

THE IMPORTANCE OF MOUNTAIN TOURISM AND STRATEGIES FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Mountain tourism represents one of the main forms of tourism practiced worldwide. The growth of mountain tourism has led to the creation of a large number of very diverse resorts in terms of size, location, altitude, architecture, and level of facilities. The selection of areas is based on the availability of suitable natural conditions for practicing the sports that define the profile of the resort.

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The boom in mountain tourism has led to the creation of a large number of resorts, very diverse in terms of size, location, altitude, architecture, and level of equipment. The selection of territorial areas is made based on the existence of suitable natural conditions for practicing the sports that define the profile of the resort. Thus, for resorts intended for skiing, the focus is on relief conditions, climate, and temperature. For resorts primarily designed for summer tourism, the starting point is also the relief conditions, climate, and accessibility for hiking and mountaineering. In both cases, the evaluation of these resources and the determination of the optimal reception capacity are necessary, using general standards and specific techniques.

Policy and environmental protection in mountain areas

From the perspective of policies developed for mountain areas, France holds a central position and serves as an example of good practices in the specialized literature. After 1960, this country implemented a true mountain policy: the creation of the Service for the Study of Mountain Area Tourism Development and the Interministerial Commission for Mountain Area Tourism Development; the adoption of the "Plan Neige" in 1960; the passage of the Mountain Law in 1985; in the 1970s, the focus shifted to creating a large number of facilities aimed at attracting primarily foreign tourists. In 1977, with

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the change in the general economic situation, the focus shifted to multi-activities and the protection of natural heritage from tourism and tourist abuses.

After 1980, the reorientation of France's mountain policy became clear: halting large-scale projects, focusing on quality rather than quantity, developing programs to equip existing resorts, modernizing ski lifts, cable cars, expanding the real estate sector, and improving access to resorts.

At the international level, the picture is contrasting: more advanced European states in mountain tourism, such as Spain, and extra-European industrialized countries like the USA, Canada, and Japan, continue to equip mountain areas. **In countries with a tourism tradition in Europe**, after the quantitative development phase of tourism, other priorities became more important: maintaining natural balance and better integrating tourism into mountain areas.

Mountain tourism also has negative environmental effects: increased erosion on slopes due to deforestation for access roads, ski slopes, and even resorts, the multiplication of cabins and holiday homes, and landscape alteration through the installation of cable car pylons; additionally, the risk of natural disasters is higher due to the multiplication of resorts, especially integrated resorts, which have altered ecosystems at high altitudes. Protective measures are multiple: stopping environmentally aggressive projects, conducting impact studies, strict zoning in land-use planning, establishing protected areas, national parks, and nature reserves.

The effectiveness of such measures depends entirely on the capacity of local communities to resist temptations and the rigor of authorities in enforcing existing legislation.

Mountain tourism has several important characteristics, such as:

- the rapid development of resorts after the war;
- the recent increase in visitation, which now raises concerns about the saturation of access and reception infrastructure;
- the degradation of the natural environment, which is highly vulnerable to mass tourism;
- the delayed adoption of policies to halt or control these phenomena.

At the same time, mountain tourism has specific characteristics:

- continuous and concentrated visitation in a small number of resorts;
- geographical and slope conditions that limit skiing to a few major massifs in temperate regions;
- the high costs of equipment necessary for various winter sports and services offered, which limits this form of tourism to wealthy countries.

Stages of mountain tourism development

It starts with the discovery of Chamonix by an Englishman in the early 19th century, who founded the British Alpine Club in 1857. This was followed by the acceleration of visitation in the 1930s and after 1960, as well as the specialization of several resorts in the early 21st century due to the appearance of new sports activities.

a. **Initial phase (late 19th century - early World War I):** This phase is linked to mountaineering, which was popular at the time, the discovery of the benefits of thermal water treatments and fresh air, as well as attracting various categories of people to vacation in mountain areas. The train made it easy to access the Alps, where higher and more picturesque areas are much appreciated: Mont Blanc, the Swiss and Austrian Alps, and the Dolomites. France with Chamonix (where the first Winter Olympics took place in 1924), Saint-Gervais, or Pralognan, Switzerland with St. Moritz, Davos, or Crans-Montana, Austria with Badgastein or Kitzbühel, attracted most of the new tourist flows. The Pyrenees also saw their share of international tourism with resorts like Luchon, Barèges, or Mont-Dore. Tourism provides additional resources to mountain communities, competing with agriculture and the development of urban industry, phenomena that led to the decline of traditional activities and the beginning of rural depopulation.

