

NETWORKING IN UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARKS – THE MODEL, THE REALITY AND BENEFITS TO TOURISM

FUNCIONAMENTO EM REDE NA UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARKS – O MODELO, A REALIDADE E BENEFÍCIOS PARA O TURISMO

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Resumo

A globalização atribui novos valores aos territórios no sentido em que eles se tornam atores de desenvolvimento, com novos e diferentes desafios. Atualmente, a gestão territorial procura alcançar vantagens competitivas ao nível local relativamente ao desenvolvimento económico e territorial global. Uma das vias para valorizar o território é fazer uso de possibilidades de classificação nacional ou internacional. Entre estas formas de classificação estão a criação de geoparques, atualmente conectados numa rede mundial - o Programa Internacional de Geociência e Geoparques (PIGG). Um dos grandes objetivos desta rede é fornecer organizações competitivas em territórios onde algumas condições específicas se encontram cumpridas. Este artigo procura compreender a forma como os geoparques agem e quais os benefícios resultantes das atividades turísticas nesses espaços, prestando especial atenção aos geoparques europeus. Para atingir este objetivo, a investigação baseia-se na análise da anterior Rede Europeia de Geoparques (REG), onde tudo começou, procurando o conhecimento de como ela é reforçada institucionalmente através da aplicação de um questionário de levantamento para os geoparques. A análise destaca o importante papel desempenhado pela criação de instituições, reunindo vários atores, o que permite explorar elementos críticos para o sucesso dos geoparques.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Geoparques, turismo, rede.

Abstract

Globalization assigns new values to territories in the sense that they become actors of development, with new and different challenges. Currently, territorial management seeks out to achieve local competitive advantages in relation to global economic and territorial development. One of the ways to value the territory is to make use of national or international classification possibilities. Among these forms of classification are the creation of geoparks, currently connected in a worldwide network - the International Geoscience and Geoparks Program (IGGP). One of the great aims of this network is to provide competitive organizations in territories where some specific conditions are met. This paper seeks to understand the way geoparks act and what benefits are resulting from tourism, paying

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special attention to European geoparks. To achieve this goal, the research is based on the analysis of the former European Geoparks Network (EGN), where all began, seeking the knowledge of how it is institutionally reinforced by conducting a survey to geoparks. The analysis highlights the important role played by the creation of institutions, bringing together several actors, which allows exploring critical elements for the success of geoparks.

KEYWORDS: Geoparks, tourism, networking.

1. THE GEOPARKS PROGRAM: EVOLUTION AND OPERATION

The concern regarding the creation of geoparks in Europe arose during the 30th International Geological Congress in 1996, held in Beijing, largely due to Nickolas Zouros and Guy Martini. These two participants in the Congress shared with the congresspersons the difficulties to balance the need of safeguarding and promote geological heritage and, simultaneously, search for sustainable development of territories where geoparks are sited (Zouros, 2004). They called up the attention to the importance of local communities' involvement and participation as fundamental conditions for the success of this strategy, for scientific, educational and tourism purposes.

As a result, four European territories - the Haute-Provence Geological Nature Reserve in France, the Lesvos Petrified Forest in Greece, the Gerolstein/Vulkanaifel Geopark in Germany and the Maestrazgo Cultural Park in Spain – got together, aiming to exchange experiences with the purpose of protecting and promoting geological heritage, as well as seeking to ensure its value for the promotion of sustainable local development. A second level of reasoning that led to the agreement between the four regions resulted from the fact that socio-economic characteristics are quite similar: rural areas, with scientific relevant geological heritage, untapped natural beauty and high cultural tourism potential, but which, in contrast, entail difficulties of economic development, with high unemployment rates and migratory flows.

The common ground has been formalised through a partnership, supported by the European Union's LEADER programme, and deepened by completion of joint studies and exchange of ideas, experiences and knowledge. This process led to the concept of geopark and the outlining of common strategies for economic and social development based on the promotion of Geotourism. These relations, over time and with the richness of further interactions, led to the creation of the European Geoparks Network (EGN) on 5 June 2000 on the island of Lesvos, Greece, resulting from the common path journeyed by the four founding regions.

On 20 April 2001, the Cooperation Agreement between UNESCO and the European Geoparks Network (EGN) was signed at Cabo de Gata-Nijar Natural Park, Spain, during the opening ceremony of the International Meeting "Management of Protected Natural Spaces and Sustainable Development". It was only then that UNESCO's sponsorship became official (Catana, 2008).

