


# Environmental, social and economic dilemmas of outdoor recreation and tourism: A conceptual research

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## Abstract

*Tourism activities encompass a wide range of experiences. Industrialized tourism in our country is clustered in specific locations with hotels, restaurants and entertainment areas and is planned in the same way as industrial areas. Facilities and regulations are part of tourism development. On the other hand, tourism also manifests itself in open spaces and nature. Camping activities, caravan tourism activities, nature walks can be counted among common recreational activities. Unlike established tourism activities, such outdoor recreational activities are relatively unregulated by the legislator and have a high degree of mobility. While they bring the economic effects of tourism to areas where there is no facility, they also bring environmental, social and managerial impacts. At this point, such open space recreations, which can be spread over large areas, provide economic benefits throughout the country, while also presenting environmental and social dilemmas as a problem. This conceptual discussion aims to draw on the existing literature and research to identify the problems associated with open space activities and to provide implications for policy makers and tourists.*

**Keywords:** Outdoor Recreation, Camping Tourism, Environmental Sustainability, Public Space Management

## 1. Introduction

Humankind's relationship with open spaces has evolved throughout history and continues today in the form of different recreational activities. The transition to sedentary life, urbanization and modernism made people organized by culture (Rantala & Varley, 2019). While connecting them to aestheticized living spaces, they keep parts of nature in their cities in areas such as parks and groves. The human longing for and connection to nature is evident not only in tourism activities but also in urban life.

Recreation is defined as the activities that people do in their free time with the economic, cultural, social and physiological possibilities of the participants with the aim of spiritual and physical renewal. (Dirlik & Köroğlu, 2021). Outdoor recreation enables people to engage with and experience nature beyond industrialized settings. (Wescott, 2015). Examples of such activities include hiking, camping, bird watching, plant collecting and photography, swimming, canoeing and kayaking, fishing, climbing and mountaineering, and cycling. Recreational activities allow individuals to rejuvenate both physically and mentally and help them to relax

emotionally. Furthermore, such activities contribute to the adoption of more sustainable living habits by raising environmental awareness (Açıkdilli, 2023). Quiet activities such as bird watching and plant collecting offer the opportunity to explore the intricacies of nature, inviting people to connect more deeply with the environment (Crouch, 2000). Such experiences not only facilitate an understanding of nature, but also contribute to the development of healthy living habits by supporting stress management (Wall & Mathieson, 2006).

Compared to mass tourism, outdoor recreation can be considered less intensive and less damaging in terms of environmental impacts. Mass tourism is a reflection of mass consumption (Roney, 2002). Outdoor recreation takes place in natural areas, in direct contact with nature, whereas outdoor recreation usually takes place in built-up and isolated areas (Hawkins & Lamoureux, 2001). Such areas are sensitive ecosystems inhabited by a variety of animal and plant species, and impacts from human activities need to be carefully considered. The impacts of human activities on these ecosystems can have both positive and negative consequences.

With the right management practices, open space recreation can allow people to experience nature without harming the natural environment. However, negative impacts such as overuse, lack of waste management and pressure on local flora and fauna can jeopardize the sustainability of these areas (Cole, 2007). Therefore, it is critical to identify and manage the impacts and limits of nature-based open space activities.

Outdoor recreation also has elements that affect the social contract such as public space and private space. For example, the use of public spaces due to the use of vehicles such as caravans brings with it debates on where private space begins and ends. Public space has wide boundaries by definition (Koç, 2020). Koç offers two definitions: narrow and broad. In a narrow sense, it refers to an extension of the state or the political sphere, an area associated with the state and under its supervision. In a broad sense, it is defined as a space created with the joint contribution of all individuals in society in connection with social life (Koç, 2020). The lack of regulation and supervision on this issue causes problems such as disputes between local people and caravanners, tourists not benefiting from the areas due to the use of caravans, and damage to social order due to the occupation of public spaces.

Although tourism activities come with opportunities, they can also bring problems (Ahmad et al., 2019; Breiby et al., 2021). In the case of nature and society, these problems can be even more serious. Outdoor recreation can have very different impacts in the context of tourism than mass tourism or tourism activities in urban areas. Therefore, it would be useful for policy makers and industry leaders to examine the current situation in outdoor recreation, discuss the concepts and define their boundaries. This study aims to provide a conceptual framework on the social and environmental impacts of tourism activities by discussing the sustainability and management dynamics of outdoor recreation.

