

Towards a transnational strategy to monitor visitor flows in the Karawanken/Karavanke UNESCO Global Geopark

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Abstract

The rising popularity of outdoor activities such as hiking and mountain biking in the Karawanken/Karavanke UNESCO Global Geopark has led to an increase in visitor numbers, particularly in the Petzen and Hochobir mountain areas. This has resulted in various challenges related to visitor management and conservation.

Hikers and mountain bikers have been reported to cause erosion, trampling of vegetation, and soil compaction on trails, leading to the degradation of natural assets. The growing number of visitors and misleading information on outdoor platforms has increased the likelihood of user conflicts. The increase in visitor numbers has led to overcrowding at peak times, resulting in overcrowding at trailheads, as well as creating pressure on the local infrastructure and services. These problems not only have negative impacts on the natural assets and visitor experience but also pose significant challenges for the park management in balancing visitor demand and natural conservation. It is necessary to find effective solutions to ensure sustainable use of these areas while preserving their natural heritage.

The INTERREG Central Europe project HUMANITA aims to establish a transnational framework for visitor monitoring in conservation areas across Central Europe. The framework will be developed by drawing upon effective visitor monitoring practices implemented in conservation areas worldwide, and will be subjected to critical evaluation by various stakeholders, including tourism regions, touristic service providers, conservation experts and institutions, and outdoor app providers. The framework will be tested at the highly frequented areas of the Karawanken/Karavanke UNESCO Global Geopark.

The proposed framework will assist conservation area managers in balancing environmental preservation with visitors' expectations. By utilizing a transnational approach, the framework will promote harmonization of visitor monitoring practices and allow for the exchange of knowledge and good-practices among different conservation areas. The involvement of various stakeholders from the tourism industry, conservation experts and institutions, and outdoor app providers will enhance the feasibility and effectiveness of the proposed framework. The implementation of the framework will support visitor management within the Karawanken/Karavanke UNESCO Global Geopark. Overall, the framework will contribute to sustainable conservation of Central Europe's natural heritage while enhancing visitors' experiences.

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