



The Osumi Canyon, Photo: A. Serjani

Osumi river canyons, Skrapari region (Albania)

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ProGEO-Albania as a branch of the European Association for the Geological Heritage Conservation in Albania. Every year we organize geotrips to the different geological sites and geoparks of Albania. This year (2015) the trip went the Osumi river canyon.

Since the ProGEO meeting in Belogradchik in Bulgaria in May 1995 the Albanian members of ProGEO have done a lot of studies together with geologists of Geological Survey of Albania and albanian geographers in field of Geological Heritage Conservation.

The number of ProGEO memers in Albania last years is up to 50 geologists, geographers, teachers, students from Tirana, Durrresi, Korca, Elbasani, Shkodra, Kukesi and Peshkopia.

The most important events last year were the scientific sessions:



Osumi River and Canyon. Picture from "Geosites of Skrapari Region."

- "Geological Heritage Conservation in Albania" held in Scientific Conference dedicated to the 90-Aniversary of Geological Survey of Albania on November, 2012 and
- "Geological Heritage and Geotourism" in Balkan Geological Association Congress held in Tirana on September, 2014. Here were presented 12 oral presentations and 22 posters. There were young participants from Albania, Romania, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Hungary.

Another important scientific event is International Symposium of Geography: Landscapes perception, knowledge, awareness and action, organised by Faculty of Geography of Spiru Haret University in Romania. Last three years 20 ProGEO members have participated in this symposium with posters and oral presentations.

The geotrip this year went to the Osumi River Canyons, in the Skrapari Region. The aim of the trip was to visit to

the most important geological sites and landscapes of the Skrapari Region and present these especially for students and additionally visit the city of Berati which have cultural heritage included in UNESCO world heritage. This was set in perspective and linked to information on environmental protection of the area.

Large canyons is a prominent feature in the landscape



Participants at the Berati Castle. Photo: A. Serjani

of the Skrapari Region. The most interesting of these are the Osumi River canyon. It is 13km long, 70-80m deep, and 4-35m wide between the Hambull village up to Çorovoda town which is the center of the Skrapari Region. The canyon is formed in bedded limestone rocks, of horizontal strike of Upper Cretaceous-Eocene age. Limestone rocks are covered by Oligocene flysch formation. It has vertically limestone walls. The Carbonate formation constitutes an underground karst water basin. Walking along the floor of the canyon, you are astonished by the natural phenomena. In some parts of the canyon there are waterfalls. Into vertically walls there are formed a lot of karst caves, amongst them the well known "Bride's Cave" near the the Bigazi village. The cave as well as other karst forms are linked to local legends such as "the foots of Saint Abas Ali".

The canyon represents a very interesting geocosystem with vegetation of different kinds linked to the limestones and the flysch sediments. In the karst holes of the limestone walls a lot of nests of doves and other birds are found. The River have several fish species. The Canyon has geological and geomorphological scientific values. It is very interesting in didactic and geotourist aspects. Every year, teams (especially Czech teams) use the river for rowing sports. On the edge of the canyon there is built visitors facilities included camping sites.

The Gradeci Canyon is placed next to the town of Çorovoda. This canyon is formed in the most southern part



Gradeci Canyon, Photo Photo A. Serjani

of the Kulmaka anticline. It is very deep (about 300m) with limestones on both sides. The Gradeci Canyon can be visited getting up along with the road to Devrie Pass, or going along with the river bed from Çorovoda by foot. During the geotour we visited the Piro Goshi karst Cave and the Guaku karst Spring.

The old city of Berati is an important cultural Heritage site inscribed in the UNESCO world heritage list. We visited the Mangalem museum and the Castle with the Onufri Museum. Here it is a lot of ancient artifacts and pictures of cultural and historical importance. The Berati Castle is built on the northern flank of the Gorica carbonate anticline, while the Osumi River has cut through this structure forming a deep Gorge.

The geotour was held over two days in June 2015. 41 geologists, geographers and students participated. Due to the efforts of Prof. Merita Dollma and Adil Neziraj the organization, accommodation and visits to Osumi and Gradeci canyons, to Piro Goshi Cave and Guaku Spring were a success. Local tourist guides accompanied us to the geological sites. This geotour was complex, combining view of geosites with cultural heritage and with environment protection. The participants were

inspired not only by visiting geosites and cultural heritage, but also as a result of good company and discussions. They will certainly contribute for distribution the ProGEO ideas in the Albanian universities, schools and other geological and geo science institutions. Some of them are planning geotourist activities in their regions.