## 2. Literature

Public spaces are an indispensable part of social life, strengthening the bond between nature and human beings and paving the way for social interactions. Camping, on the other hand, stands out as one of the most unique uses of these spaces by offering individuals a life experience in touch with nature. However, such a use requires a careful and balanced approach in many dimensions, from environmental impacts to social life dynamics. Campsites bring with them a multifaceted responsibility, from the protection of natural resources to the harmonious interaction between local people and tourists. These activities, where cultural sensitivity is taken into consideration as well as the protection of the natural environment, can

support a sustainable tourism approach while ensuring that economic benefits reach a wide range of people. In this context, the management and utilization of campsites has a critical importance that requires environmental, social and economic sustainability to be addressed together.

### *Public Space - Private Space*

Public spaces play an important role as places that are open to the common use of communities and where many social, cultural, economic and even recreational activities are carried out (Gehl, 2011). These spaces allow individuals to get away from the routines of daily life, engage in social interaction and develop a sense of social belonging. Especially in the context of tourism, public spaces serve as a common meeting point for tourists and locals, creating direct and indirect economic benefits (Urry, 2002). In this context, public spaces are not only a part of daily life, but also an indispensable platform for social integration and economic development.

Campsites are spaces where both natural and urban public spaces are used and transformed in different ways. While the history of camping in natural areas dates back to the nomadic life practices of traditional societies to modern camping tourism, the physical and social transformations of these areas as a result of intensive touristic use today constitute an important research topic (Mosedale, 2011). As a sub-category of public space use, camping tourism enables individuals to establish a more direct relationship with nature and find the opportunity to rest and renew themselves away from the intensity of modern life (Crouch, 2000). In this context, however, the interaction of camping and public space is not limited to individual experiences, but also includes broader issues such as spatial sustainability, social relations and environmental stewardship (Hawkins & Lamoureux, 2001). The sustainable management of such areas requires comprehensive planning. In addition, the use of public spaces for camping tourism raises a multidimensional debate about local people's access to these spaces, environmental impacts and contributions to the local economy (Cole, 2007; Wall & Mathieson, 2006). Therefore, conceptually examining the interaction of camping and public space in the context of tourism is critical for understanding the current dynamics of the area and providing new recommendations based on sustainability. Furthermore, camping tourism can enhance the social functions of public spaces by reshaping local community and tourist interactions. However, the environmental pressures that arise in this process must also be taken into account (Carr, 2002).

One of the critical elements that will show the conflicts between public space and outdoor recreation can be

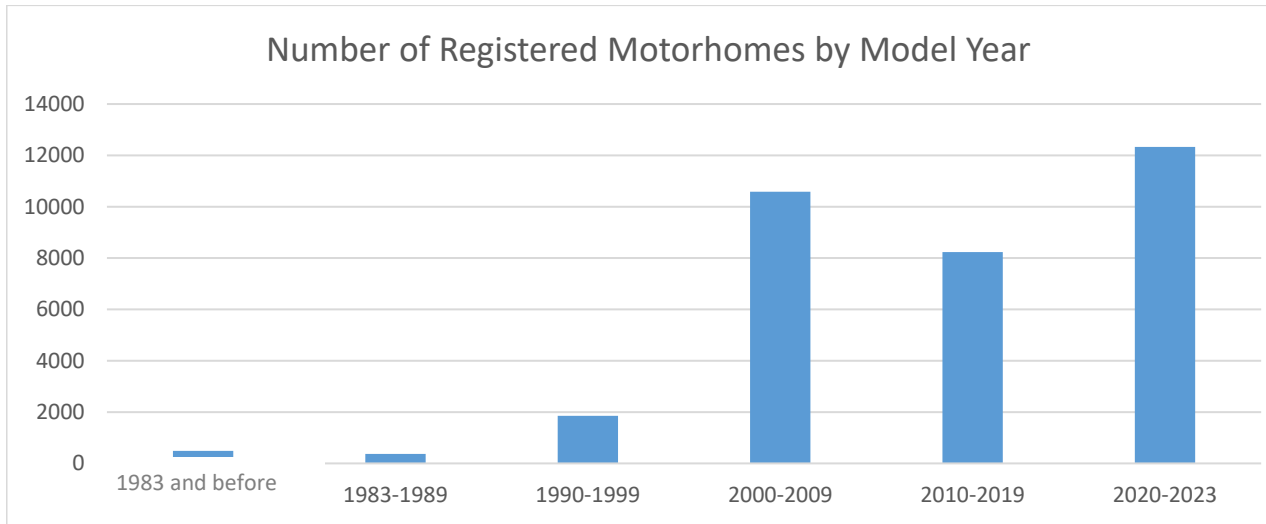


Figure 1: Number of Caravans by Year

Source: (TurkStat 2024); (Kaya, 2024)

