

AWARENESS OF SLOVAK TOURISTS ON POSSIBILITIES TO VISIT GEOSITES

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Abstract

The paper presents results of survey on the knowledge of possibilities to visit geosites in Slovakia. Geosites can be considered as the primary element of geotourism development. In this process, potential visitors play a key role. Therefore, it is important to know tourists' knowledge about such locations. Results show that Slovak tourists are not aware of the term geosite and do not use to visit such places nor search for information about geosites. Only 35,79% respondents replied that they visit geosites. In terms of sustainable geotourism development, significant revision of approach within geosite promotion, interpretation and tourism use is required.

Key words: geosite, tourist, knowledge, Slovakia, survey

Introduction

Geosites as part of natural heritage are often a subject of interest of visitors due to their values. In this regard, for some tourism forms (e.g., geotourism), geosites are of primary importance. These sites are extremely interesting to understand Earth and its various processes not only from the experts' perspective but from non-specialized visitor too. Some geosites can represent evidence of climate change, tectonic development and related changes in the history of life that have shaped our planet. They are also important for observing recent and current processes and geological elements, as they allow analyzing the development of the territory and understanding the importance of surface processes and rocks in the development of the landscape.

Geosites may differ from each other in genesis, dimensions and their unique geological features, which determine their value for science, education and tourism. They do not have a specified minimum or maximum size, which can range from a few square meters to several square kilometers. Sometimes larger geosites can include smaller ones, they can occur as single objects or like larger systems (Reynard 2004, Ilies & Josan 2009).

As knowledge on specific locations can be considered for a key prerequisite for tourism development, the aim of the paper is to analyze awareness of Slovak tourists on geosites and possibilities to visit such places.

Material and methods

For the purpose of this study a method of online survey was adopted. Survey is considered to be of the most frequent methods in social research. It is defined as a research, development and evaluation tool that serves to quickly find out facts, preferences, information about knowledge, opinions, interests, attitudes, etc.

The anonymous questionnaire includes two major parts. The first part was focused on basic demographic respondents' data, including age, gender, and education level. The second part was focused on the knowledge of respondents on geosites, including following questions:

- Did you ever hear term 'geosite'?
- Do you know where geosites are located in Slovakia?
- Do you visit geosites?
- Which geosites do you visit most often?
- Approximately, how many geosites do you know?
- Do you look for information about geosites? (If yes, what is source of information?)
- Are you interested in geosites in more detail? (more than aesthetic value, e.g., geology, geomorphology, processes, etc.)
- Do you think that the availability of information on geosites is sufficient?
- Are geosites sufficiently promoted as tourist destinations?

Results and discussion

The total number of processed questionnaires was 366. 209 female respondents and 157 male respondents participated in the survey. Considering age, the largest group of respondents was aged 26-35 years, including 109 respondents. The majority of respondents has finished at least secondary school. Basic demographic data are summarized in Table 1.

Tab. 1: Demographic data of respondents

| Demographic item | | Number | Percentage |
|------------------|------------------|--------|------------|
| Gender | Woman | 209 | 57% |
| | Man | 157 | 43% |
| Age | less than 18 | 17 | 5% |
| | 18-25 | 106 | 29% |
| | 26-35 | 109 | 30% |
| | 35-50 | 88 | 24% |
| | more than 50 | 46 | 13% |
| | | | |
| Education level | primary school | 17 | 5% |
| | secondary school | 181 | 49% |
| | university | 168 | 46% |

Out of the total number of 366 respondents, only 124 respondents answered 'yes' to the question of whether they had already hear the term geosite. This term is known by both women and men term was mainly encountered by women. In terms of age category, persons older than 35 years are more familiar with this term. Moreover, respondents with university diploma are the major sub-group in this category. Only 45,08% of respondents (165) replied that they know where are geosites located in Slovakia. However, only 35,79% (131 respondents) replied they visit geosites repeatedly (Fig. 1). 145 (39,62%) respondents visited geosites but do not plan to visit such places repeatedly. 13,11% of respondents plan to visit some geosite in the future.

