

**The importance of scientific research for fostering  
(geo)tourism development in the Naturtejo Geopark  
(Portugal)**

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**Abstract:** A Geopark is the ongoing result of millions of years of Earth dynamics, centuries of territory management and scientific curiosity, fieldwork passion and tenacity for understanding nature. Naturtejo Geopark is not different from others in this perspective; it has only a special history of fieldworkers which devoted their lives to research contributing deeply for the knowledge of natural and cultural heritages. These intrinsic values can sustain the present economical development of the territory based on cultural tourism. So, scientific research in the context of the Geopark must be financially and logistically supported by their management bodies, employing scientists and/or fostering research projects directly by universities, institutes or associations.

The mining resources of Naturtejo Geopark and the importance of the thermal springs from Termas de Monfortinho are long known since the publication by the Roman naturalist Plinius the Elder of his fundamental work *Naturalis Historia*. One of the first geological mapping works in Portugal was published in 1857 by Carlos Ribeiro, detailing the mining areas of S. Miguel de Acha and Segura. The first fossils were collected in 1874 by Nery Delgado, founder of Archeology in Portugal and still the most renowned Portuguese paleontologist. Orlando Ribeiro, the pioneer of modern geography in Portugal, worked in this territory for more than 30 years. He was also the founder of geotourism, in its strict sense, in the Naturtejo Geopark. Since 2000, Adolf Seilacher was responsible for the internationalization of the Penha Garcia fossil site through his Fossil Art traveling around the world.

Despite the curricula of pioneer researchers, there is still a lot to know about the geological heritage of

Naturtejo Geopark. The geosites inventory has 170 sites of special interest, but there are only two museums (from a total of 19) where the visitor finds information about geological heritage. Less than 50% of the territory is mapped at the scale 1:50000. Active research is running mainly in Portas do Ródão natural monument and at the Ichnological Park of Penha Garcia, geomonuments where tourism companies are operating more often and the visitor's number is increasing. New proposals for activities and business are appearing from the geosites where the field knowledge of the potentialities is more substantial and interpretation richer.



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