



The Natural and Touristic Values of Some Canyons in the Southern Albania

KEYWORDS

canyon, natural monument, geo monument, touristic values

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ABSTRACT In this article it is given a general rating of natural and touristic values of several canyons in southern Albania. Initially it is being treated the physical-geographical view of Southern Albania such as geographical position, geology, geological structure, the morphology of the main mountainous terrain systems, river valleys and climatic conditions. Further analyses are made on some main canyons (geo monuments), where we take into consideration: their geographical position, forming conditions, karsts processes, running water erosion, morphological description, and their scientific values etc. These canyons are associated with their images. At the end it is finalized with an assessment by the tourist potentials which have possibilities of exploitation of domestic and foreign visitors, investments made, current problems, and the need to protect these natural heritage values.

INTRODUCTION

Albania is located in the southwestern part of the Balkan Peninsula, on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea and the Ionian Sea to an overall surface area 28,748 km². Southern Albania extends from the strong curves Devoll (north) to the south border length 130 km from the city of Leskovik (east) up to Vlora Bay (west) with a width approximately 46km. Its total surface is 5980 km².

Southern Albania has a clear and simple geological structure. Mainly in it, it do participate the Mesozoic carbonate rocks, which occupy most of it and in a lesser extent of Quaternary terrigenous formations. Carbonate formations build higher parts of the territory as Mali i Gjerë, Gribë, Lunxhëri, Tomorr, Kurvelesh etc., where there are developed karsts phenomena as well.

In the structural plan, the mountains represent anticline structure, whereas those valleys syncline. As far as the relief is concerned, it is eye-catching the diverse forms, mountain ranges, hilly ridges of strings, holes and hollows deep ravines in the form of narrow canyons etc.. This variety has given to the relief a highly fragmented character. Another element that is striking is the strange regularity of the relief, a clear expression arrays in the combination of mountain river valleys excluding the area of Dangëllia and Kurvelesh.

The climate in this part of Albania is generally Mediterranean, but as in the prevailing high mountains and mountain chains, it also includes features of mountaneous climate. The main feature is that, the climate elements' changes are reflected in the height, in what is called (vertical climate area). Hydrographic network of Southern Albania is very rich of the current waters of underground resources.

THE CANYONS IN SOUTHERN ALBANIA AND THEIR NATURAL ASSESSMENT

Osum Canyon is known as the circle of magnificent canyons which is rightly called the "Colorado of Albania". It is located in Çorovodë - Hambull in Osumi valley is about 13 km long, from 4 to 35 m wide, of up to 70-80 m deep, with vertical slopes, underneath which it flows by the "playful" Osum, which "brags" with its creation itself. Its waters are exactly the ones that with their strength of erosion and digestive have penetrated so slowly, but relentlessly, to the extent of limestone rocks of Çorovoda with anticline structure, forming the canyon with impressive beauty.

This is not the only miracle of the canyon, in some sectors it displays its large waterfalls with breathtaking beauty, es-

pecially on sunny days, the rays of which are broken down by water droplets, forming rainbows, starting from the sky, continuing to slopes of the canyon, where it is reflected in the pools of water in the river bed.



Photo 1. View of Osum Canyon

In the vertical walls of the canyon there are plenty of niches formed by karsts' processes. Among them it stands "vrime e nuses" (eye of the bride), located 800 m near the village of Bigaz and that is a hole or perhaps a karsts' cave in the form of a gallery with a length of 7-8 m and a diameter of about 2 m. There are raised the doubts that the vertical walls of limestone caves are other much larger, which expect explorers to detect and identify their multiple values.

In the middle of the river flow of Çorovoda is located Gradeci Canyon, 250 m above sea level. It represents a canyon formed in the Mesozoic limestone cliffs. For millions of years the abrasives and dissolving activity of the waters has shaped this landscape in an attractive form. If we compare with the Osumi canyons, these are tough to describe because of the steep slopes, cataracts and large rocks. These sites are ideal for difficult areas climbers, who have not hesitated to explore in the recent years this beautiful and tough canyon. There are raised strong doubts that this canyon has been an underground karsts river crossing Çorovoda) then due to the progress of karsts, the ceiling collapsed bringing to the surface this underground transformation. This conclusion is deduced by its morphology and the underground karsts forms near it. This canyon is 3 km long and 100-200m deep, whereas its width up to its end varies from 10-15m, but it does not lack some narrow sectors of 2-3 m. The end of the canyon has a very diverse relief, with holes of hollow waters, big stones separated by the vertical walls of the canyon. They make it very difficult the trespassing on foot. This canyon is a very interesting river and karsts ecosystem. Despite its steep

slopes are vertical in its walls, it is found grass, as woods as well, whereas in its caves of the canyon's side there are many wild pigeons nest and eagles.



