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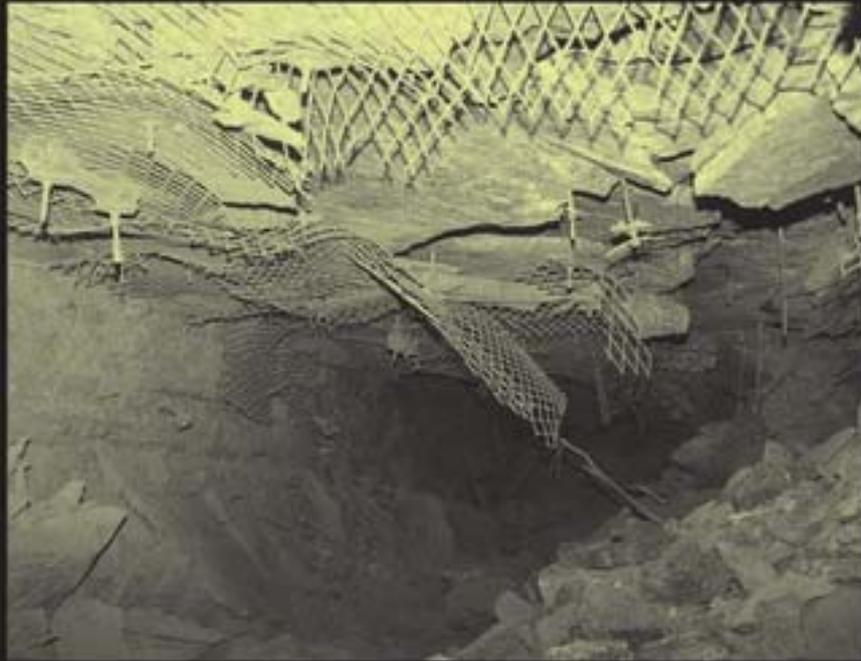


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ERM system and correlations with known rock mass rating systems <i>M. Jovanovski &amp; I. Peshevski</i>	141
Assessing the mechanical properties of a rock using indentation tests <i>H.-T. Le, F. Descamps, J.-P. Tshibangu, J.-F. Nuroy, O. Vincké &amp; L. Congémi</i>	145
Rock mechanical aspects for cavern stability <i>T. Pilgerstorfer, H. Wannemacher, K. Grossauer, A. Stuckl &amp; B. Schwegler</i>	151
Study of the relation between cracks and the elastic properties of rock mass <i>I. Stan-Kleczeck &amp; A.F. Idziak</i>	157
Rock physical interpretation of the seismic properties of the excavation disturbed zone <i>T. Takahashi &amp; S. Tanaka</i>	161
Depth distribution of lithospheric strength determined by the self-unbalancing shear rupture mechanism <i>B.G. Tarasov</i>	165
Geomechanical attributes of reconstituted Indian coals under carbon dioxide saturation <i>V. Vishal, P.G. Ranjith &amp; T.N. Singh</i>	171
Adjustment of rock mass strength parameters using direct shear tests carried out on large blocks <i>G.J. Zapata &amp; A.P. Assis</i>	175
Determination of the extent of fractured zones around mine openings using the resistivity and GPR methods <i>B. Żogała, M.J. Mendecki, R.M. Zuberek, T. Gołębiewski &amp; W. Antonik</i>	181
 <b>2. Laboratory and in-situ testing</b>	
On the accuracy of the in-situ Schmidt hammer test on carbonate rocks <i>H. Arman, W. Hashem, O. Abdelghany &amp; A. Aldahan</i>	189
Rockfall: Scaling factors for the Coefficient of Restitution <i>P. Asteriou, H. Saroglou &amp; G. Triantafos</i>	195
Nano-indentation tests on partially saturated argillite: Experimental device and measurements <i>C. Auray, R. Giot &amp; D. Grgic</i>	201
Measuring stress induced electric field in sandstone and granite using the Electric Potential Sensor <i>A. Aydın, M.R. Dobbs, H.J. Reeves, C.C. Graham &amp; M.P. Kirkham</i>	207
Characterization of the distribution of physical and mechanical properties of rocks at the Tutupan coal mine, South Kalimantan, Indonesia <i>M.A. Azizi, S. Krumadibrata, R.K. Wattimena &amp; I.D. Sidi</i>	213
Experimental study of the permeability evolution of a rock fracture under THMC conditions <i>A. Blaissonneau, M. Peter-Borle &amp; S. Gentier</i>	217
Simulation of single cutter experiments in evaporite using the discrete element method <i>C. Carrapatoso, S.A.B. da Fontoura, J.M.R. Martinez, N. Inoue, A. Lourenço &amp; D. Curry</i>	223
Damage and plasticity rate dependence of Luna limestone in uniaxial compression <i>J. Cielik</i>	233
Effective stresses in cohesive discontinuous rocks around a vertical drill hole <i>P. Ciobanu</i>	239
A database to manage rock mechanical properties and assess formation abrasiveness for drilling <i>F. Descamps, J.-P. Tshibangu, N. da Silva &amp; S. Regnard</i>	245
Effect of an increase in rotation in a wear test to predict the durability of rock materials <i>J.L.E. Dias Filho, G.C. Xavier &amp; P.C.A. Maia</i>	251
The elastic wave velocity in rocks under triaxial stress at high pressure and temperature <i>A. Dziedzic &amp; J. Pinińska</i>	255

