



Geoheritage of the Central Folded Middle Atlas and the Middle Moulouya (Boulemane, Missour and Bou Naceur regions) : inventory and valorization

The study area concerns two structural domains, namely the central folded Middle Atlas and the Middle Moulouya plain. The folded Middle Atlas is an intracontinental mountain belt that culminates at 3326m at Jbel Bou Naceur. It is mainly constituted by Jurassic carbonates. However, the Middle Moulouya is a plain covered by detrital deposits of the Tertiary. This region has known a geological and geomorphological history that has allowed the discovery of many geosites and geomorphosites.

The present study consists in an inventory and an assessment of the sites of geological and geomorphological interest, which are located in two regions : Boulemane-Missour and Bou Naceur. These sites have been classified and inventoried by adopting a new approach of evaluation which results from the merging of three recent methodologies, modified and adapted to our concept. This evaluation procedure was carried out in three phases: preliminary evaluation, specific evaluation and quantitative evaluation. The first stage concerns the collection of bibliographic data and the field study. The second step is dedicated to the specific evaluation. Following this step, we elaborated two lists, one for geosites and one for geomorphosites. The different sites were identified and classified according to parameters and scores that determine the relevance of each site. Only sites that scored high were selected. The third and final step involves the quantitative evaluation of the selected geosites and geomorphosites. This results in an evaluation of their scientific, educational, geotourism, ecological, cultural, aesthetic values, their degrees of degradation and their tourist carrying capacity. The quantification of the different parameters allows an easy interpretation for a possible future geoconservation.

The 64 identified, classified and evaluated sites have an important scientific value and various additional values, including: i) educational value; ii) geotourism value; iii) ecological, aesthetic and/or cultural value.

Also, multi-interest itineraries have been proposed to illustrate this geodiversity through the central folded Middle Atlas and the plain of the Middle Moulouya.

The realization of this work, constitutes a contribution to the regional economic development, to the promotion of a responsible geotourism and to the geoconservation of this rich geoheritage.

Keywords: Geosites, Geomorphosites, Inventory, assessment, Boulemane – Missour – Bou Naceur, Middle Atlas folded, Middle Moulouya, Morocco.