

GEPARKS AND GEOTOURISM

GEO PARKS AND GEOTOURISM
NEW APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABILITY
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Edited by

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*Geoparks and Geotourism:
New Approaches to Sustainability for the 21st Century*

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To Our Lovely Families

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Neda Torabi Farsani, Celeste Coelbo, and Carlos Costa

The tourism sector is a ‘market’ that uses cultural and natural heritage as a support for its backbone activities, such as promotion of destinations, accommodation, transportation, and catering. Hence, the new concept of geotourism as a new niche market with special interest in the geo—geology, geomorphology, geodiversity, and geography—can add opportunities to cultural sustainability and rural development. Geotourism as a branch of sustainable tourism allows tourists and visitors to travel in a territory in order to experience, learn from, and enjoy earth heritage.

At present, geotourism is a new movement helping travelers to increase their knowledge about natural resources, the cultural identity of host communities, and ways of preserving them. The ‘emerging tourism’ niche of geotourism is still at an early stage of commercial development in most countries, and geoparks as a sustainable development model for protected areas are pioneers in the development of geotourism marketing. Likewise, the rapidly increasing numbers of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) registered geoparks, up to 77 by the end of 2010, is good news for promoting geotourism and sustainable socioeconomic activities in rural areas.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) introduced the geopark as a nationally protected area including a number of geological heritage sites of particular importance (geosites), rarity or aesthetic appeal. A geopark attains its goals through conservation, education, and geotourism (UNESCO, 2006a). It is worth mentioning that in many cases, geoparks are not nationally protected areas which depend on the national laws for those territories.

According to the European Geoparks Network (EGN) charter and Global Geoparks Network regulations, geoparks should be established in rural areas (Zouros and Martini, 2003); thus, geoparks and geotourism can be opportunities for rural development, as they can effectively reduce the rate of unemployment and migration in

rural areas by creating innovative strategies for local development. UNESCO and National Geographic Traveler's declaration illustrated that geotourism has opened a new gateway to rural development (Zouros, 2010; Farsani *et al.*, 2011a). It may be said that geotourism encompasses rural tourism and sustains or even enhances the geological characteristics of a place. Furthermore, geotourism follows sustainability principles, and thus it can be said that geotourism is under the umbrella of sustainable tourism. Sustainability as a general concept for tourism has three interconnected aspects: environmental, sociocultural, and economic (Cottrell *et al.*, 2007).

The major objective of this book is to investigate how geoparks and geotourism can contribute to sustainable tourism.

This book aims to evaluate the role played by geoparks in development of the local economy, and minimization of negative sociocultural and environmental impacts of tourism. This is achieved by creating a positive upgrade in land management and planning for geoconservation and sustainable development of geological heritage.

This textbook is mainly the result of ongoing PhD research undertaken by the first author under the supervision of the second and the third authors into "Sustainable Tourism in Geoparks", in the Department of Economic, Management and Industrial Engineering, at the University of Aveiro in Portugal.

Geotourism and geoparks claim to promote the local economy by sustainable tourism (McKeever and Zouros, 2005). Geoparks, by increasing the number of tourists visiting well-structured geological attractions, play an important role in the development of the local economy. When geotourists move to geoparks, the money moves in the same direction, as if geoparks were in fact exporting something such as agricultural and local products to other places. Geoparks have to support the local commercial production. Thus, visitors to geoparks can actually take with them, together with emotions, experiences and knowledge, manufactured goods (Frey *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, geoparks strive to involve local communities in new job opportunities and geo-marketing, such as geotours, geo-products, geo-museums, geo-sports, geo-lodging, geo-restaurants and geobakeries.

Geoparks aim to promote the local economy and public awareness about geology. Regarding this, development of geotours guided by local people can be a strategy towards entrepreneurship. Geotour guides visit natural scenic landforms and explain the surface and inner earth processes that have shaped them (Robinson, 2008).

A geopark, besides tourism marketing, can successfully perform educational tasks for children including schoolchildren, and for local communities. The last but not the least of geopark targets is conservation. There is a direct relationship between geotourism and geoconservation; this relation directly influences the popularization of the geologic knowledge, didactics and scientific studies in this domain, as well as recreation (Alexandrowicz, 2006).

Furthermore, geopark conservation indirectly influences the socioeconomic prosperity of local people in the countryside of the geopark. Indigenous knowledge of local people and their work force are two key components in implementation of conservation methods in geoparks. Local administration of geoparks should accomplish the comprehensive planning management that, on the one hand creates an innovative infrastructure to increase the number of geotourists in order to improve the local economy, and on the other hand preserves the natural (geo and bio) and cultural heritage sites with local involvement.

Consequently, this book strives to identify geotourism and geoparks as a gateway and novel strategy for sociocultural, socio-environmental, and socioeconomic sustainability in rural areas.

Additionally, the authors focus on innovative strategies in geoparks around the world in order to introduce geotourism as a market that can provide unique experiences for visitors through initiatives. It is evident that geoparks offer different facilities to tourists that are never experienced in other tourist destinations. Therefore, geoparks are new tourism destinations for geotourists who want to know more about the earth where they live.

Nowadays tourists want to find out more about the outside world. They want to try out new experiences and increase their knowledge (Poon, 1993).

