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PREMISES OF THE EVOLUTION OF MOUNTAIN TOURISM IN ROMANIA

DRAGOS-CIPRIAN CHENDE, MARIUS-IONUT GORDAN, TIBERIU IANCU, TABITA ADAMOV,
IOANA ANDA MILIN

University of Life Sciences "King Mihai I", from Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism

Abstract: The mountain area faces many challenges in terms of socio-economic development, and the development of tourism activities can be a viable solution for the revitalization of these disadvantaged areas. The mountain region of Romania, with its picturesque landscapes, presents a high tourist potential, especially for nature and adventure tourism, but Romania has not exploited this opportunity to its true value.

• Introduction

Mountain tourism represents an essential component of the global tourism sector, based on the attraction of spectacular natural landscapes, the diversity of mountain ecosystems, and the recreational opportunities provided by these areas. Mountain tourism in Romania is one of the most important branches of the national tourism sector, rooted in the spectacular landscapes of the Carpathians, the diversity of fauna and flora, as well as the cultural and historical richness of mountain regions. The Romanian mountains, which cover approximately one-third of the country's surface, offer diverse opportunities for recreational activities, from hiking and mountaineering to skiing, mountain biking, or ecotourism.

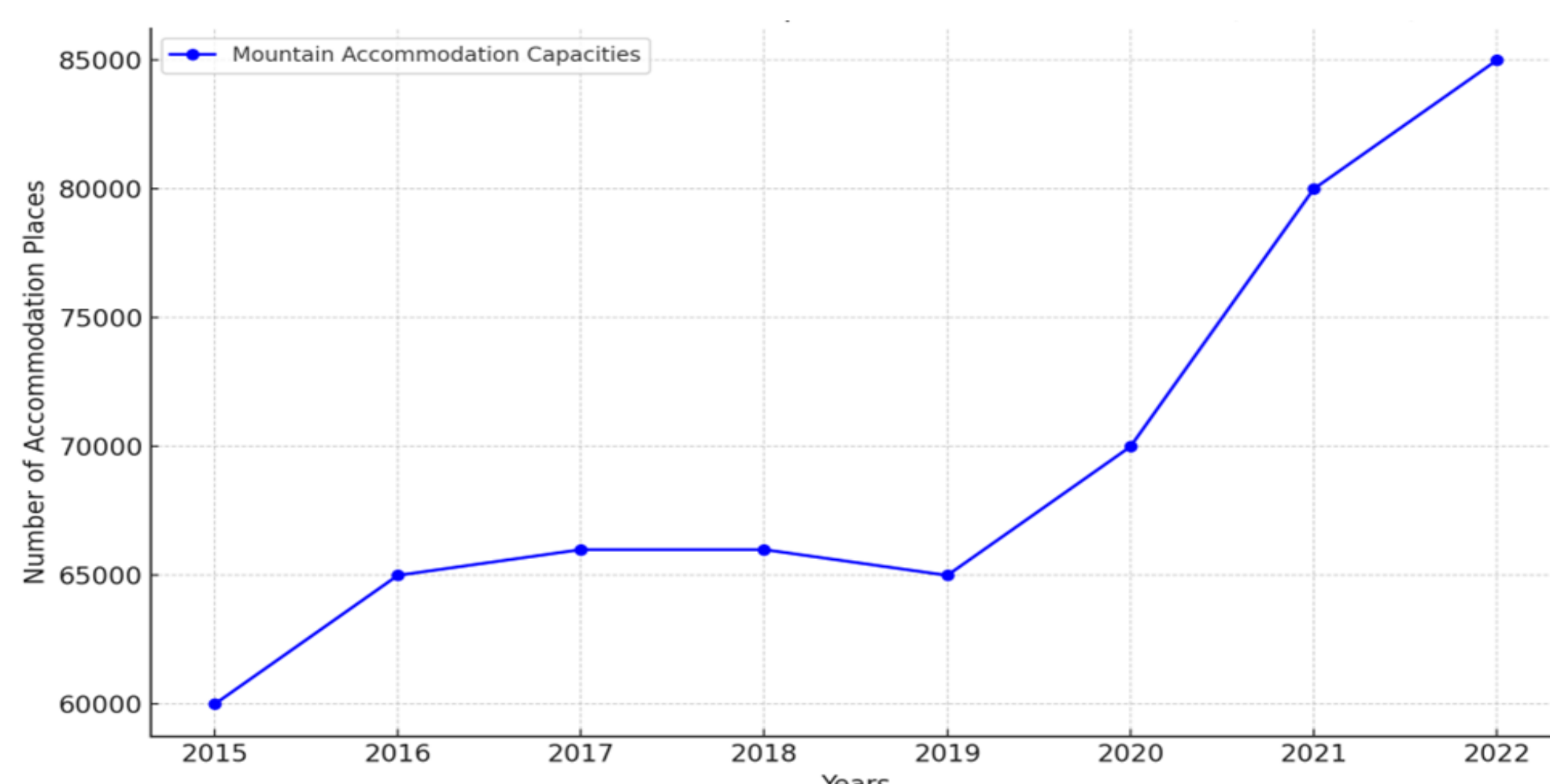
• Material and method

This study aims to identify some defining elements that form the basis for developing sustainable strategies for the development and promotion of mountain tourist areas. To achieve this objective, we conducted a SWOT analysis of tourism in mountain areas and an analysis of statistical data based on tourism indicators.

• Results and discussions

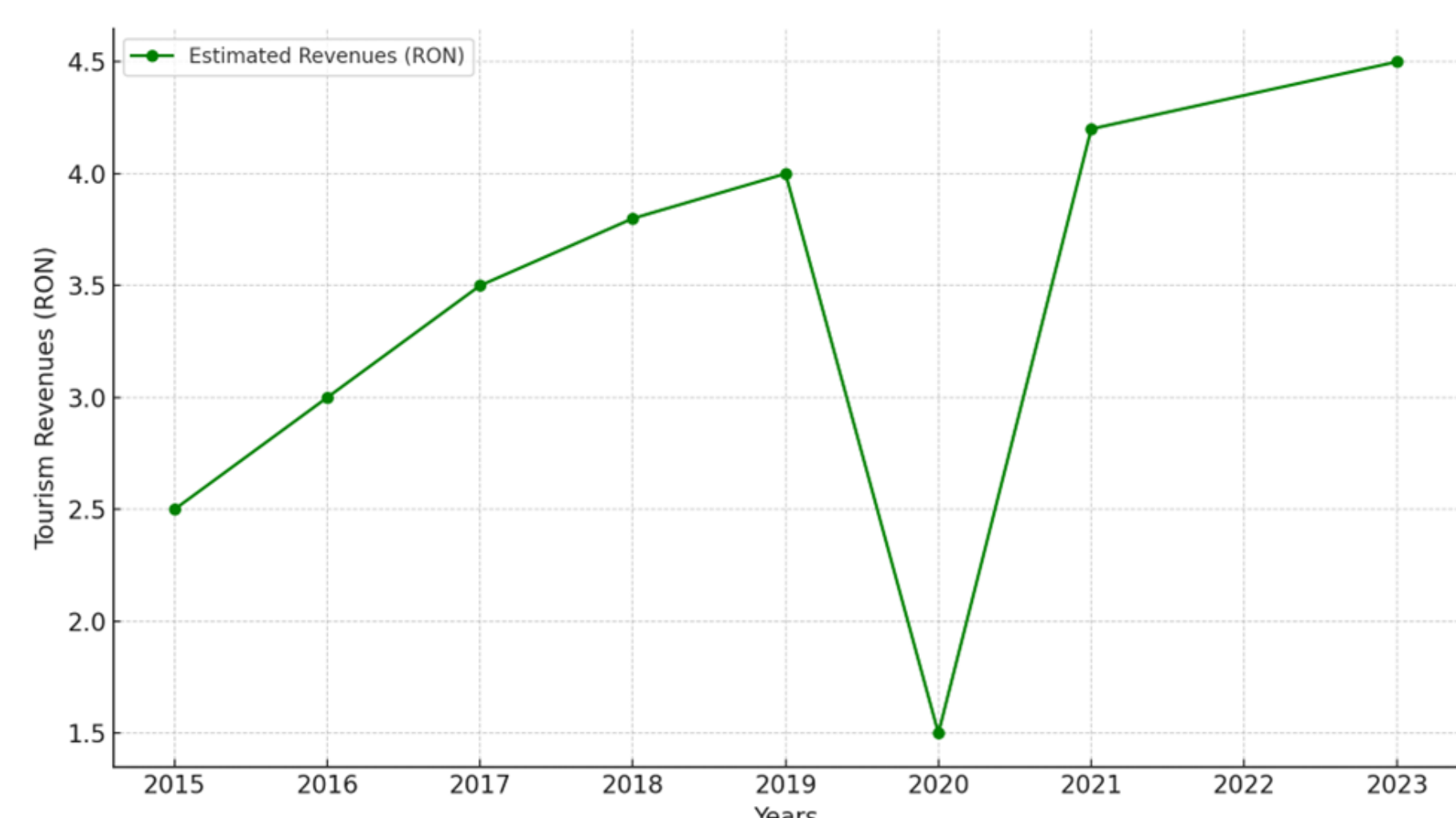
Economically, mountain tourism significantly contributes to the development of local communities, especially through job creation and encouraging entrepreneurship in areas such as hospitality, tourist transportation, and mountain guiding. However, the development of mountain tourism in Romania faces challenges, such as underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of coherent promotion, and environmental pressures from uncontrolled tourist activities.

