

GEOPARK AROUCA: A NEW PROJECT TO PROMOTE GEOCONSERVATION IN PORTUGAL

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The concept of linking sustainable development with geological heritage, education and tourism is rather new. During the last decade, the European Geoparks Network (EGN) has developed this strategy with notable results across several countries. In Portugal, in spite of its very rich geodiversity, the Geopark model is just starting. The Geopark Naturtejo da Meseta Meridional, submitted in 2005 to the European Network, is the first attempt to create a new paradigm in the Portuguese geoconservation. This work will present the main features of a new proposal for a Portuguese Geopark to be submitted to the EGN in 2008. The geological research done on the Arouca region (Aveiro, Central Portugal) allowed the identification of a remarkable set of geosites with different types of interests: stratigraphical, petrological, palaeontological, geomorphological and mining. Some of these geosites have high scientific, pedagogical, and tourist relevance.

A project team was put together with specialists from four universities and representatives of local authorities and private companies. In fact, one of the particularities of this project is related with the rewarding association between geoconservation and the exploration of a geological resource. During the last couple of years a significant number of Palaeozoic fossils (giant Ordovician trilobites and ichnofossils) were studied and preserved as a result of the normal activity of a slate quarry. The quarry owner is the first to collect all the fossils and to put them available for scientific research. Some new species will be defined in the near future. A brand new Interpretative Centre is being build by the company, which will be the headquarters of the future Geopark. The institutional support of this project is assured by the Arouca City Council and by the Ministry of Science.

KEYWORDS

Geoconservation; geopark; cooperation with quarry company; Portugal,