tourism and hospitality

CITESCORE 3.0

Article

Editor's Choice

Attractive Landscape Features as Drivers for Sustainable Mountain Tourism Experiences

Thomas Dax and Oliver Tamme

Special Issue
Rural Tourism

Edited by
Dr. Fabio A. Madau and Prof. Dr. Corrado Ievoli

MDPI

https://doi.org/10.3390/tourhosp4030023

tourism and hospitality

MDPI

Article

Attractive Landscape Features as Drivers for Sustainable Mountain Tourism Experiences

Thomas Dax * and Oliver Tamme

Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics, Rural and Mountain Research, 1030 Vienna, Austria; oliver.tamme@bab.gv.at

* Correspondence: thomas.dax@bab.gv.at

Abstract: Mountains are perceived as places of biodiversity, as attractive places with breathtaking aesthetic views and epitomized by their unique landscape features. As mountains are the second most demanded outdoor destination category at a global level after beaches and islands, the steady growth of tourism places high pressure on sensitive mountain ecosystems. As can be observed from tourism practice in mountain environments, the distribution of tourism activities is highly uneven. In the Alps, one of the best-known regions with relentless tourism growth, a substantial concentration of tourism intensity can be traced to specific locations and valleys, whereas other parts have to cope with trends of marginalization. In this situation, many concerned stakeholders have long advocated for more balanced economic and tourism development. The initiative of "Mountaineering Villages" promoted by the Alpine Convention is one of a few respective actions to shift perspectives and persuade tourists to engage in sustainable tourism activities. The paper explores how these activities are linked to the balanced use of cultural landscapes and the narratives that are exposed as convincing development models in these regions.

Keywords: mountain tourism; ecotourism; mountaineering; outdoor activities; landscape development; destination management; local development; agritourism; Alpine Convention; rural amenities

Citation: Dax, T.; Tamme, O. Attractive Landscape Features as Drivers for Sustainable Mountain Tourism Experiences. *Tour. Hosp.* **2023**, *4*, 374–389. https://doi.org/10.3390/tourhosp4030023

Academic Editors: Brian Garrod, Fabio A. Madau and Corrado Ievoli

Received: 13 April 2023
Revised: 6 June 2023
Accepted: 15 June 2023
Published: 23 June 2023

1. Introduction

Mountains are seen as particularly attractive destinations for tourism encompassing areas of specific aesthetic interest, cultural and spiritual relevance, and alternative places appropriate for emotional experiences in a non-urban atmosphere. Of course, these perceptions, feelings, and ways to capture the "nature" of mountains have been shaped by humans and are dependent on the specific cultural contexts we live in. Generalizing the ways in which mountains' relevance for large parts of societies is understood, it can be observed that mountain regions have become increasingly attractive for specific groups of people to relocate there, visit specific areas, enjoy landscape features, and/or value the existence of such remote places, in significant contrast to lowlands and agglomerations in many of their physical traits and sociocultural specificities.

For a long time, tourism development in mountain regions has been conceived as an opportunity to cope with marginalization threats and to enable inhabitants of mountain regions to gain enhanced incomes and take part in modern lifestyles. However, tourism development has remained concentrated in few places or regions, leading to "hot spots" of tourism intensity in the Central and Western Alps of Europe, and specific locations throughout the other mountain ranges of the world (e.g., Machu Picchu, Peru; Grand Canyon National Park, USA; Great Smoky Mountains National Park, USA; Kilimanjaro, Kenya/Tanzania; some Himalayan locations, Nepal/India; Picos de Europa, Spain, etc.). Many of these are famous for their iconic locations or views, with specific spots booming due to the desire to participate in social media (self) representations. Due to the tighter limitations in accessing difficult topographies of mountains, in general, intensity in mountain

tourism does not reach as high levels as urban centers or beach resorts at a regional scale. The cases where "over tourism" is actually experienced are often restricted to a specific location (e.g., viewpoint, summit, cable car access, nature attraction, lakeside resorts, cultural places, or events), except for a few regions with a high tourism intensity throughout almost all local communities. Early assessments of the rise in mountain tourism over the second half of the 20th century acknowledge the concentration in specific spots. Martin Price highlights five themes that are particularly relevant for this type of tourism: "accessibility; temporal dimensions; types of tourists; changes in communities as perceived by tourists; and changes in the sociocultural structure of tourist communities" [1] (p. 87).

Discussions about alternative perspectives for mountain tourism were advanced by some local actors, stakeholders, and concerned experts who were afraid of the negative consequences of extreme tourism intensity for the environment and social fabric of local communities. Alternatives of ecotourism [2] and adapted tourism approaches that address issues of the social impact of mountain tourism [3] were seen as relevant opportunities for many mountain areas. The assessment of the explosion of tourism throughout the mountains in all parts of the world points to the high diversity in different types of activities of tourism, yet also acknowledges the slow adaption towards sustainable tourism realities [4]. The discourse intensified over recent years, underpinning the variety of mountain tourism developments in different global mountain ranges [5] and the increased need for shifting towards sustainable mountain tourism [6] in order to preserve the inherent qualities of these environments.

In the European Alps, the concern for shaping tourism activities in such a manner that it respects the natural environment, socioeconomic development, and local cultures emerged very early. Particularly, the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA) urged for a reversed perspective on tourism in this mountain range and combined policy strategies to respect the ecological quality as the main resource for future attractiveness and use of the area already since the 1950s. Eventually, the Alpine Convention was established in 1991, providing the first legal treaty for steering policies in mountain areas. As a comprehensive strategy, activities extend to a wide set of topics that are perceived as largely intertwined in their implementation, territorial, sociocultural, and ecological effects.

With this remit, to foster sustainable development in the Alps, the Alpine Convention compiled a review of the challenges and status of implementation of sustainable tourism action across the Alpine regions [7]. This report highlights the significant obstacles to achieving an effective shift in the tourism strategy, but also includes a wide set of good practices available from local and regional actors. Relevant examples include the diversification of tourism activities, with a contribution to regional added-value; promotion of natural and cultural heritage; prudent use and the preservation of natural resources; spatial planning tools to reduce soil sealing, urban sprawl, and protect landscapes; adaptation in mobility and energy issues; and social and cultural aspects of tourism development. Given the tensions and ecological and social impact of the tourism sector as one of the leading economic sectors, alternative approaches to enhance low-intensity tourism action that is particularly suitable to mountain environments was sought by pilot action as well. The "Mountaineering Villages" is a prime example of an initiative of local development action that seeks to nurture opportunities for specific small-scale communities. This type of mountain tourism is based on a long mountaineering and hiking tradition and the commitment and attachment of Alpine club nature experiences that are not yet overwhelmed by intensive tourism development but dispose of significant "mountain" characteristics and potential [8].

This paper will explore the background and experience of this action, first elaborated in Austria but recently extended to the other adjacent Alpine regions as well. Before presenting findings from the analysis of this initiative [9], the discourse of mountain tourism will be analyzed. The focus is put on those aspects that draw on the particular role of landscape development as a foundation for respective tourism opportunities and place-

specific attractiveness for low-intensity tourism concepts. The widely shared recognition that tourist activities might represent a major source of (additional) income for mountain dwellers in many mountain regions can draw on a large body of studies and significant policy support to spot, nurture, and foster emerging activities. Against this background, the relevance of cultural landscapes in the framing of mountain tourism in the Alps, exemplified by the "Mountaineering Villages" (MV) initiative, will be explored. Its crucial impact is working towards both ends: the need to preserve the characteristics and assets of landscapes and the conclusions for adapted forms of mountain tourism. This might have important repercussions for mountain tourism in the future, and in general.

