



STRATEGIC GEOEDUCATION PLAN

of the Algarvensis Geopark

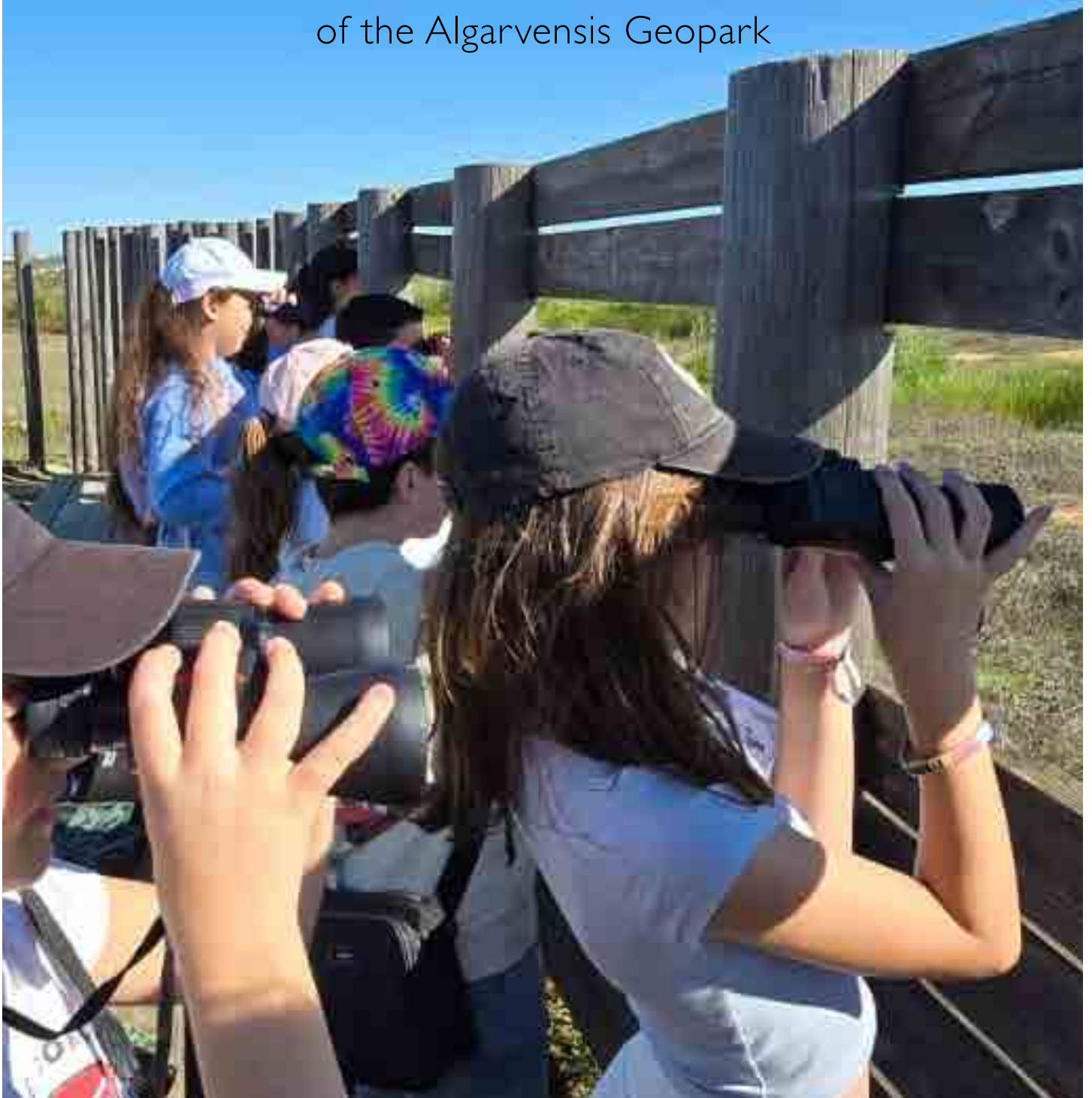


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Strategic Geoeducation Plan of the Algarvensis Geopark is structured as a guiding tool for the promotion of formal and non-formal education, anchored in the values of sustainable development, citizen science, geological literacy, and the enhancement of the territory's natural and cultural heritage. With a participatory, cross-cutting, and innovative vision, the plan proposes concrete actions, alignment with the SDGs, educational materials, teacher training, network projects, and evaluation methodologies that aim to transform the Geopark into an educational, vibrant, and inclusive territory. The flagship project "The Geopark is My School," the involvement of local schools, and the integration of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are highlighted as the structural backbone of all educational actions planned for the 2025–2028 triennium.

One of the foundational pillars of the Strategic Geoeducation Plan is the promotion of critical literacy and complex thinking, aiming to develop students' competencies to understand contemporary global challenges, act in an informed and ethical manner, and become change agents in their local and global contexts.

The methodological approach of the project "The Geopark is My School" prioritizes situated and experiential learning, capable of integrating multiple disciplines and promoting a critical reading of the territory through direct contact with its places, people, landscapes, and stories.

The educational approach of the Algarvensis Geopark is also based on a perspective of critical heritage education, which values identity, memory, and the cultural appropriation of the territory by educational communities. In this context, the school plays a mediating role between heritage and the construction of active and place-based citizenship.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Geoeducation Plan of the Algarvensis Geopark emerges as a guiding tool for the educational mission of the Algarvensis territory, as an aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark. Recognizing the central role of education in enhancing geodiversity, biodiversity, cultural and intangible heritage, and sustainability, this plan seeks to systematize the pedagogical action already developed and to project an articulated, ambitious, and coherent approach in alignment with the principles of the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network.

In this context, geoeducation is understood as a cross-cutting approach, capable of integrating scientific knowledge, local wisdom, and innovative pedagogical practices, with a direct impact on the territorial awareness of educational communities, the appreciation of local identity, and the promotion of active and informed citizenship.

