

A photograph of two men in a pottery workshop. On the left, an older man with white hair and a yellow apron looks towards the camera. On the right, a younger man with a beard and blue apron is focused on shaping a piece of clay on a pottery wheel. The background shows shelves with various pottery items.

# **STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP PLAN**

of the Algarvensis Geopark



## 1. GENERAL FRAMEWORK

The Strategic Partnership Plan of the Algarvensis Geopark arises from the need to structure, in a clear, integrated, and goal-oriented manner, the relationships established between the Algarvensis Geopark Association (AGA) and the various stakeholders in the territory. Recognizing the central role of partnerships in the operational model of UNESCO Global Geoparks, this plan serves as a guide for sustainable and collaborative development, based on principles of shared responsibility, transparency, equity, and the enhancement of the territory's human, heritage, and ecological capital.

This document results from the consolidation of normative, scientific, and strategic documents already produced by the Algarvensis Geopark, among which the following stand out: the Application Dossier, the Strategic Marketing Plan, the Business Plan, the AGA Statutes and Internal Regulations, as well as the partnership standards, membership form, letter of commitment, and documented partnership practices, along with other references authored by the executive coordination.

It thus constitutes a guidance tool for both internal and external purposes, applicable to new and existing partners, the local community, governmental and non-governmental entities, and the Geopark's technical team itself, promoting a shared vision for the future anchored in a strong commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with particular emphasis on SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals.

This plan will be publicly available, in both Portuguese and English, on the official Algarvensis Geopark website, also contributing to the sharing of good practices within the Global Geoparks Network and among territories aspiring to this designation.





## 2. STRATEGIC RATIONALE FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are one of the fundamental pillars of the management and development model of UNESCO Global Geoparks. In the case of the Algarvensis Geopark, partnerships are understood as strategic forms of cooperation aimed at strengthening ties with territorial stakeholders, with a direct impact on the enhancement of natural and cultural heritage, the promotion of socio-economic dynamics, and the reinforcement of local identity.

The strategic importance of partnerships is based on five main dimensions:

- Co-construction of a shared territorial vision;
- Mobilization of resources and synergies;
- Promotion of sustainable local development;
- Recognition and enhancement of local knowledge and know-how;
- Strengthening of the sense of belonging.

This plan is guided by the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network's reference documents and is also aligned with the principles of the 2030 Agenda, particularly SDG 17. Partnerships are not seen as occasional collaborations, but rather as structured, formalized, and continuously evaluated relationships that ensure shared responsibility between AGA and its partners.

The practical application of this principle translates into joint initiatives, co-organization of events, educational actions, integration of products and services into the Geopark's routes and programs, among many other forms of collaborative engagement.

## 3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIPS

The establishment and consolidation of partnerships within the Algarvensis Geopark are governed by a set of guiding principles that ensure the coherence, transparency, and sustainability of all established relationships. These are:

- 1. SUSTAINABILITY** – Every partnership must contribute to environmental, economic, social, and cultural sustainability goals, in alignment with the SDGs.
- 2. TRANSPARENCY** – All processes related to membership, communication, responsibilities, and partner recognition are public, equitable, and open to scrutiny.
- 3. EQUITY** – The specificities of each partner are valued, ensuring that all, regardless of size or type, are treated fairly and have equal opportunity to participate.
- 4. TERRITORIAL VALORIZATION** – Each partnership must commit to promoting the territory, its natural and cultural values, and contribute to local vitality.

**5. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY** – Partnerships entail mutual commitments and shared responsibilities between AGA and its partners.

**6. PARTICIPATION** – Partners are invited to take part in forums, discussions, projects, and strategic decision-making, actively contributing to the cohesion of the Geopark.

**7. ETHICS** – All relationships are built upon ethical and socially responsible conduct.

**8. VISIBILITY** – Partners benefit from institutional recognition and visibility, while also serving as active promoters of the Algarvensis Geopark.

These principles underpin the entire operationalization of the Strategic Partnership Plan and form the basis for the continuous evaluation of all established partnerships.





## 4. TYPES OF PARTNERS

Partnerships within the Algarvensis Geopark are organized into various types, reflecting the diversity of actors involved in fulfilling the Geopark's mission. The partner categories include:

**INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS** – Founding municipalities, universities, research centers, schools, public entities, and state agencies.

**EDUCATIONAL PARTNERS** – School clusters, secondary schools, higher education institutions, training centers, and non-formal education providers.

**SCIENTIFIC PARTNERS** – R&D units, affiliated researchers, and research projects focused on Geopark-related themes.

**CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS** – Local associations, cultural, ethnographic and recreational groups, as well as social and religious institutions.

**ECONOMIC PARTNERS** – Businesses, local producers, tourism operators, restaurants, accommodation providers, local commerce, and service providers.

**ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNERS** – Civil society organizations, NGOs, environmentally committed companies, and landscape management agents.

**CREATIVE PARTNERS** – Artists, designers, artisans, and creative entrepreneurs developing territory-based projects.

This typology enables an integrated, multisectoral, and inclusive approach, ensuring that the Strategic Partnership Plan encompasses all dimensions and interactions essential to the vitality of the Geopark.





## 5. PARTNERSHIP FORMALIZATION PROCESSES

- 1. EXPRESSION OF INTEREST** – The potential partner contacts the AGA technical team, expressing the intention to join the partnership network.
- 2. FRAMING MEETING** – A meeting is held to allow for mutual introductions, clarify the objectives of the partnership, and assess feasibility.
- 3. COMPLETION OF THE APPLICATION FORM** – The partner fills out the application form, providing relevant information and a proposed project to be developed within the Geopark framework.
- 4. TECHNICAL ANALYSIS** – The AGA team reviews the partnership proposal, ensuring alignment with the Geopark's principles and assessing the viability of the proposed project.
- 5. SIGNING OF THE LETTER OF COMMITMENT** – If approved, the Letter of Commitment is signed, formalizing the partnership and outlining the shared goals.
- 6. PARTNER PLAQUE DELIVERY** – The partner receives an official plaque and Algarvensis Geopark communication materials.
- 7. INCLUSION ON THE OFFICIAL PORTAL** – The new partner is added to the Geopark's official partner map and communication channels, becoming an active member of the network.

This process is governed by AGA's regulatory documents (Internal Regulations, Application Form, Partnership Guidelines, and Letter of Commitment), ensuring legality, traceability, and transparency.

## 6. PROJECT ASSOCIATED WITH THE PARTNERSHIP

One of the distinctive dimensions of partnering with the Algarvensis Geopark is the requirement to present and implement a Project within the Geopark context, aligned with its objectives, principles, and areas of intervention. This project must contribute directly to the Geopark's main pillars of action:

- Enhancement of geological, natural, and cultural heritage;
- Promotion of education for sustainable development;
- Socioeconomic revitalization of the territory;
- Creation of innovative and identity-based products;
- Awareness-raising and engagement of the local community.

From the moment of joining, each partner commits to presenting a project proposal, which will be monitored and coordinated with the AGA technical team. The nature of the project may vary: from the creation of a tourism product, the implementation of educational initiatives, to providing logistical support at Geopark events, among others.





## 7. CERTIFICATION OF ALGARVENSIS GEOPARK PRODUCTS

The Algarvensis Geopark is developing its own product certification process for local producers and processors, with the goal of enhancing endogenous resources and promoting practices aligned with sustainability principles.

This certification does not replace national or European official certifications, but rather constitutes a Geopark identity seal, assuring consumers that the product meets rigorous standards aligned with UNESCO and Algarvensis Geopark values.

### The main certification criteria include:

- Local origin and territorial identity;
- Use of sustainable agricultural or production practices;
- Respect for labor rights and decent working conditions;
- Reduction of environmental impact and promotion of circular economy principles;
- Contribution to the economic and social development of the territory.

The process begins with the submission of a request form by the partner. The AGA technical team then evaluates the request, possibly seeking external advice when necessary. Certification is granted only after this assessment. This initiative is directly related to SDGs 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and will be publicly promoted as a distinctive mark of the Algarvensis Geopark.

## 8. FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK, MEMBERSHIP FEES AND SUSTAINABILITY

The membership fees for the Algarvensis Geopark Association were established during its formal foundation in March 2024. This definition considered the balance between the financial sustainability of the association and the accessibility for various types of partners.

However, it is understood that these fees should be reviewed and updated over time, according to the project's evolution and the maturity of established partnerships.

Thus, in the last quarter of 2025, a participatory review process of the membership fees will be launched, which will include:

- Consultation with existing partners and local stakeholders;
- Analysis of fairness and proportionality among partner categories;
- Alignment with the Geopark's funding needs;
- Validation by the Association's Board.
- This revision process aims to ensure transparency, fairness, and viability in the partnership system, promoting shared financial responsibility among all parties involved.

All updates regarding membership fees will be published through AGA's official channels and communicated directly to partners, ensuring predictability, fairness, and shared accountability.





## 9. GOOD PRACTICES AND INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES

The consolidation of a strategic partnership plan for a UNESCO Global Geopark must be inspired by good practices already implemented at both national and international levels. In this context, the Algarvensis Geopark acknowledges and follows the strategies developed by various geoparks within the Global Geoparks Network.

