Strengthening the foundations of the local communities of Psiloritis

The Psiloritis UNESCO Global Geopark as a catalyst for sustainable local development

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Περιεχόμενα

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Intro

Management
Location

02



Area Characteristics

- Natural Environment
- Geodiversity
- Culture and tradition

03



Geopark's features

- Education
- Geopark infrastructure
- Partner Network
- Highlighting the area and its products

04



Setting up our future

Geopark's vision

Intro

01

What is a geopark?

Geoparks represent an initiative for holistic environmental management, education and sustainable local development.

They include:

- Areas of outstanding geological and geomorphological value;
- Areas of significant ecological, archaeological, historical and cultural value;
- Areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic appeal;
- People and human activities



Naturtejo UGGp, Portugal



Psiloritis UGGp, Crete, Greece

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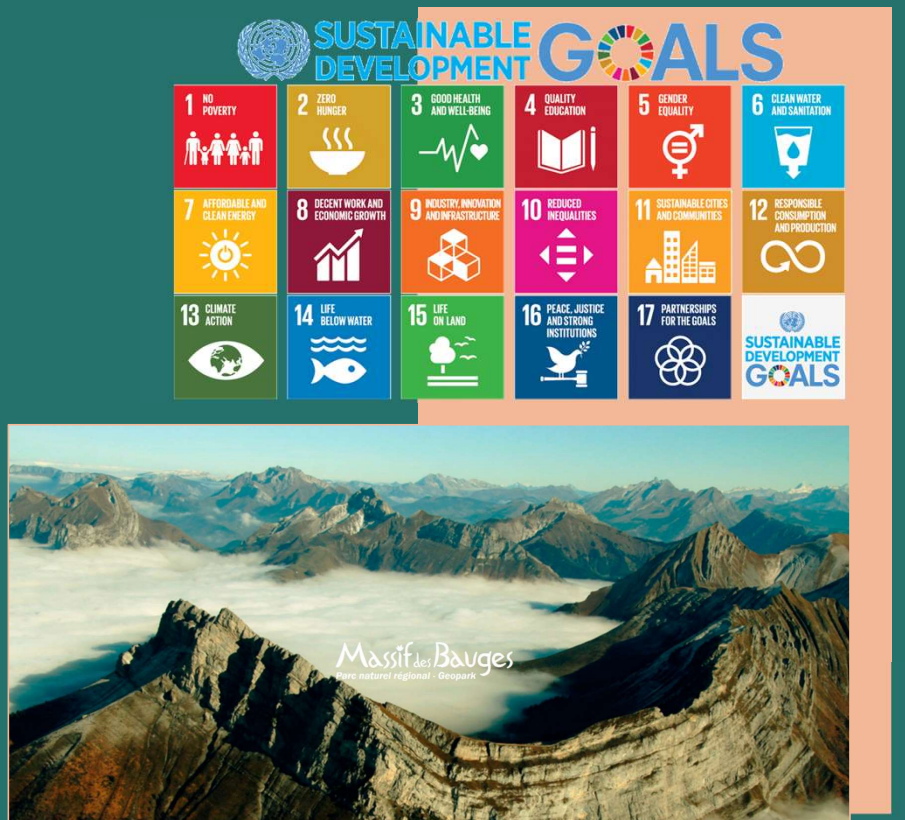
Intro

01

Geoparks' objectives

Geoparks focus on:

- Education for sustainability
- The conservation and protection of natural and cultural heritage
- The promotion and highlighting of the distinctive features of their regions
- Supporting the local economy by promoting local production and the development of geotourism, a key tool for sustainable development.



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Intro

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Geotourism value

Geotourism is no longer viewed exclusively as a specialized form of tourism that focuses on geosites or geological interpretation. Rather, it is increasingly viewed as a comprehensive development model that links the conservation of geological heritage with education, the shaping of a destination's identity, the empowerment of the local community, and regional economic resilience. Sánchez-Cortez et al. (2023)

It is a product with great potential for the future (a market with a steadily growing trend).

>750 million $ for 2025

Geotourism Market Growth Forecast (Geotourism Market Report 2026)

Expected to grow >1 billion $ in 2030 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.9%

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01 Background

- 2001: It was established as an informal Nature Park by the company A.K.O.M.M. – Psiloritis Development S.A. (Local Authority) with the scientific support of the Natural Histroy Museum of Crete
- It was included in the European Geoparks Network right from its establishment and, in 2015, in the Global Geoparks Network
- Today, Psiloritis UGGp plays an active role in global efforts to protect and **promote the environment, natural and cultural heritage**, as well as **sustainable local development** through **geotourism** and other forms of alternative tourism.

Management:

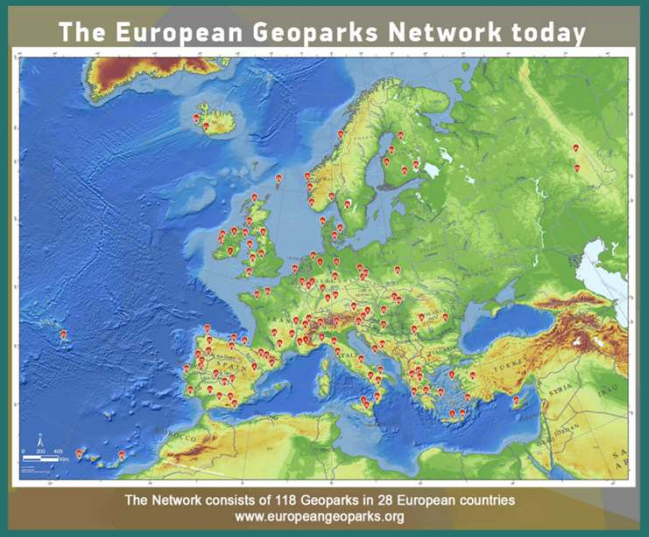
2019 (Civil non-profit company):