2. Literature Review

At the turn of this century, a particular focus was placed on mountain development potential, as can be seen in the emerging research commitment addressing global change implications for mountains [10], the discussion of mountains' roles in sustainable development at UN global development conferences (e.g., Rio 1992, Johannesburg 2002 and Rio 2012), the installation of the UN's International Year of Mountains (in 2002), and the creation of mountain network institutions (such as the Mountain Partnership, the Mountain Research Initiative, etc.). Godde et al. pointed to an increased awareness of the growth of tourism, including mountain tourism, and "seriously question(ed) the impacts of tourism on the biosphere as well as on people and their cultures and societies", but, at the same time observed that "we are starting to take more directed action toward the sustainable maintenance of precious resources" [11] (p. 1).

Against these concerns of generating forms of tourism that are respectful to the environment and sociocultural systems, the scale of mountain tourism has expanded along with general tourism growth. UNEP argued that "mountain areas are second only to coasts and islands as popular tourism destinations, generating 15–20 percent of annual global tourism, or US$70–90 billion per year" [3] (p. 11). According to the recent estimation by UNWTO [12] (p. 7), mountain tourism accounts for about 9% to 16% of total international tourist arrivals, with significant differences between countries and regions. As main drivers for the high attractiveness of mountain destinations, a series of mutually reinforcing drivers are mentioned: specific climate conditions, clean air, unique landscapes and wildlife, and also scenic beauty based on topography, impressions of local culture, history and heritage, and the opportunity for specific outdoor activities, including sports (winter and summer) and nature-related activities. As a large share of these tourism flows is concentrated in the Alps, scientific interest and respective policy elaboration were taken up very early and are particularly advanced for that region.

The Working Group of the Alpine Convention on Tourism Development estimated that about 95 million long-stay tourists and 60 million day-trip visitors spend more or less long recreation time in the Alps every year [7] (p. 27). Long-stay tourists are predominantly foreigners, but according to the specific regions, a significant number of tourists is through domestic tourism as well. This brief overview already indicates that measuring the extent of tourism is not always as easy as supposed, since various forms of staying in the regions and newly emerging types of accommodation overlap. As such, the figures on the quantity of Alpine tourism might be an underestimation. In particular, forms of "amenity migration" [13] through stays in secondary residences, apartments, split-ownership arrangements, chalet renting, etc. are hardly visible from official national statistics.

In conceptual terms, various concepts of mountain tourism types can be discerned [14] which represent divergent strategies but nevertheless might overlap to some extent. In particular, these refer to "rural tourism", "agritourism", "ecotourism", "community-based tourism", "cultural tourism", and different types of "niche tourism" which, e.g., might link to gastronomic features, sports, or other well-being focuses. The Alps were realized very early as a model of mountain tourism for other mountain ranges [4]. Similar to the Alpine Convention, the global assessment of mountain tourism performance called increasingly for prioritizing sociocultural needs and environmental impacts [3] and local

community development [6] as core drivers for shifts towards sustainable development trajectories [11,15–17].

Retaining the particular attractiveness of the Alpine regions is a key concern of diverse sector policies and territorial actors as mountain landscapes represent a key driver for regional economies [18]. In Austria in 2018, tourism amounted to 7.3%, including tourism-related activities, to 15.3% of the national GDP [19], implying that in high-intensity tourism destinations of mountain regions in West Austria, this level would even be considerably higher.

Several decades ago, tourism in the Alps reached such an intensity that warnings of the destruction of internal values were raised [20] and the scale of mountain tourism in specific places led to concerns about the negative effects on the environment and socioeconomic development of those areas. Within the elaboration of the Alpine Convention, calls for a renewed strategy and alternative forms of tourism gained relevance and contributed to a search for sustainable mobility and focus on less-intensive tourism strategies [21]. Since those early wake-up calls, the situation has intensified and issues of "over tourism" are also linked to some mountain destinations. The call for discussing alternative pathways of tourism development, particularly for those areas that were not as highly developed and often constituted areas of marginalization and population decline, was taken up in pilot schemes to foster approaches for less intensive tourism destination strategies. Sustainable tourism had been defined as "tourism which is (carried out) in a form which can maintain its viability in an area for an indefinite period of time" [22] (p. 36). Moreover, it would not "degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and wellbeing of other activities and processes" [22] (p. 35). However, the maintenance of growth strategies challenges more and more the limits and system boundaries of tourism development [23]. This calls for an integrated perspective in mountain research, linking place-based economic and social activities to implications on land use, landscapes, and natural resources [24] and uptake of adapted local development approaches in different spatial contexts of the Alps [25] and mountains in general [14].

This perspective is strengthened by practical concerns for the compatibility of tourism extent with the affected mountain systems. The concept of "carrying capacity" is hence "an attempt to define the level of tolerance or compatibility between tourist activities and demands" within an area and its "ecological, social, cultural, and economic support systems" [26] (p. 3). Although estimating the upper limits of tourism incomers to avoid overload in mountain regions [27] is a fundamental prerequisite to pursuing sustainability objectives, thresholds addressed through MV are usually set at lower levels than capacity considerations would allow. These lower thresholds are argued specifically through the needs of a holistic perspective and beneficial outcomes of low-intensity tourism settings. As local or small-scale tourism agencies are often competing with other regions, the policy and managerial implications of such schemes are huge and require the consideration of spatial interrelations, cooperation, and scale of action [16] (p. 77).

In this paper, we will focus on a specific initiative promoted by the Alpine Convention since the late 2000s, targeted at the outdoor recreation and sports potential of high Alpine mountains through mountaineering activities. This reconsideration of the foundational amenities of mountain areas builds on the aesthetic appeal of the landscapes with the iconic value of many of its places. It refers to the unbalanced tourism development which shows that tourism in the Alps is concentrated in less than 10% of mountain municipalities. According to the Working Group on Demography and Employment of the Alpine Convention, almost half of the tourist beds in the Alps (46%) are concentrated in 5% of the municipalities [28] (p. 8). These pressures are particularly visible in the western part of Austria, in the Swiss mountains, several valleys of Italian mountains, and French "hot spots" of tourism concentration.

In Austria, for example, it has led to efforts for more balanced coverage of regions with tourism demand since the 1980s, involving small-scale local development schemes under

the term of "endogenous development", albeit with limited effects. Nevertheless, niche tourism activities promoted some new small regions, enhanced the recognition of cultural landscapes as a backdrop for these actions, and inspired emerging learning processes [29]. It seems particularly important to link economic renewal with sociocultural legacies and specific expression of nature-related resources, above all as experienced through "cultural landscapes". Providing innovative concepts by local actors is thus geared to balanced strategies for economic, social, and ecological adaptation. In terms of tourism development, this might translate into limitations for tourism growth to "sustainable" levels, as visible in Austrian local pioneer case studies, to limit the increase in tourism levels to the size of local population numbers [30].

These tourism initiatives focused on new types of tourism activities and local areas that are less integrated into high-intensity tourism circles. The decisive factor in relation to mountain contexts was a dedicated shift toward valuing nature and outdoor activities as pull factors. It reflects both the core elements of mountain amenities, enhancing tourism related to the specific high-altitude experiences of "mountaineering", respecting the limitations of protected areas, and nurturing the development of ecosystem service provision from mountain regions [31]. The mountain landscape represents a crucial amenity in this regard but has to be understood in its dynamic evolution. Although quite often the significant territorial capital is seen in the valorization of the natural heritage [32], which is translated in the status of "protected area" [33], appreciation by visitors extends to a wide range of nature-related and culturally shaped landscape features. At the core of these landscapes are mountain-specific grassland management areas of pasture land [34,35], as well as biotic elements linked to particular climates, altitudes, and management-dependent aesthetic value [36]. In these contexts, specific cultures of collective land management have been elaborated due to strategies to secure human–nature conditions and long-term use [37] favoring an assessment of dynamic cultural landscapes that are rooted in long-term historical trajectories [38]. It seems important that specific opportunities for local development, amenity shaping, and limitations in cultural ecosystem services for intensive management uses are realized [39] and appropriate policies are designed. Climate change has even aggravated the effects and added to the shift towards changed value patterns with regard to tourism types [40]. With the COVID-19 pandemic, arguments for enhancing low-intensity tourism, mobility patterns, and attractiveness of less crowded or less intensive spaces gained momentum [41].

