

Erhard, A. (2000): Der Mount Kenia, Alpentourismus und Mikroökonomie. *Die Erde*, 131, S. 161-177.

Abstract

Tourism in developing countries has long been an issue for social sciences. However, in Africa research on a micro level has been rare so far. The present study attempts to change just that. The tourism industry of the East African state of Kenya has chosen a low price approach geared towards mass-tourism, justifying the use of all available natural and social resources by suggesting that poverty, high unemployment and regional disparities can be diminished with the help of tourism-generated incomes. Throughout the eighties this concept seemed to work. However, political unrest, reports of attacks on tourists and other image-destroying news have induced tourists to stay away from Kenya recently, causing the number of bed-nights to drop by 50% over the last five years. The area above the 10,000 ft contour line around Mt. Kenya (5,200 m) constitutes one of the more famous national parks of the country. Together with a forest reserve of the same name it covers an area of approximately 2,700 qkm. Its direct economic benefit is estimated at 29 million Euro, its costs (largely opportunity-costs for alternative uses) are estimated at more than twice the benefits (66 million Euro). Thus, the conservation of the Mt. Kenya area is nothing but a subsidy for the tourism industry and the central government paid for by the local population. The examples of the Naro Moru River Lodge, the Mt. Kenya Guides and Porters Safari Club and the Kenya Wildlife Service, all three situated along the most popular access route to the mountain, illustrate this: The meagre profits of the lodge are transferred out of the region, the average income of the porters proves to be even less than half the minimum wages paid in the agricultural sector and the National Park can hardly sustain itself and is not able to generate any capital for investment. Consequently the study reveals the following results: Economic benefits of tourism are less than often assumed, the low and unreliable incomes are distributed unevenly (less than 2% of the population provide goods and services) and force the locals to look for alternative sources of income, mainly in subsistence agriculture. Mountaineering tourism does not reduce regional disparities - at least not on Mt. Kenya - and has hardly anything to do with 'sustainable development'.