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PROMOTING EDUCATION AND TRAINING: AN ONLINE COURSE ON GEOPARKS

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Geoparks have gained increased global visibility with the recent establishment of the “UNESCO Global Geoparks” label, associated with UNESCO’s implementation of the new International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme. In spite of the increasing number of geoparks that have been established worldwide in the last 16 years, the geopark concept is still considered a new approach to geo-conservation, sustainable development, and territory management. New countries and regions are becoming interested in this new approach, but there are still a number of misunderstandings. Therefore, we need more education about the principles and strategies of geoparks, addressed both to those intending to be involved in geopark projects and to society in general. The University of Minho in Portugal has been involved in teaching, training, and research on geo-conservation and geoparks for the last 15 years and has recently decided to offer an online course on geoparks (<http://cursosonline.uminho.pt>). The four-week course comprises four modules: (1) general geopark concepts; (2) structures and strategies of geoparks; (3) geoparks as tools for sustainable development; and (4) UNESCO’s International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme. The university awards a diploma for those who complete the course (2 ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). The first edition of the course was held in Portuguese in April 2016, with 23 students from different countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Italy, Mexico, and Portugal). In order to enlarge the number of potential students, English editions of the course will begin in October 2016. The online course at UMinho is an efficient way to guarantee quality education for people who are interested in working in geoparks and also to promote lifelong training of geopark staff, with the flexibility of studying from anywhere and at any time over the Internet.