

Wetlands' impact on mental well-being – a case study from Uganda

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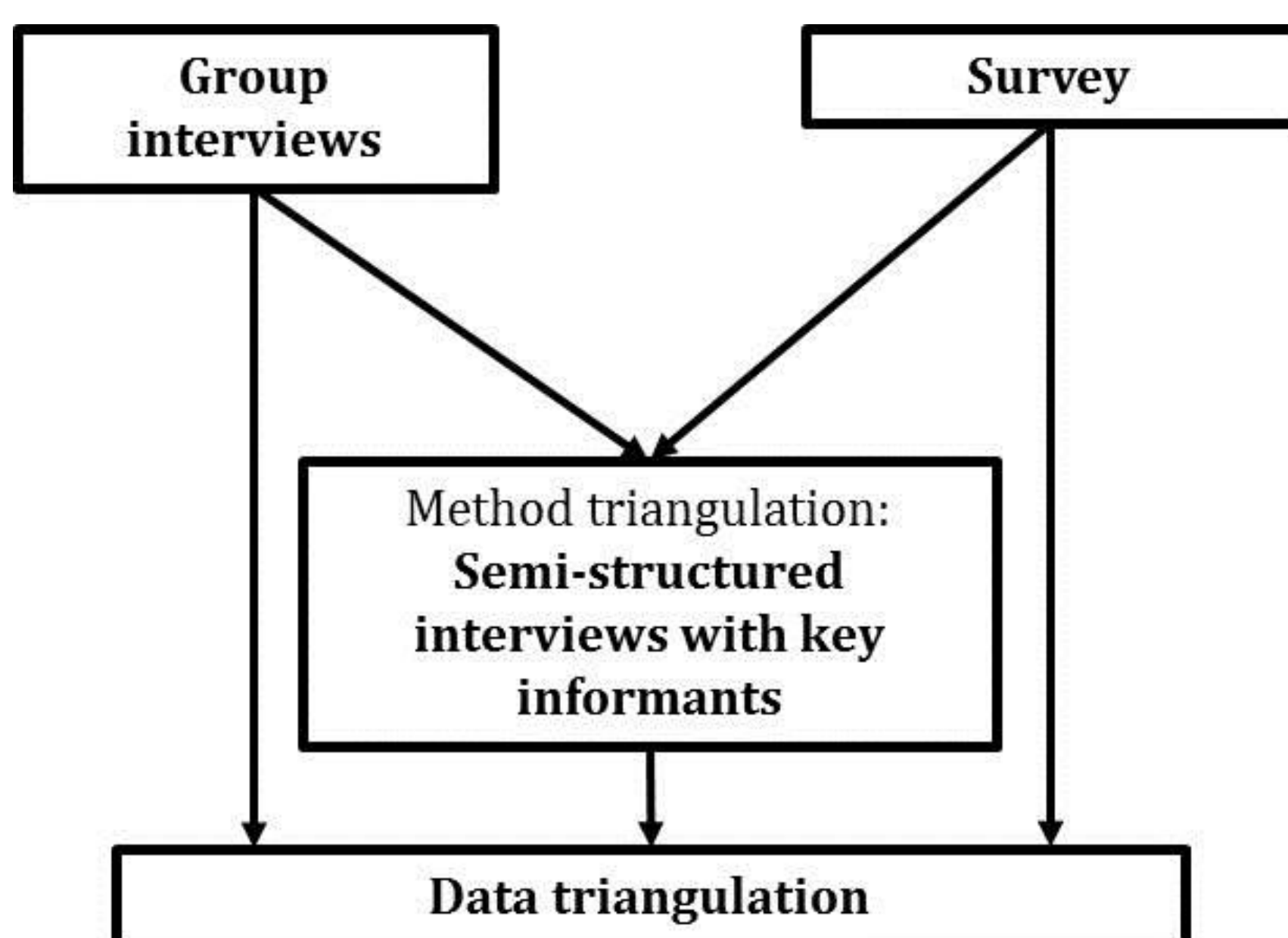
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Introduction

Wetlands, like swamps, shore zones etc. provide livelihood for subsistence farmers in East Africa. Due to a high population growth and rapid development of these regions, these ecosystems are degrading. Wetlands need to be protected and their tangible and intangible values determined. This study aims to gain evidence on the healing character of an inland wetland for locals in Uganda.

