

## Geoheritage and geotourism potential of the Homolje area (eastern Serbia)

ALEKSANDAR ANTIĆ\* and NEMANJA TOMIĆ

*University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, Trg Dositeja Obradovića 3, 21000 Novi Sad, Serbia*

(\*Corresponding author e-mail: a.antic994@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

The region of Homolje in Eastern Serbia represents an area rich with numerous geological and geomorphological features, especially karst formations which are excellent representatives of this area's geodiversity. However, the geotourism potential of these geosites still remains fully unrevealed. In this paper we analyzed the most representative ones based mainly on their aesthetic value as well as their geotourism potential. The aim of this paper is to emphasize the geotourism potential of Homolje and to determine its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as well as interactions between them when it comes to tourism development. The results of the SWOT and TOWS analysis indicate that Homolje as a tourist destination possesses immense geotourism potential but is still in the exploration phase according to the Butler tourist cycle of destination evolution. Research results also identify four different strategies which can be applied as solutions for current problems and for further tourism development.

**Key words:** geoheritage, geotourism, SWOT analysis, TOWS analysis, Homolje, Eastern Serbia.

### INTRODUCTION

As a small geographical area in eastern Serbia, Homolje is an excellent representative of rich natural heritage. Within this region there are numerous geosites with unique diversity, which can provide authentic and unforgettable experience to tourists. Such an environment possesses an outstanding opportunity regarding geotourism development.

This paper will provide an analysis of geoheritage in the Homolje region and it will determine which aspects of geoheritage can be implemented for geotourism development. The Homolje area has an irregular shape of a rectangle that is 35 km long with its widest point of 26 km. It is surrounded by mountain ranges on all sides. Zvižd area is located in the north, Beljanica mountain (1336m) is positioned to the south, mountain top Crni vrh (1027m) in the east, while the mountain Gornjak (825m) extends from the lower plains of the

Mlava River to the west. The geomorphological unit of Homolje consists of two parts: Žagubica Valley to the east and Krupaj-Krepoljin Valley to the west (Prentović et al., 2016).

Research was mainly focused on the natural values of Homolje, but there is also a great need to point out significant cultural uniqueness. Ethnographic elements certainly have their impact on the tourist offer of Homolje. It is this impact that links the cultural identity of the region with other tourist attractions and potentials that it holds, such as natural, scientific, educational etc. The geoheritage of this area mainly consists of a large number of unexplored geosites which is one of the key issues in this paper related to geotourism potential and development. Information about these unexplored areas can be mostly obtained from local residents or through participation in mountain hikes with several mountaineering associations. Current infrastructure development is at a very low,

basic level, which significantly complicates road access to certain sites. This must be improved in the near future, so that any kind of development would be possible. It should also be noted that these natural resources are often not recognized by local and regional tourism organizations. As institutional holders of tourism promotion, these organizations are obliged to present all tourist attractions and potentials in the best way possible.

Geotourism is a relatively new phenomenon based on an old idea and falls within the category of special interest tourism. In simple words, geotourism represents the promotion and protection of geological heritage through tourism with the help of education and interpretation (Tomić, 2016). At the end of the twentieth century the concept of promotion and interpretation of geological diversity and geological heritage has been presented to a much wider audience. In essence, geotourism represents a recognition process and giving a broader meaning to geosites which should further lead to better and more efficient conservation of geoheritage and geosites (Hose, 1997; Hose, 2005). Taking into consideration the original approach by Thomas Hose from the mid 1990's and by accepting the best aspects of modern approaches and literature, Hose and Vasiljević (2012) presented this latest definition of modern geotourism: "The provision of interpretative and service facilities for geosites and geomorphosites and their encompassing topography, together with their associated in situ and ex situ artefacts, to constituency-build for their conservation by generating appreciation, learning and research by and for current and future generations."

