

Geotourism in Geopark Naturtejo: exploiting a vein

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Geopark Naturtejo has a strong project centred in Geological Heritage with promotion and local economic development through geotourism. The European and Global Geoparks networks to which Geopark Naturtejo belongs have common goals and exchange information and good practices developing common strategies. Geological Heritage must be protected and managed in sustainable ways and network of transnational geoparks enable to enlarge the scale of the projects.

Geological Heritage at the Geopark, acting as the testimony of Earth History in the last 600 million years, is protected and managed sustainably. The Geological Heritage is one of the new values that can and must be exploited by tourism.

Geotourism is an emergent segment of tourism based on Geodiversity. Humans always travelled to see geological wonders, but only now there is a really chance in this sector. It is created a new niche with new specificities and new contingencies that follow the general trends of tourism (like lodging and restaurants) but that also have its own trends.

It is very important to understand that Geotourism is much more than Geodiversity. It is important to cover also biodiversity, history and culture, with the main propose in local development. The more high-quality offer diversity exists the more rich and appealing is the destination. When a geotourist visits a geosite he may also likes to visit a castle, an archaeological ruin, a traditional village or a wild animal and he also wants to buy handicraft, to taste the best local food and to rest in the most comfortable place, based on the traditional experience. This holistic approach not only enriches the offer but also diversifies it, making more pleasant to more people: an unique combination of experiences and emotions.

Geopark Naturtejo promotes geodiversity through 16 geomonuments, 16 geosites with high relevance and monumental character, which represent the geological dynamics since the Proterozoic period. This outstanding geodiversity can be discovered though 439 km of signalized pedestrian trails (Fossils Trail, Mines Trail, Orvalho GeoTrail, etc), boat and kayak trips, mountain bike rides, adventure sports

(slide, rappel, hiking), thematic visits (Visit to the Granite Boulders, Visit to the Roman Gold Mine, etc).

In Geopark Naturtejo there are several geotourist products, geoproducts such as the GeoRestaurant “Petiscos e Granitos” (= Dainty and Granites) with Boulders Soup or Marble Cake with the very traditional “Burlhões”, a sausage of goat and peppermint. There is also a GeoBakery with Trilobite cookies, Earth Slices (tectonic pizzas) and Orogenic toasts, besides traditional bread and cookies. There are local enterprises that offer services such as GeoTrekking, GeoCircuits or Geokayaks. It was born a new company called Trilobite.Aventura (=Trilobite.Adventure) with outdoor activities, like TriloPaint, a paintball championship. Naturtejo encourage new projects in the territory and promote them in its activities.

Every year Geopark Naturtejo promotes a calendar of events, such as seminars and workshops, educational programmes, pedestrian trails and thematic routes, nature sports (climbing, mountain bike, slide and rappel), kayak and boat trips, date celebrations, all with Geodiversity as scenery and taking many public (social) and private institutions to get involved. The Geopark also invests on paper and internet publications, including books, guides, leaflets, booklets, flyers and maps. These activities involve also the other heritages that enrich the offer which can be enjoyed by visitors coming from inside and outside the Geopark.

The Educational Programmes are prepared to support the School Curricula. It is intended to show in real context and exemplify the geological processes and products that the students learn in school. There are didactic tools and specialized guides that help to understand the processes and to raise awareness to Geological Heritage.

These activities are developed in the 16 geomonuments, the *ex-libris* of Geopark Naturtejo, such as the Ichneological Park of Penha Garcia with the “Fossils Trail”, where it is possible to swim nearby floating trilobites and orthoceritids that once lived there, Granite Inselberg of Monsanto with the “Boulders Trail”, Portas de Ródão Natural Monument with Geokayaking and boat trips to see Rock art and do birdwatching, Conhal do Arneiro Roman Mine with the “Conhal Trail”, Portas de Vale Mourão Geomonument with geomorphological and tectonic features nearby Foz do Cobre, a Schist’s Village with a high cultural heritage related with gold panning where visitors can revive golden ages and panning in Ocreza river margins.

It is also possible to visit fossil trees in Vila Velha de Ródão, trace fossils in the Exhibition “The world of trilobites of Sam Gon III” (future Paleozoic Museum), the Stonemason Museum that shows the stone from the outcrop to the statue. In the museums, visitors can find accessible interpretation as in exomuseums, where it is

possible to see the processes in real context. They need some visitation infrastructures and interpretation. Interpretation is a fundamental tool to communicate Geology and it is made through publications, interpretative panels in geosites, viewpoints and specialized guides. Is it extremely important to raise communication capacity with simple message and clear images and texts.

The sustainable local economy involves the creation of backup infrastructures, namely lodging, restaurants, cultural animation, outdoor activities and shops. It is important a good geotourism strategy with intervenients from different sectors of society. Geoparks need a strong commitment of the local community through local administration, local associations and local companies. Local people can also be involved through Ethnogeology. The inhabitants can contribute with their empiric knowledge and explanations about natural processes and products. In Monsanto each granite boulder has a name and a legend; in Penha Garcia trace fossils, are known as painted snakes and in Foz do Cibrão old miners help visitors to learn the ancient techniques of panning for gold.

The Geopark Naturtejo, as long-term project, is very innovative because the geological features that have been always present in the region for the local people, now can be economically explored and sustainably exploited.



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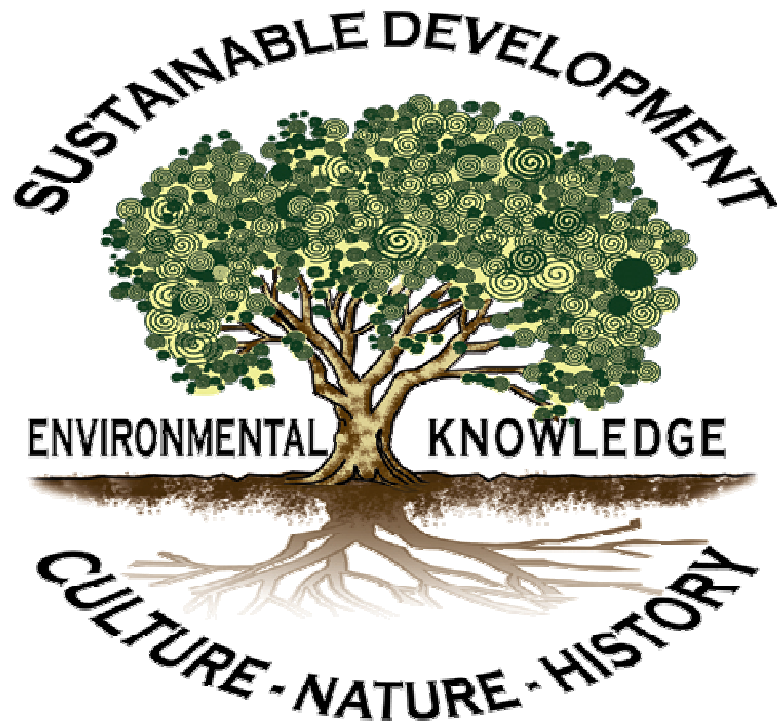
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ABSTRACTS