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# SHOWCAVE: a multidisciplinary research project to study, classify and mitigate the environmental impact in tourist caves

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## Abstract

Over the past decades, interest for the underground karst environments and its natural wonders has grown remarkably, not only from the scientific viewpoint, but also from an economic perspective. The so-called ‘show caves’ are caves made accessible to the public for touristic purposes, managed by a governmental or commercial organization. The numbers of visitors (up to 500,000/year/cave) and the profits deriving from such activities have recently gained importance at the global scale. The aim of this project is to provide an in-depth characterization of the environmental impacts related to tourist exploitation in the major Italian show caves. A multidisciplinary workforce, composed by five research units, is acting in the project, focusing on the biological, palaeobiological, geological, hydrogeological, archaeological and physical components of the cave environment with concrete opportunities of trans-disciplinary collaborations. The major Italian show caves have been involved to serve as model sites for the project. This paper will introduce the survey and state-of-the art of the Italian prehistoric show caves.

**Keywords:** Prehistoric caves, management, tourism

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