

## CURRENT TRENDS IN MANAGING MOUNTAIN TOURISM DESTINATIONS

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance and necessity of organizing tourism activities within a proper framework, since tourism is one of the key drivers in developing mountain regions. Managing tourist destinations is a matter of prime importance, as the tourist destinations are in constant competition in assuring qualitative travel experience. To compete effectively, tourist destinations have to offer tourists great experiences and excellent comfort. The tourist's opinion of a destination is influenced by a wide range of public and private services, interaction with local people and their hospitality, environment quality. Therefore, the management of mountain tourism destinations appeals to these stakeholders working towards a common goal - ensuring the present and future viability and integrity of the respective destination.*

**Key words:** *tourism management, mountain tourism, tourism destination*

### INTRODUCTION

The mountain areas are traditional tourist destinations, being ranked second in the top preferences after coastal destinations (Mieczkowski, 1995). Tourists' motivations are various: rest and recreation, adventure and sports, and other socio-cultural needs. Mountain areas have attracted the attention of investors and tourism organizations as they offer opportunities to develop effective tourism activities so that today the offers are complex, diversified, and highly attractive.

Along with tourism development in recent decades and its turning into a mass movement, the mountain has become more attractive for the investors and promoters of this form of tourism due to the many possibilities it offers to do business with beneficial results. The economic and social effects of mountain tourism development, although sometimes difficult to quantify, are rated as very important (Țigu, 2011).

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research studies are very important in supporting sustainable investments and planning decisions in tourism. They support the macroeconomic analyses to state policies and strategies in tourism. This theoretic paper is based on the references mentioned herein and internet research. Coherent, updated and accurate information were taken from the websites of some renowned organizations and scientific events in the field of tourism (UNWTO, ARPE/CIAPP, NEAP, UNEP, RIO + 20 Report) and processed into relevant conclusions.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### **Tourism importance in developing mountain regions**

The mountain tourism is a phenomenon with many economic, political, social, historical and psychological implications. Its financial implications refer to the increase of the living standard of local communities, with effects on regional and national economy. The individual aspirations of local community and tourists seem to be the most important, since tourism refers to the mutual benefits created between these groups (Godde, 2000). As a natural continuation of Chapter 13 (Sustainable Mountain Development, 1994) of

Agenda 21, the International NGO Consultation on the Mountain Agenda (1995) considers tourism one of the key drivers in developing mountain regions. In 1996, the European NGO Consultation on Sustainable Mountain Development stressed the need for clear policies in tourism (ARPE / CIAPP, 1996), as the main source of income for the inhabitants of the European mountains, especially the Alps (Zimmermann, 1998).

The literature provides some information on the role of mountain tourism in the regional economy, especially in developing areas poor in other natural resources, particularly the economic progress of other regions, or in reviving traditional occupations. Thus, there are many mountain areas where tourism has significant percent of gross domestic product: for example, in Grisons and Valais (French regions), the mountain tourism contributes 45-50% of GDP, while throughout Switzerland, its share stands at 4-5%. In other mountain regions, tourism (including ecotourism, rural tourism, cultural tourism) helped local people to preserve and capitalize on traditional lifestyles (language, folklore, crafts, religion, farming and pastoral activities) – it is the case of the marginalized, indigenous populations in Thailand, Bhutan, or some native American tribes.

Some industrial branches, like constructions or production of winter sports outfit benefit more from the mountain tourism. Although legislative restrictions vary from country to country, the construction sector grew strongly in all mountain areas subject to extensive landscaping projects. The industry of sports materials has also recorded a dynamic evolution, due to facility development, technical progress or fashion, so that renewals or upgrades of lift facilities, ski outfit and the like were necessary. This industry often developed near or inside the respective mountain tourist areas.

The multiplying effect of tourism on the economy of mountain areas has great importance. The relation between mountain tourism and agriculture led to very different situations. Sometimes mountain tourism development contributed to agricultural decline, due to the competition for jobs and land resources. Sometimes, the presence of a major tourism market provided a new outlet for the local agricultural products. In some areas, such as Tyrol (Austria) and Haut Adige (Italy), tourism and agriculture associated, by promoting both activities, as well as tourist accommodation on the farm.

