

## *THREE YEARS OF A SCHOOL CONTEST BETWEEN PORTUGUESE GEOPARKS ON EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT*

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The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development - UNDESD (2005-2014), for which UNESCO is the lead agency, seeks to integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning, in order to address the social, economic, cultural and environmental problems faced in the 21st century.

Partnerships are an important key to promote an Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and networks such as the European Geoparks Network (EGN) / Global Geoparks Network /GGN) can be very useful to share ESD ideas and practices. With a view to develop the aims of the UNDESD among the state members, UNESCO has requested the involvement of the National Commissions, at a national level, to promote those aims based for example in the United Nations Convention on Climate Change, the Convention of Biological Diversity or the Earth Charter and also based in International Years proclaimed by the United Nations Assembly, for instance the International Year of Forests (2011). The Portuguese Commission for UNESCO concluded that these partnerships would involve more people, institutions and resources in order to achieve the UNDESD goals.

In the framework of this Decade and also the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity (2011-2020), the celebration of the International Year of Biodiversity (2010) and the International Year of Forests (2011), the Portuguese Commission for UNESCO, the Arouca Geopark and the Naturtejo Geopark promoted several school contests with the main title *Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)*. These contests were one of the activities included in the protocols signed between the Portuguese National Commission for UNESCO and both Portuguese Geoparks and also under the umbrella of the Portuguese Geoparks Forum.

The three main objectives of these school contests were: i) to create awareness among students, teachers and local communities about issues related with the referred Decades and International Years, ii) promote the curiosity of the young people and encouraging them to create posters, videos, written works, prototypes, models and advertising spots appealing to their imagination and creativity, iii) contribute to the implementation of an ESD involving in this process all teachers, students and their families and also the existing Municipalities in both territories of the Geoparks and capturing the interest of the media about this activity. The school contests also aimed to increase the knowledge about the Portuguese Geoparks and the EGN/GGN and their contribution to the UNDESD. It also had the aim to stimulate students desire to learn and to explore, to undertake research and analyze the findings, to draw conclusions and find solutions and to take responsible action. Such an approach enabled teachers to become facilitators and students to be at the centre of the learning process.

The first edition of the contest was in 2009/2010 and was entitled “Climate Change & Biodiversity”. The second edition (2010/2011) was entitled “Natural Resources for Sustainability” and the third edition (2011/2012), focusing in real solutions given by students was entitled “How can I improve the environmental quality of my community?”. The general statistic data are presented in Table I.

In the Arouca Geopark, the school contests were co-organized by AGA – Arouca Geopark Association, the Arouca Municipality and the Portuguese National Commission for UNESCO with the support of Naturtejo Geopark.

In the Naturtejo Geopark, the school contests were co-organized by Naturtejo Geopark and the Portuguese National Commission for UNESCO, with the support of the six Municipalities belonging

to the Geopark territory, three companies related with nature sports (*Incentivos Outdoor*, *Vila Fraga* and *Trilobite Aventura*) and the Arouca Geopark.

All the school contests had rules of procedures, a registration form and three types of awards (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> prize) distributed between different school levels, namely Pre-school, Primary and Secondary level. Each registration form was proposed by one coordinator teacher and it would involve a group of students (2 to 32 students).

The school contests in the Arouca Geopark were addressed to teachers and students from public and private schools of the Oporto Metropolitan Area (composed by 16 municipalities, including Arouca). In Naturtejo Geopark the school contests were addressed to teachers and students from public and private schools of the 6 municipalities of the Naturtejo Geopark's territory (Castelo Branco, Idanha-a-Nova, Nisa, Oleiros, Proença-a-Nova and Vila Velha de Ródão).

The results of the school contests were always released during the European Geoparks Week. The winners who received the first prize had also the opportunity to make an exchange visit between both Geoparks during the referred Week. The visits were very important for the students because this way they had the opportunity to visit the most important geosites and to get in touch with the biodiversity of both Portuguese Geoparks. They also learned more about the EGN and GGN and the importance of these Networks worldwide. They also received a diploma giving recognition to their newly acquired expertise and contributions.

During the three years of the school contests, the Arouca Geopark organized an award ceremony, which occurred during a Seminar under the same title of the school contests from every year. The winner students and teachers were invited to present their works to a large audience (including other students, teachers, families, etc.). They also took the opportunity to explain how they had began to adopt new behaviours and practices in favour of a sustainable lifestyle and how they had influenced their families during their research. They demonstrated that they had become more enthusiastic and motivated learners. Also in every editions of the school contest, the works done by the students were presented to the local community, in a big exhibition in the Arouca Municipal Museum. At the Naturtejo Geopark, only in the first edition of the contest it was organized an exhibition with the works of the students at the hall of DINOEXPO (*in Nercab Exhibition Centre* at Castelo Branco). The reason for this was that in the second and third edition of the school contest the majority of the works presented were videos. But these videos will be available in the Geopark Naturtejo website ([www.geonaturescola.com](http://www.geonaturescola.com)).

These school contests are one of the most important annual activities of cooperation between the Portuguese Geoparks and the Portuguese National Commission for UNESCO.

Due to the success of this activity, the Portuguese National Commission for UNESCO, Arouca Geopark and Naturtejo Geopark have decided to continue this work also in the framework of the Portuguese Geoparks Forum. However, because of the distance that separate both Geoparks, and due to the new rules of the bus companies, the exchange visit of students will be reformulated and the students will have now two days of field trip, instead of only one day. This will require new sponsorship to support the costs involved (meals, accommodation, insurances).

This kind of partnership promoting school contests can inspire many other schools and other Geoparks to undertake similar projects in favour of the UNDES D while enhancing quality education and learning throughout life.

| School Year  | Number of students |             | Number of coordinator teachers |           | Number of works |            |
|--------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|------------|
|              | Naturtejo G.       | Arouca G.   | Naturtejo G.                   | Arouca G. | Naturtejo G.    | Arouca G.  |
| 2009/2010    | 249                | 585         | 11                             | 32        | 23              | 73         |
| 2010/2011    | 62                 | 367         | 5                              | 21        | 5               | 47         |
| 2011/2012    | 104                | 386         | 7                              | 20        | 17              | 31         |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>415</b>         | <b>1338</b> | <b>23</b>                      | <b>73</b> | <b>45</b>       | <b>151</b> |

Table I. General statistic data of the School Contest in both Portuguese Geoparks.