

Heritage as an Alternative Driver for Sustainable Development and Economic Recovery in South East Europe

## Utilization of geoheritage in tourism development

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### Abstract

Representing a sustainable form of tourism that focuses not only on teaching about nature but also on gaining experiences, Geotourism could be one of the most important sectors in today's tourism industry. The utilisation of the Pilis Mountains' natural, cultural and tourist attractions lags behind the expected rate, albeit having several - mainly geological - values. The main subject of our study is the exploration and evaluation of the geological and geographical attractions in the area. Data about the private accommodation facilities show that the Pilis region is also affected by the recent economic crisis. The results of our primary research describe the demands and deficiencies related to Geotourism in the Pilis Mountains in Hungary.

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### 1. Introduction

The expression 'Geotourism' has only become known in Hungary in the last couple of years. Its basic objectives are to introduce and raise awareness of the importance of our geological heritage and the dissemination of knowledge in the field of natural sciences (Dávid, 2002). This new trend of tourism can be described in two different ways: one definition focuses on protection, while the other puts emphasis on optimisation (Dowling, 2006). According to TIAA (Travel Industry Association of America) and NG (National Geographic), Geotourism is defined as tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents (Stueve, Cook,&Drew, 2002; Szabó&Sütő, 2002). Based on this definition, a geotourist will gain awareness of the environment and will travel to get to know the culture and unique characteristics of the given destination (Stueve, Cook,&Drew, 2002). The other definition, recommended by

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scientists, focuses on rocks (e.g.: stones, minerals, etc.) and geological formations (e.g. glaciers, caves, etc.) (Donka&Gyuricza, 2002). Another definition states that participants of Geotourism will travel because of wishing to experience and learn from and enjoy our world's heritage assets (Larwood&Prosser, 1998; Buckley, 2003). Geotourism can play a leading role in the field of tourism, because it is a sustainable type of nature-based tourism that focuses on nature-related new experiences and knowledge, has only little negative impact, is not part of mainstream tourism and its development is in the interest of the local community (Boley,Nickerson&Bosak, 2011). Besides the protection of the culture and/or ecology of destinations, Geotourism contributes to the increase of local economy and also widens geoscientific knowledge (Palotai, 2010; Timcak&Vizi, 2010). According to Timcak and Vizi (2010), Geotourism has more than one definition and thus has many aspects. One of the Geotourism types is exploratory in character and deals with enjoying rock outcrops, rock domes, boulders, rock faces, gorges, peaks or caves from a distance or by walking tours, by taking a cable car or airlift. Climbers are a special subset of geotourists. Rock climbing has many forms nowadays, like top-roping, lead-climbing, aid climbing, sport climbing, bouldering, free climbing, free soloing, deep water soloing, scrambling, rope-soloing, mixed climbing, simul climbing or traditional climbing (Timcak&Vizi, 2010). The greatest challenge of Geotourism is the interactive introduction of geological values. According to Bringer (1993), visitors will find a specific natural environment attractive when the following criteria are fulfilled (Bringer, 1993):

- the destination bears unique, special features
- there is a connection between the destination and experience/adventure
- the destination connects the past and present of the location
- the destination answers the critical questions of the given area
- the exchange of information is realised by telling short stories instead of scientific explanations.

An initiative called 'Triple-Bottom-Line' (abbreviated as 3BL or TBL) was set up in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The principle of this trend states that the success of a business venture or organisation depends on three criteria. According to the principles of TBL, a good company has positive effects on the economy, the society and also on the environment. These factors are often referred as the three base pillars, but literature also calls them 3P, as for 'People, Profit and Planet'. Successful sustainability requires radical changes that can only be implemented with regards to the principles of TBL. According to Hose (1998), the substance of Geotourism is the introduction and conservation of geological and geomorphological values (Hose, 1998). Figure 1 shows the complete definition of Geotourism (Figure 1). It is clearly shown that while Ecotourism only focuses on one specific topic, Geotourism bears in mind the reservation of the whole geological structure and the culture linked to it, along with the well-being of the local people. Therefore, it is to say that Geotourism should be considered a more complex type of tourism. According to Rybar, within the field of Geotourism, the objects with the highest ranking will be those, that are worthy of being classified as geosites, be it from mineralogical, petrographic, geomorphological, tectonic, or paleontological point of view, or any other reasons, or in case the object is a part of geopark (Rybar, 2010). To sum it up we can say that the link between protected areas and tourism is vital. Sustainable tourism practices in protected areas represent long-term commitments. Protected area planners and managers can do much to build a more constructive relationship with the tourism sector (Burlando et al, 2011). Furthermore geotourism adds to ecotourism's principal focus on plants (flora) and animals (fauna) by adding a third dimension of the abiotic environment (Dowling, 2011). So that the diversity and sheer geographical scale offers great potential for education and developing geotourism in any region. It is crucial to conserve the natural and cultural heritage, with many previous efforts have been put into such endeavors (Kavcic&Peljhan, 2011). Newsome et al. emphasize that geotourism can be a powerful tool for sustainable development but, if not managed effectively, can constitute a direct threat to geoheritage resources (Newsome, Dowling&Leung, 2011; Vasiljevic et al, 2011; Burek&Posser, 2008). The geoconservation aspect of geotourism is also crucial. Geoconservation is a modern term that became generally accepted post-2000, as an alternative to the term 'geological and geomorphological conservation' used previously. Conservation involves the wise use and management of a resource, and is appropriate to apply to geoconservation as sites and areas are dynamic and change as part of the landscape. Geodiversity is the variety of earth materials, forms and processes that constitute and shape the Earth, either the whole or a specific part of it. Relevant materials include minerals, rocks, sediments, fossils, soils and water. Forms may comprise folds, faults, landforms and other expressions of morphology or relations between units of earth material. However geodiversity is not normally defined to include the likes of landscaping, concrete or other significant human influence (Hose, 2012; Grey, 2004).

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