## ERMR system and correlations with known rock mass rating systems

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**ABSTRACT:** Excavation Rock Mass Rating (ERMR) system is developed on the basis of numerous investigations for different civil engineering and mining projects in R. Macedonia. In this system, all Rock Masses are divided in seven classes. For each class, an adequate technology of excavation is suggested. Beside other analyses, the correlation of ERMR with known rock mass systems is given in order to have data for parallel use in solving of different practical problems. Notes about possible practical application of the system are analyzed and results presented in short. It can be underlined, that the ERMR system is more adequate for assessment of type of excavation technology for soft and hard rock, while for coarse grained sedimentary rocks, somewhat modified classification can be used.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

One of the main problems in rock engineering is to predict ease of excavation of rock masses in an appropriate manner. This is very significant in earthworks for civil engineering works and in surface mines because of the quantity of excavation masses. In fact, this is one of the key problems in organization and technology of excavation, prediction of costs and safety aspects.

Several authors give effort to establish acceptable methodologies for practical use in this important scientific and practical field, as: Franklin et al. (1971), Weaver (1975), Kirsten (1982), Abdullatif & Cruden (1983), Pettifer & Fookes (1994), Singh et al. (1987), Jovanovski (2001), Tsiambaos & Saroglou (2010).

In general, in all classifications, main parameters for assessment of excavatability are uniaxial compressive strength, weathering degree, spacing of discontinuities, hardness, seismic velocity, continuity, aperture, orientation and roughness of joints etc. Anyhow, no particular method is universally accepted because of the complex nature of the rock masses and difficulties in determination of the input parameters.

Having this in mind, a classification system called ERMR (Excavation Rock Mass Rating) is presented.

The classification is developed on the bases of numerous investigations for different structures, with a main idea to have possibility to determine ease of excavation for non-coherent and coherent soils, weak and hard rock masses in one method (Jovanovski 2001).

Beside the analyses, several correlations of ERMR with known rock mass systems are given in order to have basis for parallel usage of the system for different practical problems.

### 2 BASICS OF ERMR SYSTEM

The system is based on scoring, where the selection of classification parameters is done respecting principles

that input parameters shall be obtained with quick and relatively simple tests, they should be relevant for the properties of the rock masses and that same property should not be taken into the evaluation twice or more times (Bieniawski 1974).

Input parameters are related and representative for the characteristics of the rock massif from one and intact rock parts from the other side.

As characteristics of the intact rock the uniaxial compressive strength ( $\sigma_c$ ) or point load strength ( $J_s$ ) alternatively, bulk density ( $\gamma$ ) and hardness are considered. Hardness, can be qualitatively expressed through the Moss scale relative hardness ( $M$ ) and quantitatively with value of Schmidt Hammer Rebound Value (SHRV). The correlation is defined with following equation after Jovanovski (2001):

$$SHRV = 8.72M - 0.04 \quad (1)$$

where SHRV = Schmidt Hammer Rebound Value; and  $M$  = hardness after Moss scale of relative hardness.

Characteristics of rock massif are presented with average joint spacing ( $L_s$ ) or as alternative with rock quality designation parameter (RQD), condition of fracture walls (continuity, aperture, roughness, infill material etc).

