

***ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING EXCHANGE INITIATIVE FOR SUSTAINABLE  
HOSPITALITY SMEs IN THE BALKAN-MEDITERRANEAN REGION***

Subsidy Contract No. BMP1/1.3/2616/2017

**Company name: Geopark Iskar-panega**

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Source: <http://www.geopark.lukovit.bg/index.html#nogo>

**Country/region of operation:** Lukovit, Bulgaria

**Sustainability dimension:** environmental, managerial innovation, heritage-based tourist product, experiential tourism

**Description of the enterprise/initiative:**

The Geopark is a sustainable tourist product of geological, geomorphological or paleontological sites of aesthetic or cultural-historical value. It unites the natural and historical assets available on the territory of the municipality, enhancing their

attractiveness for both locals and tourists. The Geopark offers educational and informational programs that aim to raise the interest of locals and visitors about the conservation of non-living sites in the region. Besides organized visits with an animator on the paths of the Geopark, the activities on the side include: bungee jumps from Prohodna cave northern entrance; alpine descent from the cave's eyes, rafting and sailing on the River Panega, team-building outdoor programs, mountain biking, paintball, off-road, rock climbing, camping in Protatna camp.

### **Social/ community impact sought:**

Increasing social and cultural benefits for local communities and minimizing negative impacts. The main task of the Geopark is to stimulate the development of geotourism and to preserve the geological and geomorphological heritage for future generations.

**Stakeholders:** Locals, national and international visitors

### **Approach applied:**

Geopark Iskar-panega Project was implemented with the financial support of the PHARE Program "Development of Bulgarian Ecotourism" Two geographic routes were established on the territory of the Geopark: the Karlukovo Karst Complex and the Panega Riverside Landscape Park. In order to ensure the access of tourists to the natural landmarks of national importance and different attractive karts forms wooden bridges, summer-houses, stairs, shelters, picnic sites and platforms were constructed. The tourist infrastructure and the tracing of paths created tourist routs with different length, through which the tourist is navigated by a system of orientation boards. In order to make tourist routs more attractive a non-verbal animation (through information boards) of main sites were made. An assessment of the potential and a marketing strategy were developed in order to ensure proper management and popularization of the new tourist product.

### **Innovation applied:**

Geopark Iskar-panega is the first Geopark in Bulgaria encompassing of different natural and historical landmarks.

### **Social impact and business results achieved:**

As a result of the project the development of the municipality as tourist destination is a fact, geotourism was promoted as a factor for social-economic development, the competitiveness of the tourist industry in the region and the attractiveness of the natural heritage were raised. As a result of project activities a temporary employment was ensured for 20 unemployed people, the number of overnights at main lodging facilities increased (with over 40 %) and the number of visits of the city and the region rose significantly.

**Financial situation / sustainability of the business model:**

The financial situation is secured by European funding. Regarding the sustainability, after the project implementation period, the municipality will continue maintain the infrastructure and will take care for its development and improvement through the development of public-private partnership, whose main purpose will be in a midterm period to prepare the candidature of the Geopark for membership in the European Network of Geoparks. This will significantly raise the image of the destination, the interest to it and its visitation.

**Key success factors:** sustainable utilization of natural resources

**Challenges and problems:** The extremely sophisticated conditions for the execution of the objects from the tourist infrastructure created difficulties for project implementation. In order to build the infrastructure according to the working design project and overcome difficulties alpine method of work were used.

**Year when the enterprise was created:** 2006

**References (web-site, intent links, video, etc.):**

<http://www.geopark.lukovit.bg/index.html#nogo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7BHvnOgBJc>