In Piro Goshi karst cave, Photo: F. Cani

UNESCO Global Geoparks: geo-heritage recognized at the highest level

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On 17 November 2015, during the 38th session of UNESCO's General Conference, the 195 Member States decided to endorse the statutes of a new international program: the International Geoscience and Geoparks Program (IGGP). This allows the Organisation to more closely reflect the societal challenges of Earth Science today and provides an international status to a former network of sites of geological significance.

The creation of a new label was also ratified by this organisation: "UNESCO Global Geoparks". This new label expresses governmental recognition of the importance of managing outstanding geological sites and landscapes in a holistic manner.

Together with World Heritage sites and Biosphere Reserves, UNESCO Global Geoparks form a complete range of sustainable development tools and make an invaluable contribution to the realisation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals by combining global and local perspectives.

The new IGGP is constituted by two activities: the International Geoscience Programme (IGCP) and the UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGG). IGCP fosters interdisciplinary geoscientific research among researchers internationally, through joint research work, meetings and workshops and is well known by the geoscientific community since 1972.

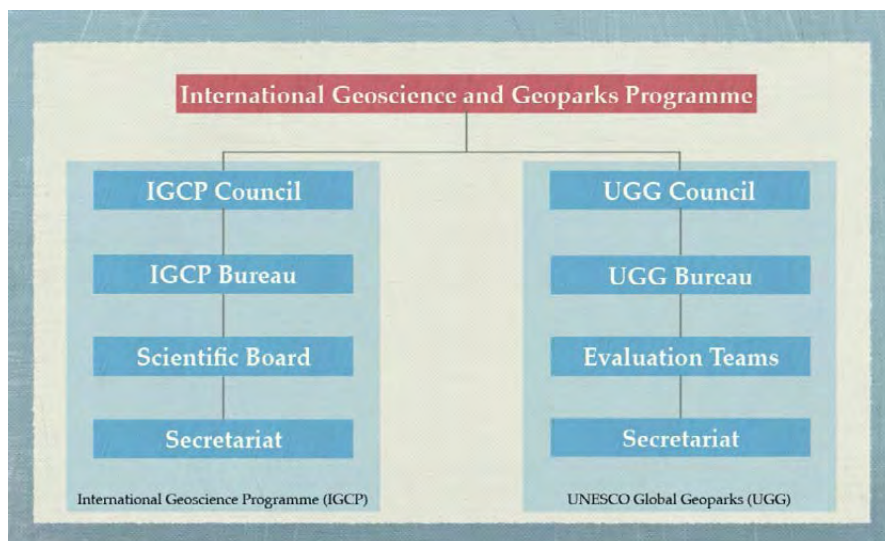


Presently, 120 UNESCO Global Geoparks are located in 33 countries (represented in red).

UGG is the mechanism of international cooperation by which areas of geological heritage of international value, through a bottom-up approach to conserving that heritage, support each other to engage with local communities to promote awareness of that heritage and adopt a sustainable approach to the development of the area. After a first aborted attempt to create a UNESCO Geoparks Programme back in 2001, now this organisation finally recognizes geoparks as relevant strategies of territorial management supported on the conservation of geoheritage with international significance.

UNESCO has now two instruments to recognise geological heritage: a) integration of a geosite in the World Heritage List when its "outstanding universal value" is fully justified (mainly based on criterion (viii) of the WH convention); b) recognition of a territory as UNESCO Global Geopark, based on geosites with geological significance at the regional international level.

This new international recognition will certainly increase the visibility of geoheritage and geoconservation worldwide. The responsibility of all geoconservationists will also reach a new level because sound science-based decisions will be needed in order to select the best geosites and to implement proper management.



General setting of the new International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme of UNESCO (IGGP).

Geoheritage as a part of nature conservation strategies

During the last years, ProGEO have been active in promoting Geoheritage and geoconservation as a part of nature conservation strategies. We have successfully contributed to motions in the IUCN system (see the Reykjavik declaration (last issue of ProGEO NEWS). ProGEO has also participated in the fitness check of the EU habitat and bird directives issued by the EU Commission. The result from this fitness check is now beginning to be revised and so far, no reference to Geoheritage has been spotted in any texts. ProGEO have therefore sent this open letter to EU officials in the hope that our voice is not forgotten:

Open ProGEO letter addressed to:

Karmenu Vella, Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
Giovanni La Via, Chair of the European Parliament's ENVI Committee
Hans Bruyninckx, Executive Director, European Environment Agency

