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Linking geological Heritage Conservation to Education and Research at the University of Bucharest

A Andrasanu
University of Bucharest, 1, N. Balcescu, urban district 1, 010041, Bucharest, Romania,

Since Rio Conference it is recognized that if the Earth's environment is to be respected, a better understanding of the geological, biological and physical processes that have left their mark on the Earth's surface is required. A good knowledge of geodiversity and a healthy respect for what it represents is an important factor in the holistic approach for sustainable development.

Promote geosciences, raise public awareness, educate decision-makers, made children to discover the Earth, and young people to pursue a career in geosciences are continuous objectives of geoscientists, universities and institutions.

Development of geoeducation was a response to the need of practical use in education and public awareness of all geological assets identified and classified by different professional geological associations, ProGEO, specialists from natural parks, geoparks, museums and other working groups (Gonggrijp, 1999, Page, 1999, Fassoulas, 2003, Weber, 2003, Andrasanu, 2005). Three events could be considered as milestone for the proces: (i) the 1st International Symposium on the Conservation of our Geological Heritage, Digne, France, in 1991; (ii) creation of the European Geoparks Network (EGN), in 2000; (iii) creation of the Global Geoparks Network (GGN), in 2004 (UNESCO, 2004).

The geopark concept, as we know today, is the result of continuous efforts of dedicated specialists and innovative approaches in using local geological heritage as main resource for socio-economic development with geoeducation playing a key role (Frey, 2003; Martini, 2003; Zouros, 2004). The geoparks are places of practical use in geotourism, education and public awareness of all geological assets and for an integrated approach and a better understanding of the close connection of natural environment and socio-economic needs for sustainable development plans.

In different countries, over the last years partnerships of universities and geoparks developed interdisciplinary research projects, new MSc curriculum or intensive courses in geoconservation to form professionals able to provide a holistic view of nature and to work for promotion of geoscience, raise public awareness, educate decision-makers (Andrasanu, 2005, Corte Bacci, 2008, Brihlla, 2009, Zouros and Mckeever, 2009)

University of Bucharest developed research and educational projects (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci) both for geological heritage conservation in the frame of ProGEO and also in fostering geoparks development in Romania. The paper presents geoeducation as part of the geoconservation activities, and the role teaching staff and students are playing in curriculum design, research and educational activities, sustained or developed by University of Bucharest. Three examples were selected to be detailed: (i) a new MSc program Applied Geo-biology in natural and cultural heritage conservation; (ii) Geoconservation as a case study in the frame of the European Virtual Seminar in Sustainable Development (http://www.openuniversiteit.nl), and (iii) Geosciences as part of outdoor learning activities in the frame of the international project In and Out (http://www.viauc.com).

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