

Papuk Geopark and the tourism activity

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Papuk Geopark can be described as an area with distinct natural and socio-economic features giving it its unique characteristics. Its vertical stratification is composed of parts of the lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, pedosphere and definitely social sphere. Consequently, geographical space differs from the biosphere since biosphere is only its integral part and the features created by human activity are incorporated within it. Taking in regard geospatial characteristics, both its features and functions one may conclude geological diversity is a unique system, distinct in its content and functionality, recognizable as a definite location. It reflects the state of the environment as the location where all living beings reside and are conditioned by the geospatial diversity. Geodiversity does not relate only to geographic physical features.

Nature Park Papuk is the first Geopark in Croatia

In 1998 UNESCO introduced the concept of Geoparks with the aim of protecting geodiversity, preserving geoheritage and developing geotourism and local communities. European Geoparks Network, established in 2000, now has 69 parks in 23 European countries. Within the concept of Geoparkit are not only geological features that are important but also sites of archaeological, cultural, historical, etc. values. All the mentioned characteristics together are crucial for the creation of thematic parks and can be found in the Nature Park Papuk. In 2007, due to its exceptional geological diversity Nature Park Papuk became the first Geopark in Croatia. Simultaneously it joined the Association of European Geoparks as well as World Geoparks.

One of the most important natural features of the Nature Park Papuk is its geological diversity.

It is the only place in the Republic of Croatia where geological formations from all Earth's geological periods can be found on such a small territory. The most common geological formations in the Nature Park Papuk are dated from Palaeozoic, around 600 million years ago, while there are also rocks dated from Mesozoic, Tertiary and Quaternary. Geomorphological features specific for this area are karst landforms, abyssees, sinkholes and caves on the crest of Papuk.

Papuk has distinct hydrological features, with abundant flora and fauna, and numerous cultural-historical monuments and sites. Forests cover 96% of the area of the Park and are represented by 13 species including sessile oak, downy oak, Austrian oak, beech and fir trees up to the altitudes of around 700 meters. The Karst parts of Papuk, particularly underground and caves are habitat for more than 80 different animal species, including 11 species of bats. The oldest archaeological traces date back to the period of Sopot and Starčevo cultures and continue as Urnfield culture, i.e. the Hallstatt culture. In Roman times, it was a transit region to the Sava and Dra-

va rivers. The remains of the medieval towns Ružica, Klak, Kamengrad, and Velički are located within the boundaries of Park.

The Nature Park Papuk – Geopark Papuk is one of the most significant tourist destinations of the continental part of Croatia.

For tourists who seek adventures, which prefer rural areas, mountains, sports or recreation, for those searching cultural and historical sites, or those interested in hunting and fishing expeditions this area offers a diversity of opportunities. In this region numerous types of selective tourism such as for example ecotourism, geotourism, cycling tourism, etc., can be developed.

The value and importance of the Nature Park, i.e. Geopark Papuk, are still unknown to the public. Within park boundaries, six educational tracks are built and half-day and full-day excursions are organized. Research shows that travel agencies forget to mention the fact that the Nature Park Papuk is the only Croatian Geopark. It was declared Geopark under the UNESCO protection at the plenary session of the 38th General Assembly on 17th November 2015 in Paris.

Table 1. Number of visitors in the Park Nature Park in the period 2004-2014

year	Number of sold tickets
2004	1050
2005	1600
2006	4224
2007	5760
2008	7166
2009	6615
2010	6244
2011	5627
2012	6508
2013	5216

Source: Public Institution Nature Park Papuk, 2015

According to the official statistics, the number of visitors is relatively small but it is supposed that the majority of visitors stay in the Park without buying the ticket and therefore they are not registered. According to the Nature Park officials, there seem to be more than 140 000 of such visitors, which pose a significant problem for protection of the Park.

The international promotion of the Geopark is also inadequate. Only 2.57% of visitors are foreign residents (Public Institution Nature Park Papuk, 2015). Majority of persons visiting Geopark are elementary school pupils. In Croatia, public awareness regarding the importance of natural and cultural heritage still is not developed enough.

Methods used for this research were field research and survey. Survey has been done among elementary and secondary school geography teachers and employees in tourist agencies. Gathered data reflect current situation regarding recognition and valorisation of Geopark Papuk. Characteristics of the Park were presented using GIS.



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