Later, on 13 February 2004, an international meeting was held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, attended by members of the Scientific Board of the International Geoscience Program (IGCP), representatives of the International Geographical Union (IGU) and the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS), as well as specialists in conservation and promotion of geological heritage. The meeting's objective was to present the final report 'Guidelines for National Geoparks seeking for UNESCO's assistance' (Frey, Schäfer, Büchel & Patzak, 2006). This report provides a set of detailed information regarding the criteria to be met for the establishment of a geopark. Furthermore, since part of the work was already bounded, it was decided to create the UNESCO's Global Geoparks Network (GGN), which included the 17 existing European geoparks and 8 new Chinese geoparks. It was also decided that geoparks which are part of the EGN will also be part of the UNESCO's GGN, without further procedures (Zouros, 2004; Frey et al, 2006; Eder & Patzak, 2004).

The 1st UNESCO International Conference on Geoparks was held in Beijing from 27 to 29 June 2004 and aimed at promoting the creation of the International Network of National Geoparks, with contributions from national governments and non-governmental organizations (Zouros, 2004).

During the 5th Annual Meeting of the European Network held in Petralia Sottana, Sicily, Italy, at the Madonie Geopark, an agreement was signed officially between the Division of Earth Sciences of UNESCO and the geoparks network - the Declaration of Madonie. Here it was defined that the EGN is an organization included in the GGN.

According to Eder & Patzak (2004: 162) “The aim of this network is to provide a platform of cooperation and exchange between experts and practitioners in geological heritage matters under the umbrella of UNESCO. The network spans all regions of the world and shall bring together groups that share common values, interests, or backgrounds. The International Network of National Geoparks under UNESCO shall serve to develop models of best practice and set standards for territories, which integrate the preservation of geological heritage into a strategy for regional economic development”. They further point out that geoparks under the patronage of UNESCO are committed to: protect the geological heritage for future generations (conservation); educate the general public on issues relating to geological landscapes and environmental matters (education); boost research in geosciences (science); pursue sustainable development (development and tourism).

The concept of geopark exists formally for almost two decades since the first parks became reality (Martini & Zouros, 2008). In the definition established by EGN (retrieved from EGN website), a European Geopark is a “territory which includes a particular geological heritage and a sustainable territorial development strategy”. This definition involves a threefold rationale for the concept (Zouros, 2004):

A European Geopark must highlight the scientific approach (geology), i.e., it must be endowed with a set of relevant geological sites of international significance, but may also be extended to archaeological, ecological, historical and/or cultural heritage.

The governing body of each geopark must agree on a strategy for sustainable territorial development, allowing and fuelling activities linked to tourism and education.

Connection to a wider network, benefiting from protecting regulatory actions and complying with a set of methodical management criteria. This refers to management’s transparency and will to assure heritage protection and correct use.

By 2011, the General Conference of UNESCO decided to “examine the feasibility of establishing a possible UNESCO geoparks programme or initiative, building on the existing success and experience of the Global Geoparks Network and geoparks” (UNESCO, 2012: 3). Two years later, the Executive Board of UNESCO “requests the Director-General to convene a working group of representatives of Member States, the UNESCO Secretariat, and the Global Geoparks Network before the end of June 2013, for further consultations on the proposed initiative and its programmatic and legal implications, with a view to producing recommendations thereon” (UNESCO, 2013: 5). The proposal of this working group was presented to the General Conference at its 38th session. Therefore, in 2015, UNESCO approved the International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme (IGGP), which is an umbrella that comprises two main activities: the current International Geosciences Programme (IGCP) and the new UNESCO Global Geoparks. Turner (2006) gives a detailed history of the newly years of IGCP and its evolution throughout time.

The UNESCO Global Geopark is a new label developed with the founding of IGGP. The aim was to set a “mechanism of international cooperation by which areas of geological heritage of international value, through a bottom-up approach to conserving that heritage, support each other to engage with local communities to promote awareness of that heritage and adopt a sustainable approach to the development of the area” (UNESCO, 2015: 4).

GGN was an informal structure for ten years. In 2014 it was converted into a legally constituted organisation in order to be able to take part in the general administration of UNESCO

Global Geoparks. This administration is assured by several bodies (Table 1) that started to operate in 2016.

Table 1. Structure of the administration of UNESCO Global Geoparks (Henriques & Brilha, 2017)

