

Abstract title

PROTECTED AREAS INTERPRETATION BASED ON GEOLOGY

Authors

BRILHA JOSÉ BERNARDO ¹, DIAS GRACIETE ¹

presenter's e-mail: jbrilha@dct.uminho.pt

1 - University of Minho

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Abstract

During the last couple of decades, many earth scientists around the world stated that the creation of protected areas rarely take into account geological features. In fact, many protected areas are normally justified just in terms of scenery and wildlife. Without denying the obvious relevance, conservation strategies are almost based on the preservation of fauna and flora. It is quite surprisingly to note that for conservationists, neither the landscape is considered a result of geological processes nor wildlife is considered to be highly dependent on the conjugation of weather and geology. During recent years, geologists are trying to persuade park managers, conservation leaders, and politicians about the need to implement geoconservation strategies. This task is being based on several arguments: i) the fact that biodiversity is intrinsically linked to geodiversity; ii) the need of urgent conservation of certain geotopes due to their high scientific, didactic, and aesthetic values; iii) the importance of geotourism revenues to local populations, and iv) the need to implement a rational exploration of natural resources in order to ensure sustainable development. The "geoconservationists war" is mainly against public unawareness and well-established interests. Regarding public unawareness of geoconservation, two force lines should be implemented: i) enhance Geosciences education in the school curricula, and ii) raise sensibility about the significance of geological systems in our daily lives. Protected areas constitute key zones to implement geoconservation strategies. Since 2000 Portuguese geologists from the Minho University and from the Geological Survey are working together in natural parks from Northern Portugal. The adopted strategy will be presented, which consider that, for any audience, rather than just offering information, interpretation is also required. A strong effort is being made in the parks under study in order to produce: i) interpretative panels; ii) materials to support geological trails and viewpoints; iii) geological guidebooks and simplified geological and geomorphological maps; iv) web pages; v) staff training sessions, and vi) guided field trips. Besides these deliverables mostly directed to raise awareness of general public and students, technical geological information as geological, mineral resources, and geosites maps is also provided to park managers due to its importance for the implementation of park management plans.

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