In 1894, the first mountain resort in Romania, Păltiniș, was established.

b. **Transition phase (1930-1960):** Before the war, this phase was marked by an expansion of clientele and the appearance of new resorts at higher altitudes, specialized in skiing, such as Val d'Isère in France or Sestriere in Italy, developed starting from existing communities. After World War II, new resorts were developed, such as Verbier in Switzerland and Courchevel in France, which paved the way for the subsequent expansion phase. Accommodation structures developed, beginning to cater to middle-class social categories, sports equipment was improved, and ski slopes multiplied. Improved connections between resorts allowed access to areas that were previously isolated in winter. Winter sports also developed in other mountain ranges such as the Vosges, Jura, and Central Europe. In America, the first resorts were established in the Appalachians. In interwar Romania, resorts such as Sinaia, Bușteni, Lacu Roșu, Predeal, and Cheia were developed.

c. **The great development phase (1960-present):** This phase focuses on the expansion of winter vacations: improved living standards in Western societies, increased vacation duration, democratization of travel, and the youthfulness of the population due to the "baby-boom" period. We witness a true "frenzy" in the creation of resorts, starting from existing villages or higher altitudes in the Alpine areas. The French, Austrian, and Swiss Alps benefited from the boom in mountain tourism. The tourism movement also reached the Central European massifs (Tatra) and the Balkan massifs (Dinaric Alps,

Rhodope Mountains), and spread to the Caucasus, the mountains of Lebanon, and Iran. In this global tourism boom, major resorts were built in North America, Japan, and New Zealand.

In this period, Romania developed resorts such as Poiana Braşov, Borşa, Semenic, Stâna de Vale, Vidra, Voineasa, Durău, Azuga, Pârâul Rece, and Fântânele. Recently, the number of tourists engaging in extreme sports such as paragliding, bungee jumping, mountain biking, canyoning, rafting, extreme skiing, snowboarding, etc., has increased, even becoming a trend.

Proposals for Mountain Tourism Development

Short-term development will focus on capitalizing on resources that contribute to the region's tourism potential. Another priority for tourism is the development of human resources in the tourism sector. Increasing the region's visibility, developing regional marketing. For this sector to grow significantly in the future, coordinated promotional actions are needed, aiming at the full utilization of tourist objectives across the entire region. Along with investments in rehabilitation and modernization of this sector, a well-directed and sustained tourism advertising campaign is necessary to increase the region's visibility through the development, diversification, and promotion of the tourism offer.

To support economic development, local productive sectors should be supported to ensure a healthy and safe growth of the economy. Improving this field involves capitalizing on local specificity, introducing new technologies, supporting innovative activities, and promoting alternative energies as a field of activity or as an environmental protection measure.

For the tourist image, it will be essential to preserve elements of local cultural identity in a well-protected and developed natural setting.

The local economy will be advantaged by innovative activities that will grant a high degree of competitiveness, and products will be recognized on European markets for their quality and specificity.

Other ideas for capitalizing on mountain tourism include:

- facilitating the promotion of quality in ecological tourism through mass media and institutional means;
- using revenue from penalties (such as littering in unapproved places) for the development of eco-tourism and leisure activities;
- establishing permanent contact with the community regarding the level of tourist and ecological education;
- reducing the impact on the number of protected species through non-ecological tourism practices. The uncontrolled development of tourism can exert great pressure on the natural environment, leading to its degradation, and thus the implementation of ecotourism should be promoted, not only in protected natural areas;

- installing restrictive signs in areas declared as natural habitats of protected species.

Ways to Develop and Modernize Infrastructure

A key factor in economic development, the transportation system becomes a priority due to the authoritative need to solve infrastructure issues to facilitate economic and social development in terms of efficiency and sustainability.

The first strategic objective is to increase accessibility. This will be pursued by reducing travel times to key destinations, achieved through the development and rehabilitation of road infrastructure, especially highways and railways, to meet the heavy traffic of goods and passengers, as well as reconsidering other modes of transport. The development of the transport network will lead to the harmonious development of the area. Another measure is ensuring territorial cohesion, by finalizing highways under construction, building new highways, and express roads.

A perspective that will lead to the accelerated development of the road network is the establishment of strategic road corridors. By modernizing and rehabilitating sections of roads included in these corridors, traffic will be ensured under optimal safety and comfort conditions for all vehicle types.

Proposed Activities:

- continuing and diversifying promotional activities for tourist attractions;
- building and promoting the Maramureș county brand, for example;
- building and promoting local tourism brands focused on the county's four regions: Țara Chioarului, Țara Lăpușului, Țara Codrului, Țara Maramureșului;
- participating in international tourism fairs;
- properly organizing and promoting events with national impact.
- promotion of other regions of Romania situated in the mountain area, for example: Țara Loviștei, Țara Bârsei etc.

Future Projects:

- diversifying and increasing the print run of promotional materials;
- returning to active promotion by participating in fairs and expanding advertising space in relevant publications;
- raising awareness about the danger of losing traditional architecture and creating legal frameworks to prevent construction in still pristine areas;
- creating an authenticity certificate for traditional agro-tourism pensions and promoting them;
- improving pedestrian and cycling tourism infrastructure, creating related tourism offers;

- facilitating tourists' access to wooden churches as tourist objectives.

The focus will be on ecological tourism, reducing the impact on protected species, and installing signs restricting access in areas declared as natural habitats for protected species.

Mountain tourism becomes even more interesting through its overlap with spa tourism, contributing to better exploitation of a resort's, region's, or country's tourism potential.

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