THIS PLAN IS GUIDED BY THREE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES:

- The enhancement of the territory as a cross-disciplinary, inclusive educational resource;
- The co-construction of educational proposals with the school community and local partners;
- The articulation between scientific knowledge, pedagogical innovation, and the geological, biological, and cultural heritage of the Algarvensis Geopark.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK OF GEOEDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARKS

UNESCO Global Geoparks have as their mission the sustainable development of their territories through the valorization of geodiversity and the promotion of education for sustainability. Within the framework of the 2021–2030 Strategy of the Global Geoparks Network (GGN), education is one of the priority areas of action, recognized as a key vector in building more conscious, resilient, and sustainable societies.

The Strategic Geoeducation Plan of the Algarvensis Geopark is inspired by international best practices, particularly the strategic geoeducation plans of benchmark geoparks such as the Arouca Geopark (Portugal), the Sobrarbe-Pirineos Geopark (Spain), the Azores Geopark (Portugal), the Lesvos Geopark (Greece), and the Langkawi Geopark (Malaysia), among others.

Drawing from these best practices, the Algarvensis Geopark affirms its own unique and identity-based vision for geoeducation, rooted in the geological, ecological, social, and cultural context of its territory, as well as in the specific characteristics of its educational and institutional fabric.



2. EDUCATIONAL MISSION OF THE ALGARVENSIS GEOPARK

THE EDUCATIONAL MISSION OF THE ALGARVENSIS GEOPARK IS EXPRESSED THROUGH THE FOLLOWING GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- Raise awareness and build capacity for the appreciation of geodiversity, biodiversity, and cultural heritage as foundations of a strong and shared territorial identity;
- Promote scientific knowledge and critical thinking from the earliest levels of education, encouraging curiosity, experimentation, and interdisciplinarity;
- Contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda by fostering sustainable and responsible pedagogical practices;
- Bring school audiences closer to the territory, encouraging critical interpretation and full engagement with it as a space for learning and active citizenship;
- Promote networks of collaboration among schools, municipalities, universities, NGOs, and other geoparks, encouraging the exchange of best practices, joint projects, and transformative experiences.



