

## Azores Geopark infrastructures through an effective partnership with the regional centres of environmental interpretation and science education

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In an ultra-peripheral archipelagic region such as the Azores, the non-continuous nature of the territory and the dispersion of the population among the islands is one of the limitations for a sustainable regional development. As a way to overcome this situation, the Azores Global Geopark promotes an effective partnership between different institutions, dispersed through all the islands.

Regarding the three main pillars that support its strategy - geoconservation, environmental education and sustainable regional development – the communication through the environmental awareness is nowadays a large part of the Azores Geopark action. The 19 Environmental Interpretation Centres and the 6 Science Centres are key partners of the Azores Geopark strategy, along with the 20 Museums, 9 Ecotecas and other institutions that promote the natural and cultural heritage among the local population and the tourists.

The integration of all these institutions allows the Geopark to fulfill objectives of promoting environmental awareness and cultural and tourism animation actions, and also to carry out measures of protection, conservation and dissemination of the natural heritage, especially the geological heritage. It also fosters the sustainable regional development, by promoting the economy through ecotourism, and especially through geotourism.

This strategy reflects a diversification in subjects, actions and organizations, as well as the optimization of human and financial resources dispersed in all the 9 islands.

The environmental and science centres are focused on a wide range of subjects, some being dedicated specifically to the geological heritage and geodiversity, such as: the interpretation and visitor centres of the volcanic caves, centres dedicated to geosites or volcanic landscapes, and science centers on volcanology and geothermal issues. Other environmental interpretation or science centers are devoted to experimental sciences, astronomy, Azorean biodiversity, etc. This work presents the important partners of the Azores Global Geopark and enhances their contribution to the promotion and valuing of the Azores geological heritage and geotourism.

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