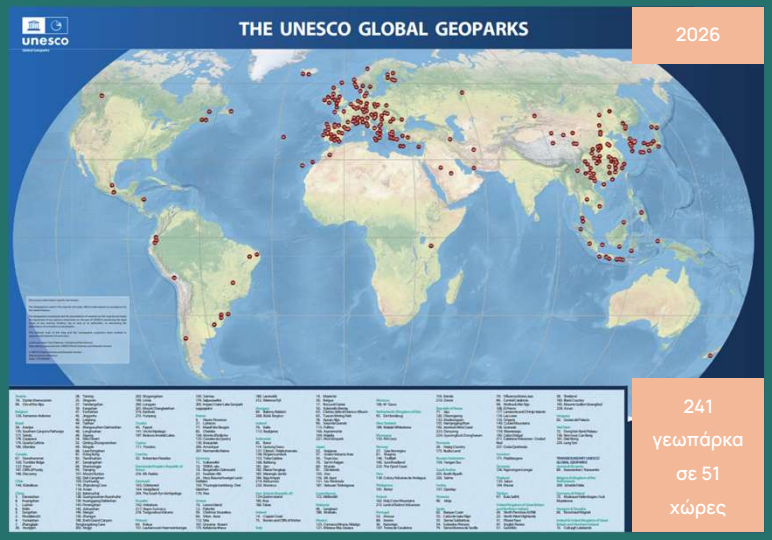
IDEON Network – DIKTYO DIMON TOU PSILORITI

