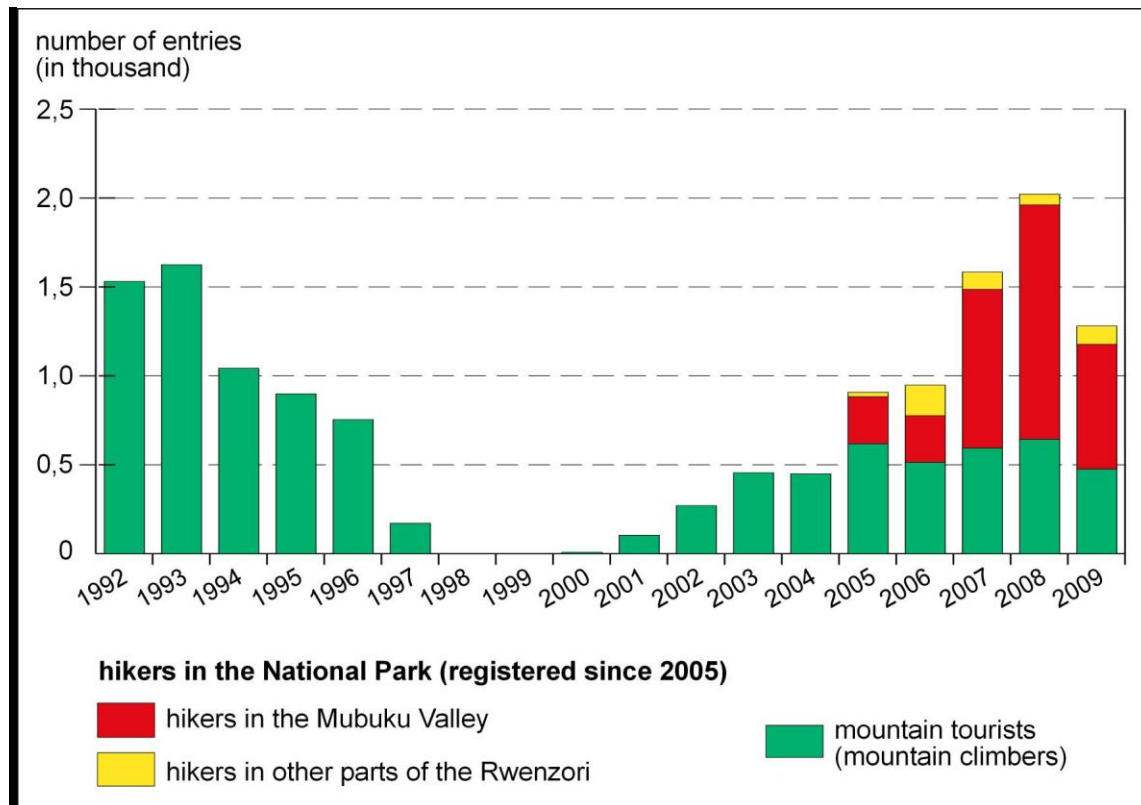
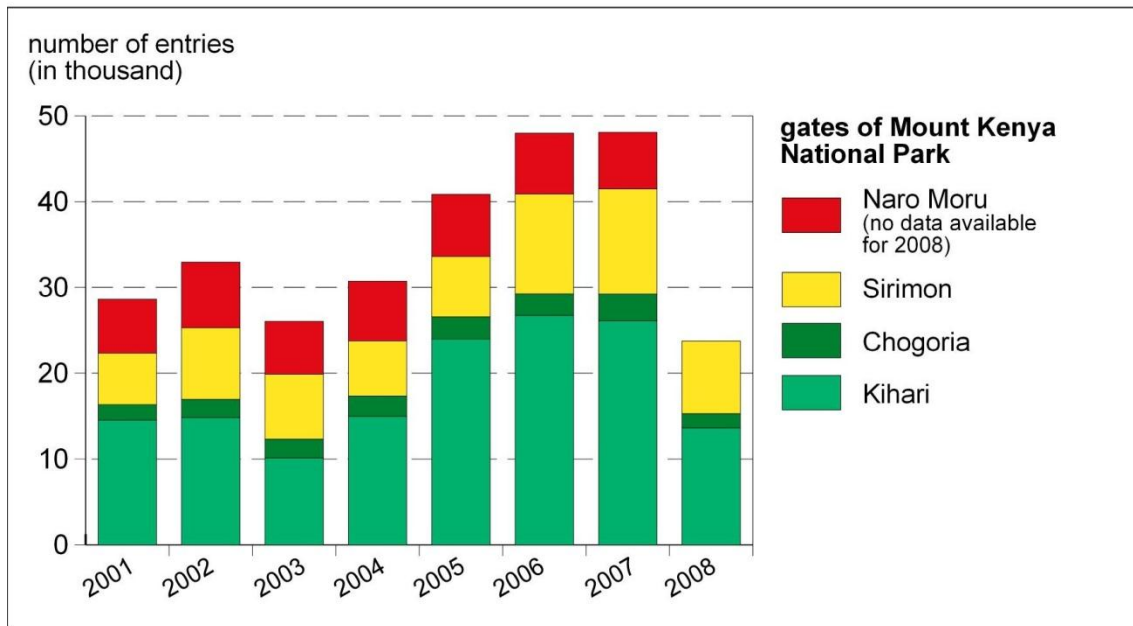


