

*There are several EU funds available to help site managers to finance their projects. One of these funds is the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This fund has three objectives; one of them is European Territorial Cooperation, better known as INTERREG. Eurosité's European Facilitation Service has explored the funding possibilities of this objective for site managers and presents several project examples. In each example a member from the Eurosité network illustrates a project, funded by Interreg, in which they were involved. More project examples and more information on Interreg can be found on [www.eurosite.org](http://www.eurosite.org).*

# EUROPEAN GEOPARKS

## As a tool for Geo-tourism development in Europe

### Basic information about the project

#### EU Programme

Interreg IIIC/ South programme

#### Duration

33 months

#### Project period

01.07.2003 – 30.03.2006

#### Budget

Total budget: € 896 028 / ERDF contribution: € 637 021 (70%)

#### Partnership

1. Natural History Museum of the Lesvos Petrified Forest (Lead partner; Greece)
2. Reserve Géologique de Haute Provence (France)
3. GAL ISC Madonie (Italy)
4. Geological Survey of Ireland (Ireland)
5. Provincia Regionale di Enna (Italy)
6. Naturepark Nördlicher Teutoburger Wald Wiehengebirge (Germany)
7. LAG Gesäuse-Eisenwurz (Austria)
8. Development Agency of mountainous area of Milopotamos and Malevizi S.A (Greece)
9. Fermanagh District Council (United Kingdom)

#### Link to Eurosité

Natural History Museum of the Lesvos Petrified Forest is a Eurosité member

#### Project focus

Improving management of protected areas with high geological value, with a focus on developing nature (geo-) tourism



## Project example Interreg IIIC: EUROPEAN GEOPARKS

### Overall objective

GEOPARKS focused on improving the management of environmentally sensitive areas with high geological value, such as mountainous and rural areas. The project also played a role in the economic development of these areas, by linking geological heritage with the development of geo-tourism. Geo-tourism is a form of cultural-environmental tourism that can be applied in territories with rich geological heritage. Transnational cooperation, exchange of knowledge and sharing of good practice contributed to achieve this objective.

The project had four aims:

1. To strengthen the co-operation between the partners, by creating and applying a common strategy for geo-tourism development on a European level;
2. To evolve the European GEOPARKS Network to a permanent European structure, with members representing the European geological heritage in all EU countries;
3. To promote the consciousness and awareness of the public towards the protection of the natural heritage;
4. To improve the quality of services offered to tourists.

### Project summary

The geological heritage of Europe is an important part of the European natural heritage. Fragments of this heritage – present in areas known as GEOPARKS - represent parts of a unique continent-scale puzzle of the geological history and evolution of Europe. The European GEOPARKS interregional partnership provided a forum for sharing experience and best practices in the management of earth heritage sites. Emphasis was given to **geological monument management** and the **development of geo-tourism** in Europe. The partners were involved in several ways:

- The promotion and preservation of geological heritage;
- The development of geo-tourism and strategies to promote geo-tourism;
- The sustainable development of the GEOPARKS territories;
- Creation of new promotional materials and tools.

### Project activities

#### • Evaluation of GEOPARKS

The creation of quality standards for GEOPARKS services and products was one of the key aims of this project. As part of this, an evaluation process was established that will try to measure the level of quality in infrastructure, services and sustainable development in each member of the partnership. The process will be repeated every three years to ensure that the level of quality remains of the highest order. The evaluation process occurs in two parts. First, a self-evaluation takes place, which is followed by a visit and an evaluation by an independent referee. Two international bodies, UNESCO and IUGS, were involved in the whole process.

#### • Exchange of know-how between GEOPARKS

Expert missions were organised among GEOPARKS-partners, aiming at the exchange of experience and know-how amongst the partnership. Meetings were organized at different locations, giving partners the opportunity to visit the hosting GEOPARKS. Exchange took place on several topics, e.g. management of museum shops and a training session for technical staff in the area of making fossil-casks.



## Project example Interreg IIIC: EUROPEAN GEOPARKS

- **Exchange of exhibitions**

In 2004, the Natural history Museum of the Lesvos Petrified Forest presented an exhibition on fossil olive, bay and pine trees with many fossil specimens, photographs and artefacts. The exhibition corresponded with expectations of the Reserve Geologique de Haute Provence (RGHP) on fossil plants. That same year, the RGHP prepared an exhibition on a dinosaur found in its region, and expanded the dinosaur theme in order to send the exhibition to Lesvos. Both exhibitions were available in three languages: English, Greek and French.

- **Organisation of open conferences on geo-tourism development**

2003 Conference held on 2-5 October 2003 in Anogia - Crete – Greece

2004 Conference held on 29-31 October 2004 in Madonie Geopark - Sicily – Italy

2005 Conference held on 5-8 October 2005 in Lesvos island – Greece

### Achieved output and results

- Establishment of a common evaluation process for all European GEOPARKS. This evaluation procedure assures the objective control of the quality of the services offered to the visitors of GEOPARKS;
- Exchange of know-how between GEOPARKS;
- Exchange of exhibitions;
- Organisation of open conferences and the publication of conference proceedings;
- Publishing the European GEOPARKS magazine and distribution amongst all partners;
- Publication of articles in international journals;
- Presentation of the GEOPARKS network at international conferences and forums.

### Relation between project and site management issues

Improved protection and promotion of geological heritage sites (to tourists) in relation with sustainable development of the GEOPARKS territories, was a result of the closer bonds that were established between the partners through the project.

### Project initiative

Natural History Museum of the Lesvos Petrified Forest, the Lead partner, initiated the project in order to improve the cooperation among partners.

### Gain for own organisation

The development of common management tools, and the exchange of knowledge.

### Lessons learnt

As it was the first time the Natural History Museum of the Lesvos Petrified Forest participated as Lead partner in such a big transnational partnership, several lessons have been learnt:



## Project example Interreg IIIC: EUROPEAN GEOPARKS

- The collaboration among partners, despite the differences in language, mentality and methodology, was without any problems. The exchange of ideas originating from a different approach and the creation of common tools were very valuable;
- On the other hand we learnt also about the difficulties of the administration on a European level. Delays due to pure administrative reasons and unexpected extra paper work raised the working hours spent, not for creating things but only for managing the project.

### Follow-up

In June 2000, several years before the Interreg project, the Geoparks Network was created. The purpose of the Network was to share information and expertises and to define common tools in order to protect geological heritage. The Interreg project provided a boost for the continuation and expansion of the European Geoparks Network, see also: [www.europeangeoparks.org](http://www.europeangeoparks.org)

### For more information

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