	Composition	Duties
Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twelve ordinary members appointed by the Director-General of UNESCO on recommendation of the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) and of Member States • The Director-General of UNESCO, the President of the GGN, the Secretary-General of the IUGS, the Director-General of the IUCN or their representatives are ex officio members without the right to vote 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To advise the Director-General of UNESCO on the strategy, planning and implementation of UNESCO Global Geoparks and specifically i) raising and allocating funds; and ii) cooperation among the UNESCO Global Geoparks and with other relevant programmes • To assess revalidated and new UNESCO Global Geopark nominations received from designated bodies in Member States • To decide on whether new applications should be forwarded to the Executive Board for endorsement • To accredit extensions for revalidated UNESCO Global Geoparks
Bureau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson and the Rapporteur of the Council • The Director-General of UNESCO and the President of the GGN or their representatives are ex officio members without the right to vote 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To prepare with the Secretariat the necessary documentation for the Executive Board of UNESCO in order for it to be able to provide a final endorsement of new UNESCO Global Geoparks nominations and extensions based on decisions of the Council • To hold joint coordination meetings as required with the Bureau of IGCP • To select the evaluation team for each application and revalidation
Evaluation Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chosen by the Bureau from the roster of evaluators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To evaluate applications, extensions and revalidations for UNESCO Global Geoparks on the basis of the strict guidelines provided by the Council • To prepare a report to the Council on the applications, extensions and revalidations evaluated
Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided by UNESCO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To maintain a roster of evaluators in conjunction with GGN

A geopark should envisage offering something new and different as a guiding principle and reflect this in its designation. There is some confusion around the meaning of 'geo', too often understood as being linked to geology rather than Earth, which undermines the territory's development potential and its conceptual value. It can have a weak impact on local population and visitors, by confusing geoparks with other territories in that semantic ambiguity.

As mentioned, there are structural similarities between geoparks: a territorial identity, a protected natural and/or cultural heritage of exceptional value, essentially aligned with sustainable development processes. The main asset in this kind of territories it's the "Geo" idea, an additional and different added value in relation to other parks/territories, where geology is the primary resource (Martini & Zouros, 2008). The embedding of the time dimension can bring together the vision of the geologist, the philosopher, the writer, the artist, at the same time and in the same space. The decreasing of the scientific aspect will allow highlighting a wider territory - the cultural territory.

Geoparks are new territories that do not fit into traditional characteristics of protected natural areas. By including the Earth's space-time dimension, geoparks are directed to the creation of something new and different from the existing, enabling users to feel the place and putting the present back into a continuous past-future time (Martini & Zouros, 2008).

The lessons learnt from the Réserve Géologique de Haute-Provence, which was a successful project during the first decade of operation, but subsequently suffered a decline in the number

of visitors, similarly to other geoparks, led to several internal studies. These studies allowed the following main conclusions (Martini & Zouros, 2008): specialization in geology has a narrow development over time, and the interest of the public is limited; the creation of other geoparks, at national or international level, diminishes the originality and trivializes the issue; other territories, when structuring their resources, included geological themes in their natural attractions.

UNESCO Global Geoparks have improved the reputation of geological heritage in territories (Henriques & Brilha, 2017). The new guidelines state clearly: “a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development” must manage areas with “geological heritage of international value” holding “sites and landscapes of international geological significance” (UNESCO, 2015: 8). Together with the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and the Man and the Biosphere Programme, UNESCO has now a new means to encourage the implementation of the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This seems to be a huge break for geoparks, by engaging geoscientists, contribute to the resolution of serious problems that humankind is facing, resulting from the changes in nature made by human action (Werlen, 2015; Gill, 2017; Henriques & Brilha, 2017; Stewart and Gill, 2017).

The issue of sustainable development arises as a basic element in the development of geoparks and in the strengthening of its management structure. The geological heritage is assessed and considered from the point of view of the perspective, presence and needs of local communities.

The contribution of geoparks is based on the emphasis and promotion of a certain image related to the geological heritage and the development of tourism. The purpose is clear: a direct impact on the territory, positively influencing the living conditions of the inhabitants and the environment; the enhancement of territorial values; encourage active participation for the cultural renewal of the territory (McKeever & Zouros, 2005). The protected geological heritage within a geopark allows an instinctive integration with the historical-cultural and natural heritage of a region. The geopark must assume an important role in the process of territorial economic development, in a sustainable way, based on the availability of archaeological heritage and in order to meet the demand for geotourism activities.

In pursuing its objectives, a Geopark must work in the context of a network (contributing to its expansion and cohesion), collaborating with other geoparks and with local businesses, creating and marketing new products related to geological and cultural heritage, in a spirit of complementarity with the other network members (Zouros & McKeever, 2008). The assumption of this condition links geoparks to an intense work of interconnection with the endogenous economic agents, aiming to create and market new products, with a close connection to the geo idea/concept.

2. SOME FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS AND NETWORK MEMBERS

The creation and diffusion of knowledge play an essential role in modern development dynamics for the most developed economies and societies. The circulation of this knowledge, regardless of the difficulty in measuring its economic impacts, increasingly materializes in goods and services in today’s economy and society.

In the case of UNESCO Global Geoparks (Figure 1), a less deterministic and more proactive view is followed than the one Storper & Harrison (1994) referred to: the core matches to the situation of asymmetric power, linking and conditioning other companies/organizations; the ring is equivalent to a symmetric power situation, since the existence of several companies/organizations are not predetermined by the other elements of the ring.