This main focus of our research is the geoheritage of Homolje and how the features of some geosites can be used as a tool for intensive development and growth of geotourism. The aim is to present the potentials of specific geological heritage resources, as well as to perform a detailed analysis of their quality. The observed sites

have exceptional aesthetic value. Landscape and nature in the region have a strong power of attraction for all nature lovers. It is this high aesthetic value that makes Homolje a unique destination suitable for geotourism development. The existence of good management and sustainable development in the future should create conditions for growth and development of all types of sustainable tourism, including geotourism, as well as favorable conditions for the application of geoconservation measures.

## STUDY AREA

The Homolje area is located in the karst region of Eastern Serbia which is very rich with numerous gorges, canyons, waterfalls, springs, caves, pits and other karst formations. These geosites are excellent representatives of this area's geodiversity. Among plenty of geosites, we analyzed the most representative ones based mainly on their aesthetic value as well as their geotourism potential. The analyzed geosites (Figure 1) are described in the following text.

**Gornjak gorge** is a landmark that indicates the entrance to Homolje and it is located between the peaks Mali Vukan (752 m) and Veliki Vukan (825 m) on the right side, and the peak Ježevac (675 m) on the left side of the Mlava River which flows through the gorge. The terrain in this area is made out of red sandstone, cretaceous flysch and andesite of the Krepoljin zone. In the basin of the Krupaj river, apart from limestones, red sandstones are most dominant. Further downstream, the basin is made out of Neogene sediments, represented by sandstones, clays and clay marl (Manojlović et al., 2012). The road to the peaks Mali Vukan, Veliki Vukan and Ježevac includes areas rich in forests, wildlife and diverse flora. At the gorge entrance, from the lower Mlava River, there are remains of the medieval metropolitanate, where 400 monks resided

and wrote and copied scriptures. They belonged to the Manasija monastery and the famous Resavska school.

**Osanica gorge** - The Osanica River which passes through the settlement of Osanica is the right tributary of the Mlava river. It originates from several smaller streams which arise below the Homolje mountains. The Osanica Gorge is located about 500 m upstream from the settlement and it is protected as a natural monument by the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia. The gorge covers the left and right bank of the Osanica river in an area of 30 hectares, starting from the artificial dam built on the river. A rich variety of geomorphological formations, mainly karst and hydrology features from Palaeozoic, Mesozoic and Cainozoic can be found throughout the area. The gorge itself is unique in this region as it contains 166 plant communities including relict dominant species, 22 bird species and 15 mammal species (Mirković, 2003).

**Mlava spring**, or Žagubica spring is located in northern Beljanica, on the top of Homolje valley, where Velika Tisnica river flows out of the meander canyon and arises into the valley. The system of Mlava spring includes the basin of Žagubica lake and a submerged cave system. The Žagubica lake is 40 meters long and 35 meters wide. It has a surface of 655 m<sup>2</sup> and is located at a height of 325 meters (Petrović, 2002.).

**Krupaj spring** is a typical karst spring that flows from a cave. It surfaces in the western side of Beljanica, at a height of 225 meters. The cave from which an underground river rises is located on the top of the short valley. The length of the valley is 30 meters, while the width is 12-15 meters. At the exit of the valley local residents built a stone dam (3 meters high) which flooded the valley and the cave entrance (Petrović, 2002).

**Waterfall Siga** is located 4 kilometers from the Ceremošnja cave. It is located right beneath the spring of the Siga stream which originates under a high karst section and then quickly descends, creating a 15

meter high cascading waterfall. In the last few years the waterfall dries up in early summer. Downstream from the waterfall, 1.5 km away, on the hill above the right bank of the Siga river stands Golubinje cave, a small cave but with an interesting speleotourism potential. The cave is in walkable distance of about 80 meters.

**Felješana forest** has the status of a strict nature reserve, and it is only 11 kilometers away from Majdanpek. The area of the reserve is full of mountain beech, in which some of the trees are 300 years old and over 40 meters high. The reserve was first protected in 1950. and since then it is state-owned under the jurisdiction of the Faculty of Forestry, University of Belgrade which often organizes research expeditions in this area ([www.zzps.rs](http://www.zzps.rs)). Impressive tourist attractions in the Felješana forest are Gaura Ursuli karst, Danilo spring, Breza ridge and canyon of the Crna river.

