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TOURIST ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION: CASE STUDY – MOUNTAIN AREA OF HARGHITA

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Abstract: The paper analyzes the relationship between tourist developments and sustainable development, emphasizing environmental conservation in the context of mountain tourism. The case study focuses on the mountain area of Harghita, Romania, which offers significant tourism potential due to its natural landscapes, biodiversity, and existing tourist infrastructure. The aim of the paper is to highlight best practices in tourism planning, the socio-economic and ecological impacts of tourism, and recommendations for the sustainable development of the area.

• Introduction

Tourism is one of the most dynamic sectors of the global economy, with a major impact on areas developed for tourism. In the absence of sustainable planning, tourist developments can lead to environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and landscape alteration. The purpose of this paper is to highlight how tourist developments can be harmoniously integrated into the natural environment, contributing to the sustainable development of destinations.

• Results and discussions

The mountainous area of Harghita is characterized by hilly and mountainous terrain, extensive coniferous and deciduous forests, and diverse natural resources, including mineral waters and thermal springs.

- This area offers opportunities for mountain tourism, ecotourism, hiking, mountain biking, and cultural tourism, thanks to local traditions and built heritage. There are accommodation facilities, agrotourism guesthouses, marked mountain trails, ski slopes, and tourist information centers. These are generally integrated into the landscape, but some interventions have had a negative impact on the environment. The analysis shows that tourism developments in Harghita partially comply with the principles of sustainability. There are opportunities for the development of ecotourism and the implementation of environmental protection measures. Tourism contributes to the economic development of local communities, but requires strategic planning to avoid long-term damage to natural resources.

Conclusions

Tourist facilities in the mountainous area of Harghita can be harmoniously integrated into the landscape if the principles of sustainable development are respected. Recommendations include: developing eco-friendly tourist infrastructure; educating visitors about environmental protection; monitoring the impact of tourism on ecosystems; actively involving local communities in tourism management.