Intro

01

Participation in geoparks' networks



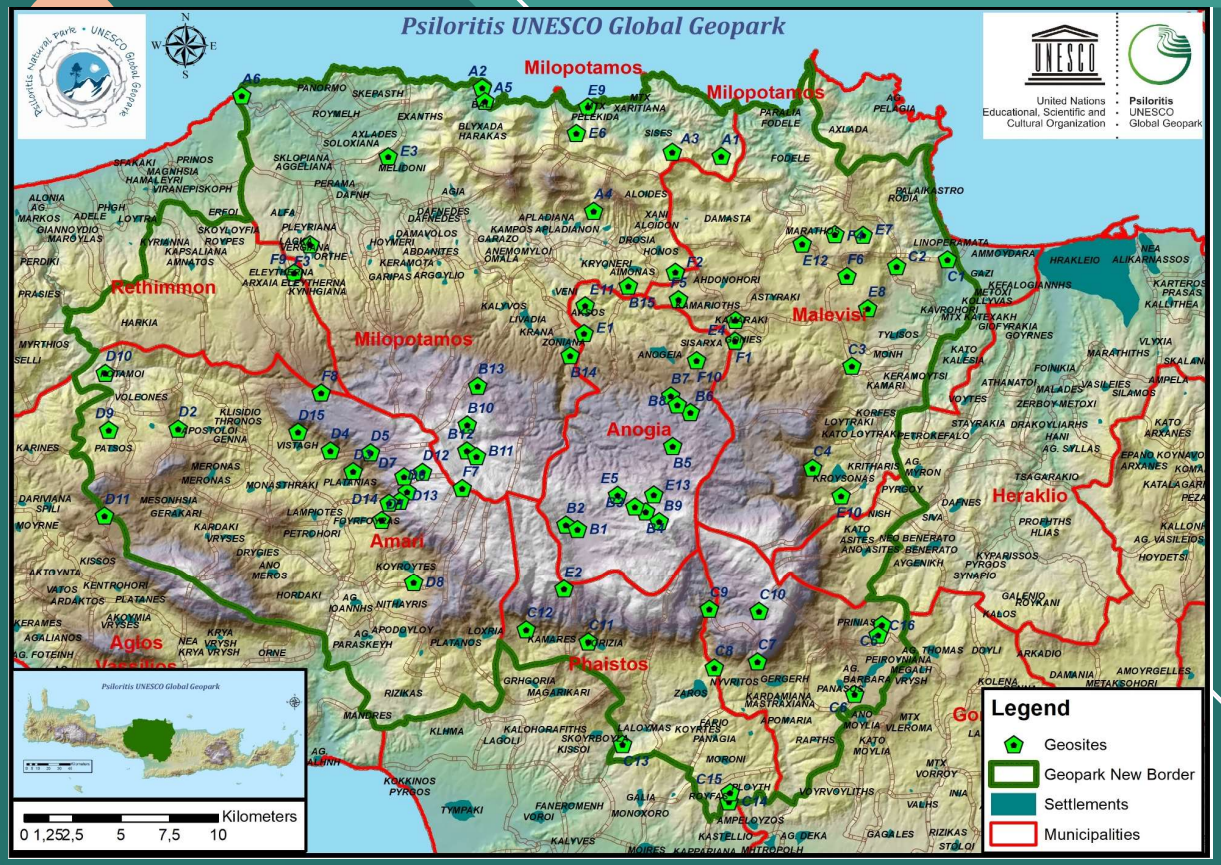


2026

241 γεωπάρκα σε 51 χώρες

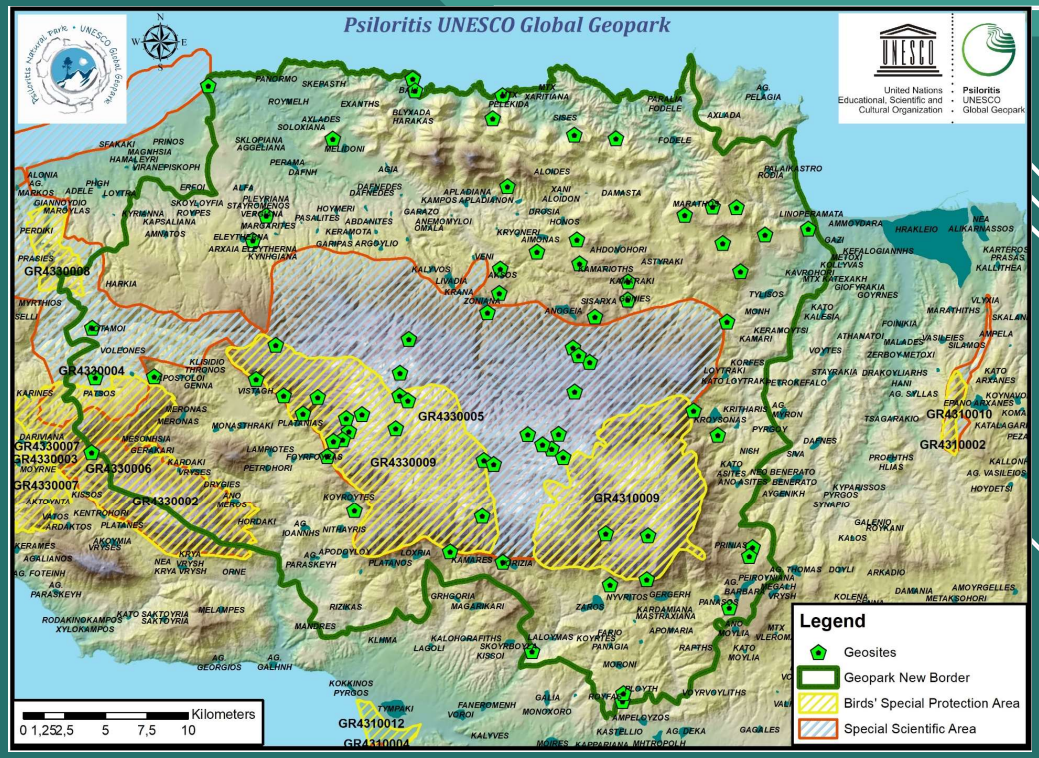
ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟ ΦΟΡΟΥΜ ΓΕΩΠΑΡΚΩΝ
HELLENIC GEOPARKS FORUM
Geoparks
GLOBAL GEOPARKS NETWORK

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01 Location

- It includes the **entire mountain range of Psiloritis, from its southern outskirts in the Messara Basin and Mount Kedros further west, to the northern coast with the Talaia Mountains**, which form its natural extension, **and as far west of Gazi.**
- It covers an area of **1,272 km²**
- It consists of **8 municipalities, 201 settlements** and **37,800 inhabitants**



02 Area Characteristics

Natural Environment

Biodiversity (flora/fauna)

~56% within the NATURA 2000 network, rare and endangered species, >100 plants endemic to Crete, 1 stenendemic genus (Horstrissea dolinicola), and Greece's only endemic mammal, the Cretan shrew (Crocidura zimmermanni)!

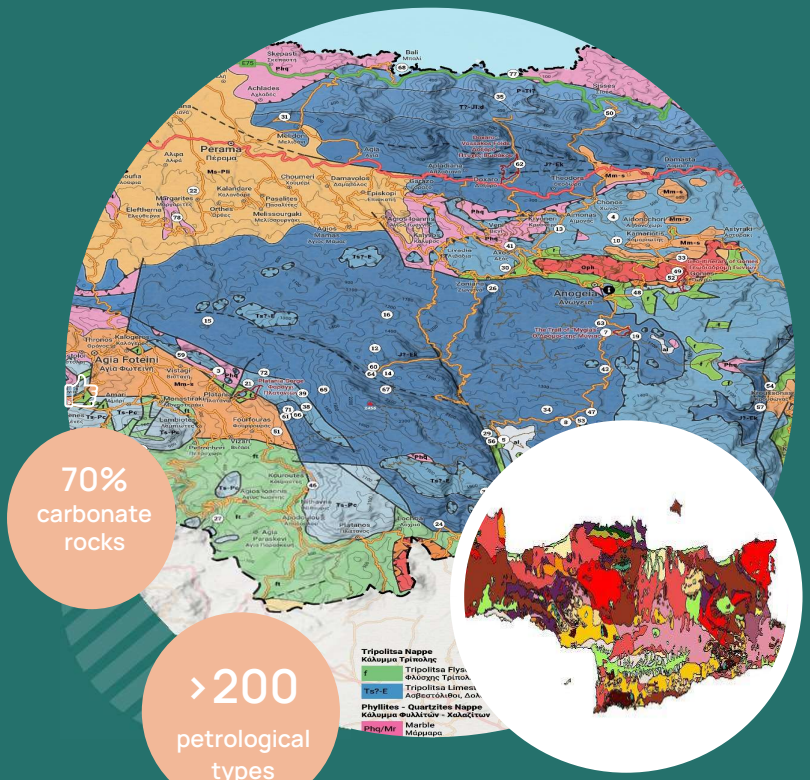

Orchis italica


Γυπαετός (κοκκαλάς)


