

SUMMARY

Legal and practical protection of caves in Poland

Evaluation of caves as natural heritage should regard several following criteria related to function of these objects and their perception: a) caves as aesthetic and cultural objects, b) caves as places characterized by specific environment necessary for existence of unique mineral aggregates, fauna and flora, c) caves as evidences of geological past and matters of paleontological, archeological and biological studies. The specific character of caves determines diverse threats: external (e.g. quarrying) and internal (caving, public access).

In Polish law system caves are protected if they are situated within the areas of legal protection (national parks and nature reserves are the most adequate forms of their protection) or established as sites of protection (nature monuments, documentary sites or archaeological sites). Effective protection of caves requires changes of law, initiation of new methods and techniques of their preservation as well as changes of public awareness. These fields of improvements may be based on the experiences observed in the other European countries. Adaptation of law protecting all caves since their discovering is the most important advance. Other changes of law and evolution of public approach to the caves should generate activation of cavers clubs in the cave protection. Cavers clubs cooperating with the authority of nature protection can be the most adequate groups inspecting, monitoring and guarding caves. Functions of the club – specific for each protected area (site) - should be determined in the project of protection of the area (site). Attitude of local societies living on the karst areas to the caves can be stimulated not only by traditional education, but also by economical motivations, e.g. financial profits for landowners observing rules of areas (objects) protections.