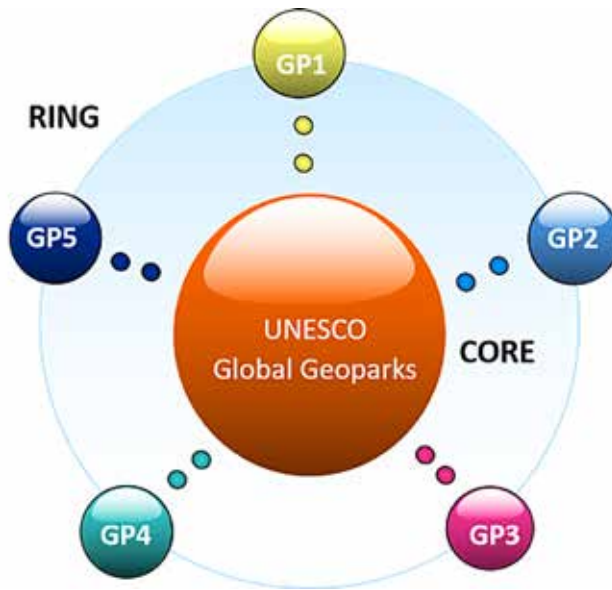


Figure 1. UNESCO Global Geoparks as a segmented system
 Source: adapted from Storper & Harrison (1994). Obs: GP = Geopark

This type of operation allows the network partners to design the project in a narrow collaborative way, directing positively the process of function sharing and the coordination of the different partners on behalf of the project. The bilateral relations established between the core and each “ring institution” tend to have a polarized configuration around the core, but it allows cross-fertilization within the network, highlighting, on one hand, informal and cooperative relations and, on the other hand, the incentive to share learning and good practices that are dispersed through the network ring (Lopes, 2001).

Segmented networks tend to play an important role in valuing codified knowledge, with territorialized know-how, depending on the flexibility provided by local environment (Figure 2).

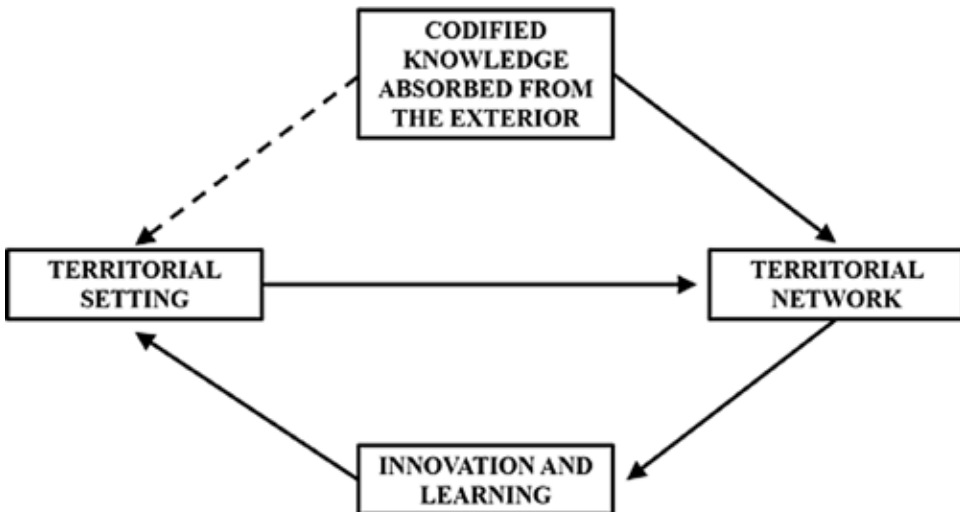


Figure 2. Interactions between Territory, Network, Knowledge, Innovation and Learning
 Source: adapted from Lopes (2001: 145)

The EGN network consists of 68 geoparks (Figure 3; 2016 reference data; in 2016, no geopark has joined the network) spread across Europe (Figure 4) and growing at a remarkable pace, from the four founding geoparks in 2000 to the 2016 composition.

