GEOLOGICAL HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SANTIAGO ISLAND (CAPE VERDE)

J.M. PEREIRA¹ & J. BRILHA²

1- Departamento de Geociências, Instituto Superior da Educação, Cape Verde
2. Earth Sciences Centre, University of Minho, Portugal
E-mail: jmvpereira@mail.pt

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Nature conservation in Africa is not a new issue. Some countries are well aware about the need to pursue conservation actions in order to preserve local biodiversity. At the same time these countries have realised that this effort can generate important tourist incomes. Nevertheless, geoconservation actions are not generally considered in the definition of nature conservation strategies. The Assembly of the African Union approved the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in July 2003. This document establishes a ‘road map’ for African Countries to manage their natural resources in a more sustainable way. Within this concept, the present work should be faced as a proposal for Cape Verde authorities.

Ten small volcanic islands located about 450 km from the African coast constitute the Atlantic archipelago of Cape Verde. The smallest is the Santa Luzia Island with an area of 35 km² and the largest is the Santiago Island, the administrative centre of the archipelago with 991 km². This work about the national geological heritage is the very first study ever made in Cape Verde. For logistical reasons the work is limited to the Santiago Island in spite of the intentions to extend the same methodology to all islands. The methodology was based on the following steps: i) inventory of geosites; ii) geological characterisation; iii) assessment of the vulnerability and relevance.

The inventory resulted in the selection of 37 geosites, all of them with educational value. About one third of the geosites identified can also be used for geotourism activities. In recent years, tourism is gaining increasing relevance in Cape Verde economy. Due to the geological setting of Cape Verde, geotourism can be an excellent opportunity to promote sustainable development at different levels. Therefore, national authorities should support geosites conservation and the development of interpretation structures. The raise of awareness regarding geoconservation and geotourism is of paramount importance. Local populations, students and teachers should be involved in a national educational program.

We hope that Cape Verde authorities recognize the importance of geoconservation well integrated in nature conservation policies and strategies at national and local levels.