

Guidelines and Criteria for National Geoparks seeking UNESCO's assistance to join the Global Geoparks Network



(April 2006)

GEOPARKS—Promoting Earth heritage, sustaining local communities

Global Network of National Geoparks — A landscape approach for geological heritage conservation, research and sustainable development

Introduction

Until recently, no international recognition of geological heritage sites of national or regional importance, and no international convention on geological heritage have existed. The initiative of UNESCO to support Geoparks responds to the strong need expressed by numerous countries for an international framework to enhance the value of the Earth heritage, its landscapes and geological formations, which are key witnesses to the history of life.

Pursuant the decision of its Executive Board in June 2001 (161 EX/Decisions, 3.3.1) UNESCO has been invited “to support *ad hoc* efforts with Member States as appropriate” to promote territories or natural parks having special geological features. National Geopark initiatives, which seek UNESCO's assistance should integrate the preservation of significant examples of geological heritage in a strategy for regional sustainable socio-economic and cultural development, safeguarding the environment.

The present document provides guidelines for developing Geoparks under the assistance of UNESCO for the inclusion in a Global Network of National Geoparks. The applicant is asked to respect the terms of the present guidelines. An independent expert group will refer to these guidelines when assessing proposals for the Global Network.

The protection and sustainable development of geological heritage and geodiversity through Geoparks initiatives, contributes to the objectives of Agenda 21, the Agenda of Science for Environment and Development into the twenty-first century adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, Rio de Janeiro, 1992) and reconfirmed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002 in Johannesburg. Geology and landscape have profoundly influenced society, civilization, and cultural diversity of our planet. The Geoparks initiative adds a new dimension to the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage by highlighting the potential for interaction between socio-economic and cultural development and conservation of the natural environment.

The Global Network of National Geoparks operates in close synergy with UNESCO's World Heritage Centre, the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) World Network of Biosphere Reserves, national and international undertakings and non-governmental organizations active in geological heritage conservation. For national Geoparks in Europe, UNESCO has established a privileged partnership with the *European Geoparks Network (EGN)*.

Part I Criteria

1. Size and setting

- A Geopark seeking to become member of the Global Network of National Geoparks is an area with well-defined limits and a large enough surface area for it to serve local economic and cultural development (mainly through tourism). It comprises a number of internationally important geological heritage sites on any scale, or a mosaic of geological entities of special scientific importance, rarity or beauty. These features are representative of a region's geological history and the events and processes that formed it.
- ‘Geopark’ is a label attributed to an area where geological heritage sites are part of a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development. The Geopark should take into account the whole geographical setting of the region, and shall not solely include sites of geological significance. Non-geological themes are an integrated part of it, especially when their relation to landscape and geology can be demonstrated to the visitors. For this reason, it is necessary to include also sites of ecological, archaeological, historical or cultural value. In many societies, natural, cultural and social history are inextricably linked and thus cannot be separated.
- If the area of a Geopark is identical to or partly or wholly overlaps with an area already inscribed, for example, on the World Heritage List or registered as a Biosphere Reserve of the Man and the Biosphere Programme of UNESCO, it is necessary to obtain prior clearance from the appropriate bodies of the said initiatives before submitting the application.

2. Management and local involvement

- Prerequisite to any successful Geopark proposal is the establishment of a management body and plan. The presence of impressive and internationally significant geological outcrops alone is not sufficient. The geological features inside the Geopark area must be accessible to visitors, are linked to one another and safeguarded in a formally managed park-type situation. The Geopark is run by a designated local authority or several authorities having an adequate management infrastructure, qualified personal and adequate financial support.
- The establishment of a Geopark is a bottom-up process. It should be based on a strong multi task-force concept and political will with long-term financial support, and professional management structures, which adopts its own territorial policy for sustainable

regional socio-economic and cultural development. Success can only be achieved through strong local involvement. The initiative to create a Geopark must therefore come from local communities/authorities with a strong commitment to developing and implementing a management plan that meets the economic needs of the local population whilst protecting the landscape in which they live. Nevertheless, it needs to be endorsed at national level by the National Commission to UNESCO.