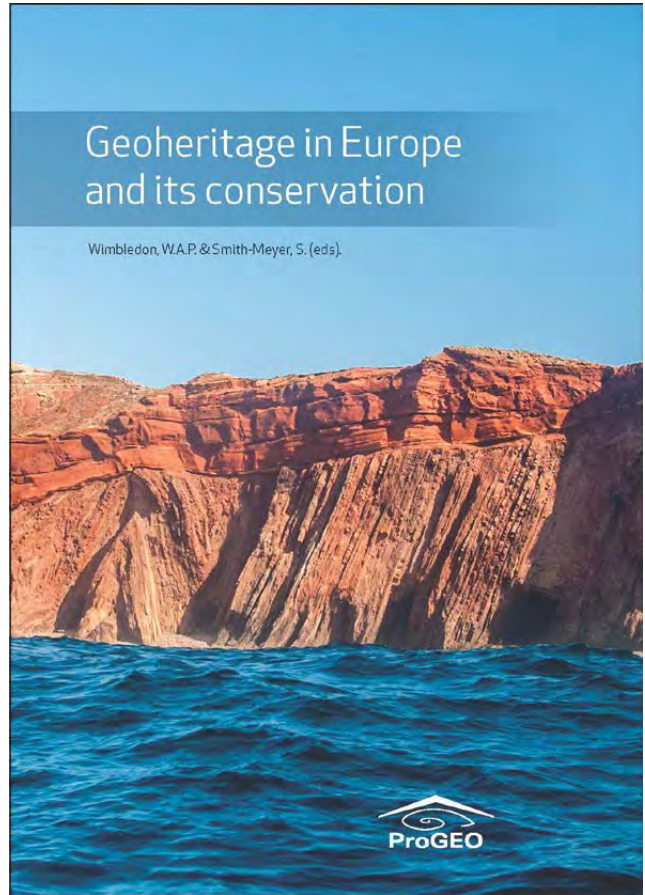
The common EU legislative framework that sets the standards for nature protection across European Member States is provided by two main pieces of legislation that are undergoing a Fitness Check.

The European Association for the Conservation of the Geological Heritage – ProGEO and many of its individual and institutional members have participated in the public consultation trying to demonstrate that having the whole EU nature protection legislation based only in Birds and Habitats Directives is putting at risk a crucial part of European nature: the geological heritage that records Europe's evolution, and the geodiversity that underpins its biodiversity.

What is exactly the problem?

Present EU nature legislation does not truly cover all types of natural elements that are under threat and which need to be properly managed.

Natural heritage includes both biological and geological heritage. The latter is made up of geological sites of interest, as well as landscapes that are shaped and defined by their geological features. Fossils, rocks, minerals, landforms and geological structures are just as much part of nature as plants and animals. These geological features also include major scientific assets shared by all countries, as well as educational and cultural resources, and thus need to be preserved and properly managed as geological heritage, part of our natural heritage.



Geoheritage in Europe and its conservation

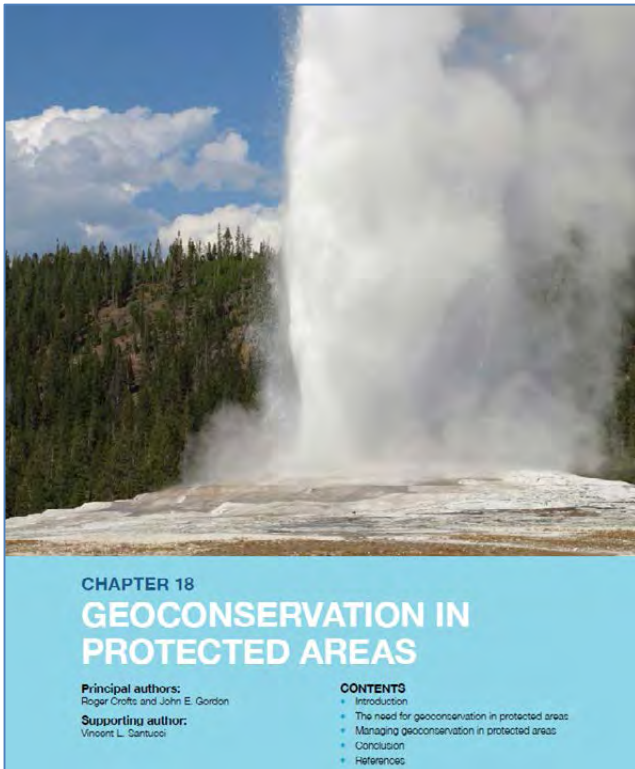
Wimbledon, W.A.P. & Smith-Meyer, S. (eds).