Figure 5b: Number of entries per gate of Mount Kenya National Park 2001 – 2008

Source: adapted from Steinicke and Neuburger (2012)

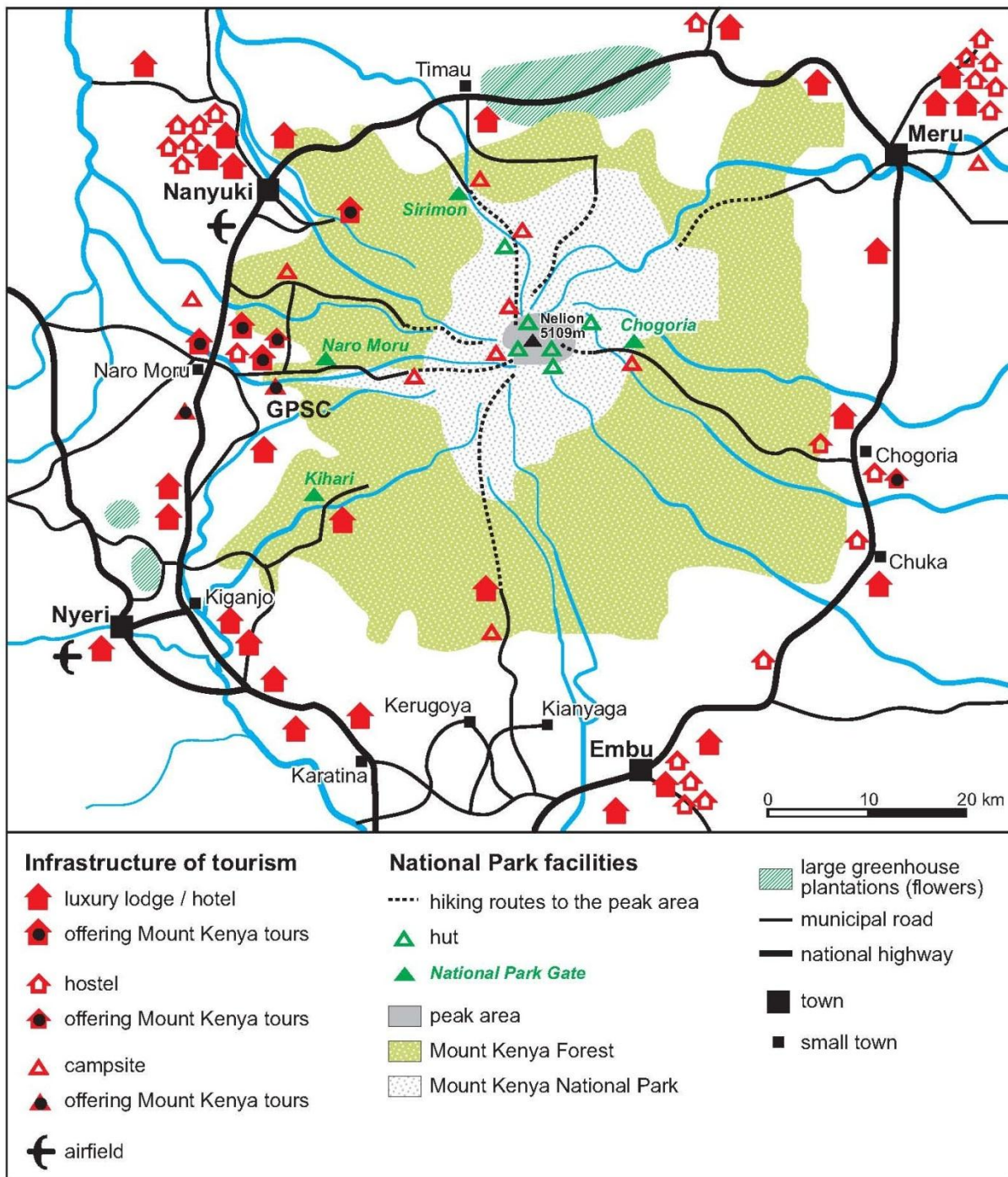


The results of our park-entry analyses show a low significance of tourism for the investigation area. In addition, one should not disregard that domestic tourism is comprised mainly of student excursions organized by official authorities; therefore they do not have substantial impact on Naro Moru's economy. However, even though social institutions (orphanages, hospital wards, etc.) and schools are funded through revenues of the National Park, no schools focused on tourism, leading to better qualified local personnel, are established in the vicinity.

For the region as a whole, tourism has only a limited effect on the socio-economic development due to the fact that tours are mostly provided from Nairobi. Furthermore, a few large tour operators and lodges localized around Mt. Kenya monopolize tourism in the region (fig. 6). Even though over recent years local tour operators established themselves, competition is increasing significantly, thereby diminishing the economic potential for local companies. Within the tourism sector the few permanent positions are created, predominantly at management level, are subsequently filled by executives from tourist centers like Nairobi or Mombasa. Jobs for the local population are characterized by their temporary nature or by low-income employment such as basic service jobs within the hotels, or as guides and porters for multiple-day tours. Erhard (2000) calculated that only 2% of the population of Naro Moru town works in tourism, and town landscape is hardly affected by tourism. Thus, the tourism sector plays an important role only for some households, specifically in the rural areas.

Figure 6: Infrastructure of tourism in the Mount Kenya region 2011

Source: mapping by the authors (2011)



In both massifs, we found therefore a type of tourism that is evident neither spatially nor in numbers. There are even months in the rainy seasons where hardly any visitors are to be encountered on the individual routes. But even in July/August and December/January, when most entries are recorded, only some huts along the routes register brisker operations. As motorized traffic can be encountered only in the lower ranges of the two mountains – and there simply in the form of a few crowded terrain vehicles – and no wood is being used for fuel on the tours, this kind of alpine tourism does not cause many environmental problems.

As a result of the low visitor numbers alone, trickle-down effects from tourism on other economic sectors are moderate. While some visitors purchase small amounts of locally-grown staple foods, lodges and large hotels import most of the goods from the district's main towns or from the state's capital. Nevertheless, a small number of locally based companies in the field of transportation, maintenance and construction do benefit from tourist activity. Due to the lack of its intensity alone, the tourism industry cannot kick-start regional development in Naro Moru and Mobuku Valley. There is also no evidence that the visitor numbers will increase significantly in the near future.