2.1. Characterization of the School Territory

The territory of the Algarvensis Geopark encompasses the municipalities of Albufeira, Loulé, and Silves, comprising a wide variety of educational contexts, ranging from urban schools with large student populations to primary and preschool institutions located in rural and low-density areas. This educational mosaic represents both a unique asset and a challenge in designing proposals tailored to the reality of each school cluster.

Close collaboration with the Albufeira Poente, Albufeira Silves, Silves Sul, and Loulé Este/Quarteira School Clusters, as well as with vocational and higher education institutions such as the Alte Vocational School and the University of the Algarve, has allowed the Geopark to initiate an institutional cooperation network with strong growth potential.

2.2. Existing Resources and Acquired Experience

Since the application phase, the Geopark has developed educational, awareness-raising, and scientific communication activities with schools and diverse audiences. These include:

- The traveling exhibition “Let’s Be the Algarvensis Geopark,” presented in several schools and cultural centers;
- The participation of schools in the GEOPALCOS – Art. Science.Nature program, integrating artistic expressions with science and natural heritage;
- Activities such as “From Rock to Bread,” interpretive walks, educational workshops, and guided visits with Geopark staff;
- Collaboration with local festivals and events featuring educational components.

These experiences have been met with great enthusiasm by schools and reflect a growing appropriation of the territory as an educational space.

2.3. Identified Potential and Needs Potential:

Potential:

- Exceptional geological, landscape, and cultural richness of the territory;
- Strong local identity and community pride;
- Presence of committed institutional partners (municipalities, universities, schools);
- Active network of Geoparks with experience available for sharing.

Needs:

- Greater systematization and scheduling of the educational offer;
 - Creation of specific teaching materials adapted to different levels of education;
 - Continuous teacher training on geoeducation and interdisciplinary approaches;
 - Logistical support for field trips and student transportation;
- Integration of evaluation and monitoring practices into educational activities

2.4. General Strategy of the Geoeducation Plan

Based on this diagnosis, the Strategic Geoeducation Plan proposes to:

- Structure the Geopark’s educational offer by educational levels and thematic areas;
- Create transversal and interdisciplinary projects that engage the entire school community;
- Develop innovative and inclusive pedagogical and exhibition resources;
- Establish partnership protocols with certified entities for teacher training;
- Promote the exchange of best practices with other geoparks and scientific institutions.



3. Action Pillars and Educational Programs

3.1 Structuring the Educational Offer by School Levels

The educational offer of the Algarvensis Geopark is organized by levels of education, allowing the adaptation of content and methodologies to different age groups, curricular needs, and pedagogical contexts.

3.2 Flagship Educational Project: “The Geopark is My School”

This project, to be implemented throughout the 2025/2026 school year, involves all school clusters in the territory and stands as the flagship project of the Geopark’s geoeducation program.

Objectives:

- Engage the entire school community in valuing the territory;
- Integrate Geopark-related themes into curricular areas;
- Stimulate critical and creative thinking and foster an emotional connection to the territory;
- Promote field trips, exhibitions, workshops, and school projects inspired by the Geopark.

Expected Results:

- Integration of Geopark content into the curricular plans of participating classes;
- Production of educational materials by schools;
- Technical visits, interpretive trails, and public exhibitions;
- Creation of inter-school sharing events.
- This project will be monitored by a technical and pedagogical team, in coordination with each school cluster’s coordinators.