**Picnic park Rajkovo and Lake Veliki Zaton**- The main attraction in this picnic park is Rajkova cave. Rajkova cave can be reached by asphalt road, off the coast of Mali Pek river and the artificial lake Veliki Zaton. From what is known so far, Rajko's cave corridors are over 2 kilometers long and divided into a river and a dry horizon. A concrete path leads through a large concert hall and hedgehogs hall. Then there are the altar, arena waterfalls, winter's tale and the crystal hall. New reconstructions of Rajkova cave connected the two horizons so that visitors could have a circular tour. The present popularity of the cave opens up a lot of opportunities for geotourism development, given the significant natural potential in its immediate vicinity (Mirković, 2003).

Feasibility study of tourism development in the area Rajkovo in Majdanpek, which was implemented by the company "Amber Consulting", states that there are four areas that need to be adequately valorized for tourism purposes. This potential tourist complex could be the main initiator for the development of tourism in Majdanpek, as well as an indicator of regional

development and growth of tourism in Eastern Serbia.

## METHODOLOGY

Our research was based on the bibliographical-speculative method in the phase of defining the theoretical framework and the descriptive method during processing and interpretation. The analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) was also used in order to obtain more reliable results of the study. The results of the SWOT analysis were implemented in strategic and analytical analysis (TOWS analysis) that helped in the process of identifying the relationship between the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The matrix also provided the basis for formulating strategies on these relationships.

TOWS analysis represents a variation of the SWOT analysis that identifies various factors and then binds them together (Božac, 2008). This analysis helped to determine the level of quality of these geosites, as well as possibilities for their implementation in the geotourist offer of Homolje.

SWOT analysis enables the development of strategies within the TOWS analysis. Strategies inside the TOWS analysis are based on a suitable combination of factors that represent strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. TOWS analysis contains four strategies:

1. **Maxi - maxi (SO)**. This strategy is focused on strengths and opportunities. It explains how strengths can be used for the realization of certain opportunities.
2. **Maxi - mini (ST)**. This strategy shows strengths in relation to threats (eg. from competitors). Basically the management should strive to use all resources in order to minimize threats or completely remove them.
3. **Mini - maxi (WO)**. This strategy demonstrates weaknesses in relation to

opportunities. It is necessary to overcome weaknesses to be able to take advantage of some opportunities.

4. **Mini - mini (WT)**. This strategy shows weaknesses in comparison to threats. It is extremely defensive strategy. The goal is to minimize weaknesses and avoid threats.

For TOWS analysis to perform successfully it is necessary to systematically explore the internal and external condition of the environment, define the information used in the analysis, as well as information used in the process of identifying the key relationship between the environment variables. Only then competitive strategies could be carried out (Božac, 2008).

Successful application of this methodology was also presented in the paper by Višnić and Began (2015) which dealt with the issues of geotourism in Serbia. Although the study had some limitations, it revealed that the two most frequently visited geosites in Serbia are Devil's Town and Resava Cave, the latter being located in eastern Serbia. The same methodology was also applied by several Iranian researchers (Farsani et al, 2012; Tavallaei et al., 2012; Entezari & Aghaeipour, 2014) for determining the geotourism potential as well as the data analysis and presentation of geotourism development strategies in several regions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Today the concept of landscape is related to the various fields and aspects of cultural assets. It is, in fact, a sort of fundamental notion, which confers new value and character on the relationships between nature and history, man and territory. In these terms a landscape can be considered as the most complex and morphologically most extended and continuous cultural asset, since it contains and communicates messages and values with which everybody

can identify. The observation phase is the first step in understanding a landscape. Therefore, the concept of landscape takes on a social dimension and can be proposed as an object of study with strong educational implications, especially for constructing a new relationship between man and nature. Geomorphological features are among the most widespread and spectacular physical aspects of a landscape: a gorge, a mountain peak, a sea cliff and many more have always exerted high interest and appeal on account of their scenic component. Nevertheless, these are not the only attributes, which should confer value on landscape elements, but also other less subjective and more lasting merits linked to the more general meaning of cultural heritage (Panizza and Piacente, 2008).