Personal experiences, social fabrics onsite as well as activities in space create an individual perspective of a landscape. The wetland was regarded as multi-dimensional *therapeutic landscape* (Völker & Kistemann 2015) and the activity space, experienced space, symbolic and social space were brought together with local peoples' mental well-being.



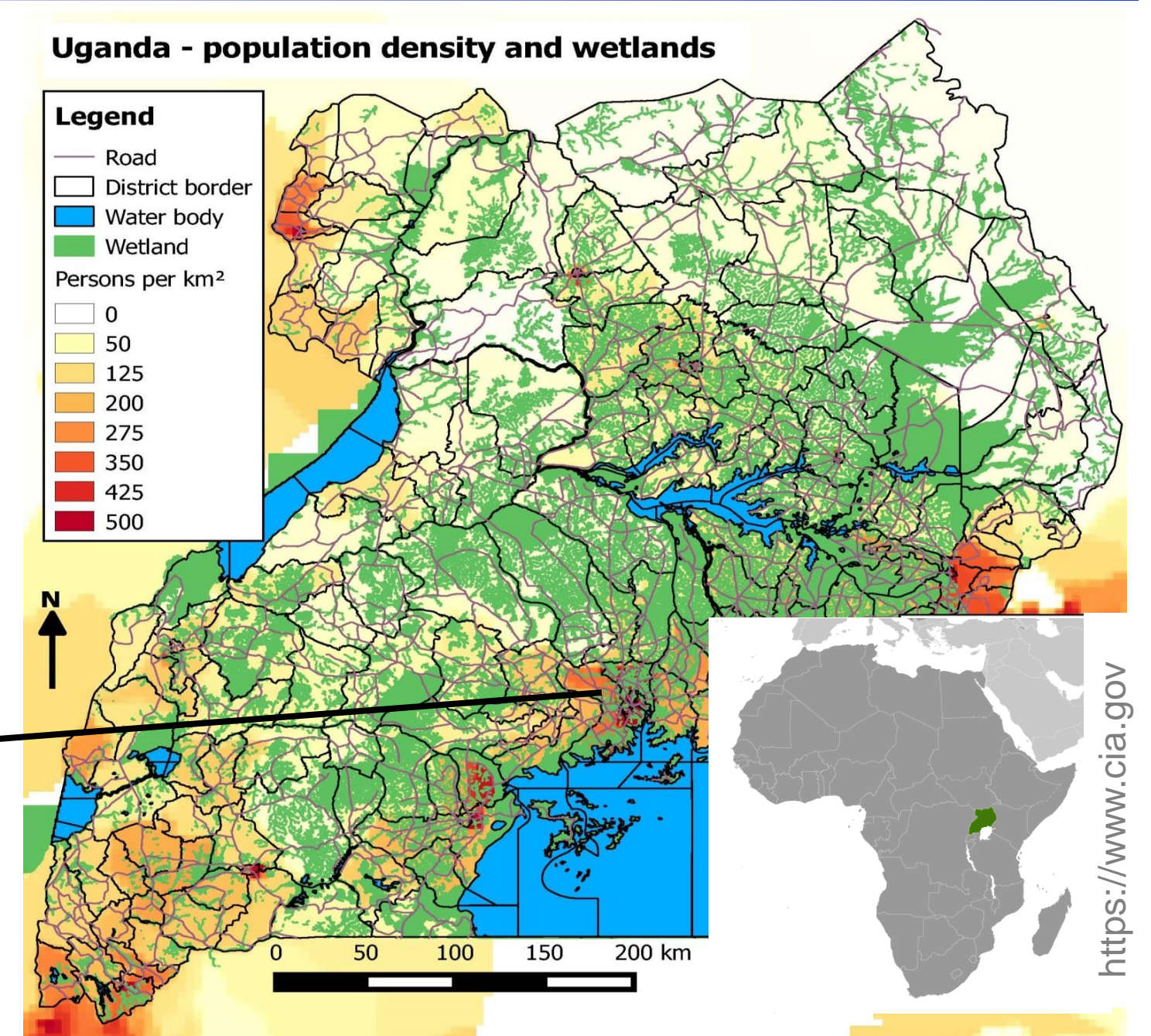
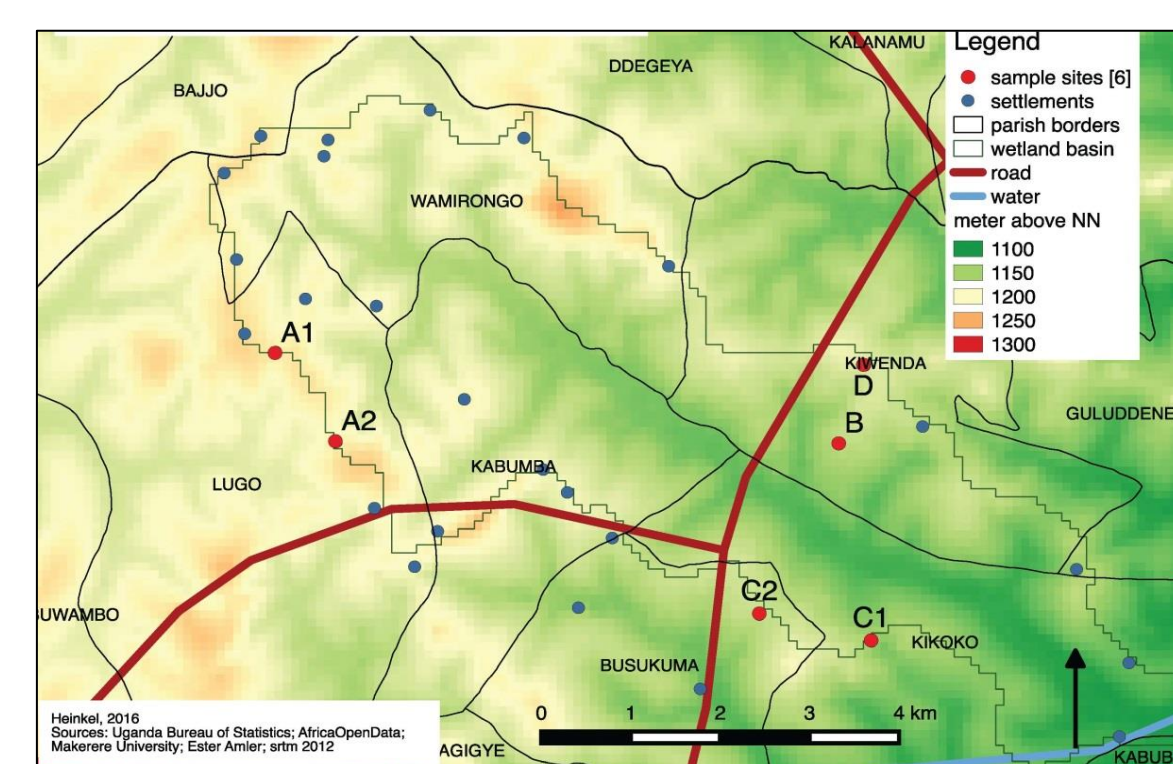
Methods – Triangulation