Combining the ranges of values for individual parameters, the total rating is defined (Jovanovski 2001). The range of values for each rock mass class and ERMR class is presented in Table 1.

For all evaluation factors correlative curves are defined, with a main goal to have possibility to assign an adequate rating for all parameters. One example for bulk density is given with following equation, while the details are explained by Jovanovski (2001).

$$Rating(BD) = 0.7832 * BD - 18.32 \quad (2)$$

where Rating (BD) = an adequate value for rating for some value of bulk density;  $BD$  = bulk density of the rock mass in  $\text{kN/m}^3$ .

Table 1. ERMR class, rating and suggested excavation method.

ERMR class	ERMR rating	Excavation
I	<10	Easy digging
II	10–25	Digging
III	26–40	Hard digging
IV	41–50	Ripping
V	51–60	Hard ripping
VI	61–80	Blasting
VII	81–100	Hard blasting

In general, up to class III, the excavation method will be digging, for class IV and V ripping is dominant excavation method, while classes VI and VII are for blasting.

In a practice, several special cases can occur. For example, for coarse grained non-coherent rock masses, large boulders can be secondary blasted. In certain cases, selection of excavation method depends on the available mechanization. For an example, if we have a bulldozer type D9 or D9G, the media will be excavated with hard ripping, and in opposite we will apply blasting procedure.

Sometimes, excavation method depends on the morphology of the terrain and the type of structure. For an example, ripping is rarely used in tunnelling, in difficult morphological conditions and tight excavations for bridge foundations and concrete dams, even if the properties of the media allow it.

In cases when conditions for blasting are extremely hard, where the specific consumption of explosives is increased and where closely spaced blast holes are needed, special cases for payment should be agreed.

It is obvious that for each specific problem, evaluation of other external factors is needed, which can affect choice of method of excavation, and which are not included in the criteria of the classification itself.

### 3 CORRELATIONS OF ERMR AND OTHER CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS

In the rock engineering practice, it is useful when several classification methods are used in parallel. The idea is to perceive the degree of correlation between different approaches, because the rock mass classification systems have some common parameters, therefore a link might be expected between the ERMR and other well known rating systems.

The established correlations are presented with the following equations:

$$ERMR = 0.76RMR + 17.98 \quad (3)$$

$$ERMR = 11.68 \log Kr + 27.77 \quad (4)$$

$$ERMR = 0.87RMR(w) + 1.48 \quad (5)$$

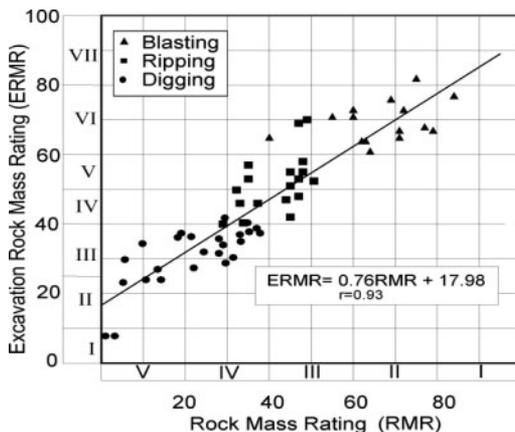


Figure 1. Correlation between ERMR value and Rock Mass Rating after Bieniawski.

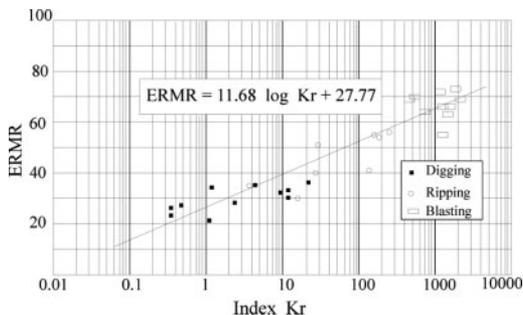


Figure 2. Correlation between ERMR value and Kr-value from Kirsten classification.

$$ERMR = 25.67 + 9.66 * Vp \quad (6)$$

$$ERMR = 26.43 * Vp$$

where ERMR = Excavation Rock Mass Rating; Kr = Rippability index after Kirsten; RMR = Rock Mass Rating after Bieniawski; RMR (w) = Ripability Mass rating after Weawer; and Vp = value of P-wave velocity in km/s.

