Geodiversity as a fundamental determinant in distinguishing geoparks in Southeast Europe

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The problem of defining geodiversity in the broader area of South-eastern Europe seems to result in the unwillingness of their getting proclaimed and nominated into the European network.

The question of evaluation and general research of geo-diversity and seclusion of Geoparks in SE Europe is burdened with many problems. Among the first is a problem of lack of recognition of the importance of the same. Although the question of Geoparks is "typical geographical" (as regards space as a subject of study in geography) it is just ignored by geographers. Some of the most important reasons for this situation in the field of research of geological diversity and seclusion of Geoparks are: different approaches to the concept of geo-diversity (narrower and a broader approach to defining), partly the failure to recognize the meaning of seclusion and protection of the most valuable parts of geological diversity (geoheritage) and political and administrative problems, which in some countries of South Eastern Europe are very pronounced, etc.

Geographical space has numerous elements in its content that give it a distinctive diversity. Summing the geospatial content, its features and functions, makes it possible, to understand that geodiversity is a unique system, distinct in its content and functionality, recognizable by its specific locality. It reflects the condition for the existence of the environment, as a location for living beings (humans notwithstanding) with all the peculiarities conditioned by the geospatial diversity. The existence of geo-diversity has been established and is not reduced to a plain physical-geographic system.

Geodiversity is often defined by diverse natural environment: geological, geomorphological, hydrological, etc.; while neglecting the fact that the geographical environment and therefore geodiversity includes all contents of anthropogenic origin, and here we present some of those definitions:

"The link between people, landscape and their culture: it is the variety of geological environments, phenomena and processes that make those landscapes, rocks, minerals, fossils and soils which provide the framework for life on Earth (Stanley, 2001). "The range and diversity of geological (rock), geomorphological (landform) and soil characteristics, units, systems and processes" (Australian Heritage Commission, 2002).

Geodiversity is defined as the natural range (diversity) of geological features (rocks, minerals, fossils, structures), geomorphological features (landforms and processes) and soil features that make up the landscape. It includes their assemblages, relationships, properties, interpretations and systems "(Gray, 2004).

The very concept of geodiversity was introduced at the beginning of the 1990s in the works of Australian and Tasmanian scientists, mainly geologists, hence the definition:

The value of this kind of diversity on our planet was recognized by UNESCO which has made its task to preserve it. The initiative "European Geopark" has been launched in the framework of the European Project Leader II, entitled "Development of geotourism in Europe" and is supported by Réserve naturelle géologique de Haute-Provence (France), Maestrazgo Cultural Park (Spain), Natural History Museum of the Lesvos Petrified Forest (Greece) and Geopak Vulcaneifel (Germany), where a network of European Geoparks "European Geoparks network" was established in 2000, in order to develop and promote geo-heritage and tourism (geotourism); the network was recognized by UNESCO in 2001.

SE Europe region has just one Geopark – Papuk in the Republic of Croatia. Bosnia and Herzegovina haven't got any registered Geoparks as yet, though many sites there deserve it: Mount Vranica, Blidinje Nature Park, Konjic. Macedonia has noted down a whole list of significant geomorphological sites: Markovi Kuli in Prilep, Kratovo-Zletovo, the canyon of the Radika, Mariovo region, Demir Kapija canyon and many others. Montenegro has listed numerous proposals, but so far has not acted upon them: Morača River (Zlatica, Raslovići, Milunovići, Andrijevo), Komarnica, the Mrtvica Canyon, the Lim River and its tributaries, Krnovo, and Lake Skadar.

If we analyse that a geopark is defined as "the territory containing geological heritage of particular importance, rarity or aesthetic appeal, with the aim to preserve other values, by supporting projects of sustainable development of the local community, particularly through programmes of education and popularization in order to win support for the protection of the local population," it is clear that the role which geographers, primarily physical, have in the valuation of a nominated area can be clearly identified. By the structure of their content Geoparks give impetus to the development of geotourism, as a modern fast-growing type of tourism in the world. (http://www.eko.minpolj.gov.rs/geoparkovi/).

The aforementioned reflects the diversity of the geospace and the potential that geography, as a complex synthetic science, can use for the promotion of geodiversity, geoparks and geotourism based on geocites.

The Geoparks Network basic development guidelines are based on three points: conservation, education and geotourism, i.e. geodiversity is the basis for singling out Geoparks, while the Institute can best be used to organize geotourism.

Geotourism includes natural and tourist resources (Dowling and Newsome, 2006, Dowling, 2011): 1) natural resources include forms (landforms, landscape, sediments, rocks, fossils, soil, minerals) and processes (tectonics, volcanism, wearing down, erosion, accumulation); 2) tourist resources include attractions, accommodations, tours/trips (panoramic flights, organized tours with transportation, independent tours), activities (visitor centre, virtual tours), interpretation (visitor centre, trails), and planning and management (geoconservation, visitors, promotional materials). Dowling (2011) distinguishes five key principles essential for geotourism: 1) geotourism based on geo-heritage, 2) geotourism is viable (economically viable, contributing to the local community and encourages geoconservation) 3) geotourism is

educational (through geointerpretation) 4) geotourism contributes to the local community 5) geotourism provides visitors with satisfaction.

The first three characteristics are deemed essential for a product to be considered geotouristic, while the last two are considered desirable for all forms of tourism. From an economic point of view, geo-heritage and geosites are considered fundamental for the development of tourism (Reynard, 2008), i.e. geotourism in the interpretation by Newsom and Dowling (2006 and 2010) where geotourism can be considered a type of tourism that focuses on geosites. Geosites contribute to the primary and secondary tourist resources (Reynard et al, 2003: Pralong, 2005.).

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