3.3 Creation and Use of Educational Materials

The Geopark has been developing and using various teaching resources adapted to each level of education. Noteworthy is the Algarvensis Geopark’s pedagogical kit called **“The Chest of Hidden Treasures”**, which will circulate through schools and includes:

- Reproduced fossils and real samples of local rocks;
- Educational games and challenges on geodiversity, biodiversity, and local culture;
- Illustrated guides and hands-on activities;
- Field notebooks and activity sheets.

Other materials include:

- Thematic worksheets;
- Interpretive posters;
- 3D models of geological features;
- Educational booklets for each thematic route.

3.4 Continuous Teacher Training

The plan includes the implementation of certified training actions in the following areas:

- Theoretical and practical training in geoeducation;
- Thematic field trips with Geopark technicians;
- Teacher gatherings from the territory and other Geoparks to foster exchange, sharing of practices, and creation of pedagogical networks.

The **Alte Vocational School Cooperative** is already a partner in certifying these training sessions, and collaborations with other accredited entities are planned.

Additionally, **“Algarvensis Weekends”** will be organized to offer immersive stays and educational activities in sports pavilions or logistics centers, facilitating interterritorial mobility and collaborative work between teachers and students.

3.5 Network Projects and Partnerships

The Algarvensis Geopark will continue to integrate national and international geoeducation networks, including:

- Collaboration with the UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet), a global partnership of nearly 12,000 schools in approximately 180 countries dedicated to fostering peace, sustainable development, global citizenship, intercultural learning, and heritage education. By aligning with ASPnet, the Geopark Algarvensis can strengthen its educational programs, collaborate with international peer schools, and integrate its geoeducation initiatives into a broader framework of UNESCO values, enhancing opportunities for exchange, shared projects, and capacity building among students and teachers.
- Collaboration with the Portuguese Network of UNESCO Global Geoparks;
- Participation in European school mobility programs (Erasmus+) with other Geoparks;
- Partnerships with universities and research centers; Coordination with NGOs focused on environmental education and citizen science.



3.6 Activities Already Implemented and Educational Offer Planned for 2025/2026

The Algarvensis Geopark has implemented various educational activities with schools and the community. These initiatives reflect a strong existing commitment to geoeducation and to valuing the territory through formal and non-formal education.

1. **Traveling Exhibition “Let’s Be a Geopark”**, presented in several schools and cultural centers. Includes geological, biological, cultural, and intangible content. Supported by complementary educational mediation activities.
2. **GEOPALCOS – Art.Science.Nature Program**, Integrates artistic expressions with science and natural heritage. Includes school workshops, public performances, and educational art installations.
3. **“From Rock to Bread”** – Activity linking geodiversity, ethnography, and intangible heritage (traditional breadmaking). Developed with students in practical settings, using traditional ovens.
4. **Fossil, Mineral, and Rock Workshops** – Use of replicas, games, and real samples. Hands-on activities for preschool and primary education.
5. **Interpretive Trails with Schools** Themed hikes with landscape interpretation, guided by Geopark staff. Adapted to different educational levels.
6. **Participation in Science Fairs and Educational Exhibitions** – Educational booths, geological experiments, and interactive scientific challenges.
7. **Creation of the Educational Kit “The Hidden Treasures of Algarvensis”** – Mobile kit with samples, games, worksheets, stories, and field notebooks.
8. **Intermunicipal School Gatherings** – Events for sharing best practices and projects among schools from the three municipalities.
9. **European Geoparks Week (EGN Week)** – Always includes an educational component: workshops, exhibitions, visits, and school activities.
10. **Earth Week, Earth Day, International Geodiversity Day**, among other UNESCO- or UN-endorsed commemorations. Educational programs and projects targeted at schools.
11. **Algarvensis Weekends** – Immersive educational field trips for teachers and students.
12. **Partnerships with Vocational and Higher Education Schools** – Initiatives with the Alte Vocational School, Piaget Institute, and the University of the Algarve.
13. **Flagship Project “The Geopark is My School”** – Systematic involvement of all school clusters in the territory (starting in 2025/2026). Interdisciplinary, territory-based projects.
14. **Capacity Building for Local Guides and Teachers** – Continuous training with theoretical-practical components, fieldwork, and thematic modules.
15. **Participation in Erasmus+ Programs with Other Geoparks** – Involvement of students and teachers in European exchange programs.
16. **Intergenerational Education Initiatives** – Workshops, oral testimonies, and joint visits with seniors and students, promoting the transmission of local knowledge.
17. **Education in Visiting Spaces** – Interpretive Centers, Info Centers, and Tourism Offices offering educational content accessible to diverse audiences.