Three sub-studies have been conducted. 290 persons took part.

Results from the survey and group interviews provided information for the semi-structured interviews.

Research area

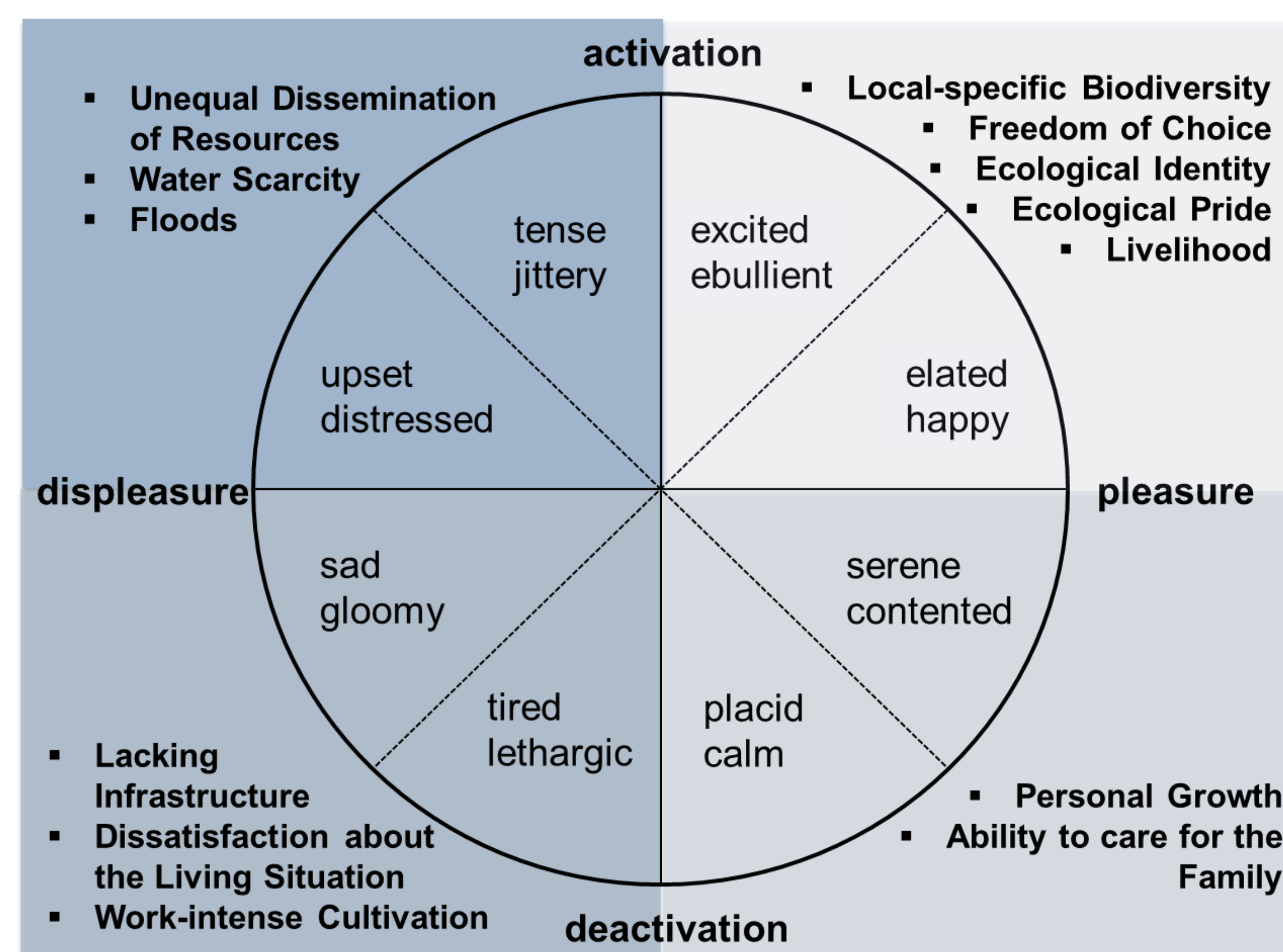
Uganda, Wakiso District,
Inland wetland basin
5 villages and towns



Results

Activity space

The wetland provides materials and resources, which are necessary for the locals' livelihood. Furthermore, the wetland provides financial well-being. People spend their day-to-day lives in the permanently and seasonally flooded areas. The wetland represents an essential part of their lives.

