GEOCONSERVATION IN ROMANIA – CURRENT STATE AND PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

The complex geological structure of Romania comprises a great variety of rocks ranging from Precambrian to Quaternary. It includes many geological sites that are of great importance, due either to their spectacular morphology (e.g. caves, mud volcanoes, basalt columns), or to their scientific interest (exceptional fossil or mineral occurrences). In spite of the multitude of important geosites, Romanian legislation does not include specific measures of geoconservation. In consequence, many geosites are not recognized at their full potential, and their protection is often a matter of luck: sites that fall within the perimeter of a natural park are fortunate enough to benefit from protection, whereas those outside such areas do not. A special status is given to speleological sites, generally considered part of the national heritage and protected by law. The isolated geological sites (e.g. not part of a larger natural park) that were declared natural reserves (usually corresponding to an IUCN Category III protection area) during the communist regime have mostly been forgotten and only exist as such on paper. They are administered by the County Agencies for Environmental Protection, but their administration usually means they are merely part of a list, with no actual protection measures in the field.

However, recent initiatives were successful in promoting the need for geoconservation, and several geosites were recognized as such and achieved law protection. Two main directions are noteworthy in this respect: conservation of large areas, under the geopark concept, or conservation of small-sized specific sites. The most successful example of areal geoconservation is represented by the Haţeg Country Dinosaurs Geopark (HCDG), created and administered by the University of Bucharest. Establishing the HCDG as national protected area was a lengthy process, as it involved a large inhabited surface and it involves not only the conservation of geological, but also of the natural and cultural heritage. The efforts in the area were successful, and culminated with the inclusion of the HCDG as the 18th member of the European Geopark Network. The HCDG also stands as a prototype, a model for new such initiatives.

Some initiatives for the protection of small, isolated geological sites were also successful in recent years. Since the protected area is much smaller, it becomes much easier to manage such sites, especially when local authorities can be convinced to act in this respect. Many local authorities simply do not know that important geosites are present in their locality, and become interested in protecting such sites once they become aware of their existence. Therefore, we consider that some of the most important measures to be taken with respect to the conservation of small geosites is to inventory such sites and to document their importance to the relevant local authorities, as well as involve private companies that are willing to fund the site's protection and promotion.

Keywords: *geoconservation, Romania, geosite, geopark, geoheritage*