3.7 Evaluation and Monitoring

All educational actions of the Geopark will be subject to continuous evaluation, based on the following indicators:

- Level of participation from schools and number of students involved;
- Satisfaction level of educational communities;
- Quality of the pedagogical materials developed;
- Perceived impact on students' connection to the territory.

Tools such as satisfaction surveys, interviews, photographic records, and activity reports will be used to measure the success of the actions and guide improvements.

3.8 Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The entire geoeducation plan of the Algarvensis Geopark is structured around the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, namely through the active promotion of several of its 17 Goals.

“The SDGs are our shared vision for humanity, a social contract between the world’s leaders and the people. They are a to-do list for people and the planet, and a blueprint for success.” Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General.

This ambitious agenda aims to eradicate poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all by 2030, through actions across three integrated dimensions: economic, social, and environmental.

Through its educational mission, the Algarvensis Geopark contributes to several SDGs, including:

SDGs integrated into the Algarvensis Geoeducation Plan

SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being

Promoting physical and mental well-being through contact with nature, educational trails, and healthy lifestyle values.

SDG 4 – Quality Education

Ensuring equitable access to education for all, with a focus on participatory methodologies, lifelong learning, and valuing science.

SDG 5 – Gender Equality

Promoting a culture of equity and inclusion in all educational activities and in the selection of representatives and local protagonists.

SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation

Raising awareness of the importance and preservation of surface and groundwater resources in the Algarvensis territory.

SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy

Promoting energy efficiency and the use of clean energy in schools and public spaces.

SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production

Engaging schools in reuse, recycling, and conscious consumption practices tied to the territory.

SDG 13 – Climate Action

Education focused on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

SDG 14 – Life Below Water

Promoting Ocean literacy and awareness about the Geopark’s marine ecosystems and their coastal interactions.

SDG 15 – Life on Land

Promoting biodiversity conservation and the protection of natural habitats associated with Algarvensis landscapes.

SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

Encouraging intercultural dialogue, active citizenship, collective memory, and territorial cohesion.

SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals

Promoting partnerships among schools, municipalities, universities, NGOs, and Geopark networks.



3.9 Strategic Contributions of Communication and Marketing to Geoeducation

The plan includes the organization of thematic educational weeks, such as the European Geoparks Week or Earth Week, with workshops, exhibitions, visits, and other activities open to school communities and the general public, promoting the territory as a living classroom and a center for scientific and cultural experimentation.

3.10 Thematic Educational Events Training of Local Guides

In line with the commitment made in the UNESCO Global Geopark application dossier, the plan reinforces the intention to develop capacity-building actions for local guides, including technicians, teachers, and youth, aiming to enhance endogenous knowledge and promote interpretive educational practices in the field.

Education for Visitors

The educational component will also be integrated into visitor reception spaces, such as Interpretive Centers and Info Centers, creating moments of scientific and environmental awareness suitable for non-school audiences and tourists, aligned with a vision of responsible enjoyment and heritage appreciation.

Intergenerational Education – Dialogue Between Generations for Territorial Valorisation

The geoeducation plan foresees, in a later phase, the creation of intergenerational activities, strengthening ties between generations in the valorization of the territory's natural and cultural heritage. These actions aim not only to transmit local knowledge but also to build new identity narratives through dialogue between youth and elders. Intergenerational Education in the Algarvensis Geopark is envisioned as a living bridge between past and future, engaging children, youth, and seniors in shared educational activities rooted in local knowledge and the cultural and natural heritage of the territory.

