

# GGN - Geopark Annual Report 2023

## 1. GEOPARK IDENTITY

**Geopark name, country, regional Network:** Psiloritis UNESCO Global Geopark, Greece, European Geoparks Network

**Year of inscription / Year of the last revalidation:** 2015 / 2023



Picture from the discussions during the 1st Impact-Chain Workshop that was implemented in October 2023 with the participation of local stakeholders from multiple agencies and associations, in order to explore the potential impacts of temperature rise in the coastal and lowland areas of the Geopark. The Workshop was implemented within the context of the Horizon 2020 project, RescueME- Resilient Cultural Landscapes, in which Psiloritis UGGp participates as an area of implementation.

## 2. GEOPARK FIGURES

**Number of Geopark staffs:** 7 people including 2 geoscientists

**Number of visitors:** Apart from the number of students, visiting the Information Center during Educational activities implemented by the Geopark and its partners (see below), the Geopark does not yet have a tool for the quantification of its visitors throughout the territory or specific points of interest within its wide borders. In total, the number of visitors to the geopark is difficult to estimate:

About 24000 visitors visited the Archaeological Museum of Eleftherna, 2700 the Archaeological site of ancient Tyliossos, about 50000 Sfentoni cave and 40000 Melidoni cave. On average, the visitors of the geopark are estimated to be more than 100.000 in 2023.

**Number of Geopark events:** In total, 21 events were held or effectively supported (in the case they were hosted by its partners) by the Geopark. These included the Psiloritis Geopark annual Festival, and many more public talks, events, workshops, seminars, guided tours etc.

**Number of school classes realize Geopark educational programmes:** The Geopark's partner, the Education Center of Anogia for the Environment and Sustainability, implemented different educational programs within the Geopark's territory and in collaboration with the geopark staff, which amounted to approximately 950 students of Preliminary, Junior High and High School classes visiting the Information Center of the Geopark. Additionally, the Geopark implemented activities related to the geodiversity of the area to ~20 scouts, ~30 students, and activities related to the climate crisis and natural disasters from its educational kit "Climate change in insular geoparks" in ~500 students from 14 different schools during the inter-scientific activity "Karst - Water and biodiversity formation in the area of the Koiliaris River in Stylos Apokoronou, from the past to the present", organized by the 7th High School, the Laboratory Center for Natural Sciences and the Directorate of Secondary Education of Chania.

**Number of Geopark press release:** The Geopark published 12 thematic series of individual social media posts and public press- releases dedicated to specific international days (e.g. Wildlife Day, Geodiversity Day etc. and thematic series of posts related to local myths- geodiversity, geosites of international importance etc.) and, also, many dozens of posts at social media and local newspapers on topics related to the Geopark's natural and cultural heritage, geopark news etc. it is worth mentioning that Psiloritis Geopark also took part in 2 poster- releases concerning activities and events planned for the International Days for Geodiversity and the Environment, jointly with all the Geopark- members of the Hellenic Geoparks Forum (an initiative undertook by the Forum's Committee on education).

### **3. GEOPARK ACTIVITIES**

#### **Major achievements in 2023**

2023 marks the beginning of a new Horizon 2020 project, RescueME- Resilient Cultural Landscapes, through which the Geopark proceeded in hiring 1 new staff member. RescueME is a Research Action funded by the Horizon Europe programme, focusing on enhancing the resilience of coastal cultural landscapes in Europe. It mobilizes resources, engages stakeholders, facilitates decision making, and enhances the implementation of co-created and just resilience solutions to protect our common heritage. Chosen areas from Psiloritis UGGp, participate as areas of implementation for the produced tools and solutions and for this reason, an Impact- Chain Workshop was implemented in

October 2023 with the participation of local stakeholders from multiple agencies and associations, in order to explore the potential impacts of temperature rise in the coastal and lowland areas of the Geopark.

In addition, in July 2023 the geopark hosted the 4 years, revalidation mission, which resulted in to the Green Card nomination for the next four years.