In the last decade, geotourism has been introduced as a new niche market that shows travelers how to increase their awareness about natural resources and ways of preserving them by outdoor and recreational activities. In geoparks, tourists can see something different from other tourism activities. Nowadays geoparks are ideal destinations for tourists, since, as a living outdoor museum and messengers of geotourism, they apply innovative strategies, which not only improve the local economy but also develop tourists' knowledge. Moreover, involving indigenous people in local geotourism marketing helps to increase cultural communication between geotourists and local communities. This book introduces geoparks as new tour-

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ism destinations for those who are interested in local culture and natural sciences, in particular geosciences, and for those willing to learn more about their place in our dynamic earth.

CHAPTER 2

GEOPARKS AND GEOTOURISM: CONCEPTS, THEORIES AND PARADIGMS

Neda Torabi Farsani, Celeste Coelho, Carlos Costa, and Carlos Neto de Carvalho

2.1. Introduction

This chapter begins with a description of sustainable tourism in order to identify the principles and objectives that guide it. The second section focuses on the emergence of geotourism and the relationship between geotourism and the local economy in geoparks. The third section discusses geopark concepts, theories and paradigms. The fourth section presents the comparison between geoparks and protected natural areas. The next section can provide a paradigm for proposed geoparks which want to become a Global Geoparks Member. And the sixth section discusses geo-products and branding in geotourism destinations such as geoparks. In this section, through the introduction of geo-products in geoparks and their various definitions, the authors place special emphasis on providing their own definition for geo-products.

Since eco-labels play an important role in the promotion of sustainable tourism marketing, the next section presents a collection of examples of applying eco-labels and the geopark brand for the development of geotourism and the local economy in rural areas located on geopark territories. Finally, the authors try to introduce some examples of eco-labels which are compatible with geopark activities. The last section is a story of the importance of network activity as an innovative approach for rural development.

2.2. The Concept of Sustainable Tourism

A rapid increase in per capita income and leisure time, and advances in technology have led to increased demands for recreation and holidays for a considerable number of people all over the world. Inevitably, such large-scale tourism activity has both positive and negative consequences for the economy, environment, and the society of the host destinations. Therefore, tourism has been referred to as a 'revolution'. On the positive side, tourism is considered a tool of

economic regeneration a means for heritage and environment preservation and citizens' awareness, the creation of infrastructure and equipment, cultural communication, and political stability. On the other hand, since the tourism product is consumed at the same place as its production, tourism development has come under criticism for various social and environmental strains experienced by host destinations and populations, such as environmental degradation, cultural pollution, commercialization of human relations and negative demonstration effects (Andriotis, 2000). In this regard, the term 'sustainable tourism' originated from the general concept of 'sustainable development' which '*meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*' introduced by Brundtland in 1987 (Beeton *et al.*, 2007).

Sustainability as a general concept for tourism, as for other industries, has three interconnected aspects: environmental, sociocultural, and economic. Sustainability implies permanence, so sustainable tourism includes the optimum use of resources, including biological diversity, minimization of ecological, cultural, and social impacts, and maximization of benefits for the conservation of natural and cultural heritage and local communities. It also refers to the management structures that are needed to achieve this.

Following the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and the growing realization of the importance of a sustainable approach to tourism development, a number of international organizations began efforts to develop principles to guide the development of sustainable tourism. In 1995, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the European Union (EU) and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) organized a world conference on sustainable tourism in Lanzarote, Canary Islands (Spain). The conference produced the first agreement on how sustainable tourism should be developed. The Lanzarote Charter for Sustainable Tourism defines 18 principles, which in turn define how tourism should be developed and it has been the basis for much work that has been done since then. The 18 principles and objectives of the Declaration are as follows: (UNEP, 1995).

1. Tourism development shall be based on criteria of sustainability, which means it must be ecologically bearable in the long term, economically viable, as well as ethically and socially equitable for local communities. Sustainable development is a guided process,

which envisages global management of resources so as to ensure their viability, thus enabling our natural and cultural capital to be preserved. As a powerful instrument of development, tourism can and should participate actively in the sustainable development strategy. A requirement of sound management of tourism is that the sustainability of the resources on which it depends must be guaranteed.

2. The sustainable nature of tourism should integrate the natural, cultural and human environment; it must respect the fragile balances in many tourist destinations, in particular many small islands and environmentally sensitive areas. Tourism should ensure an acceptable evolution as regards the influence of the activity on natural resources, biodiversity and the capacity for assimilation of any impacts and residues produced.
3. Tourism must consider its effects on the cultural heritage and traditional elements, activities and dynamics of each local community. Recognition of the traditional elements and activities of each local community and support for its identity, culture and interests must at all times play a central role in the formulation of tourism strategies, particularly in developing countries.
4. The active contribution of tourism to sustainable development necessarily presupposes the solidarity, mutual respect, and participation of all the actors implicated in the process, especially those indigenous to the locality. Solidarity, mutual respect and participation must be based on efficient cooperation mechanisms at all levels: local, national, regional, and international.
5. The conservation, protection, and appreciation of the worth of our natural and cultural resources afford a privileged area for cooperation. This approach implies that all those responsible must take upon themselves a true challenge, that of cultural and professional innovation, and must also undertake a major effort to create integrated planning and management instruments. This approach must ensure that all responsible actors have instruments of cooperation and management integrated, including technological innovation.