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The promotion of geotourism in protected areas: a proposal of itinerary through the Matese Massif (Campania and Molise regions, Italy).

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The Matese Massif is a ca. 1000 km2 wide and NW-SE elongated carbonate relief, located in the inner sector of the Southern Apennine chain. It has a tabular setting with steep structural slopes bordering the central high mountain sector including its major peaks and is crossed from approximately west to east by the border between Campania and Molise regions.
The Matese Mountains represent a key area for the comprehension of the geological and tectonic evolution of the Southern Apennines since Mesozoic times. Its long-term geomorphological evolution has been controlled by Quaternary tectonics and climate variations that have allowed the temporary or permanent establishment of various environments and morphodynamics. Deposits and landforms originated by glacial, periglacial, karst and fluvial processes, along with a rich assemblage of tectonic-structural features and landforms of complex origin have given origin to a geological heritage of exceptional value.
The geosites actually censured within the Campanian sector of Matese are reported in the Geosites Map of Campania, available at the website of Campania Region and partly included in the Italian Geosites Inventory of ISPRA. The geosites of the Molise sector have been recently assessed within the geosite inventory carried out by Molise University. They are reported in the Geosites Map of Molise, available at the website of Molise Region, and partly included in the ISPRA's National Inventory of Geosites.
The Matese area is largely included in protected areas: the Campania portion falls within the Matese Regional Park, established in 2002, while most of the Molise sector falls in the extensive ZPS/SIC IT72222287. To better protect and exploit the unique natural and geological heritage of the Matese Massif, numerous initiatives aimed at the establishment of the National Park of Matese have continued for several years and very recent attempts to promote the Matese Geopark have been made, but unfortunately without any success. Meanwhile, there are various initiatives that promote geotourism separately in the Molise and Campania sectors. However, a network of geotourism initiatives linking the two sectors and allowing the exploitation of the geological heritage of the Matese area as a whole is still lacking.
Aim of this study is, obviously, the promotion of the geoheritage of the Matese Massif. Specific objects are to contribute to a better connectivity between its two sectors, the development of an overall geotourism network and, somehow, the establishment of the Matese National Park/Geopark.
We propose a first geological itinerary that runs through the entire Matese Massif, from south to north. The proposed itinerary includes geosites of local to national relevance and various scientific interest (from Paleontology to Geomorphology). It allows also non-scientific audiences to understand the main steps of the rich geological history of the Matese Mountains and the geomorphic processes that have given rise to the high variety of paleo- and active landscapes and landforms, but also to appreciate its natural heritage.