

Geological heritage assessment as the basis for geoparks creation in Chapada Diamantina (Bahia-Brazil)

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Chapada Diamantina consists in a group of mountains and karst reliefs, sculpted in siliciclastic and carbonate rocks from the Proterozoic Eon, which extends for around 65.000 km² located in the center of the Bahia State in northeast Brazil. During the 19th century the extraction of gold and diamonds was the main economic activity. With the exhaustion of the reserves in the early 20th century, its economy declined. Tourism uplifted the economy of some cities of this region during the 80^s decade of the 20th century. This activity is mainly based in the geological heritage represented by the landscapes, waterfalls and caves.

An inventory of the geological heritage was made, followed by the development of a specific methodology for the assessment of 40 geosites. This procedure is the support for the proposal of creation of three geoparks in this region, which will help the conservation and promotion of the Chapada Diamantina's geological heritage. These actions will also increase and add value to the tourism that is on course nowadays, helping to expand the opportunities for other cities of this region.

The assessment methodology is based in 20 parameters, divided by 4 groups of values, as follows: intrinsic, scientific, touristic and use/management value. This group of values was later used to establish an order for the scientific, touristic and conservation use, so as to rank the relevance of the inventoried geosites. Eight geosites were considered with international relevance and nine with national relevance. Comparing the field considerations for the level of protection and the results obtained for the conservation value, some proposals for geosites conservation and promotion were prepared.

The creation of geoparks in Chapada Diamantina will raise geotourism in that region and contribute for the consolidation of the sustainable development. It will also be helpful tasks for the territorial planning and management, bringing and expanding new opportunities for the population of many municipalities that nowadays don't face tourism and conservation as profitable and necessary activities.

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