considered as the demand for caravans. In this context, we can look at the number of caravans by province to see the situation in Turkey.

The figures prepared on the basis of TurkStat data and the data in the report of the Northern Anatolia Development Agency, Supply Chain Localization Report in Caravan Production, clearly show the increase in the demand for caravans. Especially the increase after 2000 stands out. This high demand for caravans will also be reflected in problems in the field.

Looking at the distribution by provinces will give an idea of where RVs can create a burden in outdoor recreation. Looking at Figure 2, it can be seen that the density is in the Marmara region and the Aegean provinces.

Figure 3 was prepared from the data in the Turkey Caravan Sector Situation Analysis Report published by the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey in order to make a comparison with European Union member countries.

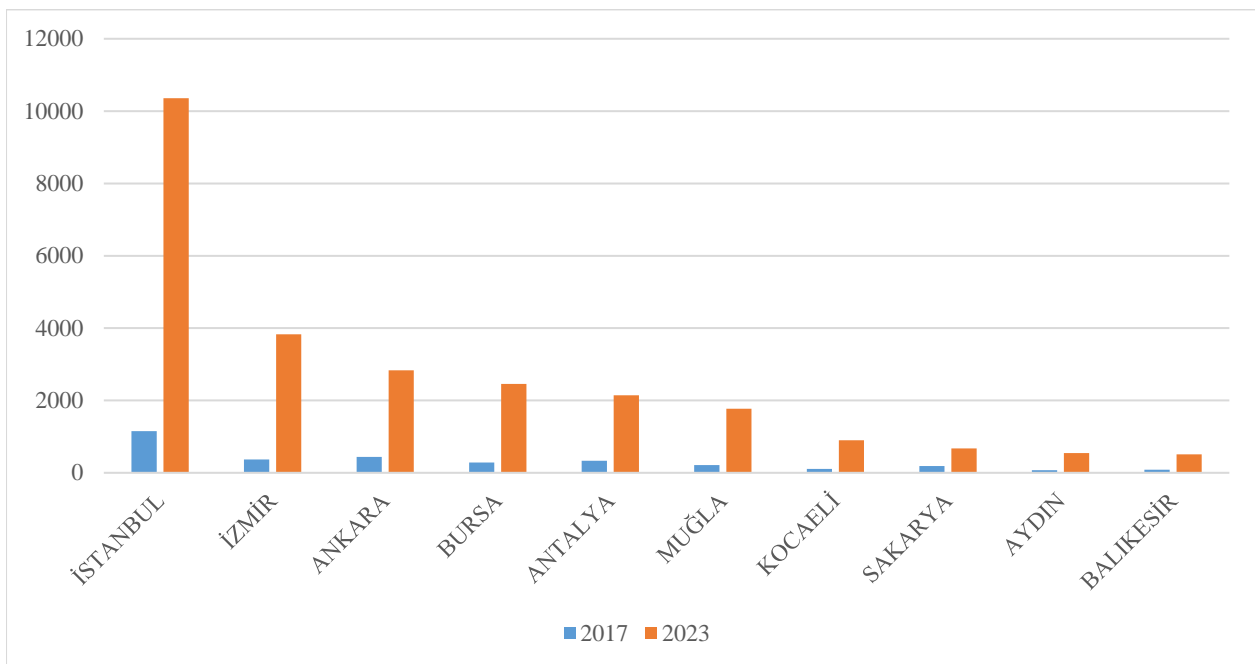
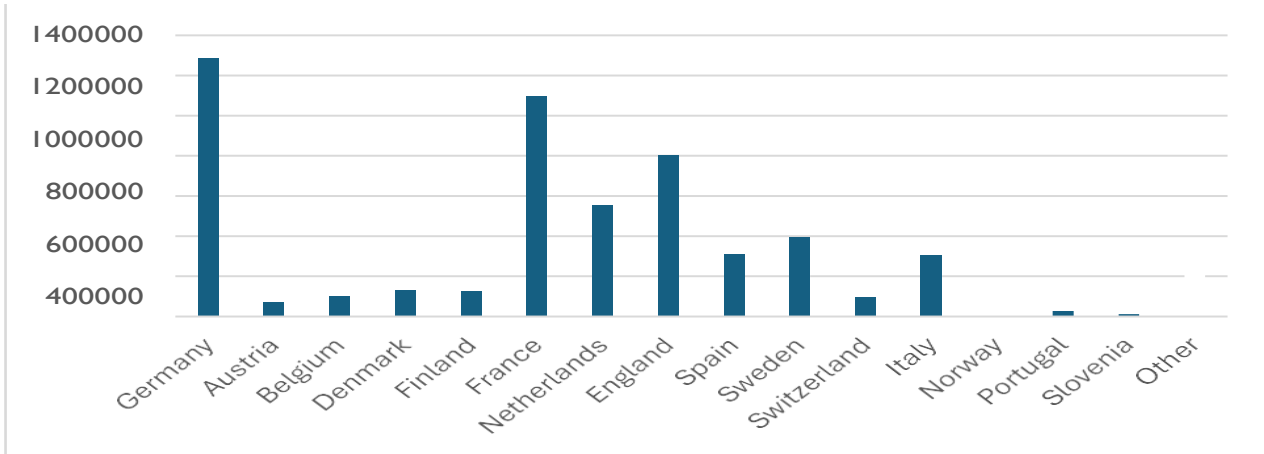