Κρητικός αγριόγατος


Crocidura zimmermanni

02 Area Characteristics

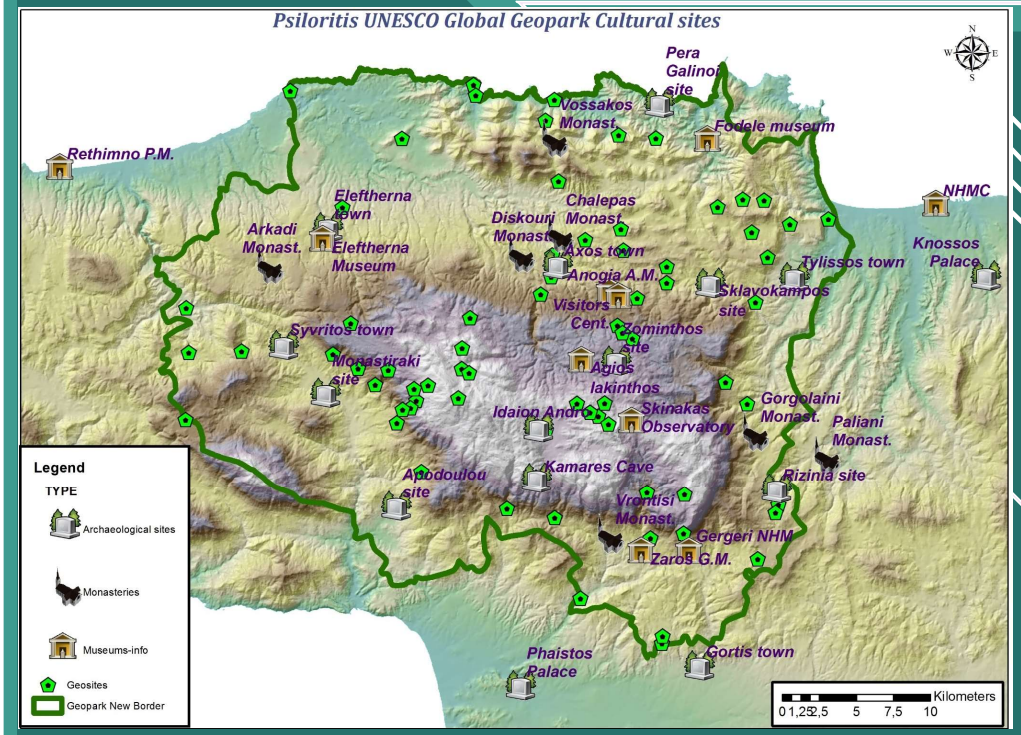


Natural Environment

Geodiversity

- Crete is characterised by an enormous variety of rocks, so fragmented that they resemble a natural mosaic! Its history stretches from 350 million years ago to the present day.
- The Hellenic Survey of Geology and Mineral Exploration - HSGME's publications describe over 200 petrological types, and almost all of them can be found in the Psiloritis Geopark! 70% of Crete's rocks are carbonate in composition (marble, limestone and dolomite) of various ages, along with metamorphic and volcanic rocks (ophiolites, pillow lavas) and recent clastic sediments.

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02 Area Characteristics

Culture - tradition

Getting to know the people of the geopark, supporting the local economy















02 Area Characteristics

Human Activity

- Livestock farming remains a traditional occupation in Psiloritis.
- The lowland area of Psiloritis is one of the most productive olive-growing regions in Greece.
- Tourism has provided new activities and opportunities for the inhabitants of the Psiloritis region.

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03 Geopark's features

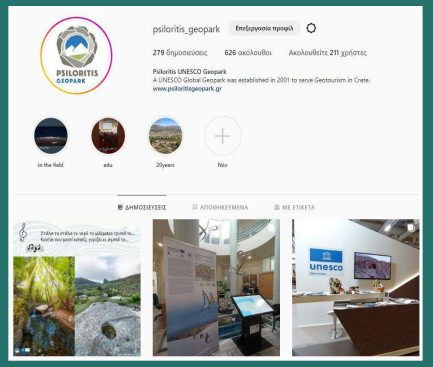
Psiloritis Geopark' infrastructure

Material



- Information Centre
- Info

Digital



- Website/social media
- Interactive

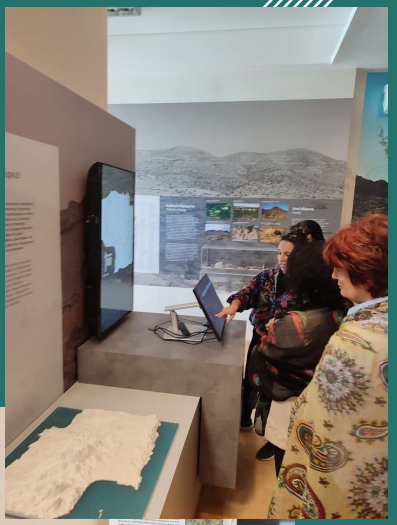
Material infrastructure

Psiloritis Geopark information Centre, Anogia

- It operates in Anogia in a specially designed space where **dioramas and interactive exhibits** are used to showcase and provide information about its activities and, more broadly, to highlight the region's natural and cultural resources through permanent exhibitions and events.
- Its primary mission is to **educate and raise awareness**—not only among visitors but also among students, educators, and community groups—regarding the sustainable management of the Geopark's natural resources through specially designed visits and guided tour programs.
- There is a **reception and information area**, a Geopark exhibition with visual aids and dioramas, a cave simulation, a diorama of a Cretan house, and a conference room for hosting small conferences (capacity: 40 people) and events.
- Open daily Monday-Friday from morning until afternoon, 9 a.m.–3 p.m. (and outside these hours by appointment).



