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GEOCONSERVATION : INTERNATIONAL ADVANCEMENTS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

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Geoconservation aims the identification, protection and management of geological heritage, those exceptional occurrences of geodiversity with particular importance for science, education, geotourism, and culture. During the last two decades, geoconservation has been gradually entering into the geosciences' community. Recently, Henriques *et al.* (2011) presented a theoretical framework justifying geoconservation as an emerging geoscience. Today, there are institutions where geoconservation is researched and developed (universities, geological surveys, scientific associations). The study and characterisation of geosites uses the same scientific approach employed in geology and research results are published in journals and discussed in congresses. The first international journal fully dedicated to geoconservation – *Geoheritage* – has started its publication in 2009 under the umbrella of the European Association for the Conservation of the Geological Heritage (ProGEO). Besides general conceptual papers, up to now *Geoheritage* has published geoconservation examples from countries such as Australia, Brazil, Colombia, France, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, and Vietnam.

Geological heritage – materialized in geosites properly managed – establishes multiple links with the society. For example, the geopark concept based on the conservation of geological heritage can promote geotourism activities and generate sustainable development of local populations, together with biological and cultural resources. Under the auspices of UNESCO, the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) created in 2004 has today almost 80 geoparks around the world.

In spite of this general positive trend, geoconservation faces some future challenges: i) strengthening of geoconservation in international institutions (IUCN, IUGS, IGU, UNESCO); ii) consolidation of a global inventory of geosites with international scientific relevance; iii) publication of adequate legislation to protect geosites; iv) reinforcement of science-orientated decisions and science research; v) sustainable GGN growing; vi) involvement of young people and promotion of jobs creation.

Reference

HENRIQUES, M.H., PENA DOS REIS, R., BRILHA, J. & MOTA, T.S. 2011. Geoconservation as an emerging geoscience. *Geoheritage*, 3 (2): 117-128.