



Picture 1: Irrigation scheme in Elgeyo Marakwet County

Picture 2: Tana delta Sub County Agriculture Office

## In brief

The UNESCO Chair on Natural and Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Mountain Development promotes research and exchange in the fields of nature conservation, renewable resources, protected area management, sustainable tourism, culture, traditions and regional development.

The Chair is run by the management centre of the UNESCO World Heritage Swiss Alps Jungfrau-Aletsch (SAJA) together with the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) and the Institute of Geography (GIUB) of the University of Bern as well as the Centre for Training and Integrated Research in ASAL Development (CETRAD) in Nanyuki, Kenya.

[Learn more here.](#)

### Publications:

Tribaldos T. 2023. Food systems and transdisciplinarity: Conceptual and methodological approaches to systemic sustainability transformations. Habilitation thesis. Faculty of Science, University of Bern, Switzerland.

Pagot G, Smid Hribar M, Rail LF, Walters G, Hymas O, Liechti K, Haller T, Urbanc M, Dalla Torre C, Joye J-F, Lorenzini S, Bogataj N, Penker M, Bender O, Manzoni A. 2025. Territories of commons: a review of common land organizations and institutions in the European Alps. Environmental Research Letters 20. DOI: 10.1088/1748-9326/add1f4

[Alexandre M, Edouard M. 2025. Rolwaling: une vallée sacrée en Himalaya. Préface de Jean Jouzel de l'Académie des sciences. Éditions Complicités.](#)

Dear readers

With this new issue of our newsletter, we would like to inform you about current events and projects of the UNESCO Chair „Natural and Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Mountain Development“. In 2024, we were able to implement various activities in collaboration with our project partners.

We visited the Swiss canton of Valais as part of a field course on the topic „From commons to a sustainable society of the future?“ for students from the Institute of Geography at the University of Bern. We looked at different forms of communal organisation, in particular the communes and Burger communities in Valais, and their use of natural resources. It became clear that collective governance often enables emancipatory and sustainable management, but that collective organisations are also exposed to political, economic and social pressure and are confronted with internal contradictions that are not easy to resolve.

Another activity of the UNESCO Chair is participation in the project „[Lebendige Geteilschaften – Geschichten vom Berg](#)“, which aims to gather the scientific basis (terminology, wording, concepts). The project documents the history of the neighbourhoods in Natischer Berg and Munder Berg and plans to communicate this via a smartphone app in the future. The project will continue to be supported during implementation and opportunities for social learning will be created together.

A Master's thesis on „Traditional irrigation in the Langeten and Rottal valleys: documentation

of implicit knowledge and its embedding in a larger context“ follows on from this topic. In his work, Master's student Christian Kleiner documents various irrigation processes that demonstrate the diversity of the farmers' existing tacit knowledge. According to his work, knowledge is only passed on practically and orally. By categorising the tacit knowledge in a larger context, he shows that existing institutional regulations such as financial compensation, compatibility with national agricultural regulations, the independence of farmers and a say in contract negotiations provide a secure basis for the preservation of the traditional irrigation skills and practice.

The Kenyan team was privileged to represent the co-chair in various fora. From 30 September to 2 October, 2024, Caroline Ouko attended the successful International Forum of UNESCO Chairs and their partners “Transforming Knowledge for the Future of Africa” in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia. The Forum brought together 550 participants from 90 countries, half of whom were from UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN networks ([check this link for more information](#)). Online





Picture 3: Field Course Valais



sessions titled „Collective Reflections on the International Forum“ provided ample opportunity to share and discuss ideas from the Forum with a view to preparing a synthesis drawing on key messages and findings.

Furthermore, the co-chair virtually attended the ITD 2024 Inter- and Transdisciplinarity Conference “Beyond Buzzwords: Educational Pathways for Sustainable Research Collaborations” held from 4 - 8 November in Utrecht, The Netherlands. The co-chair participated in a joint session co-organized by Theresa Tribaldos and Minna Kaljonen on “Approaching sustainability deadlocks in food systems from different scientific traditions”. In addition, Boniface Kiteme attended a UNESCO chairs meeting of Kenyan UNESCO Chairs.

One of last year’s highlights was a scientific exchange with our co-chair Boniface Kiteme in Kenya, which was funded by the Leading

House Africa and took place during the summer months. Theresa Tribaldos, Boniface Kiteme, Caroline Ouko and Karina Liechti focussed on the synergies between ecosystem restoration and sustainable food systems. The focus was on local projects, which we analysed regarding to this priority. From the synthesis, we developed further topics for in-depth research. One important finding of our work was the lack of interest in agricultural work among the younger generations. We see the main reasons for this in the weak involvement in (collective) user systems and in limited opportunities for innovations. In order to ensure food security in the future, we must therefore focus on the question of how agriculture can be made attractive to younger generations. To meet this challenge, we have submitted an application for the Belmont Regional Call Africa together with partners from South Africa, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Rwanda and the USA.

**Theresa Tribaldos und Boniface Kiteme**

Picture 4: Bura outgrowers  
irrigation group

Picture 5: Kipini flood-based  
farming