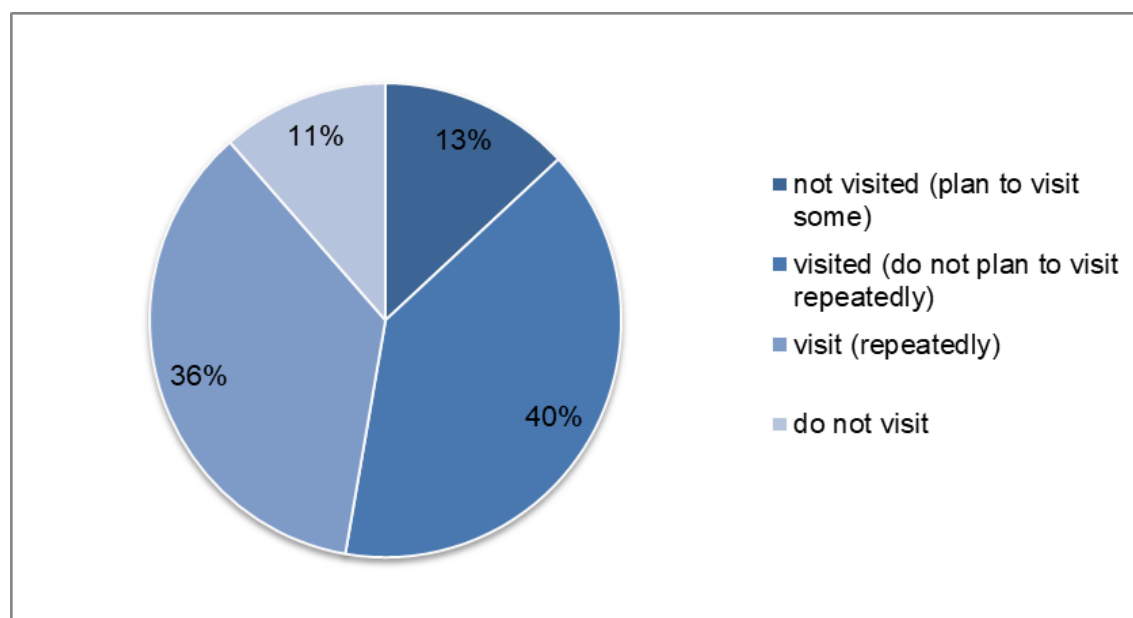


Fig. 1: Respondents' replies on geosite visits

When visiting geosite, the most frequent visited geosites include caves (184), canyons (57) and waterfalls (53). This may be caused by the fact these places are among the most visited natural phenomena in general, visited by various groups of visitors. So, also people who do not plan visit such places in the future may have been here during, e.g., some school excursion. In total, 349 respondents replied that they know at least one geosite in Slovakia among which 185 respondents know more than 5 various Slovak geosites.

People visiting geosites, most often, look for some information on internet which is considered to be the most frequent information source in general. But this information, most frequently, do not include some detailed information about geosite, just the most general data – accessibility, entrance fee, etc. The majority of respondents (263) is not interested in geosites in more detail and, we suppose, therefore more than 65% of respondents replied that they do not know if the availability of information about geosites is sufficient. Considering geosites as potential tourist destinations, the majority of respondents (198; 54,1%) thinks that these places are not sufficiently promoted (Fig. 2).