Exhibition of local products and souvenirs from children's visits to the Information Centre





Dioramas



Interactive maps

Material infrastructure

Other information points

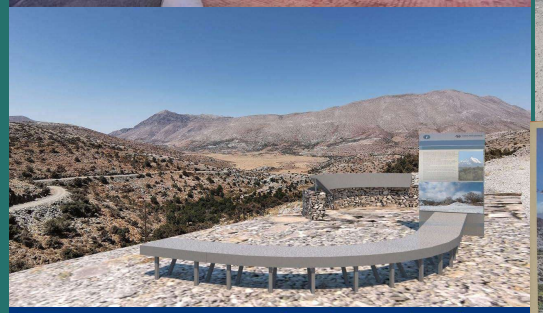
- Museums

Geotourism infrastructure:

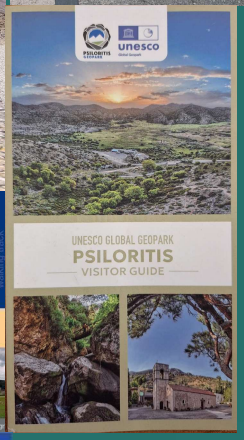
- Explanatory signs for geosites;
- Signs for geotrails;
- Printed materials (visitor guide, geological guide, hiking and geological maps, thematic publications)

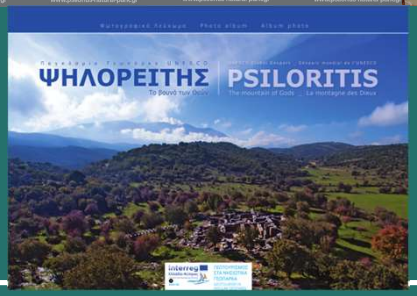












03 Geopark's features

Psiloritis Geopark' educational programme

Psiloritis Geopark offers a variety of educational activities for students and children who visit the Park and the Information Center

- Visit to the Psiloritis Geopark Information Centre
- Outdoor educational activities: During these activities, students can observe and learn about the geological and other aspects of the Geopark's identity outside the classroom.
- E-Geodiscover educational app for Android devices
- Educational programs of the Psiloritis Geopark (1h):
  - Psiloritis: Global Geopark UNESCO (Primary – High School)
  - Fairy Tale in the Geopark Psiloritis (Kindergarten – 3rd Grade)
  - Biodiversity and Psiloritis Geopark (4th Grade – High School)
- Educational museum suitcases with different themes, used during school visits or lent to local educators