ProGEO has for many years worked hard to document the need for geoconservation in Europe and beyond. Our book "Geoheritage in Europe and its conservation" documents the state of geoconservation in Europe and the need for future work. The best strategy for Europe would be an upgrade of the EU nature conservation directive system to cover all nature, not only habitats and birds.

In addition, geodiversity assures fundamental support services to biodiversity, and contributes significantly to ecosystem services. EU nature conservation legislation is currently primarily focused on the conservation of biodiversity. Its implementation will be strengthened, and aided by a wider perspective including the conservation of geodiversity.

To some degree, geodiversity should already be included, as it is fundamental to ecosystem functions and services, but the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives is not clear, and in part ignorant, with respect to the abiotic aspect of nature.

The two "nature" Directives, as implemented today, restrict the social perspective of what is nature and which parts of it deserve to be preserved for the future, making it difficult to properly manage geoheritage under the current framework.



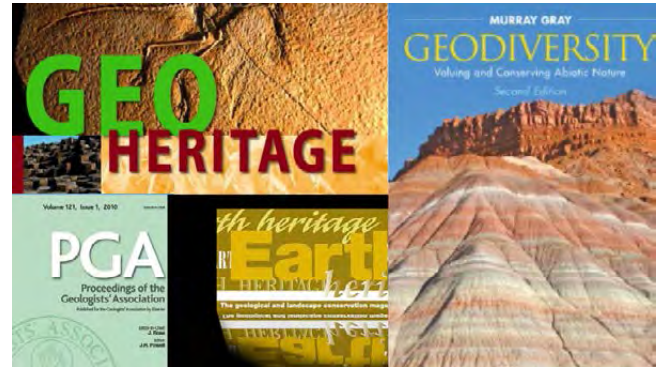
The chapter *Geoconservation in protected areas* is found in the new IUCN book: *“Protected Area Governance and Management”* and is an example of the need to integrate geoconservation in nature conservation all over the world.

A clearer Directive’s text in this regard and its stronger implementation will contribute to a better and holistic approach to nature conservation. Without it, the degradation of an important part of Europe’s natural heritage – the geoheritage – will continue, and geo sites of importance to future European generations will be lost.

Proper conservation and management of geoheritage and geodiversity will also benefit biodiversity and increase its resilience. Both are fully compatible, and nature and society will benefit of such an approach. Rec(2004)3 of the Council of Europe, and Resolution 5.048 of IUCN (Jeju, 2012) promote this holistic view of nature conservation. European states should abide to these international regulations and support the ideal of a holistic approach to nature conservation.

ProGEO wants to stress the importance of inclusive strategies to guarantee the conservation of geological heritage in EU nature legislation. At the international level, UNESCO has now two instruments to recognise geological heritage:

(a) the integration of geosites in the World Heritage List when “outstanding universal value” is fully justified (criterion viii of the WH convention);



Geoheritage has been well documented over the last years and it should be no reason that geoconservation should not be in the mainstream of nature conservation strategies.

(b) recognition of a territory as UNESCO Global Geopark based on geosites with geological significance at the regional international level.

However, there is not a single EU mechanism to protect these (and many others) exceptional occurrences. Therefore, we urge the EU to implement a solid nature protection legislation that integrates both biodiversity and geodiversity, and considers geoheritage as part of natural heritage. Any other way forward is actually a step back.

New ProGEO executive committee

After the autumn’s elections a new ProGEO executive committee has been formed:

- Gunnel Ransed – Sweden
- Iirini Theodossiou-Drandaki – Greece (second secretary)
- Jan Urban – Poland
- João Rocha – Portugal
- Kevin Page – United Kingdom
- Lars Erikstad – Norway (executive secretary)
- Lesley Dunlop – United Kingdom
- Lovisa Ásbjörnsdóttir – Iceland
- Nizamettin Kazanci – Turkey
- Radoslav Nakov – Bulgaria
- Sven Lundqvist – Sweden (treasurer)
- Tapio Kananoja – Finland

New vice president

Afat Serjani (Albania) has been elected new leader of the ProGEO working group for southeastern Europe and thereby new vice president of ProGEO

Geoheritage under threat

As can be seen from the open letter to EU officials we argue that Geoheritage in Europe is under threat. We do, however, lack documentation on the fate of European geosites. If we scan our records we have some few examples in ProGEO NEWS discussing special geosites that has been destroyed or are directly threatened during the last years (see for example ProGEO NEWS 4, 2012 and ProGEO NEWS 4 2013 geosites on Crimea).

