

Exploring the potential for geotourism development in the Danube region of Serbia

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Introduction

The Danube region in Serbia is home to numerous geological and geomorphological features as well as paleontological remains of mammoths and other animals that testify to the long and vivid history of this area. Parts of the Middle and Lower Danube in Serbia contain most of the rich natural and cultural (mainly archaeological) heritage dating back to prehistoric times as well as the remains from the Roman and Medieval period. Throughout history, it has been a place where different cultures and civilizations have flourished over a long period of time. All of these paleontological and prehistoric remains of mammoths and early man as well as numerous later civilizations and their achievements are simply woven in this space which has been continuously inhabited for nearly a million years.

Moreover, from a geological point of view, this river is considered to be a significant factor influencing the formation of the entire region through which it passed, in nearly every geological period. During this entire time, the Danube River area was a true oasis of life, even during the Ice Age when living conditions in certain areas of Europe were harsh and difficult. Thanks to its power and influence on the surroundings, the Danube has significantly participated in the creation of a very rich geological diversity along the whole of its course (Vasiljević et al., in press).

This rich and diverse natural and cultural heritage along the banks of the Danube with numerous geological, geomorphological, paleontological, archaeological and cultural attractions makes this area one of the best natural and cultural tourist destinations in Europe and the entire world.

Methods and data

The aim of this paper is to create a geosite inventory of the Danube River area in Serbia and determine the current state and potential for geotourism development by applying the modified geosite assessment model (M-GAM). An official inventory of geosites in the Danube area in Serbia still does not exist. However, numerous geosites that are included in the official geosite inventory of Serbia are located in this area. Still, not every geosite is suitable for geotourism development. This is the reason why we proposed an inventory of geosites which are the most attractive for geotourism development and have the largest potential to attract the attention of a larger number of tourists. Apart from these, there are many other geosites which can be included in the geotourism offer. However, in the initial phase of geotourism development, more attention should be focused towards geosites that not only possess a high degree of attractiveness or aesthetic value, but are also easily accessible and have at least some of the necessary infrastructure for geotourism development. The proposed inventory includes fifteen geosites throughout the Danube River area.

Afterwards, these geosites were assessed by using the M-GAM model for geosite assessment. This method provides us with less subjective results and gives us more precise results because it includes the opinion of both experts and visitors whose needs and interests have a crucial impact on determining the value and potential of geosites. If the evaluation is only done by experts, the final result will heavily reflect their opinion while other parts of the tourism market that do not belong to this segment (but are usually much larger) will be neglected (Tomić and Božić, 2014).

Results and discussion

The results indicate that the Danube region in Serbia can be divided in seven (geo) tourist zones which should be the main focus of future geotourism development in the area. According to the proposed inventory, these zones include 15 of the most representative and attractive geosites in the Danube area with Djerdap, Fruška Gora and Viminacium being the top three zones with the most attractive geosites. The results also indicate that the major problems for further geotourism development are mainly related to a lack of promotional activities, good quality tour guide service and poor infrastructure at geosites. More interpretive panels are necessary in order to provide visitors with basic geosite information as well as interpretive or visitor centers which would offer more detailed information presented in a unique and interesting manner. A good location for these centers would be Djerdap and the Fruška gora mountain. The results show us that these are the key elements which affect the quality of visit and highly contribute to the visitor experience. Thus, these services and facilities should be the primary focus of future geotourism development in this region.

Conclusion

As it was mentioned before, the Danube area in Serbia possesses valuable geoheritage as well as archaeological heritage. These two types of attractions often share the same location or are near to one another which offers the possibility for the formation of a unique geo-archaeological route. This kind of route would encompass both geological and archaeological values into a unique tourism product and would be a useful tool for the promotion of both geological and archaeological heritage which would attract the attention of a larger number of tourists and more diverse tourist profiles.

One more thing that would also contribute to the promotion of geoheritage and geotourism development is the formation of the first ever Geopark in Serbia. In the last couple of years there has been some limited effort to achieve this, with Fruška gora and Djerdap being the main candidates for joining the European geopark network. However, due to a lack of expertise and initiative this process is going extremely slowly and it still remains a mystery if it will ever be completed.



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