



# **NEW CHALLENGES WITH GEOTOURISM**

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## GEOTOURISM AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT – POTENTIALITIES AND RISKS

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Geotourism, at the same time that offers the visitor a deepening of the environment origins, based in geologic information and knowledge, also constitutes an essential element to include people in the context of discussions and reflexions which deal with the conflicting relationship between man and the planet where he lives (MINEROPAR, 2008).

In this sense, the potential development of Geotourism from Geoparks implantation needs special attention, considering it involves material and immaterial components, which articulate themselves under reflex of an incorporated history and the perspective of new models for the development of certain regions and spaces.

In this field emerge, beyond landscapes which geodiversity shape and makes beautiful, social environmental and economical problems, mixing several and sometimes antagonic interests.

Developmental practices based in extrativist models, despite the evolution of environmental sciences and increasing understanding of the interdependence between the different systems in which the planetary matter organizes itself (Capra 2004; Williams 2000) remain active and widely spread, underlying the base of human settlement on the planet.

The exploration of the geotourist potential of a given region when based and fostered by the economic component, even when justified by the social aspect, can be predatory to the environment, putting under threat the geological heritage, the local geodiversity and the community itself which longs for a development which can enable life quality improvement.

It matters considering that a Geopark is a territory with management based in the existence of an admirable geological heritage, support of a set of initiatives which enable the improvement of the life quality of its inhabitants, under a sustainable development perspective (Pereira et al. 2008).

It is essential therefore, that prior to creating a Geopark, there are comprehensive and deep discussions involving the community, researchers and the government searching for an only language, which promotes the understanding of Geosciences concepts, the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage, the search for the regional identity, and last, but not least, the development of geotourism.

Pereira et al (2008) point out that special attention should be given to this kind of tourism, so that it does not become a mass tourism, under risk of losing its sustained character.

The sustainability of the very geotourist enterprise depends on and demands protection actions to both the material and immaterial heritage of the region. The protection to the local culture and traditions, to the different ethnics and regional groups, to geosites and landscapes, associated with educational policies able to motivate development based on ethic and democratic basis, are a must to the implementation of fostering strategies to Geotourism.

Without observing such measures, aiming at promoting the harmonization of interests and fostering practices of environmental management which match development with the communities' desires, the risks of Geotourism failure are high and it loses its potential value to geoconservation and to development.

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