

## **Territorial sustainable development strategy and community involvement in Lesvos Geopark, Greece**

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Lesvos Island, located in NE Aegean Sea, is one of the largest Greek islands, with a population of 90,463 inhabitants. Lesvos is characterized by a complex geology and rich geodiversity dominated by Miocene volcanoes and the Petrified Forest, its biodiversity and protected areas presenting a variety of birds and wildflowers, the ancient olive groves, pine forests and unique landscapes. Lesvos presents important archeological sites and monuments, medieval castles, traditional villages, industrial architecture, monasteries and churches.

The Petrified Forest (15,000 ha) declared as Protected Natural Monument in 1985, was recognized as a Geopark in 2000 and included in the Global Geoparks Network in 2004. After an extension in 2012, the whole Lesvos Island (1630 km<sup>2</sup>) became a Global Geopark. The Natural History Museum of the Lesvos Petrified Forest in collaboration with the Lesvos Municipality and University of the Aegean are responsible for the Lesvos Geopark. The Geopark's management plan is the main tool for the operation of the Lesvos Geopark, linking geoconservation and promotion of geosites, natural and cultural heritage with geotourism, environmental education and sustainable local development.

Although geotourism was initially focused in the Lesvos Petrified Forest, the planning and implementation of Geopark activities including interpretation and promotion of geosites, guided tours, exhibitions and events spread to the whole island. A broad variety of educational activities in Lesvos Geopark make it an ideal destination for environmental education.

Community support is expressed by the Municipality and various social organizations fostered through the holistic development strategy of the Lesvos Geopark. The Geopark collaborates closely with women's agrotouristic cooperatives and local organic food producers to promote local gastronomy and local food products. Lesvos Geopark contributes to the local economy by creating new employment opportunities directly but also in tourist enterprises, hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, local artisans and handicrafts that are permanent Geopark collaborators.

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