The analyzed natural resources are located in eastern Serbia, in the Homolje region. They include seven geosites

(Fig. 1) which are of great importance for tourism in this area. as they are the best for the development and promotion of geotourism in this region and are among the most visited tourist sites in Homolje. From Table 1., it can be concluded that Homolje offers authentic natural values, which are generally protected by the state or some kind of local protection. The preservation of natural resources, high level of landscape and aesthetic value, popularity of Rajkova cave and unique hydrological properties of Krupaj and Mlava springs represent the most important aspects when it comes to the strengths of this destination. On the other hand, lack of promotion, poor development of alternative forms of tourism, minimum investment in infrastructure and the nonexistence of a complete geotourist offer are the main weaknesses of Homolje as a tourist destination.

The best opportunities for tourism

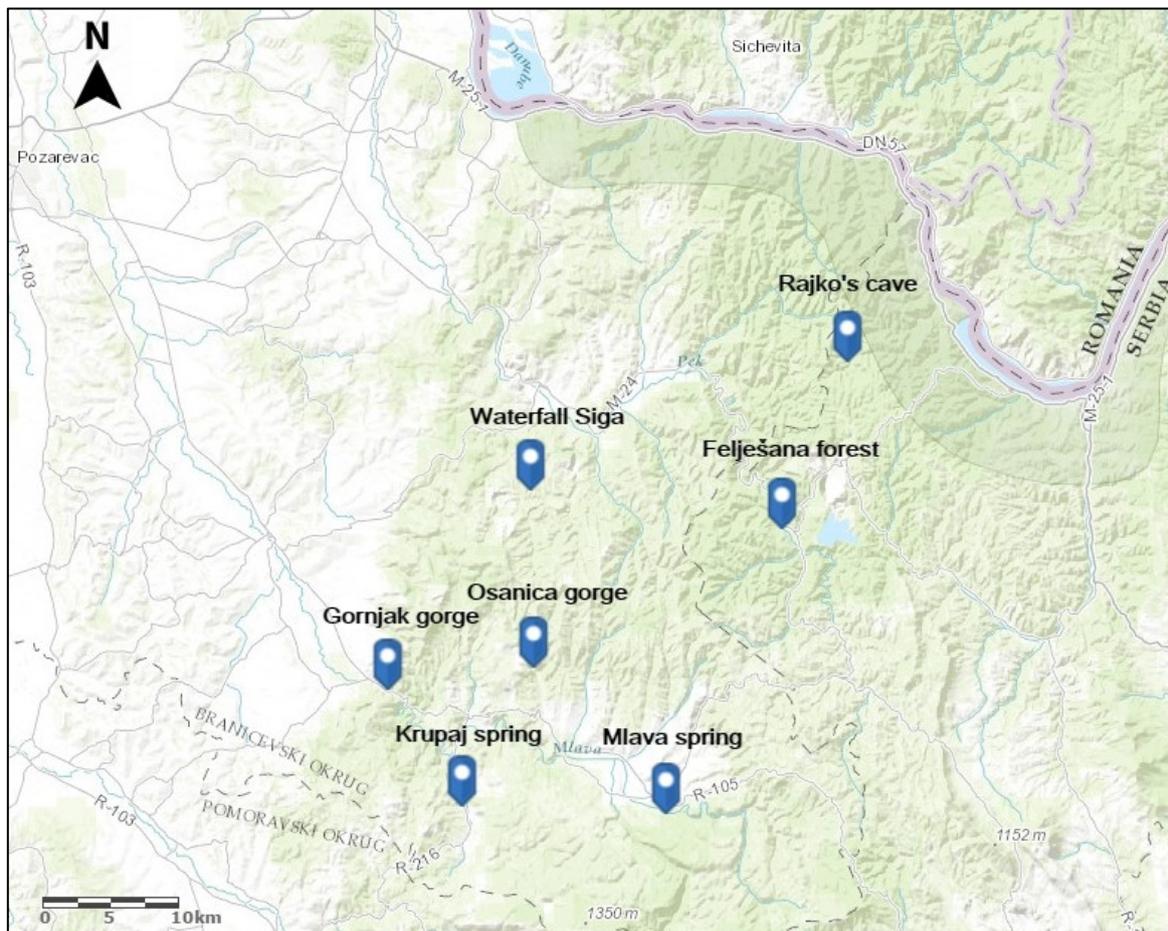


Fig. 1 Geosites in the Homolje region

Tab. 1 SWOT analysis

		Description
<b>Internal condition</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unique natural potentials (hydrological characteristics of Mlava spring and Krupaj spring, extraordinary representativeness of the Siga waterfall, flora and fauna inside of the Felješana forest and geomorphological characteristics of Rajko's cave);</li> <li>2. Attractive landscapes of Gornjak gorge and Osanica gorge;</li> <li>3. High level of aesthetic values of all geosites;</li> <li>4. Preserved environment;</li> <li>5. All geosites are relatively close;</li> <li>6. Popularity of Rajko's cave;</li> <li>7. National protection within most of the geosites;</li> <li>8. The existence of interpretive panels and road signs;</li> <li>9. The existence of the local support in terms of rural hospitality and traditional cuisine.</li> </ol>
	<b>Weaknesses</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Insufficient and poor quality promotion of the local tourism organizations;</li> <li>2. Insufficient implementation of the basic principles of sustainability and environmental protection;</li> <li>3. Lack of investments in tourism and infrastructure of the receptive centers;</li> <li>4. Lack of investments in traffic infrastructure;</li> <li>5. Not developing environmental awareness;</li> <li>6. Homolje is not well recognized in the tourism market;</li> <li>7. Alternative forms of tourism are not developing in this area;</li> <li>8. Lack of geotourist offers for active holiday.</li> </ol>
