



Evaluating the Carrying Capacity in The Škocjan Caves, Slovenia

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Park Škocjanske jame, Slovenija is a multidesignation site, located in south western part of Slovenia. In 1986 the Škocjanske jame – Škocjan Caves were listed in UNESCO world heritage list, in 1996 the Government of Republic Slovenia established the Regional Park Škocjanske jame, Slovenija. In 1999 the underground course of The Reka River in Škocjan Caves was designated a Ramsar site as first underground wetland of international importance.

The park lies within three locations Natura 2000. In 2004 Park Škocjanske jame became a MAB locality as The Karst Biosphere Reserve.

The tourist activity was already developed in the early 19th century. Today's research projects are focused on quality of caves microclimate, in order to enable the cave to remain as pristine as possible due to tourism and on the other hand to provide safe environment for people who work in the caves, and on quality of the water that flows from buffer zone to the underground world an then to the sea in Italy.

The tourist activity increased during the past years. With the aim of nature conservation and protection the management plan was developed and special programme of monitoring started in order to detect changes in the environment due to the anthropogenic impact.

In the park we consider the estimation of the carrying capacity as a key element for preparation of proper management guidelines for the tourism development in site.

The caves system is rich in several halls and tunnels and distinguishes the caves for its variety of dimensions. There are several limitations of the visits and number of visitors. They merely depend on spatial characteristic of the caves and its surroundings and on human resources of the experts stuff that is in charge of guiding tourists groups to the caves. There is no simple formula that could be used for evaluation of capacity on general, but detailed studies of several locations and suitable description of parameters could give us an idea of proposing the limiting numbers. Physical and actual capacities will be discussed and a model of preparation of social capacity will be provided.