3. Methods

The background to this paper is a review of mountain tourism activities in various European regions addressing the potential of tourism as an emerging economic activity coping with issues of limited productivity in agriculture and forestry and reduced household income options. These analyses draw both from an observation of shifting activities in mountain areas towards tourist engagement in very distinct ways and a wide range of relevant studies on the challenges, opportunities, and outcomes of such activities over recent decades. Previous studies of agritourism development in Europe and beyond [42–44] and respective literature reviews on mountain tourism [45] represent a precursor to the analysis for this paper. As mountain tourism can be conceived as a specific type of rural tourism, the focus will be on delineating the specificities of tourism activities in these spatial contexts. A common thread is that attractiveness is based on topography, aesthetic appeal, options for outdoor activity, and the notions of landscape as distinct from other rural areas. From this perspective, landscapes are not as much understood as "pristine areas" but as places that are shaped by human activity and thus largely dependent on socioeconomic activities, types of tourism activities selected, and strategies for making use of these spaces. The literature review will thus stress the need to shift mountain tourism approaches increasingly towards sustainable pathways that would enable the realization of resilient place-based strategies. Such an approach seems ambiguous as long as the widely shared narrative is supporting competitiveness and large-scale investment and only a few examples of

alternative initiatives are available. It is the intention of this paper to raise awareness of such pilot activities and enhance understanding of coping with transition challenges.

Backed by that overview of mountain tourism developments and concepts, this paper reports on the opportunities and challenges of a network activity of the Alpine Convention that seeks to foster and promote local initiatives of sustainable mountain tourism. The findings from analyzing the MV underscore its potential to serve as a good practice device for an alternative tourism approach in the Alpine regions that aims at low-intensity tourist activities, in contrast to those growth-oriented and highly intensive tourism hot spots of the Alps. Backed up by the findings of a national research project [9] applying a qualitative analysis of the scheme, the presentation focuses on the specificities of the individual local cases and seeks to convey an understanding of its close relationship to its local rootedness in specific landscape types and features.

The underlying analysis is based on three local-level case studies of differently structured MV in Austria. Following a short survey on quantitative indicators of participating villages, a qualitative research approach was applied to understand the particular features of the various communities, to comprehend and illustrate the historical, cultural, and topographical background of the various pilot cases, and to assess common aspects between the analyzed villages. This analysis repeatedly points to the core influence of the specific locations, i.e., its significant landscape attributes that shape attractiveness but is reshaped by local strategies and development action as well.

For long periods in the years 2020–2022, the COVID-19 pandemic inhibited the reception of tourists in many regions, leading to a tremendous breakdown in overnight stays in almost all regions. It also affected the feasibility of in-place studies as it largely impeded any face-to-face interview activity. Most of the contacts with local actors and interviews in the mountain municipalities had to be carried out virtually and thus lack a more intensive exchange and inclusion of other observational aspects. Following research methodological considerations for endogenous development [46], the empirical work is mainly based on qualitative research. In particular, the role of local promoters, dedicated actors, and residents [47] in conceiving and realizing the initiatives, and the support of local governance through dedicated networks [48], seem crucial. The interviewees selected for this study should be aware of the need for alternative approaches in mountain tourism and reflect on the balance of less intensive tourism offers and the desire of interested tourist groups to "experience" mountain topography, nature, and landscape aspects as well as outdoor activities. The panel of interviewees aimed at involving the relevant stakeholder groups and decision-makers at the local level that shaped the implementation of the MV scheme in the analyzed municipalities. Table 1 indicates the relevant groups addressed in the study, including local governance, representatives of the Austrian Alpine Club as promoters, local tourism managers, the farming community, environmental groups, and local entrepreneurs. The study comprises 23 online interviews which were based on a semi-structured questionnaire addressing the various spheres of scoping, designing, and implementing the scheme in the respective municipalities. Based on the concept of saturation [49] additional interviewees were sought as long as additional evidence was expected from extending the scope of interviewees. This "rule" of qualitative research indicates the number of interviewees where on the basis of hitherto collected information any further interview is assessed unnecessary. To achieve sufficient impression and familiarity with the individual context, the most relevant community stakeholders and local experts for crucial issues of community and tourism development were selected to be interviewees. Thus, the interviews engaged the most active and acquainted representatives of the initiative at the local level, including mayors and local administrators, tourism partner enterprises, people in charge of the local Alpine clubs, members of local tourism boards or Alpine consulting enterprises, or managers of protected areas. Some interviews were deliberately organized with representatives of the province level and of the administration of the whole initiative, particularly to find out about strategic aspects at a higher level and synthesis assessment of those people surveying the implementation of the initiative. A larger sample of interviews

was not deemed necessary since most active persons of the respective municipalities were already included. The findings of this study are reinforced by a series of recently carried out similar investigations of the MV in the European Alps and mountaineering tourism in general (see Section 5).

Table 1. Sample of interviewees in three MV of Austria.

Social Group of Interviewees	Interview Code
Local governance administrators	J1, J4; JSV1, JSV4; M1, M3
Austrian Alpine Club representative	Exp1, Exp2, Exp3
Tourism managers	J3; JSV2; M4, M7; Exp5, Exp7
Farming community	JSV3; M2; Exp6
Environmental groups	J2; JSV2; M8; Exp4
Entrepreneurs	M5, M6
Total number of interviews	23

Note: Interview codes denote the origin of municipality of the interviewees and expert status. They are used in the detailed discussion of their assessment in the study's final report. Source: List of interviewees in the three municipalities Johnsbach, Mauthen, and St. Jodok/Schmirn und Valsertal [9] (p. 161).

From the transcription of the interviews, a set of common themes emerged as influential aspects to establishing effective local application of this pilot scheme for sustainable mountain tourism. These themes mirror the theoretical considerations on destination management and transition needs towards sustainable tourism development in mountain regions. The assessment of those local actors and experts enabled analysis along the four topics; process development for setting up the initiative; impact on tourism development performance in the municipality; implementation aspects and issues related to the specific location, including landscape features and relation to protected areas; and considerations on future community strategy. The findings for these four topics were compared for commonalities and divergences between the three studied municipalities. In particular, qualitative accounts of interviewees underline the backdrop for establishing the initiative in their communities, the obstacles and achievements perceived by local actors, and further issues for future development. In addition, an intensive survey of the reports for all Austrian MV underpinned these arguments and revealed its relevance for the whole MV scheme. This material underpinned the specific conclusions on the relevance of landscape development by the analysis of the three MV through a wider scope of application. Moreover, the presentation of each of the MV in a dedicated brochure provided village-specific information with historical background, socioecological systems, cultural landscape design, relevance for tourism activities, and indications for the status of tourism capacity and benchmarks for future development. Detailed assessment of low-intensity strategies in the three MV analyzed, the scoping information on all Austrian MV and specific studies on their contribution to low-intensity tourism pathways, and the literature review on the need for transitions towards sustainable mountain tourism frameworks are the source for conclusions to this paper. From a methodological point, it is crucial to combine these various sources as background to underpin the options for and challenges of such alternative tourism types and point to their relevance for shifting tourism trends in mountain regions.

4. Results

Mountain tourism potential and challenges for sustainable approaches have been discussed intensively over the last two decades. The following sub-section synthesizes these concerns in a literature review before the article turns to presenting the MV initiative's implementation and considers the linkage to landscape development as a crucial aspect of sustainable mountain tourism development.

Mountain Landscapes, the Building Block for Mountaineering Villages

The local initiative of the MV, elaborated by the Austrian Alpine Club within the Alpine Convention's strategy to promote sustainable tourism is presented and analyzed here. The main aim is to underpin its potential and scope for harnessing the specificities of mountain landscapes for alternative pathways of tourism development. The scheme represents an important marketing brand that is key to the strategy and activities of the Alpine Club and a highly suitable offer for its members. The label synthesizes the core objectives and development tasks of the supporting institutions and provides an intelligible scheme for sustainable mountain tourism, distinct from other similar activities. Shaping the cultural landscapes of mountains as the key ingredient for the respective destinations and mountaineering (and related activities) as the main target activities for visitors captures the unique selling proposition of these local communities.