<b>External condition</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Exploiting the popularity of Rajko's cave for the sake of increasing the tourist traffic;</li> <li>2. Mlava spring and Krupaj spring as one consolidated tourist offer;</li> <li>3. Organizing tours to Ceremošnja and Ravništarka (explore the two caves and waterfall Siga);</li> <li>4. Organizing tours to Osanica (explore the Osanica gorge and waterfall of the Osanica river);</li> <li>5. Business networking of local tourist individual organizations and active mountaineering associations, due to increase tourism traffic and tourism revenue of Homolje;</li> <li>6. More professional and responsible management for the sake of preservation and quality control;</li> </ol>
	<b>Threats</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unfavorable economic and political situation in the country and the world;</li> <li>2. Lack of interest of the local authorities;</li> <li>3. Tourism competition is currently strong for Homolje;</li> <li>4. Not developing ecological awareness;</li> <li>5. Non-existence of local action plan for sustainable development;</li> <li>6. Non-existence of national awareness about the natural potentials and opportunities for development in this area.</li> </ol>

development in Homolje are the aforementioned geosites. However, firstly it is necessary for tourist organizations to cooperate with travel agencies and active hiking and mountaineering associations in order to increase the number of tourists. Combining certain geosites into one unique offer is also quite significant as one of the

first steps towards geotourism development. For example, Ceremošnja cave and Ravništarka cave are located in the immediate vicinity of the Siga waterfall. These sites hold a crucial potential for geotourism development in the municipality of Kučevo and would certainly assist in the development of tourism in the

whole area and it is best to offer them as a combined and unique product on the tourism market. Moreover, the popularity of Rajkova cave can be used for the sake of strengthening the excursion tourism at Rajko picnic park, which has significant natural and anthropogenic potentials (lake Veliki Zaton, ski center and Rajko meadows). In terms of threats, Homolje has a very strong competition. Current development of Zlatibor, Kopaonik, Tara and other mountainous regions negatively affects the tourist numbers in Homolje. On the other hand, Homolje possesses a large number of natural sites with great tourism potential, however they still remain unexplored and mostly unknown to a wider audience. Unfavorable economic and political situation in the country and the region also has its impact on tourism in this part of Serbia. The nonexistence of a management plan for the sustainable development of Homolje also presents a major problem and falls within the category of threats in the analysis.