There are proven effects on job creation, but they differ from one region to another. Between two regions of equal frequency, the number of jobs depends on the length of stay, the accommodation structures (hotels create more jobs), and tourism activities (alpine skiing requires more employees). Thus, in case of overnights, the number of jobs is relatively high in Austria (400,000 jobs in mountain tourism), with its long stays for winter sports and hotel or private accommodation. Same holds for Colorado or other areas with similar conditions. On the other hand, the ratio between jobs and overnights is lower in those areas with dominant short stays and weekend tourism, or in destinations with less skiers than other tourists (for example Japan or Quebec). In France, one of the top travel destinations for winter sports, there are about 150,000 jobs in mountain tourism, of which 10% are directly related to alpine skiing. In Switzerland, several sources valued at over 50% of jobs in the entire economy dependent on mountain tourism.

#### **Current trends in mountain tourism planning**

Mountain tourist planning has evolved over time in research methodology and design, patterns of tourist equipping, content and complexity in landscaping, operating, environmental, economic, and social requirements, to meet travel and land use demands, etc.

The mountain areas are characterized by a great variety of natural conditions that offer opportunities of both planning their tourist potential, and develop communication ways and means of transportation necessary in equipping and operating of tourist resorts.

Therefore, in mountain tourism planning, specialists developed several concepts and solutions according to the natural conditions and economic characteristics of tourism resources, tourism priorities of each country, and on the other hand, the rhythm and changes occurring in tourism demand.

Tourism planning of mountain areas depends largely on the wishes and needs of the potential clients, but also on the image of different sites. Planning mountain sites precedes and follows also from this process; the customers' expectations refer more often to the quality and availability of the existing equipment and, on the other hand, the equipment is located in sites chosen by tourists according to the image the respective destination created in the context of specific economic, social and cultural conditions.

The theory and practice of recent decades in mountain tourism planning highlighted some principles of designing a winter resort, established some techniques for determining the resort capacity, correlating its functions, so that it achieves the purposes it was created for.

Mountain tourism has less desirable effects, especially social effects, but the reaction of authorities or other bodies was prompt and once aware of these adverse effects, measures to prevent or combat were taken. Same holds for the environmental impact of mountain tourism, so that today it is clear the need to promote sustainable development in mountain areas and to raise protective measures (Țigu, 2011).

Developing tourism activities also means to focus on environment quality through conservation measures and ways to improve its quality in tourist areas, and to analyze the consequences of tourism activities, in order to use the tourism resources rationally (Stănciulescu, Micu, 2012).

A sustainable tourism policy should ensure a sustainable ecological, economic, socio-cultural operation at all reference levels, according to the needs of endogenous and exogenous use. From planning and development of tourism infrastructure and ending with marketing, all tourism operations must consider sustainable criteria in economic, social, cultural and environmental terms.

The planning, development and management of sustainable tourism at regional or local level involve a partnership between the tourism industry represented by the owners of tourism businesses, the environment with its defenders, the local community with the residents, the stakeholders, the local leaders and the local authorities. Such unbiased and interactive partnership will lead to the development of sustainable and effective tourism, improving the life quality of the local community, while ensuring environment and tourism resource protection, as well as reasonable benefits for the tourism industry (Glăvan, 2007).

In some cases, mountain tourism could be an uncertain business, and there are situations that lowers the number of tourists: adverse weather conditions (snow avalanches or poor snow falls for resorts in the Alps), or political instability and civil wars (Afghanistan, Bosnia, Peru, Kashmir). Each mountain region is unique and tourism should be analyzed as such and in correlation with all factors involved. The case studies reveal the various aspects of mountain tourism and its potential for future development (Godde, 2000).

## CONCLUSIONS

The mountain areas are traditional tourist destinations, being ranked second in the top preferences after coastal destinations. Tourists' motivations are various and the offers are complex, diversified, and highly attractive. The mountain tourism is a phenomenon with many economic, political, social, historical and psychological implications, one of the

key drivers of the socio-economic progress, by creating businesses and jobs, developing infrastructure and resulting in considerable receipts from tourism.

The unprejudiced and interactive cooperation in managing mountain tourism destinations will lead to the development of a sustainable and effective tourism, improving the life quality of the local community, while ensuring environment and tourism resource protection, as well as reasonable benefits for the tourism industry. Therefore, managing mountain tourism destinations appeals to stakeholders working towards a common goal - ensuring the present and future viability and integrity of the respective destination. The international cooperation in the tourism sector provides significant opportunities for the public and private sectors, especially in areas such as research and analysis, marketing and promotions, professional development for the employees in tourism, destination management, travel safety, market accessibility.

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