The outline of the scheme and its model character for sustainable mountain tourism is revealed in a previous paper that highlights a series of additional aspects for establishing attractive tourist destinations, particularly linked to "soft" forms, often termed slow tourism and local commitment [50]. The following overview (Table 2) lists the criteria for selecting these locations and indicates the core role of landscape specifics for this initiative. Several of the criteria exposed are directly, and many others indirectly, related to mountain landscapes as a basis for inclusion in this activity. Some of those, such as indicators of remoteness (distance to road network, limited infrastructural buildings) and a minimum threshold for areas of natural reserves within selected municipalities underscore the objectives for an alternative tourism approach.

Table 2. Criteria for selection of Mountaineering Villages (MV).

Criteria	Indicator	Definition
Exclusion criteria	(A1) Tourism facilities inadequate	Lack of quality accommodation
	(A2) Sparse mountain features and limited landscape characteristics	Too little relief energy (minimum altitude difference of 1000 m); no landscape damage; limited interventions in protected areas, winter sports facilities, and energy production
	(A3) Lack of village character	Too high number of residents (max. 2500 per municipality/unit), no big companies or buildings, urban sprawl, and no predominance of non-hotel accommodation
	(A4) Significant impact from traffic routes	Close location and/or impact from highways, expressways, or airfields
Mandatory criteria	(B1) Heightened tourism quality	Refuges and huts available (above 1500 masl), accessible only on foot, tourism companies of mountaineering village, good range of accommodation categories and restaurants
	(B2) Proofed "Alpine" competence for services and tourism offer	Looked-after mountain pathways, competent local Alpine advisory service, rental of mountaineering equipment, touring program, and cooperation with Alpine clubs
	(B3a) High-quality appearance of locality	Local development strategy and staging MV concept; preservation of local appearance
	(B3b) High landscape quality (roadless parts of area and limited infrastructure exposure)	Absence of "hard" infrastructure, racing events, and technical access to mountain peaks; no new construction of hydropower plants; no motorized individual transport on pastures and mountain forests; minimum of nature reserves (>20% of area of municipality)
	(B4) High sustainable mobility elaboration	Mobility offers for mountaineers (public transport, pick-up service, carpooling)
	(B5) Enhanced cooperation quality	Cooperation of relevant players, including Alpine clubs and specific working groups with regular participation in MV activities
Target criteria	(C1) Tourism support quality	Local supply of daily needs; accessible by public transport and appropriate information available for tourists
	(C2) Cultural and regional specific features	Building on heritage features, activities to strengthen existing initiatives and offers
	(C3) Information package on Alpine competence	Updated guidebooks, maps, contact persons, online route information, Alpine courses and training opportunities, all-inclusive packages, local sports shop for mountaineers (max. 10 km distance)
	(C4) User service and information on landscape quality	Nature reserve services; tours, workshops, and sensitivity support for nature and cultural issues of area

Source: adapted from [51].

The focus is not just based on the notion of mountain landscapes but includes also a vision of small-scale structures in tourism destinations and the exclusion of municipalities with too much focus on growth in tourism performance and harmful effects on the environment. As such, only small municipalities and those not located in tourism hotspots might participate. On the other hand, mountain features and attractions for mountain outdoor activities are pivotal to the destination image and inclusion in the scheme.

Implementation of the initiative in Austria's MV is shown in Table 3 by listing all active villages of the scheme with population size, tourism intensity, and "mountainous" proxy indicator of elevation difference within the municipality (aiming at a minimum of 1000 m of elevation difference). These indicators underline three crucial aspects of the initiative: the small-scale structure of local development, the low intensity of tourism within participating communities, and the high amenity level through the high elevation difference within the same municipality. These present the base for great mountaineering outdoor activities as the main destination feature characteristic of "Alpine" tourism. Variance in tourism intensity based on the indicator of overnight stays per inhabitant seems quite substantial among MV. However, the very small population numbers in those villages with extremely high tourism intensity (Vent im Ötztal and Johnsbach im Gesäuse), and the specific local contexts of those villages should be considered. In terms of tourism development since accessing the MV scheme, most participating municipalities show stability, and two-thirds of them even show a slightly positive development in tourist numbers. The intensity of tourism within the observed municipalities underscores the finding that MV are oriented to low-intensity schemes and precludes big tourism infrastructures. These quantitative figures are presented as a testimony to the selected strategy, but it is imperative to add that quality aspects of nature-based and ecologically beneficial land management systems are the elements most appreciated by visitors.

Table 3. Population, tourism intensity, and elevation difference in MV (Austria).

Mountaineering Village (Land [1])	Start Year in MV Scheme	Inhabitants (2019)	Overnight Stays/Inhabitant (2018/19)	Elevation Difference (m)
Mallnitz (C)	2008	763	159	2169
Malta im Maltatal (C)	2008	1967	42	2517
Mauthen (C)	2011	718	35	2070
Zell/Sele (C)	2013	601	2	1189
Lesachtal (C)	2008	1319	87	1736
Lunz am See (LA)	2008	1779	23	1273
Grünau im Almtal (UA)	2008	2058	31	1987
Steinbach am Attersee (UA)	2008	882	95	1353
Weißbach bei Lofer (S)	2008	412	63	1968
Hüttschlag im Großarltal (S)	2008	906	54	1856
Johnsbach im Gesäuse (St)	2008	149	221	1600
Steirische Krakau (St)	2008	1390	20	1567
Tiroler Gailtal (T)	2008	1666	110	1454
Villgratental (T)	2008	1671	44	1675
Ginzling/Zillertal (T)	2008	360	111	2510
Gschnitztal (T)	2019	1757	44	2035
St. Jodok, Schmirn und Valsertal (T)	2012	1410	24	2376
Region Sellraintal(T)	2013	2130	97	1785
Vent im Ötztal (T)	2008	138	940	1879
Großes Walsertal (V)	2008	3400	58	1218
Steinberg am Rofan (T)	2021	281	56	1284
Göriach (S)	2021	345	51	1683
22 Villages (average)	2010	1186	63	1781 [1]

[1] Note: Abbreviations of Länder: C—Carinthia, LA—Lower Austria, S—Salzburg, St—Styria, T—Tyrol, V—Vorarlberg, UA—Upper Austria. Source: BAB, own calculation.

The crucial aspect of mountain landscapes for this initiative can be derived most clearly from the results of a survey among Austrian tourists. The respective questionnaire of the tourism practices across all regions and tourist types in Austria investigated motifs, activities, attributes, and satisfaction levels among tourists in the years 2017–2019. The survey results reported in Table 4 include a total of 47,032 respondents across Austria, with 505 tourist respondents thereof being addressed through MV. Interviews have been carried out as online surveys, based on the tourists' stay in the respective destinations, and selected according to a scheme for providing a representative sample of Austrian tourists. All the results shown are statistically representative of the specific groups.

Table 4. Motifs, activities, attributes, and satisfaction of landscape aspects by tourists to MV vs. rural tourists in Austria (2017–2019; in % of respective group).

	Mountaineering Villages	**Rural Tourists** [1]
Motifs for visit to destination [2]		
Nature/landscape	80	55
Place uniqueness/atmosphere	28	23
Focus on mountain offer	22	13
Preferred tourism activities [3]		
Hiking	82	63
Mountaineering	33	10
Climbing	10	3
Alpine ski sports	13	26
Attributes of destination/destination "image" [4]		
Relaxing	71	63
Close to nature/"pristine" character	70	51
Traditional	51	42
Authentic	36	30
"Sustainable"	33	18
Romantic	20	16
Exclusive	3	7
"Crowded"	2	6
Hip and cool	2	4
Satisfaction with aspects of destination [5]		
Landscape and nature	92	78
Weather conditions	41	40
Atmosphere	67	53
Hiking paths	77	61
Overall satisfaction with stay in destination	74	61

[1] All tourists to Austria, tourists to Vienna excluded. [2] Only main motifs; multiple response options possible. [3] Only selected activities quoted; multiple response options. [4] Selected attributes; multiple response options. [5] Only assessment of highest satisfaction included in these values. Source: results of T-Mona Survey 2020 (Austrian tourism monitor), in [9] (pp. 70–80); own calculation.