Figure 2: Number of Caravans by Province

Source: (TurkStat 2024); (Kaya, 2024)



**Figure 3: Number of Caravans in EU Member States**

Source: (Union Of Chambers and Stock Exchanges Of Turkey, 2021)

If we anticipate that the number of caravans in Turkey will increase and show a trend parallel to the level of EU countries, the pressure that may be experienced in public spaces can be predicted. On the other hand, there were concerns about where the increasing number of caravans would be kept, where they would be parked and under what conditions they would be used in recreational areas. In 2024, the government took action in consideration of this situation and signed the "Regulation on the Amendment of the Regulation on the Qualifications of Tourism Facilities (Decree No: 8864)" signed by the President. 32647 and entered into force on 29.08.2024. In summary, the Regulation introduces the following regulations (Açıl, 2024; Regulation Amending the Regulation on the Qualifications of Tourism Facilities (Decision No: 8864), 2024):

- It is now mandatory to allocate at least 250 square meters of space for accommodation units in campsites and caravan parks.
- If portable structures such as tents or caravan sites are to be used, 80 square meters of space for a two-person camping unit should be calculated.
- It includes the preparation and submission of sketch documents showing the layout plans of the campsites to the authorities.
- These regulations aim to create organized and environmentally friendly campsites that do not harm nature.

### **Impact on the Environment**

The transformation of public spaces through camping tourism draws attention especially in the context of the physical and social transformation of these spaces as a result of intensive touristic use. Campsites are located at the intersection of recreational use of nature and touristic expectations, and intensive use of these areas

can lead to environmental degradation. For example, erosion, pressure on flora and fauna, and waste accumulation in forested areas due to direct human impact (Eagles & McCool, 2002), the loss of vegetation or pollution of water sources due to overuse and unplanned expansion of camping activities can threaten biodiversity and lead to the destruction of sensitive ecosystems (Cole, 2007). Natural public spaces are at risk of overuse due to camping tourism and may face irreversible impacts such as environmental pollution. This affects not only the physical environment but also social relations between local people and tourists. Local communities may face restrictions on access to natural spaces due to over-exploitation, which can lead to social tensions (Gehl, 2011). However, the transformation of some public spaces into commercial campsites may cause them to lose their original public function. In particular, the privatization of public spaces for tourism activities can lead to the removal of local people from the spaces they use in their daily lives, which raises debates on spatial injustice (Mosedale, 2011). For example, paid campsites, which are widespread in Europe, can be an economic barrier for local people, while at the same time having the paradoxical consequence of turning them into a source of income that contributes to the local economy (Wall & Mathieson, 2006). Therefore, the transformation of public spaces in the context of camping tourism necessitates sustainable management approaches to ensure the preservation of environmental, social and economic balances. Determining the carrying capacity to prevent environmental degradation and promoting nature-friendly tourism practices can minimize the negative impacts of this transformation (Hawkins & Lamoureux, 2001).