- A Geopark shall provide organizational arrangements to involve public authorities, local communities, private interests, and both research and educational bodies in the design and running of the park and its regional economic and cultural development plan and activities. This co-operation shall stimulate discussion and encourage partnerships between the different groups having a vested interest in the area; it shall motivate and mobilise local authorities and the local population.
- Sustainable tourism and other economic activities within a Geopark can only be successful if carried out in cooperation with local communities. Tourism activities have to be conceived specially to match local conditions and the natural and cultural character of a territory and must fully respect the traditions of the local populace. To respect, reinforce and protect local cultural values, is a crucial part of the sustainable development effort. In many regions and countries it is also necessary to involve the indigenous population in the establishment of a Geopark.
- It is strongly advised during the preparatory phase, to seek cooperation with respective Geological Surveys, local public and tourism bodies, local communities, universities and research bodies, and private interest groups and to broaden the composition of the start-up team in charge of the Geopark project. These groups should be representative of the scientific, conservation and socio-economic communities of the area. A wide local consultation process must involve the local population to facilitate local acceptance for the planned Geopark and to develop a strong concept for their Geopark application dossier.

3. Economic development

Sustainable development was defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development in *Our Common Future* (1987) as ‘development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’

- One of the main strategic objectives of a Geopark is to stimulate economic activity and sustainable development. A Geopark seeking UNESCO’s assistance serves to foster socio-economic development that is culturally and environmentally sustainable. This has a direct impact on the area involved by improving human living conditions and the rural environment. It strengthens identification of the population with their area and triggering cultural renaissance, which in turn aids direct protection of geological heritage.
- Often, aspects of a region’s cultural heritage are linked to the geological heritage. Respectful of the environment, the establishment of a Geopark shall stimulate, for example, the creation of innovative local enterprises, small business, cottage industries, initiative high quality training courses and new jobs by generating new sources of revenue (e.g. geotourism, geoproducts) while protecting the geo-resources of the Geopark (e.g. encouraging casting instead of sale of fossils). This provides supplementary income for the local population and shall attract private capital. ‘Geotourism’ is an economic, success-oriented and fast-moving discipline, a new tourist business sector involving strong multidisciplinary cooperation.

4. Education

- A Geopark must provide and organize support, tools and activities to communicate geoscientific knowledge and environmental concepts to the public (e.g. through museums, trails, guided tours, popular literature and maps, modern communication media). It also allows and fosters scientific research and cooperation with universities, and between geoscientists and the local populace.
- The success of Geopark educational activities depends not only on the content of tourism programmes, competent staff and logistic support for the visitors, but also on the personal contact with the local population, media representatives and decision-makers. The aspects of wide community participation and capacity building on the local level (e.g. training of visitor guides) helps to develop a wide range of acceptance of the geopark philosophy (and transfer of knowledge and information) in the population. It cannot be repeated often enough that local people are of primordial importance for the successful establishment and maintenance of a Geopark.
- Among the instruments available for the transfer of information are events such as excursions for school classes and teachers, seminars, and scientific lectures for the environmentally and culturally interested public and for residents who enjoy introducing their landscape to visitors. One of the main issues is to link geo-education with the local context, thus local students must learn the importance of their geological heritage. Creating geo-curricula for primary and secondary schools, using the local information about geology, geomorphology and physical geography will help to preserve the Geopark while at the same time reinforcing local awareness, pride and self-identity. Geoparks may be great educational tools at local and national levels.
- Within the educational concept, museums, ‘discovery centres’, interpretive centers and other innovative new tools must be developed to promote the principle of geological heritage conservation and the necessity of its safeguarding and archiving. The museums and centres also serve for developing different educational programmes for visitors and local actors.
- All educational activities should reflect the ethical considerations around holistic environmental protection.

5. Protection and conservation

- A Geopark is not specifically a new category of protected area or landscape and can be quite different from what is mostly an entirely protected and regulated National Park or Nature Park. The responsible Geopark authority ensures the protection of the geological heritage of the Geopark in accordance with local traditions and legislative obligations. It is the government of the country where the Geopark is situated which decides about the level and measures of protection of certain sites or geological outcrops.
- In accordance with national legislation or regulations, a Geopark shall contribute to the conservation of significant geological features including:
 - representative rocks
 - mineral resources
 - minerals
 - fossils
 - landforms and landscapes
 which provide information on various geoscientific disciplines such as:
 - solid earth sciences
 - economic geology and mining
 - engineering geology
 - geomorphology
 - glacial geology
 - physical geography
 - hydrology

- mineralogy
- palaeontology
- petrology
- sedimentology
- soil science
- speleology
- stratigraphy
- structural geology
- volcanology

A Geopark explores and demonstrates methods and best practice of conserving those examples of geological heritage.

