

Session 5: Environmental Priorities: Conservation Models for Working Landscapes

The Ichnological Park of Penha Garcia: bringing it back to Nature and sustainable enjoyment (what's next?)

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Penha Garcia is a small village with less than 1000 inhabitants. This year Penha Garcia celebrates 750 years of a history made by wars and hardships. This village suffers from a fast decrease of population characterised by an ageing population and lower productivity due to migration of working people to the city. Economic activities are still based on a the primary sector and traditional industry. Since 2003 the process of tourism development was started in this territory. Bypassed by the main country tourist routes, this Portuguese hinterland is waking up to Nature Tourism, where the visitor meets pristine landscapes, genuine people and hospitality.

The Ichnological Park of Penha is the core and case study of the Geopark Naturtejo Meseta Meridional, the only Portuguese Geopark. Actions already undertaken by Idanha-a-Nova municipality with the help of Penha Garcia community include restoration of the medieval castle (nowadays a wonderful viewpoint) and the watermill complex (site museum with the Fossils House), as well as the ancient paths. The Fossils Trail and the Climbing School were the next steps to create visit corridors to control environmental pressure. The Ichnological Park was defined mainly on the existesting geological heritage and astounding invertebrate trace fossils with 480 M.y. and all the area was protected by the law of the Cultural Heritage. Since 2004 there are regular guided visits. Only three years have shown an increase of 40,5% in the visitors number, almost reaching 9000 in 2006, year of integration of the territory in the European Geoparks Network, with 123,8% more foreigner visitors. The needs of visitor attendance and interpretation of natural and cultural sites lead to creation of a Tourism Office and it is being carried out recuperation of quartzite houses to constitute the Palaeozoic Museum.

A new period is beginning: an action plan is proposed for the next five years in order to mitigate the extent of the landscape change. Five strategies must be followed in order to benefit the geomonument: ranging from restoring riverside flora to minimizing building impact in landscape; cleaning of infrastructure; implementation of geoconservation procedures and research; improvement of the management policies; innovating interpretation with social and environmental-friendly approaches.



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