### **Contribution towards GGN - Networking and participation**

- Geopark's director, as member of the UGGp Council participated in two council meetings, one in presence in Morocco, and one digital. In addition, he implemented two evaluation missions and he is active member (vice catalyst) of the Geohazards WG.
- Geopark participated at the GGN congress in Morocco.
- Geopark participated in most of the international campaigns organized by GGN this year.

### **Management and Financial Status**

No particular changes. After the change in the Geopark's management in 2021 (its management was transferred from AKOMM Psiloritis SA to a new, Non-Profit Company, named "Idaion Network", that was created at the end of 2019, by the Municipalities of the Geopark and the Region of Crete), the 9- seat Council of the management body's General Assembly decided on the creation of a new committee to facilitate the geopark's management and functionality. In 2022, the Council decided to establish an Advisory Board in which representatives of the partners of the geopark, as well as the various groups of stakeholders, have a seat with a two-year term, that advises and discusses with the council on matters concerning the policy making and the geopark strategy. The board meets at least twice per year and is formed by one representative from the collaborating Museums, research Institutions, local Chambers, Social Cooperatives, tourism operators, accommodations, restaurants, cultural clubs, Show-caves, local enterprises, local producers, local artists, etc.

Finance of the Idaion Network and, consequently, of the geopark is secured through three main sources. The first is the direct annual contribution of the shareholders of the geopark, who agree upon an annual fee that depends on the action plan and the proposed budget that the Council suggests during the General Assembly. This fee secures the basic annual liabilities and the operational costs of the company. Secondly, by the contribution of its partners (mainly AKOMM and NHMC) in kind (i.e., personnel time for management of the geopark); and thirdly from means resulting from the geopark's own projects and other initiatives.

### **Geoconservation**

The geopark is not officially in charge for the conservation and protection of natural heritage in its area, as this by Law is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Environment and the Regional services of Forestry and Archaeology. However, in collaboration with local authorities, the geopark monitors the geosites and other areas of environmental interest and performs necessary actions for their

conservation and maintenance. In 2023, however, the Geopark did take some steps to improve the situation of some of its geosites' and geotrails' accessibility by putting 17 new information signs in different areas throughout the territory. Additionally, it proceeded in voluntary signage maintenance and litter- removal of the geotrail nearest to the Information Center (Mygia's trail) during an event co-organized with multiple local authorities. Also, in 2023, the materialization of the Geopark's collaboration with the national organisation for Natural Environment and Climate Change (NECCA) actively started by beginning to use the funding that has been received by the geopark to promote two emblematic geosites (with the construction of view- points) and partial renovations of the existing info-center. This project is underway and expected to be completed in the following months.

### **Sustainable tourism (Geotourism)**

The geopark staff participated and organised events and workshops supporting the sustainable development of touristic and athletic activities, while meetings with local tourism stakeholders were also organised. Regarding the last comment, on the afternoon of the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2023, the geopark staff met with members of the Psiloritis Geopark "Local Quality Label" (an initiative to bring together and support producers and businesses in the territory that share the Geopark's vision and quality), in order to reaffirm their collaboration by sharing ideas and expressing constructive comments on how the *Label* could improve. Another one of the highlights of the Geopark's actions in favor of sustainable tourism, was a 2-day seminar addressed to mountain guides (organized for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time by the Geopark), in order to introduce them to the philosophy and the natural and cultural heritage of the Geopark. This seminar ended with an extra day in the field, during which the participants witnessed what the Geopark's staff and scientific partners had introduced theoretically during the first two days of the seminar. Additionally, during 2023 a field survey for the establishment of multiple new paths and trails begun in the Geopark, that will be prepared and delivered during the next few months (as a complete study for the implementation of a new series of family- friendly trails) by the company "Paths of Greece". This study, will serve as the basis for an expanded network of trails suitable for non- expert hikers, hopefully enabling the geopark to approach a new type of visitors of its wilderness. Moreover, a new set of 360° panoramas was produced and incorporated in the Geopark's toolkit and VR experiences, concerning the highest peak of Psiloritis, Timios Stavros. At an altitude of 2456m, Timios Stavros can now be accessible digitally, through the Geopark's digital means, by those visitors that could not access it physically.