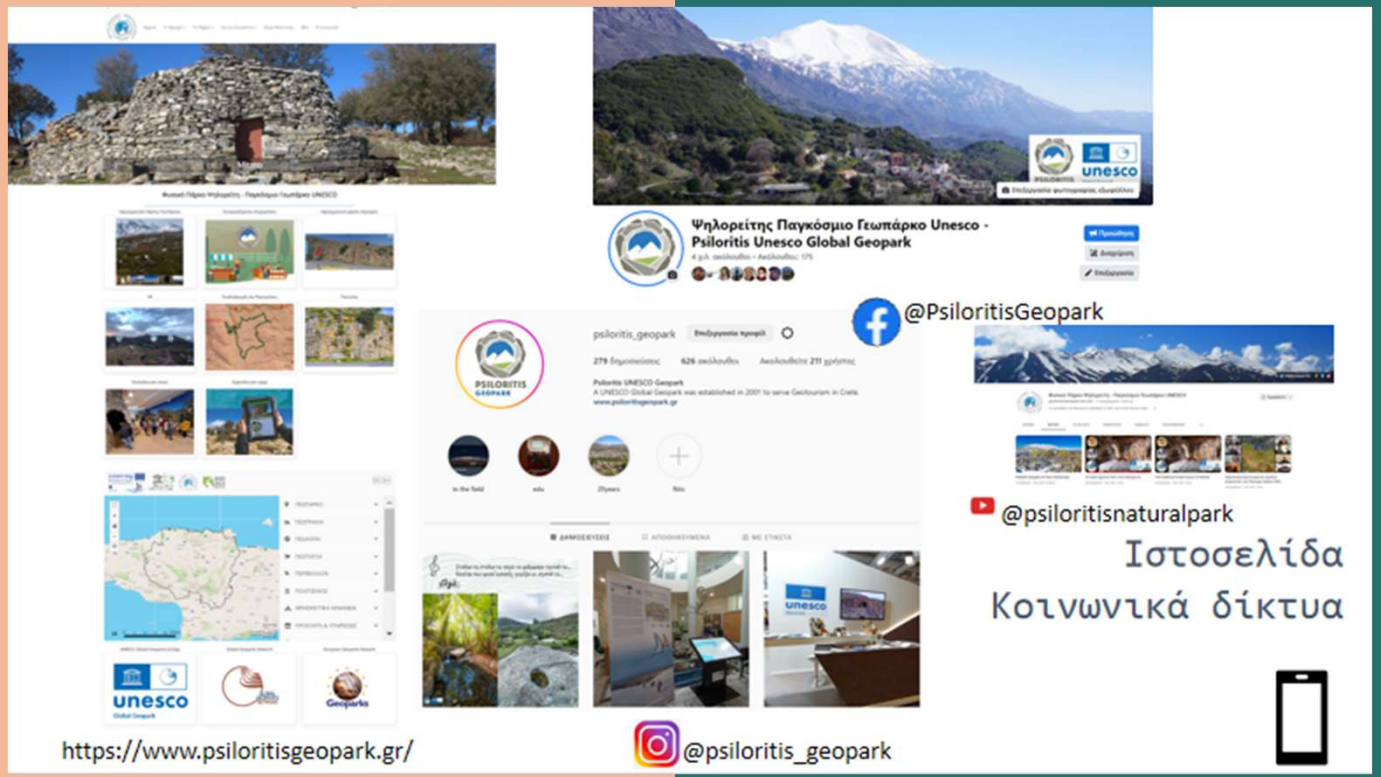








Digital Infrastructure



Digital infrastructure

GEO-IN INTERREG Greece-Cyprus Project in collaboration with Museum of Natural History of Crete:

- Digital Storytelling Maps https://tours.nhmc.uoc.gr/geoparks/map/idi/en/
- Information about the Geopark Virtual tour of areas within it (spherical panoramas with commentary on the landscape and its geological features) Collection of photos and videos Geotrails (virtual 3-D tour of each route with approximately 200 viewpoints)
- Ruritage Project https://storymaps.nhmc.uoc.gr/
- Narrative maps for churches in Amari, the Nida Plateau, and partner businesses: Option to activate VR mode (3D tour)



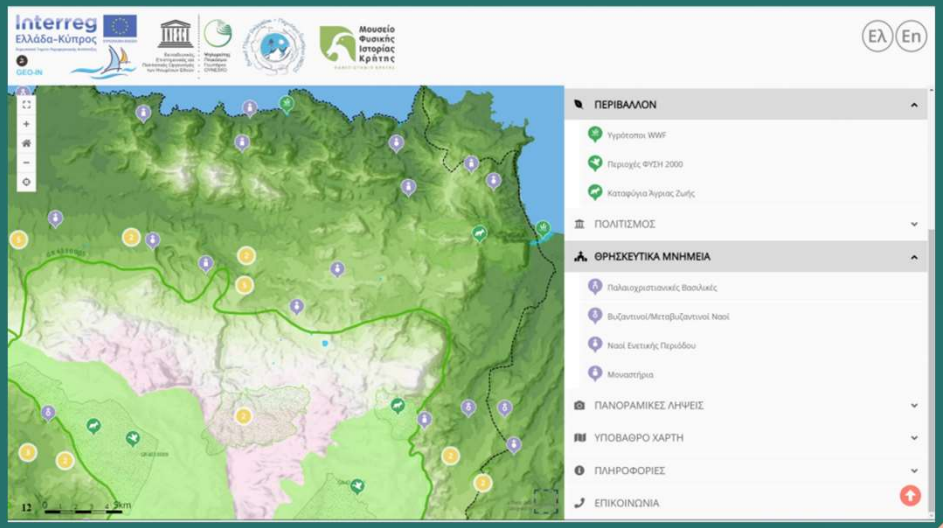
Digital infrastructure

360° Digital Tour of the Peaks of Psiloritis
https://tours.panotours.gr/psiloritis/

Psiloriitis Geopark interactive map
https://tours.nhmc.uoc.gr/geo/psiloritis/

This is a digital map optimized for mobile and desktop devices, which operates via the web. The map is based on ArcGIS and the MFIK's digital geodatabase, which can be easily updated and populated. It is divided into two parts—the map and the content—which interact with each other. The map displays geographic, geological, environmental, cultural, and geotourism data for the geoparks.





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Digital Infrastructure

Interactive Information Points on Psiloritis



Information Centre



Meronas village

Interactive Map

Three information points were set up using the interactive map (the location changes from time to time on a rotating basis)



Natural History Museum

Digital Infrastructure

Geo-education

GEO-IN INTERREG Greece-Cyprus Project in collaboration with Natural History Museum



Mygias trail



Example of the treasure hunt

E- GEOdiscover:

As part of the project, two Android apps for mobile devices were designed for Psiloritis (and one for Sitia) with the goal of promoting inquiry-based learning in the outdoors.

- They operate solely using GPS and do not require a network connection.
- They are based on a treasure hunt game designed to encourage exploration, discovery, learning, and enjoyment of the geopark.
- They are available for free on Google Play.



In Google play (GR for Android)

Digital Infrastructure

Advantages

- The digital tools offer a wealth of possibilities for exploration, learning, and entertainment.
- They enable remote “visits” to geoparks, to hard-to-reach locations—even for people with disabilities—and the organization of visits (for residents, visitors, and tourism offices).
- They utilize modern technologies that are user-friendly and appealing to younger audiences, with the ability to be easily expanded and updated.
- They are offered free of charge by the Psiloritis and Sitia Geoparks and the Natural History Museum of Crete.