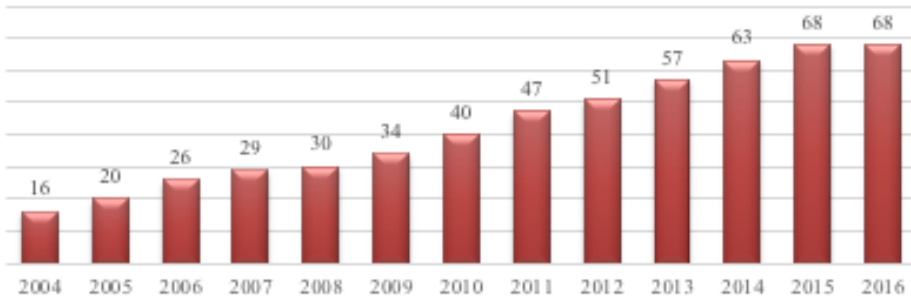


Figure 3. Cumulative Evolution of the members of the EGN, in number

Source: UNESCO Global Geoparks website

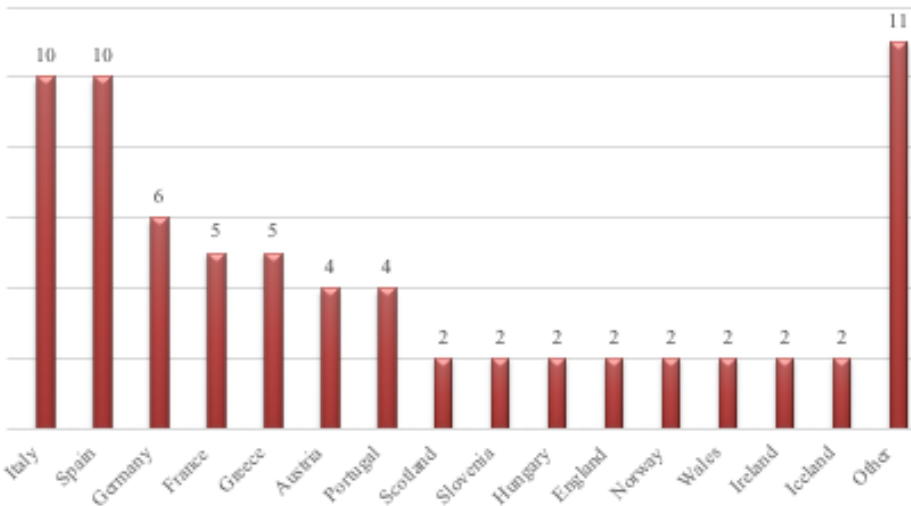


Figure 4. EGN member dispersion, by country/number

Source: UNESCO Global Geoparks website (reference data: 2016)

The overwhelming majority of geoparks are far from the main axis of European development (stars in Figure 5) and more and more countries are taking up this development strategy. Although the figure shows 71 geoparks, EGN is comprised of 68 once that 3 geoparks are transnational.

The average growth in the number of geoparks in Europe (over 15% per year, in average) allows a positive feeling about this development strategy as an instrument of tourism, scientific, cultural, and territorial development that is increasingly valued in social and political terms. One must highlight the role played by the geoparks' network, which assures compliance with a broad set of appropriate criteria for the promotion of territories who hold important geological features as a strategy for sustainable socio-economic development, cultural development and heritage and environmental preservation and conservation.

The geoparks develop their activity attending a double aspect: on one hand, the preservation of the geological, natural and cultural heritage; on the other hand, the pursuit of territorial valorisation policies on a sustainable development trajectory. Any geopark that wishes to be part of the UNESCO Global Geoparks must safeguard those aspects. In this sense, the UNESCO Global Geoparks network must be considered as a set of actors (the geoparks) that are affirmative and beneficial to the development (including economic) of regions where they are held. As far as

economic development is concerned, it is important to mention the stimulus that should be given to local entrepreneurs in the sense of producing goods and services linked to geotourism or local culture, working in partnership with the geoparks for the development of the territories.



Figure 5. EGN members' dispersion, 2016
Source: EGN website (2016)

The network has a unifying role (the core in Figure 1) of experiences that seek to valorise the territories where geoparks are located (the ring in Figure 1) by marketing specific resources and by safeguarding heritage. This instrument turns possible to share objectives and methodologies, regular interaction and the dissemination of experiences and activities among the members.

The UNESCO Global Geoparks Council is composed of 12 ordinary members, with the right to vote, individuals appointed by the Director-General of UNESCO on recommendation of the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) and of Member States. In addition, the Director-General of UNESCO, the President of the GGN, the Secretary-General of the IUGS, the Director-General of the IUCN or their representatives are ex officio members of the Council without the right to vote. There is an annual meeting, UNESCO Global Geoparks Council access only, usually held in Autumn.

The configuration benefits from previous networking culture, which allows participation processes to be broadened to a wider set of actors/institutions and shows the investment that is made at UNESCO Global Geoparks level and by geoparks.

This form of bilateral or multilateral cooperation encourages inclusiveness and a participatory spirit between the actors, which also results from the fact that the territories are very similar in terms of the issues that affect them. The constant search for models to overcome these territorial problems often makes possible to develop a benchmarking spirit among the Geoparks network.