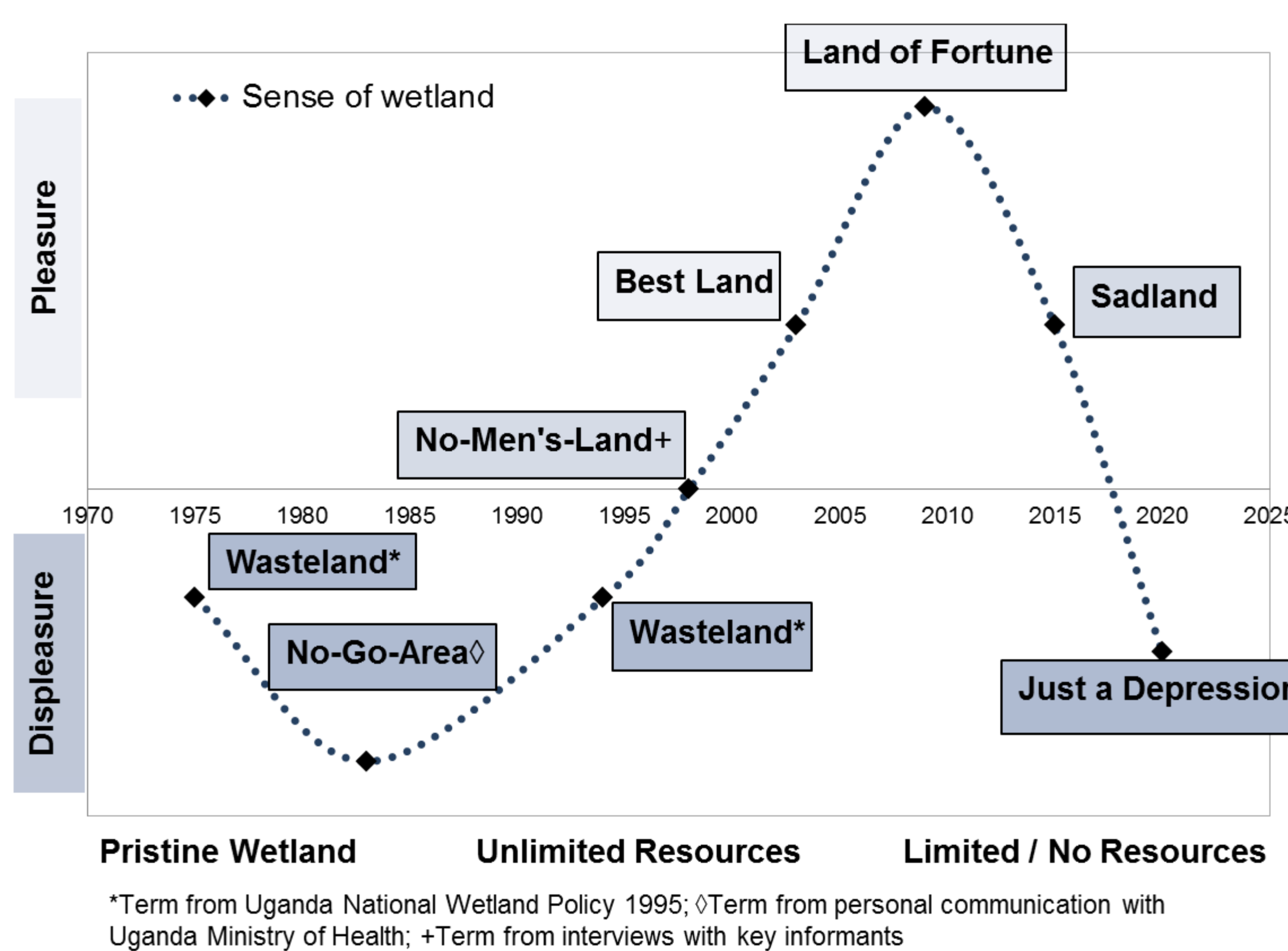


Experienced space

The wetland provokes feelings and emotions. The wetland's specific biodiversity and its provisioning functions of income and livelihood result in a deep identification with and emotional bonding to the wetland. Food and water security satisfies locals. The social hierarchy onsite, however, hampers these feelings as well as causes distress for local subsistence farmers.

Symbolic space

The wetland has a *sense of place*, which represents historical, social, political as well as demographical changes of the country. During the Ugandan wars in the 1980s guerilla forces took the wetland as concealment. After 1995 political stability and population growth fostered cultivation in the swamps. Today the year-round availability of water attracts *outsiders*, which results in a rapid degradation of the wetland.



Conclusion

Wetlands in East Africa impact mental well-being of their residents. They provide livelihood and income. Based on the ecosystem services, farmers have the opportunity to develop and act freely.

Climate change and the wetlands rapid degradation leads to the loss of health-promoting functions. Unequal distribution of resources forces conflicts and adversely impacts mental well-being.

References

- Völker, S. & Kistemann, T. (2015), Developing the urban blue: Comparative health responses to blue and green urban open spaces in Germany. *Health & Place* 35, 196-205.
- Russell, J. (2003), Core Affect and the Psychological Construction of Emotion. *Psychological Review* 110, 145-172.

Funding

This work was funded as part of the GlobE project: Wetlands in East Africa by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (FKZ 031A250)