

Geotourism as a tool for the protection and promotion of the Cave of Galaxidi

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Introduction

Geotourism has rapidly developed in the last two decades. One of its most popular segments is cave geotourism (e.g. Garofano 2003, 2010). Transforming a cave into a tourist attraction, or show cave, is complex and it requires modifying the unwelcoming raw underground space. The first step needed to start the process of transformation of a natural cave into a show cave is to recognize its value. This step requires the understanding of both their aesthetic and scientific aspects (Garofano & Govoni, 2012).

Galaxidi is a coastal town on the northern coast of the Corinthian Gulf and belongs to the extended municipality of Delphi, Fokida that is located in the region of Central Greece. The Cave of Galaxidi, also known as “Karkaros” is located on the central square of Galaxidi, known as square of Nicholas Mamas. Before 1940, the cave served as an improvised "dump", since from a hole at the top of the rock the inhabitants were usually throwing old objects. Observing the physical properties of the cave (stable temperature), the inhabitants of Galaxidi used it for many years as a refrigerator. In 1965, two Australians turned the cave from refrigerator for cheeses to a disco. In 1980, following a Ministerial Decision by Melina Merkouri on the Protection of Caves, according to which caves are included in the category of Monuments and are considered an integral part of the country's cultural heritage the function of the cave as a place of entertainment was terminated. Since then, the cave remains closed to visitors.

The general purpose of this study is to establish the cave of Galaxidi as a cultural organization aiming to the enrichment of the lives of people by promoting research, knowledge and enjoyment through an integrated experience that will be offered to the widest possible audience within and outside of this unique geo- monument. More specific objectives are the presentation of the cave as geological formation, as well as an interest pole of paleontological, archaeological, historical, folklore and aesthetic aspect.

Activities and materials developed to promote the geological heritage

The cave of Galaxidi has an outstanding potential to promote geotourism and education in Earth Sciences. Its location and accessibility can attract the arrival of a large number of visitors each year. This great potential, however, has not been exploited owing to the abandonment of the cave for many years.

As part of the overall redevelopment and reuse of the cave, it is necessary to carry out a series of actions such as site plan, rock mechanics study, removal of all movable components, removal of all wiring etc, aimed at its remediation. The collaboration of scientific staff (geologists, conservationists) is necessary in any work so as not to cause further damage.

Approach & Involvement of the local community

Community engagement took place in two stages: 1st stage: Meeting with the community, its needs and its specific features, presentation of the project to the community, assignment of tasks, participation in the interview process. 2nd stage: Creating a stable, timeless relationship with the community of Galaxidi (Karamani et al., 2019).

Proposal for cultural and environmental promotion of the cave

Considering that the tourist development of caves due to their particularly sensitive and closed ecosystems should in principle be avoided, a mild tourist development is proposed based on the specific features of the cave and with taking into consideration its protection (Papathanasoglou & Painessi, 2006). All the suggestions of re-emergence and re-use were largely shaped by the limitations and possibilities posed by the monument.

The cave system can be divided into four thematic sections while before the entrance of the cave there is an introductory text preceded for the history of the cave.

Section 1: Caves and Mythology

- Nymphs and Caves
- The birth of Jupiter
- The birth of Mercury

Section 2: Cave and Philosophy

- Allegory of Plato's Cave

Section 3: The cave in the memories of the inhabitants

- The Galaxidians narrate - Photographic archive

- Guests “leave” their own thoughts

Section 4: Caves and Environmental Education

- The uses of caves over time

- The development of environmental awareness through educational actions

A number of actions will enhance the communication character of the Cave including logo, banner suspension, creation of a vendor, creation of a website and social networking pages, inauguration invitations, inauguration events.

Conclusions

The case of Galaxidi Cave exemplifies the work necessary in order to promote education in Earth Sciences and promote the appreciation and conservation of important geosites and geoheritage in general. This study showed that the social approach is mandatory. The local population has to be involved in the project, and training is crucial for the improvement of scientific outreach and guidance, where local communities play a central role. Galaxidi Cave constitutes an excellent example of promotion of Earth Sciences education in issues related to geoheritage.

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