

*"THE FIFTH LAKE": AWARDED SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN THE ASPIRING GEOPARK
CONCA DE TREMP – MONTSEC (LLEIDA, SPAIN)*

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Keywords: tourism, sustainable, geopark, heritage

The Fifth Lake is a sustainable touristic product that consists of a five-day circular hike through a truly singular part of the aspiring Geopark Conca de Tremp – Montsec, from Eocene to Ordovician. It is a self-guided route that demands no great technical skills. It allows you to immerse in outstanding landscapes which are the result of millions of years of formation and to meet people through who transfer the essence and authenticity of a cultural territory.

The project was born in 2012 joining the efforts of the local people who wanted to offer a quality, specialized and non-seasonal touristic product which reflects the human side of tourism. The Association "Marques de Pastor" (Shepherd Marks), stakeholder of the aspiring Geopark, is in charge of the management of the Fifth Lake, formed by rural tourism accommodations of the area and a travel agency (Pirineu Emocio) which sells the product.

The circuit integrates natural and cultural heritages. It takes you to numerous viewpoints, full of geological history and singular geodiversity, where the Fifth Lake, Montcortés, is highlighted as a unique karstic lake at 1065 m. People can do birdwatching, discover both abandoned villages and villages that still full of life, and enjoy the stories and legends that talk about geomorphology and how people survive in the heart of these mountains.

To meet the goals of a responsible and sustainable tourism, the Fifth Lake follows three main criteria. First, the environmental criteria contribute to the conservation of trails and landscapes, which includes the commitment of local, national and abroad volunteers to restore the dry-stone walls. It also avoids tourists damaging or taking plants, animals or geological items and waste during the trail. Moreover, it promotes the usage of public transport, The Train of the Lakes, contributing to offset the carbon footprint of visitors. Second, it meets economic criteria reinvesting part of the price of the touristic product in the area and fostering local products. Finally, social criteria because it is a bottom-up project that uses and put in value the popular knowledge and facilitates cultural interchanges between visitors and locals. 2015 was the year of the consolidation of the Fifth Lake reaching over 150 bookings, it meant 1000 overnight stays out of season and a turnover of € 100,000. Thanks to these results, this touristic product has become a marketable, viable and sustainable. Moreover, due to its internationalization, this experience is a non-seasonal tourism, boosting local economies such as food processing and handicraft sectors. Consequently, it improves the self-esteem by local territory.

The Fifth Lake has been awarded as recognition of its innovative management and the sustainable practices: Fitur 2017 the "Best Active Tourism" for "National Nature in Spain"; in 2015, the "Singular initiatives for Protecting and Improving the Environment" by the Catalan Government and in 2013 the first Sustainable Tourism Prize in Catalonia.

Consequently, this project has played a key role in our territory as an example of good practices and it could be exported and reproduced to other Geopark's areas.