Applying the Values of Geoethics for Sustainable Speleotourism Development

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Establishing sustainable and responsible speleotourism development is a major challenge and involves complex activities. Adequate theoretical starting point is the application of geoethical values related to the conservation and protection of the caves to be used for touristic purposes. Positive and negative cases of human behaviors towards speleological geoheritage are discussed, in order to highlight what should be done in cave management to avoid malpractices and on what elements could be founded adequate strategies aimed at promoting sustainable speleotourism.

This is important to tourism management organizations involved in the promotion of caves and in creating economic opportunities for local populations, while respecting cave ecosystems. Modern cave management must be focused on the protection of the cave ecosystems, finding ways to achieve at the same time an economic development of local communities. But this approach needs the adoption of a geoethical framework of values to be shared by all stakeholders involved so that successful cooperation can be achieved despite differences in interests and expectations.

The aim of this paper is to raise the awareness about the need to apply the values of geothetics to speleotourism, stimulating new fields of discussion within the scientific and technical communities involved in studies and activities related to geotourism and geoheritage. The possibilities of developing new ways to manage caves, in order to promote a sustainable socio-economic development of local communities, have to be balanced with the protection of natural environments as much as possible. The proposed theoretical frameworks have the goal to increase the discussion on the best ways of connecting speleotourism to sustainable and responsible cave management, presenting two case studies, and pointing out potential solutions.