Differentiation of the results by tourists' destinations enabled a comparison of survey outcomes for tourists to MV as opposed to tourists visiting other rural places in Austria. It can be shown quite impressively that in all four categories, elements of access to nature and landscapes are of outstanding importance for tourists of MV. The inclination for the landscape-related indicators is significantly higher for MV tourists than for other rural tourists. For example, landscape as a motif for visiting a specific destination is mentioned by 80% of MV tourists vs. 55% of other rural tourists. Likewise, the activities of tourists are much more focused on making use of the mountain landscape, and attributes ascribed to the destination are related to the "pristine" character and close relation to nature. Destinations are also recognized to be "sustainable" to a much higher degree than by other rural tourists, confirming the initiative's aim for sustainable development. Opposite indicators that would characterize a destination as "crowded", "exclusive", or "hip and cool" are less frequent

for MV tourists. Maybe the most expressive indicator is the widely shared satisfaction with landscapes and nature in MV, and the also very high overall satisfaction with the stay in the respective destination. Survey results thus suggest a substantial approval of visitors to the initiative's aims and the approach of sustainable mountain tourism for MV.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the MV strategy and implementation, as well as tourists' satisfaction, highlight the wide scope of drivers and linkages to mountain landscapes attraction. The initiative was elaborated on the basis of a discourse on tourism development in the Alps over several decades and the tensions between intensive growth and the search for integrative local development action in destinations with low tourism intensity but significant mountain amenities. These can be attributed to topographic and landscape characteristics, often visualized through the assignment of protected area status, but actually affecting the ecological performance of the area. It can be addressed as a particular model of sustainable mountain tourism [4,6], representing a specific type of rural tourism [52], seeking an inspiring alternative to mainstream tourism strategies of growth and ever-increasing concentration processes.

From analyzing the process of conceptualizing, preparing, selecting, and implementing local communities to realize this specific approach for sustainable mountain tourism development, it arises that historical experience and cultural contexts matter a lot. The interest in the tourist offer of this initiative is only understandable against the backdrop of the long-lasting debate of how to curb intensive tourism growth and negative consequences, stirring desire and demand for this type of tourism activity, at least within a small but increasing share of visitors to the Alps. It thus encompasses a meaningful scheme for low-intensity tourism patterns based on the initial policy focus for shifting tourism strategies in the Alpine Convention's regions [53], closely linked to a perspective for nature protection, ecologically beneficial land use, and landscape development [54]. The tensions were visible long before, and the discourse was particularly animated so that the shift towards low-intensity forms of tourism was only feasible through local pilot cases [7]. The particular approach of the MV promotes a sensitive tourism offer that is cognizant of the tensions of the general tourism development, use of natural resources, settlement density, and destination management focusing on iconic hotspots. As an alternative, it aims to respond to the challenges of sustainable dimensions requirements [55].

The ongoing threat to characteristic cultural landscapes of the Alpine regions is reflected in the recent position paper by CIPRA: "The more landscapes are developed, the more the value of undeveloped landscapes becomes apparent, be it from an ecological point of view for the preservation of biodiversity, from an economic point of view as an attractive space for tourism, or from a social point of view in terms of generational justice and as a space for experience" [56] (p. 3). This quote addresses the numerous drivers, persistent implementation obstacles, and use conflicts impeding a swifter application of the concept.

The core idea of MV is dependent on the appreciation of rural amenities, visible through particularly attractive mountain landscapes, which present an environment that offers great emotional experience, outdoor activities, and exploration of cultural heritage. The scheme thus relates closely to considerations on the wide scope for ecosystem services provision [31], the need for conceptualizing "cultural landscapes" [38,39] as its core asset, and the high relevance of a sufficient share of protected areas and an informed understanding of its dynamic and human action-related character.

The particular appeal of the initiative is its combination of addressing the activity of mountaineering, and in a broad sense, rendering it attractive to diverse groups of visitors (see assessment of satisfaction by tourists to MV). This is linked to a global "commodification" of mountaineering [57] and a search for seasonal balance in the destination profile [58,59]. Moreover, landscape development is tightly interwoven with land use and specific types of land management. The support for mountain farming [60], its integration with tourism activities, use and design of agritourism options [61], and the reference and

use of tourist activities to local food systems [62] are further pivotal features of MV. It is crucial that this combination of a set of elements constitutes the specific value of MV [63]. Moreover, assessing initiatives for sustainable mountain tourism needs to overcome the shortages of short-term planning [64] and integrate aspects of all dimensions of sustainable development, in particular including sociocultural impacts and local agency [65], as well as practical issues of the need for high visibility of the territorial brand and guidelines for practitioner involvement [16].

The initiative is also ambitious in focusing on aspects of low-intensity tourism, which involves the limitation of tourism development [66] and even implies the exclusion of too-intensive municipalities from the scheme. It thus refers to the concept of carrying capacity, revealing the boundaries of tourism growth [67]. Achieving a good balance is the challenge here, as the local/regional contexts of participating municipalities struggle with weak economic development, out-migration, and limited alternative activity options. Beyond coping with sensitive environments [15,68–70], tourism development is often presumed to overcome income gaps in those remote places [71]. With an increased interest in remote places, becoming visible, particularly in the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, demand for soft tourism types such as MV might gain additionally [72]. Even if that should be assessed as a further turn towards appreciating and realizing sustainable forms of tourism, we should be aware of the dangers of "hypermobility" [73] and carefully assess the involved practices, tourists' behavior, and destination implications.

The attractive feature of the MV initiative depends on the interrelated set of criteria and the "territorial brand" assigned to participating municipalities. The sophisticated certification scheme intends to secure the high quality of participants and to communicate the specific offer to potential visitors [16]. The focus is on those tourists seeking the particular quality aspects of MV [74]. Branding aspects are therefore core in elaborating this alternative form of mountain tourism. The MV of the Alps are therefore also assessed as a "model" initiative [75], providing lessons to other locations in the Alps and in other European and global mountain ranges. Even if place-specificity is high, numerous similar activities have been elaborated throughout many mountain ranges of the world. The most obvious similarity is with trekking and mountaineering offers available in the Himalayas [76,77] and other mountain ranges, which respond to a rising global demand [78], particularly through young groups of adventurers [68]. In those mountains, community-based approaches [79] and poverty alleviation [80] are particular features that are more relevant than in European contexts. Global discourse is intensive on "slow tourism", often termed as ecotourism approaches, of which many cases of mountain tourism schemes are available throughout mountain ranges [75,81–84].

6. Conclusions

Although growth in tourism has resurged after the COVID-19 pandemic as a main concern for many regions, including mountain locations, the discussion of alternative pathways has received a new impetus. Local initiatives such as the MV present a "niche" approach to low-intensity tourism, with some appeal to small-scaled communities, that refers to increasing demand for outdoor activity, tourist experiences, and community-based approaches that also address the socioeconomic challenges of remote mountain areas. Situated in the Alpine regions, the small set of MV is in conspicuous contrast to intensive tourism notions of large parts of the Alps. These challenges might also be an opportunity for the scheme as it represents an inspiring approach to balance tourism offer and local development needs, an aspect that might assume increased attention with changes in mobility perception, rising energy and transport cost, and shifts in tourism demand patterns.

As the analysis reveals, its implementation involves an ambitious repositioning of local strategies. This is dependent on the awareness and commitment of local actors, institutions, and governance that seek to overcome the prevailing investment imperative and "growth" myopia of previous policies. The elaboration of local activities in about

20 small mountain municipalities in Austria over more than a decade has raised interest within neighboring countries and regions that are now also elaborating applications in appropriate municipalities that respect the specific criteria of the scheme. Of course, mountaineering tourism is not a recent phenomenon but is part of a long tradition. The MV are thus a specific territorial brand that makes this alternative tourism type visible and excites discussions about the challenges of landscape development, ecological impact, and socioeconomic outcomes in mountain regions.