Main Objectives:

- . Value the knowledge and memory of older generations;
- . Create opportunities for active listening and sharing of stories, practices, and local traditions;
- . Foster mutual respect and recognition among different generations;
- . Reinforce territorial identity through oral narratives and lived experiences;
- . Promote social cohesion and a sense of belonging.

Planned and Ongoing Activities:

. Workshops on Local Knowledge: Thematic workshops where seniors teach traditional techniques (bread-making, basketry, beekeeping, folk tales, etc.) to children and youth. The territory's geocultural component is always integrated.

. On-site Visits and Testimonies: Local encounters with older residents who share how they lived and interacted with the territory, its mountains, springs, caves, or agricultural and pastoral landscapes.

Collection of Oral Memories and Creation of Living Archives: Students, guided by teachers or technicians, conduct interviews with seniors, creating audio and video recordings that feed into a digital memory bank for Algarvensis.

Walks with Multiple Generations: Interpretive walks where seniors accompany school groups or families, sharing empirical knowledge about geography, medicinal plants, weather signs, or local history.

Intergenerational Cultural and Artistic Events: Exhibitions, theater plays, music, storytelling, or local celebrations involving collaboration across generations in creation and performance.

School-Community Projects: Partnerships between classrooms and elderly homes, day centers, or local associations to implement ongoing projects of sharing and learning, with curricular integration.

Strategic Framework:

- Aligned with UNESCO principles on Lifelong Learning and Inclusive, Participatory Education;
- Reinforces the Geopark's educational mission as an educator territory;
- Values intangible heritage (memory, orality, customs and traditions);
- Contributes to SDGs 4, 5, 10, and 16, promoting a more just, cohesive, and culturally diverse society.



Complementarity with Other Plan Areas:

Naturally integrated into the “The Geopark is My School” project;

Enriches non-formal geoeducation activities;

Leverages community involvement and social cohesion, which are pillars of the Geopark’s sustainability strategy.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

Surveys and satisfaction records from participants;

Final products (audiovisual records, exhibitions, publications);

Engagement indicators (number of seniors and students involved, partnerships created, continuity of projects).

3.11 Complementarities with the Application Dossier and Future Proposals

The Algarvensis Geopark commits to integrating the educational dimension into all its thematic programs and public events, from European Geoparks Week to Earth Week, including fairs, celebrations, and meetings with partners. These events serve an educational, awareness-raising, and celebratory role, functioning as platforms for knowledge exchange between technicians, the educational community, local populations, and visitors. Workshops, exhibitions, scientific challenges, interactive circuits, and school competitions will be part of this broad, networked, and territory-engaged educational visibility strategy.

Thematic Events as Community Educational Platforms

The focus on continuous training for local guides, young monitors, teachers, and municipal technicians is reinforced in the application dossier to UNESCO Global Geopark as a territorial sustainability strategy. The Algarvensis Geopark believes its educational success largely depends on the ability of its technical and educational teams to convey content with accuracy, passion, and a strong sense of mission. Thus, training modules will be developed focusing on interpretive mediation, participatory methodologies, and geological, heritage, and cultural knowledge of the territory.

Capacity-Building for Educational Local Guides

The application also recognizes the importance of visitor reception spaces—such as interpretive centers, tourist offices, and info centers, as educational opportunities. The Strategic Geoeeducation Plan integrates this vision, foreseeing the implementation of educational actions in the context of tourist and cultural visits, ensuring that visitors of all ages have access to engaging, accessible, and scientifically sound content. Museological communication and cultural mediation will be designed to stimulate curiosity, promote heritage interpretation, and encourage responsible behaviors.