Graphical presentation of the defined correlations is given in Figures 1–4.

It can be noted that determination coefficient for all cases has very high values from  $R^2 = 0.8$  to  $R^2 > 0.95$  which indicates a very strong connection between the analysed parameters.

The data for correlation are obtained from more than 45 case histories for large civil and mining projects, so it is considered that for initial phases of planning, the method can be very useful for practical application.

### 4 PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF ERMR SYSTEM

The proposed classification method can be used at a first place to choose adequate technology of

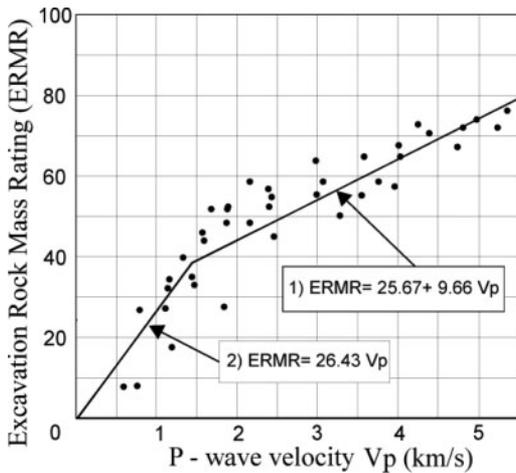


Figure 3. Correlation between ERMR and velocity of P-waves.

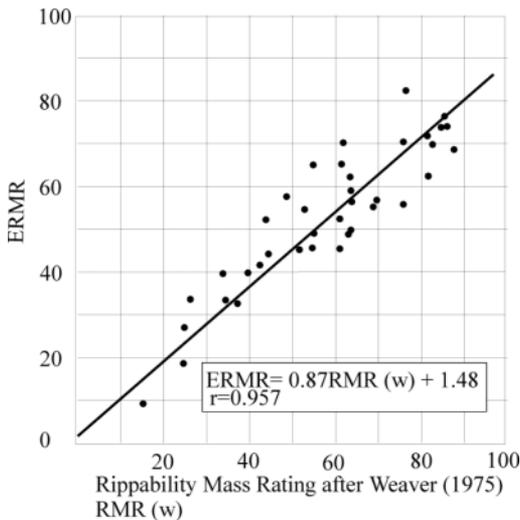


Figure 4. Correlation between ERMR and Rippability Mass Rating after Weaver (1975).

excavation. It can be noted that blasting is required when ERMR values are higher than ERMR = 60. Successful ripping is generally achieved for rock masses with ERMR values between ERMR = 40–60. However, there are cases when alternative methods for excavations are possible.

Another important aspect for defining of excavation cost is possibility to connect ERMR value with the unit price for excavation per cubic meter (Fig. 5).

The diagrams are obtained using prices from several large civil engineering projects, as a lower and upper envelope. It is clear that this can be only method for fast prediction of the cost of excavation,

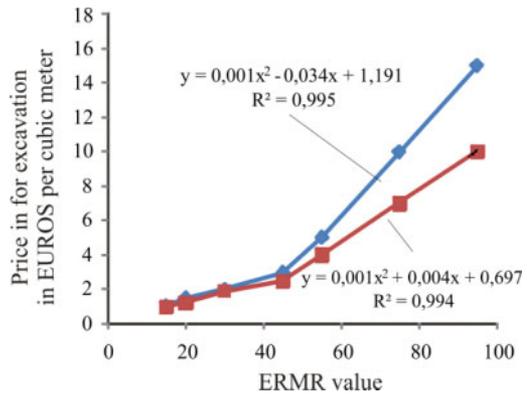


Figure 5. Prediction of unit price per meter cubic using ERMR value.

while the tendering price or real price of excavation shall be prepared according to the market and field conditions.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Based on numerous investigations for specific structures, Excavation Rock Mass Rating classification system is developed. All rock masses are divided in seven basic classes, and for them a recommendations for possible method of excavation, mechanisation etc. is given.

The system well correlates with other classification systems (RMR after Bieniawski, value of longitudinal seismic Vp-waves propagation, Kirsten method and others).

Having in mind that the empirical methods are based on certain level of experience, the philosophy of the methodology it should be subjected to critical reviewing in time, and should be used in combination with other methods.

Anyhow, it can help a lot in defining of technology of excavation, selection of excavation equipotent and cost of excavation.

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