

## **The Culture 2000 programme and small thematic Museums in Europe.**

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Aiming at protecting and efficiently managing the Lesvos petrified forest declared as protected natural monument, the Natural History Museum of the Lesvos Petrified Forest was founded in 1994. It is a non-profit organisation and its seven-member board encompasses representatives of the central government, the local authorities, universities and the local community. Scientific, technical and administrative staff includes 7 permanent and 25 temporary employees. The Lesvos Petrified Forest Geopark comprises 15,000 hectares of the Petrified Forest protected area.

A broad range of activities combine the main components for the operation of the Museum including scientific research, creation of the fossil geosite inventory and map, protection - interpretation and promotion of geosites, conservation of fossils, creation of visiting parks, establishment of a network of walking trails linking geosites, development of environmental education programmes on geosites and organisation of scientific, educational and cultural events that assist in raising public awareness about the importance of natural and cultural heritage.

With its activities the Museum has been recognized as an important economic factor. The Museum attracting more than 35000 visitors every year with a variety of cultural and educational activities, has an active role on the economic development of the western Lesvos Island linking the protection and promotion of geosites with the sustainable local development through the development of geotourism. It has also created links with local tourist enterprises, handicrafts and women cooperatives on local gastronomy.

The Museum is founder member of the European Geoparks Network developed in cooperation with UNESCO, aiming the protection and promotion of the European Geological Heritage. In this frame has a permanent collaboration with 25 partners coming from 10 E.U. Member States.

An intention of this cooperation was to establish a network that has the capability to assist European territories including important geo-heritage sites in developing their heritage in a sustainable way.

Partners have benefited directly by: learning and applying the key factors in a sustainable development strategy specifically tailored to geoparks; embracing and applying the concept of social inclusion as an integral part of their heritage development activities; disseminating awareness of the importance of Europe's geological history and evolution as an agent of cohesion in modern European society; sharing knowledge of conservation and interpretation of geo-heritage to enhance the cultural life of Europe.

This cooperation added value by: transferring know-how in the partner areas; establishing European-standard quality criteria by formulating the Europarks Charter as a yardstick for membership, with the award of the Europarks logo as a quality mark; disseminating education programmes concerning the common European geo heritage; demonstrating the value of incorporating social inclusion as an integral part of geo heritage operations; making links to promote the interests of European geo heritage internationally. .

We found it very useful to work with the Culture 2000 programme, which promotes cooperation between cultural institutions and museums in Europe.

Advice and technical assistance for this project was very satisfied. Dissemination of information about the project was broad and communication with the national cultural contact points ([CCPs](#)) was very useful and informative for building proposals. Communication and problem resolving with the Secretariat were excellent. Budgetary reporting was very simple and straightforward.

The requirement, that all co-organisers had to provide 5% of funding helps to ensure that all cultural operators are actively involved in the projects and has to be continued even if prevents some cultural operators from participation in the project.

Education activities and programmes in museums is an essential part of their activities and have to be targeted in the new program.

The total project budget is very modest and does not permit the creation of more permanent and broad cooperation structures between cultural institutions.