

Cultural geology in the Sesia-Val Grande Geopark, NW-Alps, Italy

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Landscape is a complex dynamic combination of landforms and processes. These elements are memories of the history of the Earth and enable us to understand the evolution of our world. The paper describes first the conceptual framework and the methodology followed in order to investigate the relationships between landscape's geodiversity, environmental dynamics and man in the Sesia-Val Grande Geopark (Northern sector of Piemonte Region, Italy), and then the suggestions for a program of appraisal and popularization of geoheritage.

Sesia-Val Grande Geopark offers a wide variety of geological and geomorphological elements, and holds stories of different people, who founded their independence in the mountain environment by using the available local resources and even suffering the difficulties. There are traces of human activity starting from the Neanderthal man on the Fenera Mountain; Walser settlements from the 13th Century (in the upper part of the Sesia and Ossola valleys) and several mines dating back to period of Savoy Kingdom (19th Century). In this perspective, the physical landscape of the Sesia-Val Grande Geopark has been analyzed and geosites individualized as available resources for human activity and settlement. Comprehensive interpretation of geosites showed that local community suffers, models, works, enhances and destroys part of the landscape, giving it a "personality" that can be defined as landscape culture. Culture proved to be not only the "activities of human being" but also the "the product of the interactions with the environment in which people lives". Geosites described may, therefore, be proposed as elements of sustainable tourism, aware of local resources and respectful of local traditions.

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