Although Homolje does not have geopark status, it represents an area where there is potential for this in the future. A Geopark represents a territory where protection and promotion of geological heritage is combined with sustainable local development (Farsani et al., 2011). For the sake of sustainability, tourism management of Homolje and local authorities should put into effect an action plan with strategic effects. This way it is possible for a destination to have continuous growth and development of tourism with the minimal use of resources.

By applying the TOWS analysis, four strategies (Tab. 2) for the improvement of the Homolje tourist offer were developed. The proposed strategic guidelines represent the first step towards successful and profitable management of Homolje as a tourist destination.

The first strategy, which links strengths and opportunities, indicates the necessary integration of geosites into one geotourist offer. Specific hydrological features are

also mentioned in this strategy as a potential focus of some geotours. Modernization of roads, road signs and interpretive panels is also included in the strategy. A very important aspect of this strategy is the process of identifying Homolje as a potential candidate for obtaining the status of a geopark. Geopark advantages are numerous and very important. The process is very complex and demanding, but in the case of Homolje quite realistic. According to Dowling and Newsome (2006) geoparks are a fairly recent development that are particularly focusing on geotopes of regional and national geoscientific importance. They can be seen as instruments to coordinate the many stakeholders towards the common purpose of regional sustainable development. In this way Homolje would become an attractive and unique destination with a variety of geotourist attractions.

The second strategy indicates the correlation between strengths and threats. One of the main threats is related to the human factor. This strategy emphasizes the need for high-quality, educated and professional staff that will work on improvement of tourism in the given circumstances. It also includes building several tourist information centers and the foundation of the Tourist Organization of Eastern Serbia which would be in charge of tourist promotion of Homolje and entire eastern Serbia.

The third strategy is focused on the connection between weaknesses and opportunities of this destination. Weaknesses must be eliminated in order to take advantage of some opportunities. The strategy draws attention to the unstable cooperation among certain tourism organizations and hospitality companies. Successful internal collaboration is needed in order to enable a quality stay for tourists at Homolje. In addition to improving internal cooperation it is also necessary to adopt tourism projects, implement basic principles of sustainability and manage the development of environmental awareness.

Tab. 2 TOWS analysis

		Internal condition	
		Strengths	Weaknesses
External condition	Opportunities	<b>SO strategy: maxi- maxi</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing geotourism (integration of all geosites);</li> <li>Creating geotours featuring hydrology (Mlava spring, Krupaj spring, waterfall Siga and waterfall of the Osanica river);</li> <li>Modernization of road signs and interpretative panels;</li> <li>Promoting local hospitality and traditional cuisine;</li> <li>Identification of Homolje as a potential candidate for receiving the status of geopark;</li> </ul>	<b>WO strategy: mini- maxi</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving internal cooperation between tourism institutions and hospitality companies;</li> <li>More active promotion of geosites and geotourism;</li> <li>Applying the basic principles of sustainability;</li> <li>Developing ecological awareness.</li> </ul>
	Threats	<b>ST strategy: maxi- mini</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The introduction of professional and appropriate educational personnel to the tourism industry of Homolje;</li> <li>Infrastructure investments for the sake of road improvement, construction of new units, construction of bicycle and pedestrian paths;</li> <li>Setting several tourist information centers within Homolje;</li> <li>Foundation of the Tourist Organization of Eastern Serbia that would incorporate all the attractiveness and potentials of the area and promote Homolje as an important destination.</li> </ul>	<b>WT strategy: mini- mini</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maximum use of existing natural resources and with minimal harm to the most efficient manner;</li> <li>Developing alternative forms of tourism, such as sustainable tourism, geotourism, ecotourism, mountain tourism, camping tourism and others;</li> <li>Modernization of roads and other infrastructural units;</li> <li>More professional and active connection between the tourist organizations through the integration of tourist activities featuring nature and culture.</li> </ul>

The fourth strategy is related to weaknesses and threats. This is a defensive strategy that involves eliminating weaknesses and avoiding threats as much as possible. The strategy includes the maximum use of natural resources for the purpose of tourism, with minimal harm. It includes the development of geotourism as an alternative form of growth and development of tourism. Furthermore, the strategy is focused on modernization of infrastructure and linking local tourism organizations for the sake of integrating tourist activities that feature nature and culture.

