

Abstract

Geotourism and the utilisation of natural sites
with earth-science features of interest:

The areas of Crans-Montana-Sierre (Valais, Swiss Alps)
and Chamonix-Mont-Blanc (Haute-Savoie, French Alps).

Jean-Pierre PRALONG, Institut of Geography, University of Lausanne

Based on the study of the areas of Crans-Montana-Sierre (Valais, Switzerland) and Chamonix-Mont-Blanc (Haute-Savoie, France), this study considers the links between tourism activities and Earth science. Thus, the studied geological and geomorphological sites have not only a scientific value, but also scenic, cultural and economic value. From a point of view of tourism, different models of analysis are examined in order to explain the components of the supply and the demand, and to understand the life cycles of the considered objects.

The primary product of these sites is first presented, in order to assess their different potential as well as their didactic, economic, spatial and temporal use. The stakeholders' behaviour is then analysed to understand the factors and projected use, with the help of the optimisation, exploitation and transformation phases. Finally, the demand of the different target markets as well as their socio-tourist and (geo)didactic characteristics are discussed. To complete this study, methods of census, assessment, interviewing and questionnaire surveying are used, at different scales of analysis.

The main results appear to demonstrate that the scenic and economic values present a higher value relative to the didactic use. Moreover, the required conservation measures for the studied sites do not generally restrict the use, on the contrary to the « risk » factor. From the point of view of the target market, a relevant requirement for explanatory commentary is expressed and tends towards an approach optimising different themes to utilise potential; basic popular goods and services are also requested. Finally, it is clearly demonstrated that only relevant projects are able to make this kind of activity profitable.

For the future, geotourism may be marketed to a tourist demand for imagination and emotion. Consequently, the product approach should integrate a reflection on Earth science popularisation given that this branch of tourism tends to receive a component of the economic and regional development, notably during the summer period. However, the use of geodiversity should include a concept of dynamic management, taking into account conservation as well as tourism development. Thus, the final aim of this process is to widen the notion of cultural heritage, in order to stimulate a multidisciplinary approach to the landscape.