Both the tourism response and the discourses are not limited to the Alps or European contexts, but relevant throughout the mountain ranges of the world. Together with many other small-scale examples of mountain tourism, the initiative of MV might underpin the need for shifting towards *sustainable* mountain tourism activities. They might be perceived as precursors to global trends which, however, require strong support to enhance local activities and advance transition towards such tourism activities. There are important pitfalls in implementing and nurturing such a change process. In particular, it seems crucial not to fall into the trap of short-term economic success, but to convey an understanding of inherent change in values and objectives. Ecological performance, the "uniqueness" of mountain contexts, including cultural landscapes, foundation in natural and cultural heritage, and core engagement of local stakeholders and actors are core attributes. Realizing low-intensity tourism development can be understood as the art to strike a balance between preservation, high-quality ecological performance, and the sensible use of amenities of mountain areas, i.e., aesthetic values and landscapes, providing space for outdoor activities and experiences.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, O.T. and T.D.; methodology, O.T.; validation and formal analysis, O.T.; investigation, O.T.; data curation, O.T.; writing—original draft preparation, T.D. and O.T.; writing—review and editing, T.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding. It was carried out within the research program of the Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics, Rural and Mountain Research (BAB), project no. BAB 025/19.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Publicly available datasets were analyzed in this study. These data can be found in [9]. Data on tourist perception and satisfaction survey results are available on request from the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments: Authors are grateful to all experts and stakeholders interviewed during the background study (project BAB 025/19) on their experiences and perspectives on implementation of the MV initiative in Austria.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

References

1. Price, M.F. Patterns of the Development of Tourism in Mountain Environments. *GeoJournal* **1992**, *27*, 87–96. [CrossRef]
2. Williams, P.W.; Singh, T.V.; Schlüter, R. Mountain Ecotourism: Creating a Sustainable Future. In *The Encyclopedia of Ecotourism*; Chapter 13; Weaver, D.B., Ed.; CABI Publishing: Wallingford, UK, 2001; pp. 205–218.
3. UNEP. *Tourism and Mountains, A Practical Guide to Managing the Environmental and Social Impacts of Mountain Tours*; UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (DTIE), United Nations Environment Programme: Paris, France, 2007.
4. Debarbieux, B.; Oiry Varacca, M.; Gilles Rudaz, G.; Daniel Maselli, D.; Kohler, T.; Jurek, M. *Tourism in Mountain Regions: Hopes, Fears and Realities*; Sustainable Mountain Development Series; UNIGE: Geneva, Switzerland; CDE: Bern, Switzerland; SDC: Bern, Switzerland, 2014.
5. Kala, D.; Bagri, S.C. (Eds.) *Global Opportunities and Challenges for Rural and Mountain Tourism*; IGI Global: Hershey, PA, USA, 2020.
6. UNWTO. *Sustainable Mountain Tourism—Opportunities for Local Communities*; United Nations World Tourism Organization: Madrid, Spain, 2018. [CrossRef]

7. Alpine Convention. *Sustainable Tourism in the Alps, Report on the State of the Alps*; Alpine Signals—Special Edition 4; Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention: Innsbruck, Austria, 2013.
8. Östereichischer Alpenverein. *Kleine und Feine Bergsteigerdörfer zum Genießen und Verweilen*, 8th ed.; Eine Initiative des Österreichischen Alpenvereins in Kooperation mit Deutscher Alpenverein, Alpenverein Südtirol, Club Alpino Italiano, Planinska zveza Slovenije: Innsbruck, Austria, 2018.
9. Tamme, O. *Die Bergsteigerdörfer. Eine Inititative des Österreichischen Alpenvereins (ÖAV) als Umsetzungsprojekt der Alpenkonvention (AK)*; BAB Report 004; Bundesanstalt für Agrarwirtschaft und Bergbauernfragen: Wien, Austria, 2023.
10. Price, M.F. (Ed.) Global Change in the Mountains. In Proceedings of the European Conference on Environmental and Societal Change in Mountain Regions, Oxford, UK, 18–20 December 1997; Parthenon Publishing Group: New York, NY, USA, 1999.
11. Godde, P.M.; Price, M.F.; Zimmermann, F.M. Tourism and Development in Mountain Regions: Moving Forward into the New Millennium. In *Tourism and Development in Mountain Region*; Godde, P.M., Price, M.F., Zimmermann, F.M., Eds.; CAB International: Wallingford, UK, 2000; pp. 1–25.
12. FAO; UNWTO. *Understanding and Quantifying Mountain Tourism*; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO): Rome, Italy; World Tourism Organization (UNWTO): Madrid, Spain, 2023. [CrossRef]
13. Moss, L.A.G. (Ed.) *The Amenity Migrants, Seeking and Sustaining Mountains and Their Cultures*; CAB International: Wallingford, UK, 2006.
14. Gløersen, E.; Price, M.F.; Borec, A.; Dax, T.; Giordano, B. *Cohesion in Mountainous Regions of the EU—Research for REGI Committee*; IP/B/REGI/IC/2015_175; European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Policies Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies, Regional Development: Brussels, Belgium, 2016; Available online: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/573420/IPOL_STU%282016%29573420_EN.pdf (accessed on 31 March 2023).
15. Gössling, S.; Hall, C.M.; Weaver, D.B. Sustainable tourism futures perspectives on systems, restructuring and innovations. In *Sustainable Tourism Futures*; Gössling, S., Hall, C.M., Weaver, D.B., Eds.; Routledge: London, UK, 2009; pp. 1–18.
16. Gulde, C. Promoting Sustainable Tourism in the Alps, A systematic Assessment of Major Certification Schemes for Sustainable Tourism Destinations. Master's Thesis, Faculty of Geosciences, University of Utrecht, Utrecht, The Netherlands, 2021.
17. Tucker, C.M.; Alcántara-Ayala, I.; Gunya, A.; Jimenez, E.; Klein, J.A.; Xu, J.; Bigler, S.L. Challenges for Governing Mountains Sustainably: Insights From a Global Survey. *Mt. Res. Dev.* **2021**, *41*, R10–R20. [CrossRef]
18. BMNT. *Plan T Masterplan für Tourismus*; Bundesministerium für Nachhaltigkeit und Tourismus: Wien, NY, USA, 2019.
19. ÖROK. *Tourismus in Österreich 2019*; Exposé, ÖROK Atlas Raumbeobachtung; Österreichische Raumordnungskonferenz: Wien, NY, USA, 2023; Available online: https://www.oerok-atlas.at/#indicator/92 (accessed on 31 March 2023).
20. Krippendorf, J. *Die Landschaftsfresser: Tourismus und Erholungslandschaft—Verderben oder Segen?* 3. Auflage; Verlag Forschungsinstitut für Fremdenverkehr der Universität Bern: Bern, Switzerland, 1981.
21. Reiner, K. Bergtourismus—Herausforderungen und Entwicklungschancen für eine nachhaltigere Entwicklung. In *Zeitreisen(de) im ländlichen Raum. Diskurse, Re.Visionen*; Research report 57; Oedl-Wieser, T., Ed.; Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen: Wien, Austria, 2007; pp. 41–55.
22. Butler, R. Tourism: An evolutionary perspective. In *Tourism and Sustainable Development: A Civic Approach*; Nelson, J.G., Butler, R., Wall, G., Eds.; University of Waterloo: Waterloo, ON, Canada, 1999; pp. 33–63.
23. Higgins-Desbiolles, F. Sustainable tourism: Sustaining tourism or something more? *Tour. Manag. Perspect.* **2018**, *25*, 157–160. [CrossRef]
24. Dax, T. Mountain Development in Europe: Research Priorities and Trends. Doctoral Thesis, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna, Department of Economics and Social Sciences, Vienna, Austria, 2017. Available online: https://zidapps.boku.ac.at/abstracts/download.php?dataset_id=9914&property_id=107&role_id=NONE (accessed on 31 March 2023).
25. Chilla, T.; Heugel, A.; Streifeneder, T.; Ravazzoli, E.; Laner, P.; Teston, F.; Tappeiner, U.; Egarter, L.; Dax, T.; Machold, I.; et al. *Alps 2050 Common Spatial Perspectives for the Alpine Area. Towards a Common Vision. The Alps 2050 Atlas*; ESPON Project Targeted Analysis; ESPON EGTC: Luxembourg, 2019; Available online: https://www.espon.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/ESPON_Alps_2050_FR_annex_ATLAS.pdf (accessed on 31 March 2023).
26. Sharma, P. *A Framework for Tourism Carrying Capacity Analysis*; Discussion Paper; Series No.MEI 95/1; ICIMOD: Kathmandu, Nepal, 1995.
27. Jangra, R.; Kaushik, S.P. Estimating Carrying Capacity in a High Mountainous Tourist Area: A Destination Conservation Strategy. In *Global Geographical Heritage, Geoparks and Geotourism*; Singh, R.B., Wei, D., Anand, S., Eds.; Springer: Singapore, 2020; pp. 427–447. [CrossRef]
28. Price, M.; Borowski, D.; Macleod, C.; Rudaz, G.; Debarbieux, B. *Alps—Rio+20 Report, Sustainable Mountain Development in the Alps, From Rio 1992 to Rio 2012 and Beyond*; Swiss Federal Office for Spatial Development: Bern, Switzerland, 2011.
29. Gerhardter, G.; Gruber, M. *Regionalförderung als Lernprozess, Evaluierung der Förderungen des Bundeskanzleramtes für Eigenständige Regionalentwicklung*; Schriften zur Regionalpolitik und Raumordnung no. 32; Bundeskanzleramt: Wien, Austria, 2001.
30. Dax, T. Endogenous Development in Austria's Mountain Regions, From a Source of Irritation to a Mainstream Movement. *Mt. Res. Dev.* **2001**, *21*, 231–235. [CrossRef]
31. Schirpke, U.; Wang, G.; Padoa-Schioppa, E. Editorial: Mountain landscapes: Protected areas, ecosystem services, and future challenges. *Ecosyst. Serv.* **2021**, *49*, 101302. [CrossRef]