Remote visit option

Modern Technologies

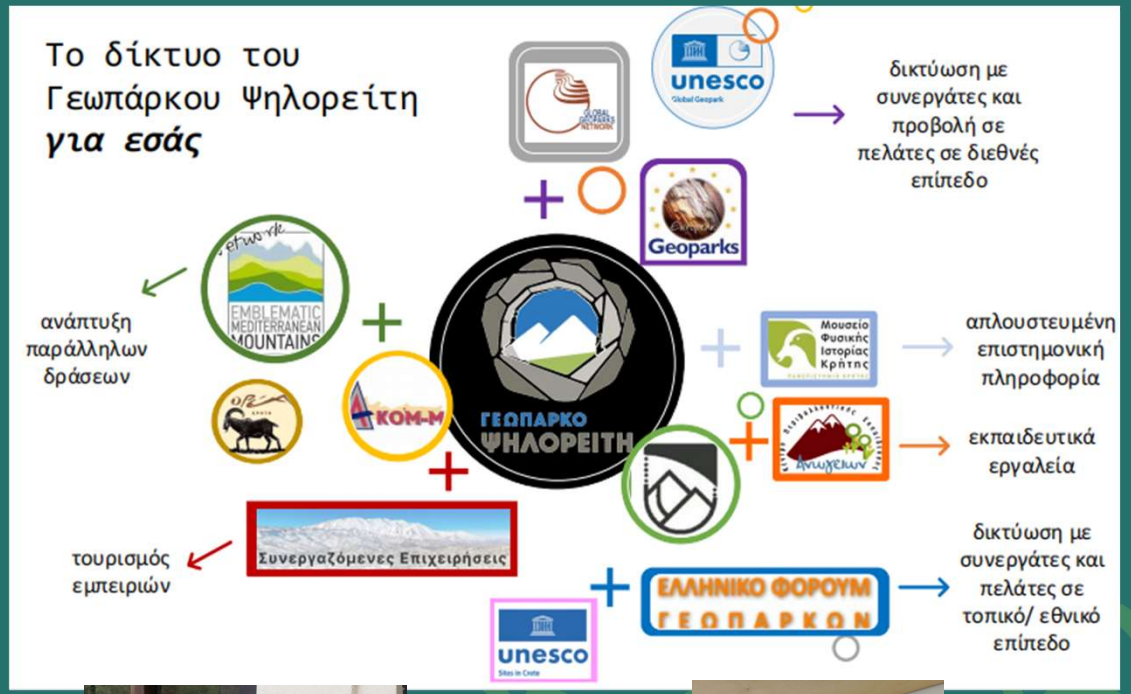


Psiloritis Geopark Partner Network

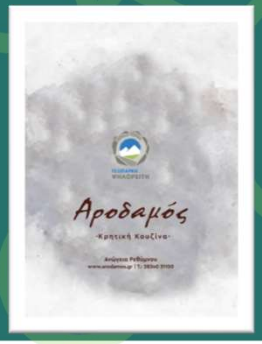
Local Quality Label – Psiloritis Geopark Partner Label (65 partners-stakeholders)

Benefits:

- Added value through association with the UNESCO logo.
- Enhanced visibility and promotion through the Geopark's official website, promotional material (tourist guides, brochures, interactive maps, etc.), activities (e.g., exhibitions, events of the European and Global Geoparks Networks), and information points across the region.
- The opportunity to distribute Geopark material directly to customers and visitors.
- Priority in collaborating with the Geopark in related areas of activity (e.g., businesses with the Quality Label are generally selected to host or cater Geopark-related events and conferences).
- Strengthening local partnerships;
- Sharing knowledge and best practices; Opportunities;
- Networking;
- Enhancing the professional's profile;
- Increased self-confidence and influence