Trying to outline the main elements, the network allows participants (Modica, 2009):

- the development of common ventures and projects, seeking to solve similar problems;
- exchange experiences and know-how, valuing (for example) biotic and abiotic aspects and the way cultural landscapes bring value to environmental preservation strategies.

This exchange is achieved by: carrying out workshops, seminars or study visits that occur frequently; through calls participation for funded projects (locally or through EU funds); collaboration with research institutions; joint international promotion; and various other formats;

- observe, analyse, create and test new conservation models and actions that can be used together;
- develop or produce common tools and strategies;
- benefit from a strong, quality-assured international image;
- develop joint types of actions and activities;
- create and foster working groups involving professionals interested in pursuing a sustainable development model.

The strength of networks lies in efficient organizational formats that have three fundamental characteristics (Castells, 2006): flexibility; adaptability; the ability to survive.

The concept of networks applied to the tourism sector is still relatively recent (Villafuerte & Flecha, 2006) and lacking in research. In practical terms, the major advantages of implementing tourism networks are the reduction and distribution of costs and the qualification of products/services. Besides integrating the members that carry out tourism activities in each territory, it facilitates a strategic blending between business actors, at the level of sales and promotions, either on the supply side or at the destination (Garrido, 2001). In this way, the size of a network is not only local but regional, national or international.

It is possible to conclude that globalization has encouraged the connectivity of society as a response to new demands, through flexibility, decentralization and social articulation. And this is equally important in networks implemented for tourism development, such as UNESCO Global Geoparks.

3. THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The UNESCO Global Geoparks Secretariat at UNESCO Headquarters coordinates the proposal submissions and is ready to provide advice. For a geopark to become part of the network, any aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark must submit an expression of interest via the official channel as set out in the Statutes and Operational Guidelines for UNESCO Global Geoparks. A comprehensive and carefully formatted application dossier (including supporting material to demonstrate that the area has already been functioning as a Global Geopark *de facto* for at least one year) must be submitted in the same way. The applicant geopark will have to comply with a set of specific criteria for admission, detailed in the application dossier, including a set of complementary information. The aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark must have geological heritage of international value and be managed by a body having legal existence recognized under national legislation that has a comprehensive management plan, covering governance, development, communication, protection, infrastructure, finance, and partnership issues.

The aspiring UNESCO Global Geoparks must be visible to both visitors and local people through a dedicated website, leaflets, and detailed map of the area that connects the area's geological and other sites. An aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark must also have a corporate identity.

The dossier is submitted for evaluation to the UNESCO Secretariat that will check the completeness of each new application, according to the criteria presented in Table 1, and includes a quantitative (0-100) self-assessment of all aspects considered for evaluation, as well as a statement of support from the governmental institutions linked to UNESCO in the country.

Table 1. Main criteria in the evaluation of the application

Criteria
E.1 <i>Territory</i>
E1.1 GEOLOGICAL HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION
E1.2 BOUNDARIES
E1.3 VISIBILITY
E1.4 FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE
E1.5 INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
E.2 OTHER HERITAGE
E2.1 NATURAL HERITAGE
E2.2 CULTURAL HERITAGE
E2.3 INTANGIBLE HERITAGE
E2.4 INVOLVEMENT IN TOPICS RELATED TO CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURAL HAZARDS
E.3 <i>MANAGEMENT</i>
E.4 <i>OVERLAPPING</i>
E.5 <i>EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES</i>
E.6 <i>GEOTOURISM</i>
E.7 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS
E7.1 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY
E7.2 PARTNERSHIPS
E7.3 FULL AND EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
E.8 <i>NETWORKING</i>
E.9 SELLING OF GEOLOGICAL MATERIAL

Source: Application dossier for UNESCO Global Geoparks (available at http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/SC/pdf/IGGP_UGG_Statutes_Guidelines_EN.pdf)

As previously said, the UNESCO Secretariat will check the completeness of each new application. If incomplete or incorrectly formatted, the UNESCO Secretariat will ask for a revised application. Once an application is considered complete, the UNESCO Secretariat will send the geological section of each new application to IUGS for a desk-top assessment. At the same time, the UNESCO Global Geoparks Bureau will assign a maximum of two evaluators to undertake a field mission, who are sent to the aspiring territory to evaluate and discuss in situ the application with the promoters, national and local authorities, and with local stakeholders and communities. This intervention is further enriched by observations made by those evaluators on the integrity and future management of the candidate geopark; these recommendations have been, in several cases, critical success factors for long-term applications (Zouros & Valiakos, 2010). Additional participants to these missions, including representatives of National Geopark Committees, may participate as observers and without a role in the compilation of the mission report.

Upon completion of the field evaluation mission, a report must be prepared by the evaluators and submitted to the UNESCO Secretariat, which will then make the report available to the Council for review and decision.

