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SUSTAINABILITY OF MOUNTAIN DESTINATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN POLICIES

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Abstract: *The paper compares European instruments relevant to the sustainability of mountain destinations. The documentary analysis examines objectives, responsibilities and monitoring in the frameworks of the European Union, the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Convention. A complementary analysis examines keywords from 13 selected articles. The documents present common priorities but different application mechanisms. The evidence consulted describes provisions and activities without demonstrating policy effects. For Romania, the analysis supports verifying responsibilities, data and local outcomes before transferring practices.*

• Introduction

The sustainability of mountain destinations entails aligning tourism development with resource protection, community participation and territorial management. European documents formulate common objectives but differ in status, stakeholders and application mechanisms. The paper compares how the frameworks of the European Union, the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Convention link objectives to responsibilities, instruments and monitoring.

• Material and method

Comparative documentary analysis of objectives, stakeholders, instruments, deadlines and reporting. EU documents from 2022–2026, the Alpine Tourism Protocol and the Carpathian strategy for 2014–2024 are examined. Implementation evidence includes a European report from 2025, the Carpathian decision from 2020, the Alpine trial from 2023–2024 and examples of practices published in 2014.

The complementary analysis uses authors' keywords from 13 articles published in 2014–2026; 10 include authors affiliated with USVT, including under its historical name. The selection is purposive. The network is created in R/igraph, with a Fruchterman–Reingold layout and Louvain clustering.

• Results and discussions

1. Common priorities, different mechanisms

The frameworks analysed pursue environmental protection, community involvement and coordination. The EU distributes actions and responsibilities across levels; the Alpine Protocol provides for reporting and evaluation; the Carpathian strategy establishes stakeholders, milestone indicators and reporting every three years for the 2014–2024 horizon. These provisions do not demonstrate the achievement of objectives.

2. Application must be demonstrated separately

The European report distinguishes the existence of strategies from effective coordination. The Carpathian decision from 2020 records implementation difficulties at that time, while the Alpine trial from 2023–2024 documents methodological support. The sources cover different periods and scopes and do not allow a ranking of policy effectiveness.

3. The transfer of practices is conditional

The examples of Zărnești–Piatra Craiului and the Romanian ecotourism network indicate the need to verify resource protection, community participation and recognition criteria. Local application requires clear responsibilities, resources, accessible data and periodic updating.

The analytical framework below links an explicit objective to an identifiable responsible actor, the instrument and resources required, an indicator and reference point, and reporting and review. These components guide the examination of implementation conditions without demonstrating policy effects.



Figure 1. Analytical framework for verifying operationalisation

The co-occurrence network comprises 50 keywords and 104 links, organized into six connected components. In the configuration analyzed, the Louvain clusters coincide with these components. Figure 2 displays the terms that appear together in the selected articles; it does not account for citations between authors, causal relationships, or the evaluation of policy effectiveness.

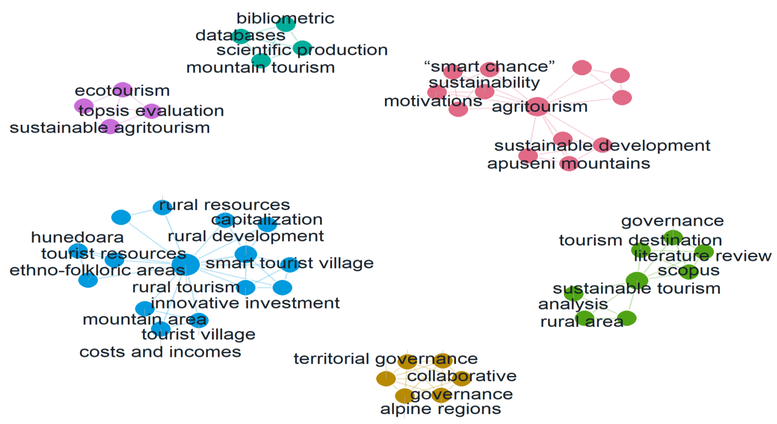


Figure 2. Keyword co-occurrence in the selected corpus

Rural and agritourism themes are frequent in the selected corpus. Alpine governance, TOPSIS prioritisation and bibliometric research appear in distinct groups. The structure depends on article selection and keyword wording; it does not describe the entire European literature or measure policy effects.

• Conclusions

European frameworks converge on general objectives but use different application and monitoring mechanisms. The existence of a strategy, a structure or an administrative indicator does not, in itself, confirm a destination's sustainability.

For mountain destinations in Romania, transferring practices entails verifying responsibilities, resources, data and local conditions. Evaluation must track verifiable outcomes concerning the environment and communities. The proposed framework requires empirical verification; the purposive selection of articles and the lack of independent verification of coding limit generalisation.