As Erhard (2000) and Steinicke (2011), based on own calculations for the two regions Rwenzori and Mount Kenya, already determined, generally the economic importance of tourism for the National Parks of Mount Kenya and Rwenzori is of low significance: the direct (agriculture, extraction, and tourism) and indirect revenues (protection of water catchment areas and erosion control) from the protected areas are far from adequate to carry their direct (forest and park management, wildlife damage, etc.) and indirect costs (opportunity costs through loss of land use). The designation of these protected areas becomes therefore the equivalent of subsidization of the predominantly international tourism by the local population.

4 Micro-Economic Research: the Household Level

The section illuminates various impacts of alpine tourism on sustainability of livelihood at the local level.

In the regions surveyed the households of the surrounding settlements benefit for the most part from employment in one of the hotels, or through accompaniment of the alpine tourist groups as a porter, guide, or cook. As the number of jobs in the gastronomy and hotel industry is very low, we focus on the income effects from the mountaineering services in the two national parks.

As previously stated, in 1993 the Rwenzori Mountaineering Services (RMS) received from the state National Park Administration a 30-year license for the Rwenzori National Park as the exclusive provider of porters, guides and other services for the climb of the Rwenzori in the so-called Central Circuit that has its beginning and endpoint near Ibanda in the Mubuku Valley (numbers below from Erhard and Steinicke 2006 and Steinicke 2011). The RMS was founded in 1987 as a cooperative by the Konjo residents of the Mubuku Valley. It has since been viewed as a flagship of a sustainable, community-based tourism organization (Rogers 2004). Currently (2010) 83 guides and over 800 porters and cooks are organized in the RMS. Each climber will be assigned four carriers for the duration of his hike. For the climb of the Rwenzori, for which generally seven days are estimated, there are two main seasons: from December to March and from July to September. These do not only represent the dry seasons in the mountains, but also the two main harvest seasons in agriculture. The latter signifies that with increasing engagement of the male population in tourist services the fieldwork becomes and/or remains increasingly women's responsibility.³ As a result, women's work in agriculture must subsidize the income derived from tourist services if it is not sufficient to ensure the existence of the carrier porter families on a permanent basis. In 2010, the gross daily earnings for a guide amounted to US\$ 10 and for a porter or cook US\$ 7. Each guide employed by the RMS received an annual income of US\$ 400 and each porter around US\$ 130 (in 2010).