32. Chakraborty, A. Mountains as a Global Heritage: Arguments for Conserving the Natural Diversity of Mountain Regions. *Heritage* **2020**, *3*, 198–207. [CrossRef]
33. Chávez Velásquez, R. Mountain Protected Areas and Ecotourism for Sustainable Development: A Case Study of Ecuador. Chapter 21. In *Montology Palimpsest., A Primer of Mountain Geography*; Sarmiento, F., Ed.; Springer Nature Switzerland AG: Cham, Switzerland, 2020; pp. 375–396.
34. Laković, L.; Kapetanović, A.; Pelcer-Vujači, O.; Koprivica, T. Endangered Mediterranean Mountain Heritage—Case Study of katuns at the Kuči Mountain in Montenegro. *Land* **2020**, *9*, 248. [CrossRef]
35. Mazzocchi, C.; Sali, G.; Ruggeri, G. Tourists' Preferences for Alpine Pastures Maintenance. *Landsc. Online* **2019**, *68*, 1–18. [CrossRef]
36. Chen, Y.; Dax, T.; Zhang, D. Complementary Effects of Agricultural Tourism and Tourist Destination Brands in Preserved Scenic Areas in Mountain Areas of China and Europe. *Open Agric.* **2019**, *4*, 517–529. [CrossRef]
37. Gretter, A.; Ciolli, M.; Scolozzi, R. Governing mountain landscapes collectively: Local responses to emerging challenges within a systems thinking perspective. *Landsc. Res.* **2018**, *43*, 1117–1130. [CrossRef]
38. OECD. *Rural Amenity in Austria: A Case Study of Cultural Landscape*; Group of the Council on Rural Development (document C/RUR98/4); Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development: Paris, France, 1998.
39. Schirpke, U.; Scolozzi, R.; Dean, G.; Haller, A.; Jäger, H.; Kister, J.; Kovács, B.; Sarmiento, F.O.; Sattler, B.; Schleyer, C. Cultural ecosystem services in mountain regions: Conceptualising conflicts among users and limitations of use. *Ecosyst. Serv.* **2020**, *46*, 101210. [CrossRef]
40. Pede, E.C.; Barbato, G.; Buffa, A.; Ellena, M.; Mercogliano, P.; Ricciardi, G.; Staricco, L. Mountain tourism facing climate change. Assessing risks and opportunities in the Italian Alps. *TEMA J. Land Use Mobil. Environ.* **2020**, *15*, 25–47. [CrossRef]
41. Böhme, K.; Haarich, S.; Toptsidou, M.; Besana, F.; Corbineau, C.; Hans, S.; Holstein, F. *Regional Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis on the Tourist Sector*; Document CCI 2020CE16BAT074; European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy: Brussels, Belgium, 2021.
42. Streifeneder, T.; Dax, T. Agritourism in Europe: Enabling Factors and Current Developments of Sustainable On-Farm Tourism in Rural Areas. In *Global Opportunities and Challenges for Rural and Mountain Tourism*; Kala, D., Bagri, S.C., Eds.; IGI Global: Hershey PA, USA, 2020; pp. 40–58.
43. Dax, T.; Zhang, D.; Chen, Y. Agritourism Initiatives in the Context of Continuous Out-Migration: Comparative Perspectives for the Alps and Chinese Mountain regions. *Sustainability* **2019**, *11*, 4418. [CrossRef]
44. Khartishvili, L.; Muhar, A.; Dax, T.; Khelashvili, I. Rural Tourism in Georgia in Transition: Challenges for Regional Sustainability. *Sustainability* **2019**, *11*, 410. [CrossRef]
45. Ng, S.L. Bibliometric analysis of literature on mountain tourism in Scopus. *J. Outdoor Recreat. Tour.* **2022**, *40*, 100587. [CrossRef]
46. Ray, C. Endogenous socio-economic development in the European union—Issues of evaluation. *J. Rural Stud.* **2000**, *16*, 447–458. [CrossRef]
47. Bichler, B.F. Designing tourism governance: The role of local residents. *J. Destin. Mark. Manag.* **2021**, *19*, 100389. [CrossRef]
48. Dredge, D. Networks, local governance and tourism policy: Local tourism associations under the microscope. In *CAUTHE 2003: Riding the Wave of Tourism and Hospitality Research*; CAUTHE Conference; Braithwaite, R.L., Ed.; Southern Cross University: Lismore, Australia, 2003; pp. 359–374.
49. Saunders, B.; Sim, J.; Kingstone, T.; Baker, S.; Waterfield, J.; Bartlam, B.; Burroughs, H.; Jinks, C. Saturation in qualitative research: Exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Qual. Quant.* **2018**, *52*, 1893–1907. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
50. Dax, T.; Tamme, O. Sustainable mountain tourism in the Alps: The "Mountaineering Villages" concept, a local model for sustainable mountain tourism in the Alps. *Tour. Rural Space* **2022**, *48*, 106–126.
51. Bergsteigerdörfer. *Criteria for Mountaineering Villages*, Revised version; Alpine Convention: Innsbruck, Austria, 2017.
52. Lane, B. Rural Tourism: An Overview. Chapter 20. In *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies*; Tazim, J., Ed.; Sage: Los Angeles, CA, USA, 2009; pp. 354–370.
53. Alpine Convention. *Protocol on the Implementation of the Alpine Convention of 1991 in the Field of Tourism*; Tourism Protocol; Entry into force 18.12.2002; Alpine Convention: Innsbruck, Austria, 2002.
54. Alpine Convention. *Protocol on the Implementation of the Alpine Convention of 1991 Relating to Nature Protection and Landscape*; Protocol "Nature Protection and Landscape Conservation"; Entry into force 18.12.2002; Alpine Convention: Innsbruck, Austria, 2002.
55. Bassi, I.; Carzedda, M.; Iseppi, L.; Nassivera, F. Sustainable Development in the Alps: The Mountaineering Villages (Bergsteigerdörfer) Initiative. In *New Metropolitan Perspectives. NMP 2020. Smart Innovation, Systems and Technologies 178*; Bevilacqua, C., Calabrò, F., Della Spina, L., Eds.; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2020; pp. 21–30. [CrossRef]
56. CIPRA. *Alpine Landscape Is Not Renewable!* CIPRA position paper landscape; Adopted by the CIPRA Assembly of Delegates on 9 December; International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA): Schaan, Liechtenstein, 2020; Available online: https://www.cipra.org/en/positions/alpine-landscape-is-not-renewable/dateien/210107_CIPRA-Positionspapier%20Landschaft_en%20REV_final.pdf/download?inline=true (accessed on 31 March 2023).
57. Johnston, B.R.; Edwards, T. The commodification of mountaineering. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **1994**, *21*, 459–478. [CrossRef]
58. Muhar, A.; Schauppenlehner, T.; Brandenburg, C.; Arnberger, A. Alpine summer tourism: The mountaineers' perspective and consequences for tourism strategies in Austria. *For. Snow Landsc. Res.* **2007**, *81*, 7–17.
59. Kuščer, K. Determining Indicators of Mountain Destination Development. *Tour. Anal.* **2014**, *19*, 441–460. [CrossRef]