The economic importance of geotourism for local communities is adequately presented in the study of Farsani, Coelho and Costa (2011). The authors state that geotourism is an emerging vision that involves the creation of new tourism

products, new jobs and new recreational activities. These recreational activities are often related to the topography and geology of the scientific and educational nature, which enables the connection of this type of tourism with school field trips, science camps and the like. Within the Homolje region there are many rural areas, which hold a large number of natural and anthropogenic tourist potentials. Geosites presented in this paper are a valid representatives of these values. Research has shown that the geoheritage of Homolje has great potential, which is unused and under-researched. Quality tourist valorization of these geosites could enable economic development of local communities, while geoconservation could lead to continuous preservation and improvement of the existing tourist sites.

Geoconservation refers to active

management. The main role of geoconservation is to maintain quality and ensure that certain natural phenomena and processes occur at "normal" speed and by the laws of nature, without being slowed down or sped up by human activities (Burek & Prosser, 2008). The geoconservation concept also includes the development of mechanisms and measures that will enable the preservation of geodiversity for future generations. This primarily includes the inventory and interpretation of geological diversity, creating tourist trails and pathways, publishing various publications, both scientific and those intended for the general audience, maintaining geosites in good condition and of course adequate presentation at visitor centers or museums (Boškov et al., 2015; Tomić, 2016).

The geoconservation and geotourism aims need the support of several types of initiatives and products in order to achieve different target groups. The deliverables for management should be technical, though of easy to understand and use by the natural parks staff. The products for the public should be designed according to the target public, although simplified, attractive and well-structured products can be understood by different types of public even without awareness of geomorphological heritage and geoconservation (Pereira et al., 2009).

Given the fact that Homolje is a mountainous region and that all geosites are located near Homolje mountains, it holds potential for community-based mountain tourism. This form of tourism represents only a small fraction of the overall tourism activity in mountain areas. In its ideal form, it is initiated and operated by local mountain communities in harmony with their traditional culture and responsible stewardship of the land. It also works toward balancing power within communities so that conservation and communal well-being, not individual profit, are emphasized.

Communities may be empowered through supportive, arbitrating regional and national

policies, partnerships with NGOs, training and education, and equitable distribution of tourism opportunities and revenues. As a tool that brings empowerment to a community and sets a basis for sustainable development, community-based mountain tourism, then, suggests a highly responsible form of tourism through which the tourist experience, environment and community are all mutually benefited. Local communities thus take a leadership role in the planning, decision making, management and ownership of these mountain tourism projects. Policy makers have effectively assisted mountain communities by supporting local ownership and strengthening traditional stewardship roles toward mountain resources (Godde, 1999).

To catch the attention of potential geotourists, outcrops with spectacular patterns should be promoted properly by guides, brochures, special signs, on-line resources, etc. Such a classification will facilitate the choice of objects suitable for such a promotion, and it will also indicate on features that should be promoted. In this way, the approach "aesthetics first, geology second" may work well in support of the necessary tourist flows to geosites and geoparks (Mikhailenko et al., 2017).

According to Popesku (2011) one of the most widely accepted approach to the model of life cycle or the evolution of tourist destinations is by R.W. Butler (1980). According to this model, a tourist destination is passing through a cycle that consists of six basic phases: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation and decline, rejuvenation or conversion. Based on the results of descriptive analysis, Homolje is positioned in the initial phase, or research phase in the Butler model (Fig. 2). This circumstance is a result of the apparent lack of interest of local authorities for the development of tourism in Eastern Serbia, which certainly requires a much larger and more important dedication. One of the main reasons for this is political. People that are leading local tourist organizations are quite often people