Accommodation capacities are often varied, including hotels, guesthouses, chalets, and campsites. Analyzing the distribution by comfort categories (1-5 stars) can highlight diversification opportunities to attract different segments of tourists, including international ones seeking higher standards.



Evolution of accommodation capacities in mountain resorts, 2015-2023

A steady increase in the number of accommodation places in mountain resorts is observed, indicating investments and expansion of accommodation infrastructure. In 2020, the number of places was maintained, but practically, the capacities were not fully utilized due to travel restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Starting in 2021, capacities continued to grow, suggesting an adaptation of operators to the increased demand for mountain tourism. This growth indicates a response to heightened demand, suggesting continuous investments and a strategic orientation toward mountain tourism development.



Estimated revenues from mountain tourism in Romania, 2015-2023

Estimates of revenues generated from mountain tourism in Romania for the period 2015-2023, based on data on overnight stays and average expenditure per night, show an interesting evolution. Mountain tourism revenues consistently increased, reaching approximately 388.7 million RON in 2019, suggesting growing demand and a positive economic contribution to mountain regions. In 2020, revenues dropped significantly to 218 million RON due to restrictions and reduced tourist flows, highlighting the sector's vulnerability to major external events. In 2023, estimated revenues reached approximately 454.6 million RON, exceeding pre-pandemic levels, due to an increase in overnight stays and tourist expenditures. Direct revenue growth suggests a positive economic impact and justifies further investments in infrastructure and diversification of tourist services. If the development strategy includes luxury services or personalized experiences, revenue per tourist could increase, enhancing economic benefits for mountain regions.

• Conclusions

Romania's mountain region faces multiple socio-economic challenges. Developing tourism activities is seen as a potential solution for revitalizing these disadvantaged areas, particularly by creating economic opportunities and stimulating demographic growth. However, Romania has not fully capitalized on the potential of mountain tourism, especially compared to other European countries with similar mountain relief.

Proposed measures include:

- ☐ **Developing infrastructure and creating leisure facilities** adapted to mountain tourism, including winter sports and ecotourism.
- ☐ **Conserving the mountain environment** by integrating ecotourism practices.
- ☐ **Promoting natural and cultural specificities** through campaigns that highlight the uniqueness of mountain landscapes and local cultural traditions to attract both domestic and foreign tourists interested in authentic experiences.
- ☐ **Stimulating local economic growth and employment through mountain tourism**, providing jobs for the rural population and revitalizing mountain communities.
- ☐ **Positioning mountain tourism** as a pillar of Romania's economy through strategic and coordinated approaches to boost GDP and support the revitalization of disadvantaged areas, offering a sustainable economic alternative.