Educational Valorisation in Visitor Reception and Interpretation Spaces

One of the dimensions highly valued by the Algarvensis Geopark is the potential of education as a bridge between generations. In this sense, the Geopark proposes to develop intergenerational initiatives that bring together students, seniors, and local knowledge holders. These encounters, whether workshops, visits, oral testimonies, or practical activities, aim to value collective memory, ancestral ways of life, and the territory’s stories, ensuring their preservation and transmission to new generations. Geoeeducation thus becomes a space of active listening and recognition of the cultural capital of communities.

Intergenerational Education as a Link for Intangible Heritage Transmission

This Strategic Geoeeducation Plan was designed in alignment with the principles and commitments established in the UNESCO Global Geopark application dossier. This foundational document recognizes education as one of the core pillars of the Algarvensis Geopark, valuing not only formal education in schools but also informal and non-formal lifelong learning processes and the active involvement of the community.



4. Conclusions and Future Commitments

The present Strategic Geoeducation Plan of the Algarvensis Geopark serves as a fundamental tool for planning, guiding, and mobilizing all educational action within the Algarvensis territory as an aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark. It also represents a commitment to the educational community, institutional partners, UNESCO, and the Global Geoparks Network, positioning geoeducation as a central pillar of transformation and sustainable development. This plan is aligned with the founding values of the Geoparks, emphasizing:

Education for sustainability, through the valorization of geodiversity, biodiversity, and cultural heritage;

Active participation of schools, teachers, and students in reading, interpreting, and protecting the territory;

Promotion of science and knowledge, as tools for citizenship, innovation, and territorial development;

Openness to national and international networks, as a way to enrich practices, inspire projects, and share knowledge.

Its implementation will be supported by mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement, ensuring coherence and relevance in all actions.

The Algarvensis Geopark thus positions itself as an educator territory, where the school steps beyond its walls and finds in the territory a living classroom. Where children learn from the rocks, young people engage in dialogue with fossils, teachers reshape curricula based on the real world, and the entire community is called upon to recognize, value, and care for the heritage that defines it.

This plan is not a closed document: it is a foundation for growth, integration of new proposals, inclusion of diverse perspectives, and the construction of lasting bridges between science, culture, and education.

Through this document, the Algarvensis Geopark declares its readiness to implement an educational action that is transformative, plural, critical, affective, and deeply rooted in its territory.

In this context, the Strategic Geoeducation Plan also aims to gather contributions from educators and trainers, reinforcing a vision of integrated, cross-cutting, and engaging geoeducation, centered on people and the appreciation of a unique territory, both in its geodiversity and in its human and cultural dimension.

All geoeducational activities should be conceived as meaningful, memorable, and shareable experiences, with educational and emotional value, capable of impacting students and creating strong bonds with the territory.

Educational Experiences with Emotional Value

Geoeducation in the Algarvensis Geopark has the mission of empowering new generations to interpret, preserve, and narrate their territory, transforming them into true guardians and storytellers of its geodiversity, culture, and intangible heritage.

Educating to Tell Our Story

The geoeducation plan will be articulated with the Geopark's communication strategy, in order to give public visibility to good educational practices, student and teacher testimonials, didactic materials produced, and field activities carried out.

Strengthening the Visibility of Geoeducation

Education must serve the construction of a shared identity, creating a sense of belonging and pride in the Algarvensis territory, where children and young people recognize themselves as "children of the Geopark."

Education as a Pillar of Territorial Identity

In this context, education should be understood as a structural tool for the Geopark's positioning, capable of fostering belonging, recognition, and social cohesion.

Based on the strategic document "A Strategic-to-Action Marketing Blueprint for the Geopark Algarvensis" (2024), the importance of aligning the geoeducation plan with principles of institutional communication, community engagement, and the construction of territorial identity is emphasized.

Loulé, June 2025

Executive Coordination of the Algarvensis Geopark



“ONE TERRITORY,
SEVERAL SEAS TO DISCOVER!...”

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