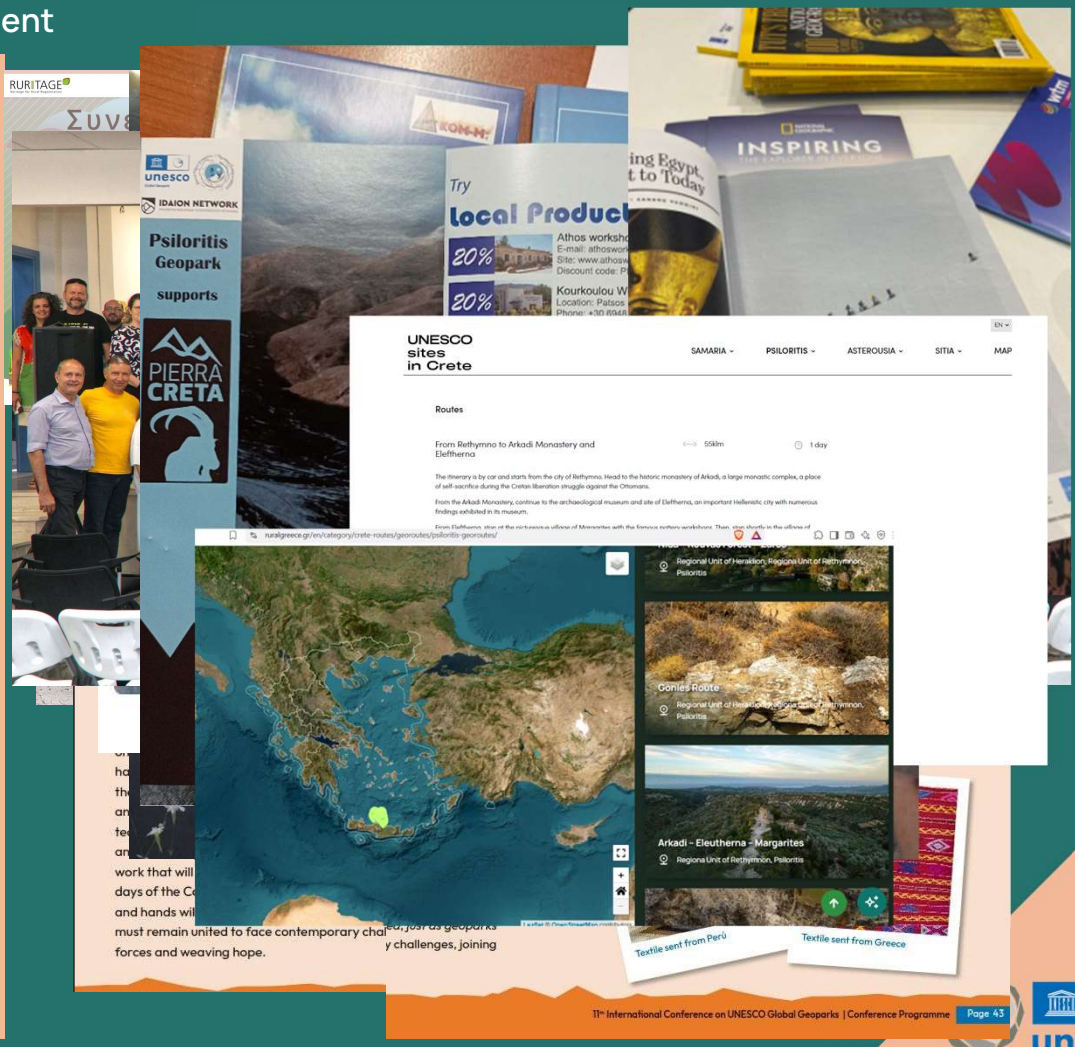


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Highlighting the Geopark's Region and Products

The Geopark as a Tool for Sustainable Local Development

- Local Quality Label for Partners (65 partners)
- Reception and hospitality for journalists (Articles in the Greek and international press)
- Social media campaigns for the Geopark and campaigns by the Geoparks Network
- Annual Geopark Festival (Promotion of partners, affiliated businesses, and supporters of the Geopark through an exhibition and workshops)
- Guided tours and presentations about the Geopark for students and visitors, as well as seminars for mountain leaders;
- Geopark photography exhibitions;
- Participation in conferences and events, and organization of workshops involving the local community (e.g., 6th Greece & Cyprus Geoparks Conference, Periplus workshops (circular economy), Fodele Run)
- Collaborations with local and regional bodies (e.g., KEPEA Anogia Summer School 2025)
- Crete European Region of Gastronomy 2026
- Production of videos and promotional articles in the print and digital editions of National Geographic as part of the UNESCO Regional Branding Initiative for Crete;
- UNESCO Sites in Crete, Paths of Greece,Rural tourism cluster e-paithros Routes



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Measures for Adapting to Climate Change and Protecting the Environment

Digital tools RescueME

The Geopark participated from 2023 to 2026 in the Horizon Europe project "RESCUEME" to strengthen the resilience of coastal cultural landscapes in Europe. The project developed innovative digital tools and solutions for climate adaptation and natural disaster risk management in five target regions, including the Psiloritis UNESCO Global Geopark.

- For Psiloritis, emphasis was placed on issues related to agricultural production and tourism.
- Available on the project's digital One-Stop Shop https://rescueme.iais.fraunhofer.de/resource-hub-rescueme/?filter=true&project_category=rescueme

Under the guidance of the Geopark, the project's local partners developed targeted measures that took into account a combination of challenges, such as water scarcity, heat stress, the heavy burden of overtourism in certain areas, restrictions on human presence in the countryside, and policy gaps.

These targeted measures involved all relevant decision-makers in sectors such as natural resources, infrastructure, the economy, and human resources, with the aim of improving the region's current situation.

Such a research project engages directly with the local community, its unique characteristics, and local features, with the goal of creating a more resilient cultural landscape, while also providing additional technological tools for adapting to a climate-adverse environment.





Measures for Adapting to Climate Change and Protecting the Environment





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Setting up our future

04

ΓΕΩΠΑΡΚΟ ΨΗΛΟΡΕΙΤΗ

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04 Setting up our future





Goal - Vision

To make the Psiloritis Geopark a place of safety, equitable development, and pride for its residents, and for visitors, a destination that offers hospitality, authenticity, and memorable experiences.











04 Setting up our future

Action plan until 2027

1. Risk reduction, adaptation to climate change, reduction of the ecological footprint, Geopark resilience
2. Supporting local production, promoting local products, fostering entrepreneurship, and fostering inclusion
3. Preservation and protection of cultural heritage, landscape conservation, promotion of values, and strengthening of the geopark's ownership
4. Improving tourism infrastructure, creating heritage interpretation spaces, improving access, and enhancing staff skills
5. Highlighting local treasures, creating stories, showcasing everyday life, and promoting local products to visitors
6. Creating experiential packages, attracting responsible visitors, fostering interaction between the community and visitors



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04 Setting up our future

Coming up next...: Geosite of 2026

International Geodiversity Day Celebration (6/10):

October 4th: Activities for all ages in collaboration with local organizations and the municipality:
Hiking, rock climbing, educational workshops, and a musical event.

Geosite of the Year 2026: Voulismeno Aloni



Βουλισμένο Αλώνι

Thank you!

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Each year, we aim to improve the infrastructure, partnerships, synergies, products, and image of the Psiloritis Geopark and to make the most of the opportunities and benefits offered by UNESCO recognition, for the benefit of our local communities.

