

VALORIZATION OF THE GEOSITES OF TROPOJA FOR GEOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Tropoja municipality with an area of 1057.3 km² is located in the southeast of the Albanian Alps. Within this high mountainous area with stunning alpine landforms, are present three categories of protected areas of IUCN: category I-Strict protected area "Gashi river" (3000 ha); category II-National Park of Valbona (8000 ha); category III- Natural Monuments (Canyon of Shoshani, Ice cave, Cave of Dragobia, Glacial lakes of Dobërdoli, Glacial lakes of Sybilca, etc.). Due to rich natural heritage and interesting landscapes of the river valleys, canyons, waterfalls, glacial and karstic lakes, etc., this area is increasingly being frequented by native and foreign visitors. However, the geodiversity of this area is still unknown to the admirers of these landforms, due to poor promotion, lack of information and infrastructure to reach them. On the other side, there is an increasing request from tourists to visit this area and the travel agencies need to provide their tours with geological, geomorphological and biological information, in order to raise the visitors' understanding of the area.

This research project undertaken in the scope of the natural heritage study and promotion intends the recognizing and popularizing the geosites of Tropoja. The activities undertaken by this project are the evaluation, the inventory, the storage and the publication of information in relation to geosites of this area. Touristic values of these geosites are evidenced based on their valuing according to four criteria of Knapik et al modified by Anna Solarska and Zdzisław Jary (Solarska and Jary, 2010) such as accessibility, state of preservation, scientific value and education values.

Geoinformation of the geosites of Tropoja created with the help of ArcGIS10 is a digital database about each site, where general and specific data about geographical position, geology, geomorphology, biodiversity, state of preservation, management, risks, etc., are provided. An inventory card of each site containing pictures and descriptions divided in sections is created. The general data of the site is presented in the first section; pictures and text in the second, cultural values, curiosities in the third section and state of preservation and risks in the last one. A database accessible directly from Web and a Web-GIS application is being developed in order to promote the knowledge of the natural heritage to the public and stimulate geotourism development.

Keywords: *geosite, valorisation, inventory card, geoinformation, promotion.*