The significance of geotourism through the lens of geoethics

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Geoheritage and geodiversity visually and symbolically express the link between the physical and biological environment and cultural world. In the geoethical vision, their protection is fundamental, since they are irreplaceable components of a non-renewable social and natural "capital" (Peppoloni et al. 2019: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-12010-8_2). They become points of reference to redefine the intimate connection between human beings and Earth, thus assuming a value meaning to be placed at the basis of a new way of experiencing the territory. Initiatives such as geoparks or geotourism represent their concrete implementation, as activities capable of enhancing the environment and its geological landscape. Furthermore, their learning and enjoyment also foster a broader understanding of the significance of geosciences and their importance for the functioning of societies, as well as promoting interactions with local human communities, and the expansion of one’s spiritual and aesthetical dimension while living the interaction with nature.

Newsome and Dowling (2010: https://doi.org/10.23912/978-1-906884-09-3-21) define geotourism as follows: “a form of natural area tourism that specifically focuses on geology and landscape. It promotes tourism to geosites and the conservation of geodiversity and an understanding of Earth sciences through appreciation and learning. This is achieved through independent visits to geological features, use of geo-trails, and viewpoints, guided tours, geo-activities and patronage of geo-visitor centres”.

Responsible geotourism enhances sites and landscapes of geological significance, assuring their protection and the sustainable development of surrounding areas. Moreover, the use of those sites by citizens can increase their awareness and understanding of key issues to be faced by society, such as the sustainable use of geo-resources, the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change effects, and the reduction of risks related to natural and anthropogenic phenomena. Geotourism, therefore, also represents the common ground on which geosciences and social sciences can interact, offering undoubted advantages. It makes multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary work and cross-boundaries national and international collaboration visual and tangible; it produces an increase in public awareness and scientific knowledge; it improves the quality of life of the local population by creating incentives for economic development; finally, it drives society to behave and act more responsibly towards geodiversity and biodiversity.

This paper frames geotourism within geoethical thought, emphasising its formative contribution...
for the human being living in the Anthropocene. In the vision of geoethics, geotourism helps to understand that Earth is a system, that reality can be reduced to its constituent parts only for rational convenience, but its deep meaning can only be grasped through the relationships that bind the parts to the whole. In the same way, the human being is an individual immersed in a continuum in transformation and the relationships that bind the individual to the whole are the essence of its specificity.