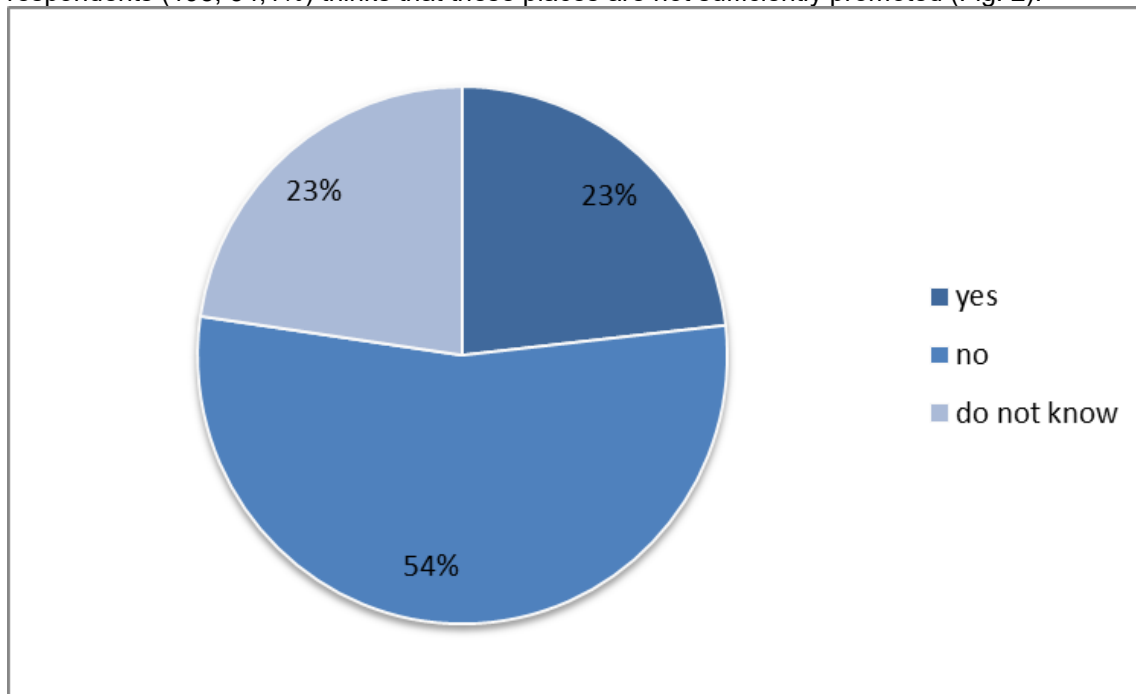


Fig. 2: Respondents replies on the question: Are geosites sufficiently promoted as tourist detinations?

Findings presented in this paper confirm the conclusion of Liščák and Antalík (2018) that there is a decreasing level of geological knowledge of Slovak people, which is manifested by a worsening perception of environmental importance of various components of the country.

Nature-based tourism has an undeniable potential of development in Slovakia. This importance has also been recognized by the various documents adopted by the Government of the Slovak Republic (e.g., Slobodníková 2022). However, for effective sustainable development, participation of people as potential visitors is crucial. This paper shows that, compared to previously published results (Štrba 2019), only a part of Slovak tourists visits geosites repeatedly. Survey results indicate that Slovak tourists do not recognize the importance of geosites in general what leads to decreasing interest in such locations. Without real interest in geosites, no geotourism (or any other nature-based tourism form) development is possible. Therefore, appropriate changes are required in terms of communication and interpretation of this natural phenomena at various levels, from schools (within the education process) to in-situ interpretations. Local stakeholders and DMOs should also be involved, especially in the process of geosite promotion and sustainable use management.

Conclusion

Nature-based tourism forms are generally recognized as sustainable tourism forms with special emphasis on specific natural phenomena. Geosites represent one of such categories having big potential to attract people and, in case of proper management, educate them various aspects of geosciences and related fields. This paper, based on the online survey, was aimed at the study of Slovak tourists' awareness on possibilities to visit geosite. Results of the survey shown that, despite the fact that people know some Slovak geosites in general, less than 36% visit geosites regularly and there is a considerable group of respondents which do not plan to re-visit geosites. This study did not cover reasons why people visit or not visit geosites in Slovakia what may bring more light into this topic. However, it can be concluded that, when considering geotourism development in Slovakia, much more attention and appropriate action is required towards general public when discussing geosites as potential (geo)tourist places in Slovakia.

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Souhrn

Geolokalita jako součást přírodního dědictví jsou pro své hodnoty často předmětem zájmu návštěvníků. V tomto ohledu mají pro některé formy cestovního ruchu (např. geoturismus) prvořadý význam. Cílem příspěvku je analyzovat informovanost slovenských turistů o geolokalitách a možnostech takové místa navštívit. Pro účely této studie byla využita metoda online průzkumu. Z celkového počtu 366 respondentů odpovědělo „ano“ pouze 124 respondentů na otázku, zda již pojem 'geolokalita' slyšeli. Pouze 45,08% respondentů (165) odpovědělo, že ví, kde na Slovensku se geolokalita nacházejí. Pouze 35,79 % (131 respondentů) však odpovědělo, že navštěvují geolokalitu opakovaně. 145 (39,62 %) respondentů geolokalitu navštívilo, ale neplánuje taková místa navštěvovat opakovaně. Celkem 349 respondentů odpovědělo, že znají alespoň jednu geolokalitu na Slovensku, z toho 185 respondentů zná více než 5 různých slovenských geolokalit. Většina respondentů (263) se o geolokalitu blíže nezajímá a možno předpokládat, že proto více než 65 % respondentů odpovědělo, že neví, zda je dostupnost informací o geolokalitách dostatečná. Tato studie se nezabývala důvody, proč lidé navštěvují či nenavštěvují geolokalitu na Slovensku, což může vnést více světla do tohoto tématu. Lze však konstatovat, že při zvažování rozvoje geoturismu na Slovensku je potřeba mnohem více pozornosti a patřičných kroků směrem k široké veřejnosti v oblasti geolokalit a jejich využití jako (geo)turistických cílů na Slovensku.

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