The environmental impacts of campsites are directly related to factors such as intensity of use and

disturbance. Campsites in natural areas can increase the risk of environmental degradation if not managed sustainably. However, regulations in line with sustainability principles can ensure that these areas are protected and remain accessible for future generations.

The sustainability of campsites is critical for both the conservation of natural resources and economic and social benefits. Sustainable campsite management should include the development of environmentally friendly infrastructure, flood protection and energy conservation (Oh et al., 2007). In addition, educational programs to raise visitors' environmental awareness, waste reduction and recycling strategies can support the sustainability of these areas (Garst et al., 2009). Determining carrying capacity and limiting the intensive use of areas can reduce environmental degradation (Crompton, 1999; Wall & Mathieson, 2006). It is also necessary that campsites are regularly inspected and brought up to environmentally sound standards. Intensive use of campsites is one of the main factors threatening their sustainability. Density can lead to increased environmental degradation, especially in popular areas (Hawkins & Lamoureux, 2001). To address this problem, policies can be implemented to ensure a balanced distribution of visitors across seasons and areas. For example, encouraging tourism during the low season or restricting access to areas that are overcrowded can be effective. One of the most effective methods to reduce the environmental impact of campsites is to increase the environmental awareness of users. Education programs and awareness-raising campaigns can help campers develop nature-sensitive behaviors (Foley & Hayllar, 2007). This can create a more sustainable user base in terms of waste management, resource conservation and protection of natural areas.

In conclusion, the environmental impacts of campsites can be controlled through management and regulation strategies in line with sustainability principles. Developing environmentally sensitive infrastructures, limiting intensive use and implementing educational programs will ensure that these areas are both protected and remain an attractive destination for visitors.

### ***Social Structure***

Campsites are not only a recreational space for tourists, but also a critical role for sustainability, affecting the social structure and lifestyle of local people. By creating a platform for interaction between local communities and tourists, these areas create impacts in many dimensions such as cultural exchange, economic gain and environmental awareness. In areas with high levels of tourism, campsites can directly affect the lifestyle and social dynamics of local people. Constant

interaction with tourists can strengthen the cultural identity of the local population, but can also lead to cultural erosion in case of overdevelopment of tourism (Mosedale, 2011). For example, changes in traditional lifestyles in line with touristic demands can create cultural and social tensions among the local population (Crompton, 1999).

In addition to appealing to a wide audience by offering a low-cost tourism alternative, campsites have the potential for a significant economic contribution through income from accommodation, entrance fees and additional services. Local people can generate economic income by providing services that cater to the needs of tourists. However, such economic activities need to be carried out without reducing the quality of life of the local population (Wall & Mathieson, 2006). For example, excessive commercial development can negatively impact the naturalness of campsites and access for local people. Income-oriented use of campsites can contribute to local economies, while at the same time changing the traditional living practices of local communities (Cole, 2007). Therefore, the transformation of public spaces through camping tourism should be based on both environmental and social sustainability. Nature-based tourism activities have the potential to improve tourists' environmental awareness (Garst et al., 2009) and campsites can enable tourists to develop a deeper connection with nature and increase their environmental awareness. However, overuse and uninformed behavior by tourists can lead to environmental degradation and restrictions on local people's access to campsites (Oh et al., 2007). This can cause potential conflicts between tourists and locals.

The sustainability of campsites is directly related to environmental protection and the conscious use of natural resources. Exceeding the carrying capacity of campsites can have negative impacts on flora and fauna. Sustainable management strategies are necessary to avoid such problems. For example, studies on sustainable visitor management in protected areas emphasize that careful planning of visitor numbers and activities is critical for the conservation of natural resources and the sustainability of ecosystems (Göktuğ & Kurkut, 2016) or the protection of natural resources and the development of environmentally friendly infrastructures, ensuring the long-term sustainability of these areas (S. Cole, 2007) strategies are examples of these practices.