Photo 2. View by Gradec canyon, Skrapar.

Langarica Canyon is another monument that is formed millions of years before. It is located in the river flow Langarica, which constitutes one of the largest branches of the river Vjosa. Langarica, for locals is "the blessed river" flowing strongly through a spectacular canyon hidden between Rocky Mountains of Dangelia in southern Albania.

The canyon constitutes a major asset for tourism development in Albania and a source of income, not only for local residents. It is located near the village Bënjë, height 400 m above sea level. Its total length is 4-5 km. Its height ranges 80 to 100 m, with nearly vertical walls, and the width 20 -30 m, in some sectors is even narrower 1.5 up to 2m. This kind of superb nature is saved for several kilometers. The width of bed rarely exceeds 1.5-2 m. In some places the canyon is not passable as there have been created underground tunnels, and numerous gradations of rapids. In the canyon slopes of Langarica numerous caves are distinguished which are related to each other through the tunnels and galleries. One of the largest caves in the canyon is the Pigeon's, which is known not only for its natural values, but also for archaeological values. Researches in recent years have brought a rich pottery material, which indicates that there were early settlements.



Photo 3. View by Langarica Canyon, Përmet.

Gjipe Canyon is another canyon formed in a deep valley with steep sides; it was formed as a result of karsts processes and current water erosion, which apparently had taken million years to get this form that it has today. This canyon is situated in the valley of the river of the same name. Its length varies up to 800 meters, width 10 meters and its height up to 120 meters.

The river has permeated almost half of its route, meandering in a rugged rocky relief and then it is inserted into a valley, creating one of the most beautiful canyons in the country, with a magnificent view to anyone who watches it. In this canyon in its last 400 meters you can clearly observe all the appropriate settings as identical, where the lateral sides of the steep rise to a height of up to 120 m, and with an exit in the sea in the form of a funnel which surprises us with an exotic picture surprises.



Photo 4. View by Gjipe Canyon, Vlora.

The nature, the greatest architect of all time, has not saved to give us even here on the steep slopes on both sides of the canyon some rocky mass, but also some separated rocks as a result of erosive activity of external factors, some strange forms, but also rare in its kind, to create the impression that they are masterfully sculpted by human hands.

When you enter inside, the narrowness reaches at about 25-30 m, and probably less, you can understand it better what magic you experience. The canyon is also a stunning beauty that preserves the ecosystem itself, where greenery on both sides is permanent, with a Mediterranean vegetation shrub and numerous green

TOURISTIC VALUES

Until the early 90s they have been virtually unused for tourist purposes. After the 92nd when Albania entered the path of democracy the canyons have been the subject of many tourists both domestically and abroad. Foreign tourists are generally Italian and French, but tourists from other countries are not missing as well.

In these last four - five years the number of visitors who enjoy the wonderful views of the canyons has increased significantly as both native and foreign tourists. Canyons can be visited in two ways, through the river by canoe, kayak or rubber boats or overland by vehicle or on foot.

The National Tourism Agency has begun to promote the values and the unique beauty of the canyon of Osumi identified as 3 million years old. Part of this initiative, in cooperation with the Albanian Rafting Federation Regulation, was a promotional trip of 8 waterfalls of 120 meters high, a work of art and nature, qualified as "Albanian Colorado".

In recent years improvements have been made in the services and hospitality as well. Cities where tourists can be accommodate are mainly Berat, Vlora, Saranda and Përmet.

CONCLUSION

In this article are identified some of beautiful canyons of South Albania, known by explorers as "The Miracle of Albania Nature".

It is necessary to underline that, geologic structure and Mediterranean climate (especially Mediterranean karsts) have created the possibility to form these canyons with great natural and touristic values. The canyons should not be defined as monuments in which the explorers have finished their studying because referring to their characteristic, canyons are in periodic changing.

As a result, the cooperation between explorers is considered as necessity to identify the values that are losing and to recommend the measures for preventing negative environment impact.

The lack of infrastructure and non adequate investments constitute an obstacle to domestic and foreign visitors. In these

objects you can observe very often the dump of the urban waste, about which the local authorities do not reveal interest, not taking any administrative measures which would prohibit the pollution in the future.

In these conditions, it is required the state interest, but as well the civil sensibility, for the protection of this natural inheritance, for the present and future generations.

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