### **New education programmes on geoconservation, sustainable development and disaster risk reduction**

Three new short educational programs were designed in the last months of 2023 by the Geopark's staff including short presentations, knowledge- retention activities and respective worksheets. These programs are as follows: 1. Psiloritis: UNESCO Global Geopark (for Elementary-High School): what is and what does a geopark do? what are the "geosites" and what is the geodiversity of Psiloritis

Geopark? what is the paleogeographic evolution of Crete? how does geology relate to the animals, plants and people of Psiloritis?; 2. A tale from Psiloritis Geopark (for Kindergarten - mid- Elementary School): who studies rocks? what is a geopark and what does it do? what can be a "geosite" and what cannot? what does geology have to do with myths?; 3. Biodiversity and Psiloritis Geopark (for mid- Elementary -High School): what is and what does a geopark do? what is geodiversity and biodiversity? how are they related to each other? unique plants and animals of Psiloritis Geopark: their history and threats. These programs are gradually tested during school visits in early 2024 and will be adjusted according to the Geopark- staff's observations and the teachers'/ students' feedback. Moreover, new activities and short experiments are also being used for schools visiting the visitor's center and in events where the geopark is invited, to explain to children and also adults basic geological processes one can see in the Geopark and also concepts and behaviors related to sustainability.

### **Strategic partnership**

Since 2007, Psiloritis geopark has established a network of stakeholders based on a Quality Label Agreement under the "Psiloritis Land Association" (initially), the "Psiloritis Friends" awarded system (in 2017) and the development of the "Criteria for a Quality label" produced by AKOMM SA under GEOIN project in 2019. The Psiloritis Geopark Local Quality Label is given to businesses in the area (accommodations, restaurants, producers) but also associates (museums, facility management bodies), reflecting differently depending on the characteristics of each stakeholder. The Local Quality Label promotes networking between all the involved bodies of the Geopark area that accept its environmental and cultural value, while it also benefits from the Geopark's recognition by UNESCO and additional networking and promotional opportunities it provides.

So far, the Psiloritis Geopark Local Quality Label has been awarded to numerous hotels, restaurants, local producers, artists, alternative tourism agencies, as well as museums and management bodies. In 2023, the Geopark added 5 new stakeholders (Vedema Social Cooperative Enterprise, Epimenides Cultural Society of Panormo, LOGOS wooden craftware, Damianakis Fossil collection & Herbs, Tourist Guides Of Crete), while it also met with former members of the Psiloritis Geopark "Local Quality Label" to reaffirm their collaboration by sharing ideas and expressing constructive comments on how the Label could improve.

### **Promotional activities**

The geopark itself organized many promotional activities with the Psiloritis Geopark Festival being the highlight of its events, but also numerous seminars and other, smaller scale events (presented also in the sections above). Some examples of such promotional initiatives were the participation of the Geopark in the tourism exhibition ITB Berlin 2023 (through the *UNESCO sites in Crete* initiative of the Region of Crete) and the inclusion of landscapes and businesses from Psiloritis in the Aegean Airlines magazine *blue* (for Nov- Dec 2023), introducing Psiloritis Geopark to a grander scale of

audiences. Smaller events, in the local level, targeting at residents and visitors of the territory included events and actions organized by the Geopark and/ or its partners in different cultural events (Amari Green Festival, “*All of Greece under One Culture*” at Ideon Andron) and sports activities (Keri cross- country race 2023), and events like the “Open Day at the Information Center of the Geopark for International Earth Day” and the numerous online campaigns on the promotion of local producers and businesses. Targeted audiences, like scientific researchers, were reached through the Geopark’s participation in meetings and conferences (e.g. presenting examples of good practices, activities and projects of the Geopark at the Greek Geopark Forum International Conference 2023 and the Helecos 2023 Conference of the Hellenic Ecological Society, guiding participants of the Ancient Philosophy Conference "Form and Matter in Porphyry and Iamblichus" in geosites of the territory etc.). Finally, multiple seminars (co-) organized by the Education Center of Anogia for the Environment and Sustainability/ Natural History Museum of Crete, addressing to school- teachers, included presentations of the examples of practices/ educational programs implemented in our territory by geopark staff and said partners.

#### **4. CONTACTS**

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