### Notable national examples include:

- Naturtejo Geopark – Development of local brands and partner clubs strongly linked to tourism and regional products.
- Arouca Geopark – Creation of the “Arouca Geopark” brand and certification system for associated products and services.
- Estrela Geopark – Promotion of partnerships with schools, universities, and tour operators to enhance knowledge and appreciation of the territory.

### At the international level, notable examples include:

- Haute-Provence Geopark (France) – A certified partner network with sustainability criteria and direct involvement in educational activities.
- Katla Geopark (Iceland) – Engagement of local microenterprises in geological storytelling and natural heritage projects.
- Langkawi Geopark (Malaysia) – Integration of indigenous communities and fishers into sustainable value chains.

These experiences highlight the importance of clear structuring of criteria, independent certification, technical support, and public recognition of partners as essential elements for the success and sustainability of a partnership plan.

Furthermore, UNESCO Global Geoparks Network brochures emphasize the role of partnerships in fulfilling SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), recommending that Geoparks develop dedicated strategic plans for this dimension — as is now being implemented by the Algarvensis Geopark.



## 10. MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PARTNERSHIPS

The implementation of partnerships within the Algarvensis Geopark is subject to a process of continuous monitoring and evaluation, ensuring their effectiveness, coherence, and contribution to the Geopark’s objectives.

### The following mechanisms are established:

1. Technical Support – Each partner is accompanied by the AGA technical team, which maintains regular contact, supports project implementation, and verifies compliance with the Letter of Commitment.
2. Annual Evaluation – All partners will undergo an annual evaluation, based on criteria such as participation in activities, execution of the proposed project, alignment with the Geopark’s values, and benefits generated for the community.
3. Partnership Reports – Partners may be asked to submit a brief annual report summarizing the activities carried out, challenges encountered, and future proposals.
4. Partner Meetings – General or sector-specific meetings with partners will be promoted to share experiences, update information, and plan joint initiatives.

5. Record Updates – The partner map, institutional list, and certifications will be regularly updated on AGA’s official platforms.

These mechanisms also serve to identify opportunities for growth, redefine strategies, strengthen partnerships, or discontinue collaborations that no longer adhere to the established principles.





## 11. IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

### Indicative Timeline for the Participatory Review of Membership Fees (2025)

Phase	Expected Period	Objective
Internal preparatory assessment	Sept. 2025	Analysis of current fees, review of categories, and benchmarking against best practices in other Geoparks.
Planning and methodology definition	End of Sept. 2025	Definition of methods for stakeholder consultation and participatory processes.
Consultation and hearing sessions	Oct. 2025	Thematic meetings, working groups, or surveys with partners.
Systematization and proposal analysis	Early Nov. 2025	Consolidation of feedback and drafting of the final technical proposal.
Presentation and internal validation	End of Nov. 2025	Submission to the Association's Board for formal deliberation.
Communication and entry into force	Dec. 2025 / Jan. 2026	Public release of the new criteria and values; implementation expected in Q1 2026.

## 10. MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PARTNERSHIPS

### Additional milestones:

July to September 2025 – Public release of the Strategic Partnership Plan; organization of information and clarification sessions for current and potential partners.

October to December 2025 – Launch of the participatory review process for membership fees and categories; collection of feedback by partner type.

January to March 2026 – Consolidation and validation of the new fee structure; definition of new partnership outreach goals.

From April 2026 onwards – Strengthening of the partnership network through invitations, training sessions, technical visits, and communication campaigns.

**Annual evaluation** – Starting in 2026, a global evaluation of partnerships will be conducted at the end of each calendar year.  
Strategic Plan review – This plan will be revised every three years; the next update is scheduled for 2028.

### The following mechanisms are established:

1. Technical Support – Each partner is accompanied by the AGA technical team, which maintains regular contact, supports project implementation, and verifies compliance with the Letter of Commitment.

2. Annual Evaluation – All partners will undergo an annual evaluation, based on criteria such as participation in activities, execution of the proposed project, alignment





## 12. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Indicative Timeline for the Participatory Review of Membership Fees (2025)

This Strategic Partnership Plan of the Algarvensis Geopark represents a key and foundational step toward the consolidation of a strong, coherent, and transformative partnership network. It reflects the founding principles of the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network as well as the strategic documents developed by the Algarvensis Geopark Association team.

The plan is intended to be a living and dynamic instrument, open to adaptation, improvement, and contributions from the partner network and the evolving needs of the territory. It aims to serve both as an internal operational guide and an external source of inspiration, for existing geoparks and aspiring territories alike.





By committing to this plan, the Algarvensis Geopark reaffirms its dedication to an inclusive, responsible, and shared model of territorial development. Partnerships are not an accessory to the project — they are its very essence.

We therefore invite all local stakeholders to get involved, join, and co-build this journey. Only with everyone, can a Geopark truly belong to everyone.



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

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