A prerequisite for any geopark application to be approved is the existence of an effective management system and an implementation program. The international presence of significant geological elements is not a satisfactory condition for a territory to become a geopark. The geological and non-geological features in the geopark should be accessible to visitors, connected with each

other and protected by a responsible management organization or partnership that benefits from local support. The management or partnership body must have an efficient management structure, endowed with qualified staff and benefiting from sustainable financial support.

The setting of a geopark should be based on strong community support and local involvement, developed through a bottom-up process. The whole idea of geopark should reveal strong support from local political and community leaders, including access to the necessary financial resources. The geopark, counting on a professional management structure, must define policies and actions for regional sustainable socio-economic and cultural development in the whole territory where it is located.

Within a geopark, sustainable tourism and other economic activities will only succeed if undertaken in a cooperative way with local communities. Tourism activities should be designed in coordination with local circumstances, with the natural and cultural character of the territory and should respect local traditions, and these efforts are an essential part of sustainable development efforts.

Any geopark that has seen its application approved will be subject to a process of revalidation of membership in UNESCO Global Geoparks every four years. This task involves a revalidation process and a follow-up evaluation report. This process is triggered by a field visit carried out by two evaluators from two different countries, nominated by the UNESCO Global Geoparks Council. The revalidation process involves an analysis of the progress related to the protection of geological heritage and internal promotion of the geopark, as well as the sustainable development of economic activities in the territory. It also considers the geopark's degree of participation in common activities with other network members (Zouros & McKeever, 2008).

When the revalidation process is complete, the results are discussed in the UNESCO Global Geoparks Council, resulting in: a Green Card, which renews the membership of the network for an additional four years, reflecting the fact that the Geopark is an active member of the network and has made a significant degree of progress in the evaluated criteria; a Yellow Card, indicating that the results achieved were not totally satisfactory or that there was some specific aspect that was highlighted and that did not allow the assignment of the Green Card - in this case, membership will be allowed for a temporary period (maximum of two years) to give geopark's some time to improve the identified aspects, starting a new revalidation process; if the correction of those aspects is not satisfactory, a Red Card will be assigned to the geopark, revoking the UNESCO Global Geoparks membership status and signifying that the geopark has proved to be inefficient in the development of the network and sustainable philosophy, forcing the process to restart to access the network.

4. EVIDENCE FROM REALITY AND BENEFITS TO TOURISM

To get a better understanding about geoparks, a survey by questionnaire (Annex 1) was applied to European geoparks to seek relevant information to enrich the analysis (Ramos, 2016). This survey was made available through an online questionnaire platform. The survey was applied to the 58 geoparks existing in Europe by the end of 2013, during the months from September to November and the response rate was 22.8%. Given the elements analysed and with the consciousness that the number of geoparks' answers is limited but may reveal a trend, it is possible to draw some conclusions, with interest for this investigation. One must point out that the focus of this section is to understand how geoparks and its institutional organization allow development in the territories where it is located; further methodological aspects can be found in Ramos (2016).

Geoparks' managers show a natural concern regarding geology conservation and promotion, alongside with other types of heritage, main reason to establish a geopark. They also pursue sustainable development based on tourism activities and education, the latter especially focused on younger people.

Networking allows for experiences' sharing and teamwork development, as well as the development of new and innovative products for economic strengthening.

Although geoparks don't exactly mean new administrative territories, they are new tourism territories, usually territories which are underexplored in terms of the supply-side industry and tourism history. Nevertheless, some tourism destination structuring difficulties occur in the territories where geoparks are located, due to lack of experience.

The concern regarding population and stakeholders' involvement with the holistic development idea for the geopark is always present, not correlated with public or mixed management. The location of geoparks in low-density areas, away from the main development spaces, together with low expectations of demographic growth and low levels of accessibility, is a strong reasoning for the geopark's creation. In this sense, the geopark operation as social enterprise embodies the connection between territory and community.

The geoparks' promotion is done through the most common forms (website, newsletter, and social media) or through community-based services (local festivals or fairs), appealing to an umbrella brand, limiting operational costs, and benefiting from the multiplier effect. The territory is planned within the scope of different spatial planning tools and tourism activity becomes a concern in most of these tools.

Tourism supply is focused on the attraction, reception and staying, but the growth of visitors assumes an important role for investment attraction and infrastructure endowment. Population and businesses' attraction ability can only become effective in a joint effort for raising employment and visitors, not only dependent on geopark's actions.

The capability to value heritage, transforming it in usable heritage, with the economic and social return for the community, is a task taken into hands by geoparks according to many heritage classifications assigned to territories where geoparks are located.

In general, geoparks are cherished by communities to which have brought more benefits than risks.

