

## **GEOTOURISM – A SHORT INTRODUCTION**

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Geotourism is a relatively new form of tourism with considerable European and global growth potential. Geotourism provision, as tourism focussed on geology, with a particular emphasis on rural localities and geoparks (Kavecic and Peljhan 2010) has burgeoned since the turn of the present century, especially with the emergence of geoparks. However its growth and impact on geoconservation, and associated concerns over geo-exploitation (Hose 2008a), are difficult to accurately quantify due to limited appropriate research and evaluation. It has been considered as a form of niche (Hose 2005) or 'special interest tourism', both actively growing tourism market segments. It also already has some overlap with other tourism segments such as 'eco-tourism', 'sustainable tourism' and 'alternative tourism' and potentially much overlap with 'educational travel', 'environmental', 'nature-based' and 'heritage' tourism. Geotourism's original purpose as envisaged in the United Kingdom (Hose 1995) was as a means to promote and fund the preservation and then conservation of geosites and geomorphosites. It was intended that as a consequence geotourism provision would open up and maintaining access to geosites and geomorphosites through the development of sustainable tourism products and services ranging from leaflets and guided walks to major new construction projects such as visitor centres. This approach to geotourism was developed after the recognition in the late-1980s by school, university and museum geologists in the United Kingdom of the increasing losses of mines and quarries to unsympathetic after-uses and reclamation programmes; similarly, but to a lesser extent, natural geological exposures were also increasingly being lost due to unsympathetic urban developments and infrastructure constructions. Within Europe similar concerns led to the establishment of The European Association for the Conservation of the Geological Heritage (ProGEO) in 1993. ProGEO working through its member country and regional working groups develops and promotes geoconservation, especially through the GEOSITES project established in 1996 to select appropriate sites across national boundaries. Its third international symposium, »Towards the Balanced Management and Conservation of the Geological Heritage in the New Millennium«, in Madrid in 1999 produced an influential and much

cited publication (Barretino et al. 2000) with contributions from acknowledged international authorities on geoconservation and geotourism.

The first attempts to define geotourism (Hose 1995, 1997, 2000) were related to aspects of interpretative provision for geoconservation purposes at *in situ* geosites and geomorphosites, as well as museums, library and archive collections, together with artistic outputs. It was also recognised that geotourism has significant social history and industrial archaeology underpinnings. As variously defined and redefined in Europe over the past fifteen years geotourism almost always encompasses an examination of the physical basis, interpretative media and promotion of geosites and geomorphosites. The original definition (Hose 1995) and the approach surrounding it was accepted and promoted by UNESCO in its initial geopark documentation (Patzack and Eder 1998; UNESCO 2000) and should underpin all modern geopark developments. The fairly rapid development and designation of geoparks across Europe has led to an influx of geotourism practitioners, many of these have little or no prior geoconservation experience; they also seemingly lack a good knowledge and understanding of geology as an historic force in societal change, arguably essential to inform and underpin geoconservation-focussed sustainable geotourism and its associated geo-interpretation. They further commonly lack a good understanding of the development of geology and the history and significance of its geosites and geomorphosites, their relation to geo-collections, and their associated personalities – that is, geo-history. For Hose (1995, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2008b, this volume) geotourism further encompasses for geosites and geomorphosites their associated geoscientists' lives, work, collections, publications, artworks, field-notes, personal papers, workplaces, residences, and even final resting places and monuments. At the outset, Hose envisaged that geotourism would both constituency-build and provide some funding, as indeed did Martini (2000), for geoconservation when Europe's governments were unwilling to provide such financial support.

Because it has only relatively recently been defined, and especially due to a new appreciation of its historical roots (Hose 2008b), geotourism is already undergoing redefinition in Europe and wider afield. Geotourism is now a developing field, especially in Europe, of international academic study. It was first defined (Hose 1995), the first focus of university research (Hose 1994; Hose 2003), and promoted (Hose 1996) in the United Kingdom before its recognition and promotion in Europe (Hose 1997; 2000) and farther afield. The United Kingdom is also where the first geotourism conference, with international attendees and contributors, was held (Hose 1998; Robinson 1998) in Belfast in 1998. Europe is where the first journal dedicated to geotourism, 'Geoturystyka', was founded in Poland in 2004, but tends to focus on national issues. The International Association for Geotourism (IAGt) was also concomitantly founded in Poland, but it too, despite a promising start, has had little real impact beyond its borders. There have also been three global geotourism conferences over the past six years (in 2007, 2009 and 2011) but these have been mainly southern hemisphere events with limited contributions from the key European geotourism academics. Most recently, in November 2011, a geotourism conference, sponsored by a geopark, was held in Portugal but this also lacked contributions from the key European geotourism academics; it further confused the nature of geotourism by giving prominence to the USA's National Geographic geographical approach to geotourism (Stueve et al. 2002). The proponents of this latecomer to the geotourism scene, which completely ignored all previous geological work on geotourism, even dismissed geology based geotourism as a minor activity (Buckley 2003)! It gained some limited acceptance in northern Europe when Norway signed up to the associated Geotourism Charter. However, National Geographic's approach as it is focussed on the natural and human attributes that make a place worth visiting (Tourtellot 2006) is essentially a mere rebranding of other long-standing types of recognised tourism provision (Hose, this volume). Both of the two published edited books on geotourism (Dowling and Newsome 2006; Newsome and Dowling 2010) with contributions from some of Europe's leading geotourism academics and practitioners have supported the geological basis of geotourism and the original approach adopted by Hose (1995; 2000). Thus, within most of Europe and globally the geological basis of true geotourism is not in any doubt. Most of the published material on geotourism adopts this basis.

This special issue of *Acta Geographica Slovenica* provides new insight into recent advances in the field of geotourism investigations. The papers in this special issue cover a range of interests from pure definition of geotourism (Hose 2011) to a variety of studies related to specific geotouristic topics and destinations (Li and Luk 2011; Vasiljević et al. 2011; Vujičić et al. 2011; Komac, Zorn and Erhartić 2011). These papers are associated with the Geotrends meeting, held in Novi Sad, Serbia from 24 to 26 August 2010, organized by the Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, Faculty of Sciences, University

of Novi Sad. The Programme and Abstracts of presented lectures and posters are available at the website: <http://www.dgt.uns.ac.rs/geotrends>. The task for the Geotrends conference was to bring together the most relevant researchers (68 participants) worldwide (18 different countries) and to open investigations of geoheritage and geotourism to a much wider scientific community.

The Geotrends 2010 fieldtrip was created in order to promote local geoheritage which has been neglected by general public due to inappropriate promotional and scientific activities (Vasiljević et al. 2011), especially Fruska Gora Mountain and most important loess sections in the Vojvodina region that have potential to become future geotouristic destinations (Vasiljević et al. 2009).

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