60. Dax, T. The impact of EU policies on mountain development in Austria. In Proceedings of the Regional Studies Association—International Conference "Europe at the Margins: EU Regional Policy, Peripherality and Rurality", Angers, France, 15–16 April 2004; Available online: https://lib.icimod.org/record/11599/files/23.pdf?type=primary (accessed on 31 March 2023).
61. Niederl, A.; Friedl, B.; Gstinig, K.; Janisch, D.; Kaltenegger, C.; Katz, N.; Kirschner, E.; Sarcletti, S.; Maurer, M.; Peters, M.; et al. *Cluster Urlaub am Bauernhof, Evaluierungsprojekt, Endbericht*; Joanneum Research, Universität Innsbruck und UMIT Tirol: Graz, Austria; Innsbruck, Austria, 2021.
62. Duglio, S.; Bonadonna, A.; Letey, M. The Contribution of Local Food Products in Fostering Tourism for Marginal Mountain Areas: An Exploratory Study on Northwestern Italian Alps. *Mt. Res. Dev.* **2022**, *42*, R1–R10. [CrossRef]
63. Elmi, M.; Wolff, S. Mountaineering villages for sustainable Alpine tourism. In *Mountain Tourism—Towards a More Sustainable Path*; Romeo, R., Russo, L., Parisi, F., Notarianni, M., Manuelli, S., Carvao, S., Eds.; FAO: Rome, Italy; UNWTO: Madrid, Spain, 2021; pp. 46–48. [CrossRef]
64. Muskat, B.; Reichenberger, I.; Muskat, M.; Aigner, A.-E. Sustainable Tourism Development—The Mountaineering Village Initiative. *Tour. Case Stud.* **2022**. [CrossRef]
65. Jochum, K. The Social Dimension of Sustainability in Alpine Tourism: A Case Study of the Mountaineering Villages. Master's Thesis, University of Graz, Graz, Austria, 2022.
66. Lundmark, L.; Zhang, J.J.; Hall, C.M. Introduction: Degrowth and tourism: Implications and challenges. In *Degrowth and Tourism: New Perspectives on Tourism Entrepreneurship, Destinations and Policy*; Hall, C.M., Lundmark, L., Zhang, J.J., Eds.; Routledge: Abingdon, UK, 2021; pp. 1–22.
67. Clayton, A. Strategies for sustainable tourism development: The role of the concept of carrying capacity. *Soc. Econ. Stud.* **2002**, *51*, 61–98.
68. Bonadonna, A.; Giachino, C.; Truant, E. Sustainability and Mountain Tourism: The Millennial's Perspective. *Sustainability* **2017**, *9*, 1219. [CrossRef]
69. Butler, R. Sustainable Tourism in Sensitive Environments: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing? *Sustainability* **2018**, *10*, 1789. [CrossRef]
70. Tribaldos, T. *Highlighting Sustainable Food Systems in Mountains for the UN Food Systems Summit 2021*; Mountain Partnership Secretariat and Centre for Development and Environment: Bern, Switzerland, 2021; Available online: https://boris.unibe.ch/166263/1/2021_FSS_Mountain_Partnership_Infosheet.pdf (accessed on 31 March 2023).
71. Bierling, B.; Pasotti, J. (Eds.) Issue "Sustainable Tourism for Poverty Alleviation in Mountain Areas". *Mt. Forum Bull.* **2006**, *6*, 1.
72. Bogner, K.; Pfefferkorn, W.; Hribernik, V. *Reset Alpine Tourism, Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Alpine Tourism*; Final report; CIPRA: Schaan, Liechtenstein, 2021.
73. Cohen, S.A.; Gössling, S. A darker side of hypermobility. *Environ. Plan. A* **2015**, *47*, 1661–1679. [CrossRef]
74. Weiand, R. Die gemachten Gäste. Die Bergsteigerdörfer und ihr Bild von den Reisenden. *Český Lid* **2020**, *107*, 493–510. [CrossRef]
75. Romeo, R.; Russo, L.; Parisi, F.; Notarianni, M.; Manuelli, S.; Carvao, S. *Mountain Tourism—Towards a More Sustainable Path*; FAO: Rome, Italy; UNWTO: Madrid, Spain, 2021. [CrossRef]
76. Apollo, M. The true accessibility of mountaineering: The case of the High Himalaya. *J. Outdoor Recreat. Tour.* **2017**, *17*, 29–43. [CrossRef]
77. Upadhayaya, P.K. Sustainable Management of Trekking Trails for the Adventure Tourism in Mountains: A Study of Nepal's Great Himalaya Trails. *J. Tour. Adventure* **2018**, *1*, 1–31. [CrossRef]
78. Cater, C.; Miller, M. Mountaineering and trekking tourism management: A global perspective. *J. Nepal Mt. Acad.* **2019**, *1*, 28–45.
79. Walter, P.; Regmi, K.D.; Khanal, P.R. Host learning in community-based ecotourism in Nepal: The case of Sirubari and Ghalegaun homestays. *Tour. Manag. Perspect.* **2021**, *26*, 49–58. [CrossRef]
80. Wilson, J.; Dashper, K. In the shadow of the mountain: The crisis of precarious livelihoods in high altitude mountaineering tourism. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2022**. [CrossRef]
81. Richins, H.; Johnsen, S.; Hull, J.S. Overview of Mountain Tourism: Substantive Nature, Historical Context, Areas of Focus. In *Mountain Tourism: Experiences, Communities, Environments and Sustainable Futures*; Richins, H., Hull, J.S., Eds.; CAB International: Oxon, UK, 2016; pp. 1–12.
82. Asgotraa, S. Astrostays, Leh, Ladakh, India. In *Mountain Tourism—Towards a More Sustainable Path*; Romeo, R., Russo, L., Parisi, F., Notarianni, M., Manuelli, S., Carvao, S., Eds.; FAO: Rome, Italy; UNWTO: Madrid, Spain, 2021; p. 65f. [CrossRef]
83. Heshmati, M.; Gheitury, M.; Shadfar, S. Factors affecting possibility of ecotourism development and sustaining natural resources using SWOT approach in west Iran. *Int. J. Geoheritage Park.* **2022**, *10*, 173–183. [CrossRef]
84. Poudel, B.; Joshi, R. Ecotourism in Annapurna Conservation Area: Potential, Opportunities and Challenges. *Grassroots J. Nat. Resour.* **2020**, *3*, 49–73. [CrossRef]