We will, however need to collect more examples of the successes and failures of European geoconservation. The failures are at this stage especially important in documenting that the Geoheritage is a part of nature also under threat and that it is necessary to include Geoheritage in European nature conservation strategies. We will therefore urge our members to send in documentation from different parts of Europe to illustrate this points. Please send in examples in a simple text format or as contributions to ProGEO NEWS with text and pictures that illustrate both the Geoheritage values as well as the threat. The material will be used in strengthening our argumentation towards EU, single countries and international organizations.



European Geosciences Union General assembly 2016

The meeting (Vienna 17-22 of April) will contain a session on Geoheritage and Geodiversity (**SSS3.6/EOS7**) convened by Benjamin van Wyk de Vries, Zbigniew Zwoliński, Paola Coratza, Marco Giardino, Hanneke van den Acker, Emmanuel Reynard, Sjoerd Kluiving, Thomas Kissler, Grazina Skridlaite, Alicja Najwer, Erika Vye and Stefanie Zecha. The themes of the session are linked to the terms, which are being used more and more frequently in scientific nomenclature: Geoheritage and Geodiversity.

The concept of geoheritage and geodiversity have aroused strong interest and debate, not only of researchers in Earth Sciences but also of experts in biol-

ogy, spatial planning, tourism and cultural heritage, especially those interested in integrated and interdisciplinary approaches. The importance of conserving geodiversity and geoheritage is now widely acknowledged and introduced in the European Landscape Convention and the EU Soil Strategy. Several attempts have been made to define and assess geoheritage and geodiversity. As with biodiversity, when describing the geodiversity of an area it can refer to different aspects, such as the maximum variety as well as those elements and patterns that are characteristic for the genesis of a specific area. At present, there is a raising awareness of the complex connections that exist between geoheritage, biological and cultural heritage. In our session, we want to address these subjects, including current methods of research and debate on geodiversity and geoheritage in international as well as national scientific worlds, from the global to the local scale.

In particular, we invite presentations and posters related to the following themes:

- methodological presentations (definitions, approaches, context),
- presentations of methods (mapping, assessment, classification and quantification),
- case studies of geodiversity, geoheritage, geo(morpho)sites and geomonuments,
- especially studies addressing a more sustainable land use,
- geoparks and geoheritage conservation, management and promotion,
- links and interactions between geoheritage and geodiversity, bio- and cultural
- diversity and heritage,
- geoparks, geotourism and geoheritage conservation, management and promotion,
- educational aspects of geoheritage and geodiversity.

The session is co-organized by the International Association of Geomorphologists' Working Group on Geomorphosites and the Working Group on Landform Assessment for Geodiversity, and ProGEO, the European Association for the Conservation of the Geological Heritage. We are organizing the publication of the session's proceedings in a special issue of an international peer-reviewed journal free of charge (subject to acceptance).

Detailed information on how to submit an abstract can be found at: http://egu2016.eu/abstract_management/how_to_submit_an_abstract.html Deadline for receipt of abstracts is **13 Jan 2016**, 13:00 CET.

For more information: http://www.egu2015.eu/support_and_distinction.html

Three important meetings next year:

- International Geologic Congress (IGC), Cape Town, South Africa, 27 August – 4 Sept. 2016, <http://www.35igc.org/>, The deadline for abstract submissions is 31st January 2016. Consider submitting to the *IGC Geoheritage Theme Session*: <http://www.35igc.org/Themes/1/Geoheritage-and-Conservation>; GSG Steering Committee members, Patrick McKeever and Enrique Díaz-Martínez, are conveners (champions) of this session.
- IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC), Honolulu, Hawaii USA, 1 – 10 September 2016, <http://www.iucnworldconservationcongress.org/>,
- UNESCO Global Geoparks Conference, South Devon, UK, 26 – 30 September 2016, <http://ggn2016.com/about-ggn2016/>, The call for abstracts will be issued in January 2016.

Deadline next issue of ProGEO NEWS: Mars 15th. 2016

Please do not forget to send contributions to ProGEO NEWS. Members are interested in things that happen all over the world, your experiences, geosites, everyday geotopes and landscapes, geoconservation and geotourism efforts! ProGEO news is published on the internet

www.progeo.se

Please send your contributions 500 – 2000 words with photographs, maps and figures clearly marked as a ProGEO NEWS contribution to:

lars.erikstad@nina.no

If longer texts are needed, please contact the editor

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