One of the elements that stand out matches to the opening to tourism practices in the geopark territories. The presence of tourists is very well seen in host communities, proud that their territory generates sufficient attention to lead to displacement of people. The tourist which is more aware of the characteristics of geoparks engenders a tourism typology that is quite specific (usually, geotourism) but it is not limited to this typology.

A geopark should involve public authorities, local communities, private interests, researchers and educational institutions in designing and executing the geopark application and in the regional, economic and cultural development plan. This cooperation should inspire debate and encourage partnerships between different groups with an interest in the territory and encourage and trigger local authorities and the local population.

The identity of a geopark should be easily identifiable by visitors, what can be achieved through a consistent promotion and communication strategy, including the dissemination of geoparks in all publications and all activities related to that identity. Geoparks tend to strengthen the identification of the local population with the territory, stimulates the pride of the place and the cultural development, protecting the geological heritage. In many situations, the cultural heritage of a territory is related to the geological heritage.

The creation of a geopark should, for example, trigger the emergence of innovative local businesses, smart specialization, small businesses, home-based industries, high-quality training courses, new jobs, producing new sources of revenue (handicrafts, gastronomy and sweets, traditions), protecting the territory's georesources. This set of initiatives provides the possibility of adding income to the local population and may allow the attraction of private capital.

The creation of a geopark, in addition to the promotion of geotourism, is expected to produce a direct impact on the territory, enabling the revaluation of heritage values, while supporting environmental education activities and valuing the natural environment, improving and implementing policies for sustainable development, as well as opening research opportunities.

It was sought to show that tourism can contribute to the development of tourism territories

(geopark territories) but there are still some challenges that inhibit this development - these challenges require new ways of thinking and new ways of doing, that is, they require innovation. Hall and Williams (2008, based on Carayannis & Gonzalez, 2003) refer to a set of innovation inhibitors that may have amplified effects in geopark territories, namely: resistance to change by the most important stakeholders, dragging scepticism, lack of courage and creativity, and; prevailing conservativeness, lack of political courage and hierarchical structure stiffness.

The creation of the European and Global Geoparks Network, and later the UNESCO Global Geoparks, has turned visible the scattered geological heritage of the world, which needs to be protected and conserved. The creation of geoparks delivered a window of opportunity when many doors were closed, providing the opportunity for sustainable development to territories that are far and uncentered from the fundamental axes of development. The main beneficiary in terms of economic activities is tourism - the territories now have a structure that could be valued using resources at their disposal and which could favour local entrepreneurs, on the one hand, and provide unique experiences to tourists, on the other.

5. MAIN CONCLUSIONS

The institutional action of geoparks, promoted within the framework of the UNESCO Global Geoparks network, involves the interrelation between all geoparks, which meet every year. The emphasis placed on cooperation between the network members showed a considerable departure from the isolationism that often accompanies competitive development in the tourism sector. In contrast to other tourist destinations, geoparks share common contexts, circumstances and experiences, reciprocally spreading their natural and cultural attributes and activities. In this way, when visitors travel to a geopark for the first time and enjoy a remarkable experience they are more minded to develop an interest in visiting other geoparks.

UNESCO Global Geoparks is a forum in which territories can address and develop solutions to common socio-economic problems and form partnerships to apply for funding. For example, the EGN website, the EGN Magazine and the advertising of the European Geoparks in its Information Centers are other examples of cooperation aimed at promoting geotourism. One of the most striking slogans of the network is precisely "Geoparks: Geology with a human face".

The development of geotourism, in addition to other forms of tourism activities, can create new jobs and improve regional economy, benefiting residents. Local tourist services industries, such as information centres, hotels and restaurants offer employment for the local population. Geoparks also employ local guides and create employment through the promotion of local crafts, gastronomy and agricultural products.

The involvement of local communities is an important factor in the development of these new forms of sustainable benefit through geotourism. The promotion of geotourism allows geoparks to combine territorial development and the emergence of a special interest market related to sustainable preservation of the geological heritage, creating awareness and attention to the uniqueness of the terrestrial environment. UNESCO Global Geoparks network achieves and maintains the high-quality standards set to meet the requirements of a global tourism market through a rigorous evaluation process for all new applicants and their reevaluation process every four years. In the end, however, the strength of the network will always depend on the collaboration of local communities in the foundation and development of each geopark.

Further research can be directed to three gaps that arise from our investigation: to know the geopark's tourist/visitor profile in order to promote more effectively the territory and structure in a correct way the local tourism system; to understand how the geoparks are (or aren't) related with other nearby classified or protected areas; to understand cross-border relations - are there any advantages for territories in bordering areas, mainly comprehending the continuity of spaces (that must not be cut off despite the existence of borders).

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