³ Since 2004 the RMS have also employed some female porters.

These income figures increase by 20% to 40% when adding the gratuities the guides and porters receive from the tourists. The income of the guides and porters will not rise significantly over the coming years because the number of mountain guides who sign up with the RMS is steadily increasing, while the number of climbers who embark on the classic seven to eight-day tour has remained constant for many years.

In 2005, about half of the household income of the guides and porters came from tourism. In addition to this direct income the population in Mubuku Valley obtains indirect revenue from a small restaurant in Ibanda, the sale of victuals and souvenirs, the rental of climbing equipment and occasional work in expanding the road from Kasese into the valley.

A similar situation applies to Mount Kenya, where our analyses focus on the GPSC (Mount Kenya Guides and Porters Safari Club) in the Sublocation Naro Moru (Nyeri District) as an example of a community-based tourism organization. Already in the 1960s, climbers as well as hikers in the Mount Kenya area used guiding and portage services provided by the local population. Guides and porters were subsequently under the management of the Naro Moru River Lodge. In 1970, however, the idea emerged to bring these service providers together in a registered, community-based organization. Similarly, around the Mount Kenya massif a dozen of such cooperatives have developed. Each of these organizations of guides and porters encompasses 50 to 150 members.

The GPSC offers tours on Mt. Kenya of varying route and duration, typically starting from Naro Moru Gate. According to the size of the tourist group and its needs, GPSC assembles a team of guides, porters and cooks who are paid based on days and services (2011: guide US\$ 7.15, cook US\$ 6.50, porter US\$ 5.20). The team is composed of one or two porters per tourist, and one guide and one cook for every 5 persons. As a rule, these are members of GPSC that are dispatched in a rotation system. As rural households in the region basically practice small-scale agriculture of subsistence with only a very small production surplus for sale, the activity as guide or porter plays a prominent role for their livelihood because it represents one of the few sources of monetary income in the community. In the peak season, the porters and guides usually have one to three opportunities per month to work at a tour lasting several days. With an average duration of three days for the tours, and a season of about seven months, they earn between US\$ 325 and US\$ 455 per year, depending on their activities, substituted by gratuities of about 30%. These earnings are invested in the well-being of family members, such as in education for children, in livestock, or in basic needs like food and clothing. The seasonality of alpine tourism impacts the requests for tours. The months from April to June and October to December usually see less than half the number of orders of the high-season months of July to September and January to March.

In the Mount Kenya region, as in Rwenzori, the peaks of labour in agriculture coincide to a large extent with those in tourism. Indeed, the GPSC hires non-members for individual tours if its own members are unable to participate. Accordingly, especially in the months of July/August and December/January, the GPSC has to rely on external porters. Regardless, GPSC had to cease accepting new applicants due to steadily increasing membership, which currently peaks at 150. GPSC introduced these membership limitations in order to secure sufficient employment for its members. Simultaneously it strives to hold up the main goal of the organization, that of welfare of and collective help among its members, either in the form of the welfare fund, micro credits, or through the support of members struggling due to hardships, or through the provision of assistance in any possible form (Steinicke and Neuburger 2012). Therefore, besides the benefit of income, households have access to the large social network of the GPSC committee to local authorities, public administration and to

the private sector. Furthermore, the organization's infrastructure secures water supply, and GPSC's welfare fund provides access to funds in case of emergencies. Hence GPSC creates a positive effect of reduced vulnerability on households by improving financial (income), human (education), physical (livestock), natural (water), and social (network) capital.

5 Synthesis and Conclusion

As we demonstrated with the examples Rwenzori and Mt. Kenya, statements about the sustainability of tourism in developing countries in general and of community-based tourism in the tropical high mountain regions of Africa at different levels have to be taken with a nuanced view. At the same time, the socioeconomic and ethno-demographic conditions play an equally important role at the regional level as does the socio political setting in the various communities and the respective internal structuring of the community-based tourism organizations.

