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The inventory of the Portuguese geological heritage: a good example of scientific cooperation between universities

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Initiatives of identification, protection, and valuation of the Portuguese abiotic natural heritage have been carried out mainly by the scientific community, and particularly by the academic community. The official institutions responsible for nature conservation have focused their policies primarily on biodiversity issues and the relevance of geoconservation in the Portuguese geological survey was always minor, compared with homologous institutions from countries like Spain, for example. In this context, the academic community has led geoconservation research and activities in Portugal, especially since the late 1990s, following the development of this theme in the European continent. The first systematic inventory of the Portuguese geological heritage is a clear example of the academic collaboration that characterizes the geoconservation in Portugal. Three hundred and twenty six geosites with international or national relevance have been inventoried under the scope of the scientific research project “Identification, characterisation and conservation of geological heritage: a geoconservation strategy for Portugal”, financed by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology between 2007 and 2010 (PTDC/CTE-GEX/64966/2006). The inventory (one of the project’s outputs) was coordinated by the University of Minho team with the participation of the universities of Algarve, Aveiro, Azores, Coimbra, Évora, Lisboa, Madeira, Nova de Lisboa, Porto, and Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro. The inventory procedures were based on the ProGEO methodology, i.e. definition of geological frameworks followed by the identification of representative geosites with national and international relevance for each framework. The geosites were selected exclusively based on their scientific value and support twenty-seven frameworks. For each geological framework a leading geoscientist from a university was responsible for the scientific characterization of the framework, to invite collaborators to identify representative geosites, and to assess the scientific value and vulnerability of the geosites. In the end, seventy geoscientists, mainly from universities, took part in the scientific results that are now important raw data to support nature conservation initiatives. The inventory will integrate the natural heritage database (SIPNAT) under the responsibility of the Institute of Nature Conservation and Biodiversity (ICNB), as expected in the Portuguese legislation for nature conservation (DL 142/2008) and established in a protocol signed between the ICNB and the University of Minho.