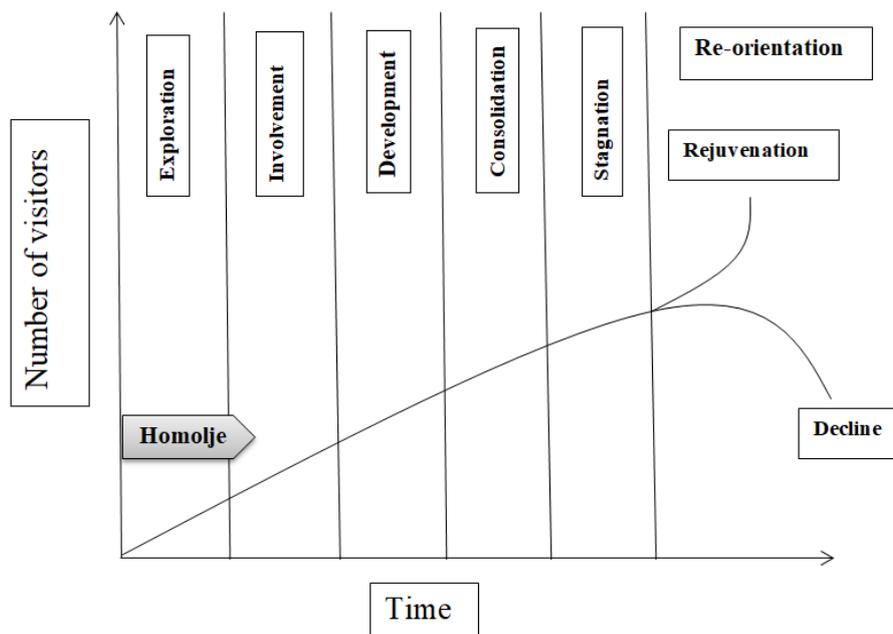


Fig. 2 Modification of the Butler Tourist Cycle of Evolution Model

that have no or very little knowledge about the tourism industry. They are appointed as heads of tourism organizations simply based on their political merit and not on their expertise. They are usually not interested in making an effort and contributing to further tourism development. This is one of the main obstacles for further tourism development not only in eastern Serbia, but throughout the country as well. The first step towards better tourism development would be to employ people who actually have knowledge and experience in the tourism industry, regardless of their political views. Better yet, local people who possess the knowledge and actually wish to do something for their local communities, but do not have the opportunity due to their political beliefs. This has proven to be the best solution and there are some municipalities in Serbia (for example, Sombor and Zrenjanin) where this solution has given good results.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to show the

geoheritage potential of the Homolje region, as well as prerequisites for the development of geotourism in this area. Our SWOT analysis presents the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of this tourist destination. The TOWS analysis included all measures, which are necessary for research, identification and eventual involvement of Homolje in the tourist market. Displayed strategies are adequate solutions to the current condition and problems of the area. The study presented a high level of tourism potential, both in terms of natural resources, and in terms of anthropogenic values. By using the strategies presented by the TOWS analysis, the natural and anthropogenic values are highlighted, tourist potentials which can create economic benefits are identified and an ambience which emphasizes geological, geomorphological and archaeological values is created. The main reason why Homolje is a suitable territory for the development of geotourism is the fact that there is a prominent diversity of geomorphological and hydrological phenomena. However, according to our study analysis it can be concluded that this destination is in the exploration phase. It is

necessary to modernize road signs and interpretive panels, develop and promote geotours in the Homolje area, significantly invest in infrastructure and hire skilled and professional personnel with extensive knowledge of geology, which will take into account the preservation and promotion of geological heritage of Homolje. When it comes to geotourism development in other parts of Eastern Serbia similar problems also occur. Extensive research of geotourism potential in other areas of Eastern Serbia has been done by several other researchers (Tomić, 2011; Tomić & Božić, 2014; Marković et al., 2014; Božić et al., 2014; Božić & Tomić, 2015; Tomić et al., 2015) and the existing problems are almost always pretty much the same in every case.

According to the strategy for tourism development of the republic of Serbia, our country's priority are tourism destinations which do not require large investments. Since geotourism is a type of tourism which does not require big investments it is ideal and completely in accordance with the tourism strategy of the Republic of Serbia. It is not a type of mass tourism and it can generate larger income with smaller investments. The inclusion of the local community is also an integral part of the geotourism concept and thus the development of this type of tourism can be an important factor in the economic development of rural areas in Serbia where most of the geosites are located.

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