As represented, the foothills of Mt. Kenya and the Eastern Rwenzori range constitute important economic areas in the respective countries. They are therefore well known regions of in-migration for numerous other ethnic groups. As a consequence, allochthonous groups join the already existing ethnic diversity. In Uganda, the strengthening of the traditional kingdoms and the establishment of the new Rwenzori Kingdom (on the western territory of the Toro Kingdom) form an additional significant ethno-political problem. Even around Mt. Kenya, the riots after the presidential election in 2007/2008 showed that peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups is fragile and depends on subtle political negotiations and specific distribution systems of political and economic resources – sometimes called corruption. In Western Uganda, the considerable problem of demarcation of the new kingdom for the BaKonjo adds to the high potential for ethnic conflicts. Apart from the vague notion over its exact expansion, the monarchy project is aimed against the interests of the BaToro, who function in the “Obusinga bwa Rwenzururu” now only as a minority. These ethno-social processes are particularly relevant as regional framework conditions in the Rwenzori region that strongly influence the effects of alpine tourism.

The examples of the Rwenzori and Mt. Kenya regions show the multiple layers of the impact of alpine tourism in mountain areas of tropical Africa. Due to the low visitor numbers in the Rwenzori Mountains National Park, large tourism companies are absent, which would channel the flow of international visitors. While this opened a niche for the Rwenzori Mountaineering Services Cooperative (RMS) as an exclusive supplier for mountain tours, the positive impulses are limited to the household level in the form of comparatively small, rather regressive income effects. It should also not be forgotten that the alpine tourism takes place actually only in a single valley of the Rwenzori Range.

In the Mt. Kenya region the business structure of tourism is heavily monopolized, therefore developmental effects at the regional level are hardly noticeable, neither with supply and service companies, nor in terms of employment effects. Regardless, the few jobs in tourism in both regions are very popular, because they provide access to foreign currency and/or the generous gratuities of the international tourists. They also offer contacts abroad, which the local people see as a potential springboard for foreign jobs or training. In addition, the large (exclusive) hotels in the Mt. Kenya region represent the most important link to clients for the guides and porters organization, which in turn produces very one-sided dependency relationships.

With respect to the community-based tourism organizations, considerable differences can be detected. The RMS is essentially limited to the composition of the teams and the logistical

planning for the mountain tours, and it ensures that by rotation of the guides and porters the income from tourism is distributed evenly between its members. Nevertheless, since in recent years new members were continually accepted, the annual income per person decreases with stagnating visitor numbers, even though the RMS could somewhat increase the service demand with the diversification of offers for mountain tours. However, the activities of the RMS are restricted exclusively to the tourism sector.

In contrast, the community-based tourism organization GPSC in the Mt. Kenya region stabilizes the livelihood of rural households and contributes to the welfare of the community. The internal democratic organizational structure with elected and regularly rotating offices prevents the enrichment of some few GPSC members and ensures the evenly distributed benefit to all members and to the whole community. Due to the high reputation of the GPSC, both with the large hotels and with the local authorities⁴, it can be assumed that the concerns of GPSC and its members are heard by the political decision makers. This empowerment secures on the one hand the bureaucratically usually uncomplicated access to the National Park as a base for tourism; beyond that it can, for example in times of crisis – e.g. from droughts (cf. Wiesmann et al. 2000) or ethnic conflicts – contribute to more rapid emergency response. To that extent the GPSC activities increase the sustainability of livelihoods of their members.

For the rural households employment as a guide or porter is one of the few sources of monetary income in both case study regions; it subsidizes the families' livelihood at least in form of financial capital. The strengthening of all the different capitals in the Mt. Kenya example also reduces the vulnerability of households to stress and shock. But in the long term the guide and porter occupation is not an attractive prospect for the future, as income derived from it is used primarily for the education of children, which in turn should enable them to gain higher-quality employment. Thus, in a sense, tourism can contribute to migration out of the region. At the same time career opportunities within the tourist sector are scarce, and the tourism element of the local economy provides no developmental effects. However, other segments of the economy also do not offer highly qualified jobs.

As shown by the examples of the Rwenzori and Mt. Kenya regions, afro-alpine tourism as a whole provides only limited stimuli to regional development. Even though community based tourism is able to alleviate poverty and to set empowerment processes in motion, it relies upon internal participative-democratic structures of the organizations to generate equitable welfare for households and community. However, no sustainable regional development can be initiated through it.

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⁴Almost all representatives of public institutions followed an invitation by GPSC in July 2011 to the inaugural opening of new buildings.

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