



Geoheritage Assessment in Northern Malta (Mediterranean Sea) as a Tool for Geoconservation and Tourism Promotion.

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The Maltese Archipelago, which lies in the central Mediterranean Sea, has a long and rich history of cultural heritage, rooted in the presence of ancient civilizations on the archipelago due to their strategic location. Additionally, over the past five decades, the Maltese Islands have rapidly developed into a popular tourist destination, especially sought after for outdoor activities such as sun-bathing, diving, hiking, climbing and countryside walking. These activities have particularly developed in the northern part of mainland Malta, encouraged by the presence of impressive coastal cliffs, bays and sandy beaches with clear marine waters, which create breathtaking topographies nestled in a pristine natural landscape.

Nevertheless the impact of tourism, northern Malta is less intensively built up compared with the rest of the island and conserves remarkable geomorphological features, that can be defined as geomorphosites.

The geomorphosites have the potential to be recognised as both natural heritage and tourist resources with potential economic benefits.

The aim of this research is to demonstrate the relevance of this study area as a geomorphological and geological heritage site, through the use of current inventory and evaluation methods internationally tested. The results show that northern Malta includes a significant number of geomorphosites of great relevance for their scientific values (rarity, representativeness, integrity and paleogeomorphological model), additional values (ecological, aesthetic and cultural values) and use values (accessibility, visibility, services and importance for education).

The ultimate goal of the study is to take advantage of these results and bridge them with current tourism promotion and geoconservation measures. This research is meant to support natural heritage protection and to offer the necessary knowledge for possible enhancement of activities to be carried out by public institutions responsible for the protection of the rich Maltese geoheritage. Such measures are of current relevance, due to the fact that the Maltese Islands have the highest population density in Europe and annually receive a considerable tourist influx, which result in a high degree of human pressure.