

The aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark Algarvensis

O aspirante Algarvensis a Geoparque Mundial da UNESCO

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Sumário: *Situado na região mais a sudoeste da Europa, o aspirante Algarvensis a Geoparque é um território identitário e inspirador que visa contribuir para uma maior coesão social e territorial dos concelhos de Loulé, Silves e Albufeira, através de uma política de valorização do território, baseada no conceito de Geoparque UNESCO, com o apoio da Universidade do Algarve.*

Trata-se de um projeto integrador e potenciador de uma maior valorização e promoção do património local e regional a nível internacional, pretendendo acima de tudo, contribuir para a preservação do seu património geológico e cultural. A sua missão reside em promover a proteção, a valorização e a dinamização do património natural e cultural, destacando o património geológico, através da criação de conhecimento científico e educativo, a fim de proporcionar o desenvolvimento socioeconómico e sustentável do território, a fixação de pessoas e promoção da sua qualidade de vida.

Palavras-chave: *património geológico e cultural, geodiversidade, sustentabilidade ambiental, económica e social*

Key words: geological and cultural heritage, geodiversity, environmental, economic and social sustainability

Background

In 2019, the UNESCO National Commission accepted to recognize the aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark Algarvensis (aUGGp Algarvensis) based on its geological heritage of international and national importance. With an area of about 1381 km² belonging to three municipalities of the central Algarve, the project is co-headed by the municipalities of Loulé, Silves and Albufeira, the University of Algarve and the Marine and Environmental Research Centre (CIMA/ARNET-Ualg). It combines a geoconservation strategy and a set of environmental education and awareness policies, to the promotion of a sustainable socio-economic development based on geotourism activities, involving local communities, and contributing to the valorisation and promotion of local products. This strategy of sustainable development combined with the geology of the region allowed the limits of the aUGGp Algarvensis to be defined, forming a cohesive territory which does not extend to the sea and which has 48.8% of its area made up of parishes considered to have a low population density (Fig. 1). It should be noted that the name and logo of this aspirant refer to the remarkable geological heritage of world reference that is the *Metoposaurus algarvensis*,

a new Triassic fossil species discovered near the village of Penina.

Geodiversity

Being the westernmost European and only Portuguese aspiring geopark south of the Tagus, the aUGGp Algarvensis territory and its colourful landscapes are the testimony of a geological history that tells the cycle of ancient Variscan Orogeny (Permian and Triassic) and ancient Rheic and Thetys seas (Carboniferous and Jurassic) including the Central Atlantic Magmatic Province (CAMP), and extends until nowadays (Quaternary) (e.g. Rodrigues et al., 2015; Terrinha et al., 2006; Fig. 1).

The surface and underground landscapes of the territory of the aUGGp Algarvensis hide a great geodiversity of geosites, which survey and inventory are still in progress:

- To the north, in the "brown Algarve" made of schists and grauvaques from the Baixo Alentejo flysch sequence, the landscape of the *Serra do Caldeirão* is characterized by hills separated by embedded valleys (*barrancos*).

- In the "red Algarve", a depression known as the *Beira-Serra*, we can find the *Grès de Silves* Formation in which the "bonebed" deposit of *Metoposaurus*

algarvensis fossils was found but also the CAMP volcano-sedimentary sequence, representing the early stage of the Algarve meso-cenozoic basin.

- In the "Silver Algarve", further south, the *Barrocal* is dominated by marine limestones forming a characteristic karst morphology, represented by dolines, polders, karren fields, caves or karst aquifers.

Biodiversity

The territory of the aUGGp *Algarvensis* encompasses the three environmental landscape units of the Algarve, the uplands or *Serra*, the *Barrocal* and the littoral, which allows the occurrence of a high diversity of ecosystems, with emphasis on characteristic and identifiable habitats of a rural Algarve, enabling the presence of a considerable number of endemic species with high conservation value and scientific interest.

This territory has around 57 % of its surface area classified according to the National System of Classified Areas (SNAC), of which the most important are the Local Protected Landscapes of Rocha da Pena

and Fonte Benémola, areas integrated in the National Network of Protected Areas (RNAP), six Sites of Community Importance (SCI - Monchique, Arade/Odelouca, Ribeira de Quarteira, Barrocal, Caldeirão and Guadiana) and two Special Protection Areas (SPA - Caldeirão and Monchique) areas integrated in the Natura 2000 Network. It also has a Wetland of International Importance for waterfowl and fish under the RAMSAR Convention, the *Vascão* Rivulet and an Important Bird Area (IBA) in the *Caldeirão* mountains.

Cultural Diversity

Although poorly known, the territory of the aUGGp *Algarvensis* contains a very rich and diverse cultural heritage with 228 listed and referenced sites, including different types of heritage, namely cultural, tangible and intangible. However, cultural diversity is also evident in the artistic manifestations presented in the first edition of the GeoPalcos - Art, Science and Nature programme.

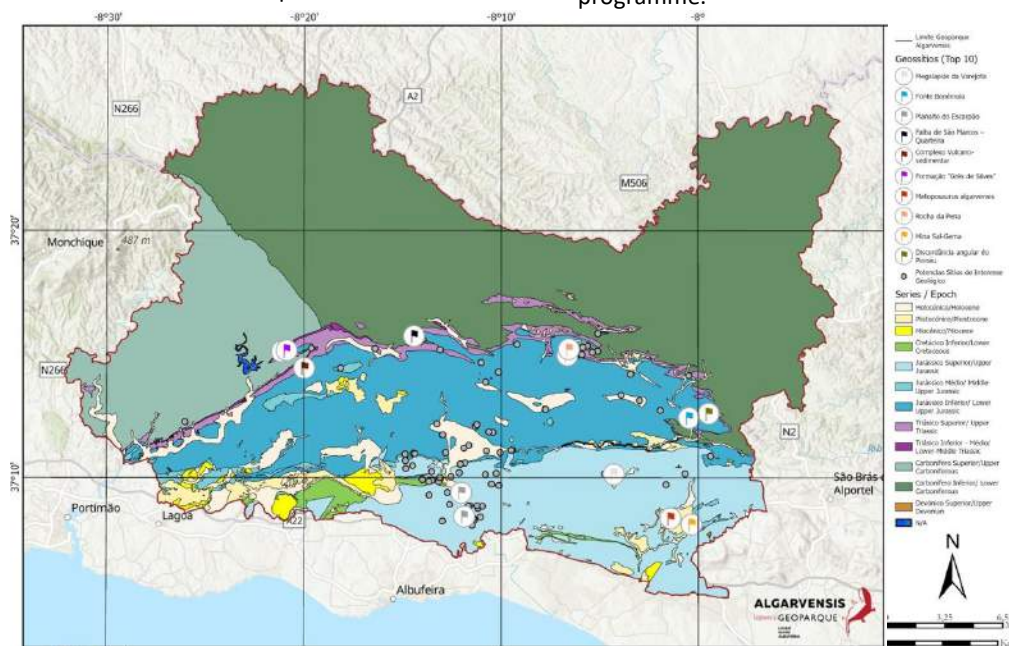


Fig. 1. Geologic map of the aUGGp *Algarvensis* including the 10 top geosites

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