

GGN - Geopark Annual Report 2022

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 / 2019

Representative photo with caption (from the most important event this year)



Synthesis of the different aspects of the Geopark (local art, local products, promotional material, education activities) that took place during the second Geopark's Festival (at Fountana square, Gergeri village, 3 Sept. 2022).

2. GEOPARK FIGURES

Number of Geopark staffs: 6 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 80000 visitors received the Archaeological Museum of Eleftherna, about 60000 the Sfentoni and 40000 the Melidoni cave. On average the visitors of geopark are estimated to be more than 300.000 in 2022.

Number of Geopark events: In total, 19 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, digital campaigns, workshops, seminars, guided tours etc.

Number of school classes realize Geopark educational programmes: A new educational program for responsible consumption and recycling was designed within the RURITAGE project by the geopark and project team, called “Reduce- Reuse- Recycle”, which was successfully tested in 6 schools in the geopark area and during other events of the Geopark (Geopark festival, public talks etc.). Additionally, the Geopark’s partner, the Environmental Education Center of Anogia, implemented different educational programs within the Geopark’s territory and in collaboration with the geopark staff, which amounted to approximately 500 students of Preliminary, Junior High and High School classes visiting the Information Center of the Geopark.

Number of Geopark press release: Many hundreds of posts at social media and local newspapers.

3. GEOPARK ACTIVITIES

Major achievements in 2022

A strategic collaboration has been established with NECCA and the Ministry of Environment, which now overviews and supports the Greek geoparks through MoUs and new legislation. In 2022, additionally, the Geopark managed to add to its network of partners most Social Cooperative Enterprises of the territory as well as two research/ scientific institutes.

Contribution towards GGN - Networking and participation

- GGN Digital event on the International Geodiversity Day: Digital Course to celebrate the International Geodiversity Day, Oct. 2022
- Participation in Digital Course on UGGps organised by GGN: Digital Course on UNESCO Global Geoparks & Geotourism (presentation by C. Fassoulas), 11/2022
- Geoparks Summer school 2022 (Digital): presentation by C. Fassoulas, 11/2022

Management and Financial Status

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. Thus, 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. In the years since the COVID 19 outbreak, the activity of the geopark was much reduced and this was depicted to the annual budget. No projects were implemented, as well as dissemination and other public activities. Since 2021, however, the geopark budget includes the receipt of funding additional to the other income, through projects of IDAION Network.

Geoconservation

The geopark is not officially in charge for the conservation and protection of natural heritage in its area, as this by Law is an authority of the Ministry of Environment and the Regional services of Forest 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. However, the Geopark took action and participated actively in the discussions for the development of the Management Plans for the Nature 2000 areas and organised online workshop on 13/1/2022 with its community to discuss proposed plans by the Ministry of Environment. On the geopark's collaboration with said Ministry, an important side step was achieved with the establishment of a formal partnership between the Geopark and the Ministry of Environment and the national organisation for Natural Environment and Climate Change (NECCA), which is monitoring and managing the Nature 2000 and other protected areas in Greece. An MoU was signed and special funding has been received by the geopark to promote emblematic geosites (two in 2023) and improve existing info-center.

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. Additionally, the Geopark coordinates the project titled "UNESCO sites in Crete" that has already provided results on the promotion of the UNESCO sites of Crete as a tourism product through the photographic exhibition IRIS Green Witness, the National Geographic magazine and international press announcements. Signed agreements exist with 4 tourism agencies operating in the area of the geopark, whereas under the RURITAGE project, a study for the tourism promotion of the geopark was produced, that has been included in its new Management plan. The Geopark participates at the temporary exhibition of all Greek geoparks of Greece and Cyprus titled "Memories of Gaia", that has traveled in many areas of said countries, through the year. The respective local businesses are also promoted via the geopark's promotional tools (website, social media, articles

concerning the geopark etc.).

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

A new educational program for responsible consumption and recycling was designed within the RURITAGE project by the geopark and project team. The program was successfully tested in 6 schools in the geopark area and from next year it will be available in all schools in the area. It was also performed during other events of the Geopark (Geopark festival, public talks etc.). Additionally, short presentations on the evolution of the island of Crete and the Geopark's main characteristics (in Greek and English) entitled "Psiloritis UNESCO Global Geopark" and cave formation (in Greek) entitled "The world of Caves", have been developed including simplified sketches and images of examples of corresponding topics (geodiversity, biodiversity, history, myths, people). 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 the children basic geological processes one can see in the Geopark: relationship between limestone and water, stalagmite formation, karst formation etc.

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 2022, however, the Geopark managed to add to its network of partners most Social Cooperative Enterprises of the territory (N- Idaia, Rodakas, Argastiri, Anavatis tou Psiloriti (Psiloritis' Climber) Social Cooperative Enterprises (SCE), "To Konaki" - Omada Melissoparagogon Gergeris OE (Beekeepers of Gergeri), "Idaia Gi" - Women's Cooperative) and the Research Institutes of Skinakas Observatory and the Palaeontological Museum of Rethymnon, as well as one additional local producer and one more restaurant owner.

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 section "*Number of Geopark events*"), such as short courses and seminars on alternative

tourism, cultural and sports activities with stakeholders, and events like the Geodiversity Day photo contest, the online campaigns on the promotion of local producers and businesses, the display of the VR- tour of Nida plateau during the Skinakas Observatory open Day, the “Memories of Gaia” Greek and Cypriot Geoparks’ common exhibition, the IRIS Green Project photo exhibition etc.

4. CONTACTS

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