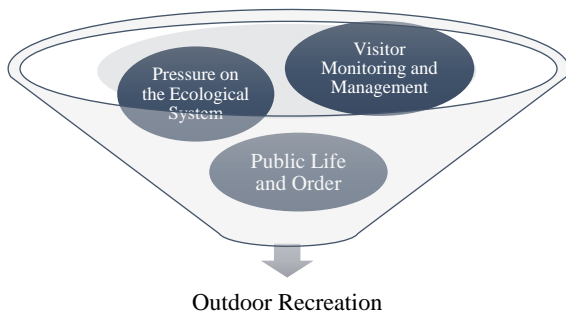
Sustainable management of campsites for both locals and tourists can be achieved through a participatory approach. Involving local people in decision-making processes and educating tourists on environmental awareness can promote sustainable use of these areas (Hawkins & Lamoureux, 2001). Education programs and local ownership of campsites can prevent such

conflicts and strengthen a culture of cooperation (Foley & Hayllar, 2007).

In conclusion, the impacts of campsites on local communities, tourists and sustainability can be turned into a positive balance with the right management strategies. By striking a balance between environmental protection, cultural sensitivity and economic benefits, these sites can continue to create value for both tourists and local communities.

### 3. Discussion and Conclusion

This study focuses on the environmental, social and economic impacts of outdoor recreation and camping tourism in a conceptual framework, focusing on the opportunities and problems created by a wide range of tourism activities. While outdoor recreation offers important opportunities to connect with nature and improve the quality of life of individuals, it also brings management and environmental problems. As a result of the research, the conceptual framework shown in Figure 4 was developed.



**Figure 4: The Vortex of Outdoor Recreation**

Outdoor recreation seems to lead to a number of consequences that we consider as a chain. This spiral seems to stem from dynamics such as the country's population density, inadequate destination management and economic difficulties. The focus of the study is on the results.

The order it creates in public life and order comes before other impacts. This is because these impacts occur in areas that are frequently and intensively used by local people, such as urban areas and beaches. Caravans left in parking lots in Istanbul, caravans left on roadsides and other public spaces in holiday resorts, caravans left on beaches receive many complaints and are the subject of many news reports. (Caravans Occupying Public Spaces on the Beach in Antalya Removed, 2024; Caravan Pollution on Güllük Beach! - News Milas, 2024; Caravan Occupation on Istanbul Beaches! - YouTube, 2023; Image Pollution Caused by Caravans and Camps - Ekşi Sözlük, 2023; Beaches Under Caravan Occupation | NTV - YouTube, 2023). On the other hand, in many cases, citizens without garages park their caravans on the roads and sidewalks in front

of their houses. The parking of overnight vehicles in public spaces and the seasonal permanence of such parking creates a major problem in terms of the order and use of public spaces.

Another conclusion reached by conceptual research is the pressure on the ecological system. The use of motorized vehicles such as vehicles and caravans in natural areas and the presence of fauna and flora in the habitat leave permanent traces in the environment. On the other hand, the approach to protecting natural areas and ecosystems is based on leaving no trace (Cole, 2018). Unforeseen consequences, positive or negative, can arise due to the waste left by citizens or their awareness of wild animals (Milner et al., 2014). For a self-sustaining ecosystem, the impact of human activities should be limited in natural areas.

The last problem can be considered as a destination management challenge. Monitoring and managing visitors presents several challenges (Bell et al., 2007). This problem complicates the planning of open space recreation. In order to manage a large number of visitors spread over a wide geography, they must first be monitored, counted, and their routes and densities must be determined. At this point, it is necessary to monitor the activities of both recreational vehicles and personal vehicles in natural areas and to determine the regional densities of individuals and groups. In the absence of planned walking routes, camping areas, fishing areas, picnic areas, citizens freely carry out these activities in the areas they determine. This results in inadequate visitor monitoring and management.

After the discussion and presentation of the conceptual framework, recommendations for the aforementioned maelstrom of problems are listed below:

- Different procedures should be prepared and implemented for the use, parking areas and monitoring of recreational vehicles such as caravans
- Research and plans should be made and included in destination management plans to enable citizens to carry out outdoor recreation activities on a provincial basis.
- Natural and protected areas should be identified and declared with clear boundaries.
- Public education programs should be prepared to raise awareness of visitors and local people in order to reduce human impact and trace.
- Criminal sanctions should be increased and deterrence should be provided for behaviors that may harm the environment and natural life.
- Field studies should be prioritized in tourism faculties and research, and it should be ensured that they take part in planning for outdoor recreation activities.



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