

Chapter 2

The Contribution of UNESCO Global Geoparks in the Promotion of Sustainable Tourism: The Example of Estrela UGGp

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ABSTRACT

The Estrela UNESCO Global Geopark, which encompasses the highest mountain in mainland Portugal, is a geographically defined territory with resources of notorious geological interest, with precious ecosystems, identity, and ways of life. Its geodiversity, associated with traces of glacial origin, the richness of its natural and cultural heritage, make this a unique territory, whose structured approach will strengthen its knowledge, the importance of its functions, and its tourist, heritage, and cultural potential. The Estrela UGGp has the mission of contributing to the protection, valorisation, and dynamics of the natural and cultural heritage, with special emphasis on geological heritage, with a view of disseminating scientific knowledge, promoting tourism and the sustainable development of serra da Estrela. Overall, the Estrela UGGp fosters the development of an integrated development strategy, combined with geoconservation, education, and tourism, supporting the construction of development strategies for the well-being of the community.

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UNESCO AND GEOSCIENCES PROGRAMS

UNESCO, in addition to its literacy campaigns and its World Heritage Sites, is also known for working in such a way that scientific and technological knowledge is a right of humanity, putting the human being at the center of priorities, that is, ensuring that science and knowledge are put towards the well-being of all the inhabitants of planet Earth, promoting their sustainable development.

Since its foundation, UNESCO has sought to achieve development and peace through scientific knowledge and the science produced, putting it at the service of all, on the assumption of contributing to the resolution of the real problems of societies, making them more informed and aware and, in this way, better prepared to achieve their development.

UNESCO's International Geosciences and Geoparks Program, created on the 17th of November 2015, is today a new paradigm of valorisation, promotion and development of territories, anchored in the importance of their geological heritage. In the centre of its concerns, UNESCO Global Geoparks advocate a holistic view of the territories, the implementation of concerted actions between the different development agents, a conservation and valorisation strategy for their sites of geological interest and a territorial-based development policy that is effectively integrated and participatory.

Having said that, UNESCO Global Geoparks are well-delimited territories, holders of relevant geological heritage, linked with a sustainable development strategy that has in the promotion of Geosciences, education for sustainable development and geotourism, their main pillars (Hose, 2012). Also, these must also value, promote and preserve biodiversity, cultural heritage, crafts and gastronomy, among others, seeking to improve the living conditions of populations, promoting, in an integrated way, endogenous values (Stueve et al., 2002).

Each UNESCO Global Geopark is unique and tells part of the long history of Earth Planet (4600 Million years), using its geology as a tool for the development of its communities, through the implementation of strategies based on Science, Geoconservation, Education for Sustainable Development and Tourism.

UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGGp), as holistic territorial strategies for the promotion, enhancement and protection of natural heritage, in particular geoheritage, play an important role in the sustainable development of territories. At the same time, UNESCO classified territories can generate new job opportunities, new economic activities and additional sources of income, especially in rural regions. These strategies encourage the production of new products and enhance regional handicrafts, involving geotourism activities and "geoproducts", focusing on improving the economy of local communities.

In these pandemic times, tourism in rural areas gains expression and followers, due to the less densified modalities of accommodation and the search for outdoors activities, which leads to the emergence of products leveraged on the territory's endogenous resources, such as: health and well-being tourism, nature tourism and heritage interpretation for the valorisation of nature and landscapes. As such, tourist practices are increasingly complex, in the way they are sought, the means involved, the needed experiences, and the relationship with the territory. Tourism, in its territorial relationship and transformations generated, promotes local resources, develops products to which services are associated and generates new jobs.

The frequent divergence between the global needs of nature protection and the local needs of socio-economic development has been, in many situations, an obstacle to the management of natural places, in particular those of low density, as it can disqualify their perception and the activities established by their population. They are places of opportunity, reinforcing new approaches, generating territorial cohesion, promoting self-esteem and the identity of local communities, which are fundamental for dif-

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