- The management authority of the Geopark ensures adequate protection measures, in consultation with relevant statutory bodies, to guarantee effective conservation and provide means for physical maintenance, as appropriate. Those sites remain under the sole jurisdiction of the country in which the Geopark is situated. It is the country's responsibility to decide how to protect the particular sites or areas, in conformity with national legislation or regulations.
- A Geopark must respect local and national laws relating to the protection of geological heritage. Its managing body should strongly discourage the selling of all elements of geological heritage, which could not be regarded as sustainable but it should permit, in certain circumstances, the limited (sustainable) collecting of geological samples for scientific and educational purposes from naturally renewable sites. It can be demonstrated that a sustainable approach in this question leads to higher economic benefit than a shortsighted selling of Earth heritage, minerals and fossils.

6. The Global Network

- The Global Network of National Geoparks provides a platform of cooperation and exchange between experts and practitioners in geological heritage matters. Under the umbrella of UNESCO and through cooperation with the global network partners, important local, national geological sites gain worldwide recognition and profit through the exchange of knowledge and expertise, experience and staff between other Geoparks. This international partnership developed by UNESCO, brings the advantage to be a member of and profit from worldwide network, as compared to a local isolated initiative. It permits to benefit from the experience of other members of the network.
- The network comprises all regions of the world and brings together groups that share common values, interests, or backgrounds following a specific methodology and management. It further serves to develop models of best practice and set quality-standards for territories that integrate the preservation of geological heritage in a strategy for regional sustainable economic development. The establishment of a Geopark brings sustainability and real economic benefit to the local populations, usually through the development of sustainable tourism and other economic and cultural activities, in developing the sustainable development component and not to be over focussed on conservation.

Geoparks that are part of the network:

- 1) preserve geological heritage for present and future generations
 - 2) educate and teach the broad public about issues in geological sciences and their relation with environmental matters
 - 3) ensure sustainable socio-economic and cultural development
 - 4) foster multi-cultural bridges for heritage and conservation and the maintenance of geological and cultural diversity, using participatory schemes and co-partnership
 - 5) stimulate research when appropriate
 - 6) contribute actively to the life of the network through joint initiatives (e.g. communication, publications, exchange of information, twinning, participation in meetings)
- UNESCO supports the development of this initiative, among others, in order to put the geosciences back on the agenda of politicians and decision-makers of the governments and local actors, as well as on the 'radar screen' of private enterprises. An important number of activities within Geoparks are being developed

worldwide to increase partnership with the private sector, e.g. the tourism industry. The private sector often requests an international cooperative framework that UNESCO can offer. UNESCO's umbrella will definitely raise the interest of government sectors in this effort, as the organization has a strong awareness-raising potential that will be used to its maximum extent informing its Ambassadors of the different Member States. This in itself will lead to a much better understanding and support for local initiatives that want to join the UNESCO Network.

- The inclusion into the Global Network of National Geoparks is a sign of recognition of excellence and in no ways implies any legal or financial responsibilities on the part of UNESCO. This relates also to the use of UNESCO's name and logo, which needs a special authorization respecting the regulatory framework of sponsorship of the Organization. For approved network members, a special logo was created for the Global Network. Please note that the use of this logo and the mentioning of membership in the Global Network can be only used after the positive evaluation of the application and upon receipt of the official letter of approval from the Global Geoparks Network Secretariat.
- Should a member of the network wish to use UNESCO's logo and name for a specific event or activity, it can obtain patronage through the National Commissions for UNESCO or by special permission of the Director-General, which must be expressly authorized in advance and in writing. It is the responsibility of the managing body of the Geopark to avoid any misunderstandings with anyone in this regard. (Directives concerning the use of the name, acronym, logo and internet domain names of UNESCO can be obtained through the Geoparks Secretariat, address see below.)

Part II Nomination procedure—a step by step procedure how to become a network member

1. Non-European Countries

- Geoparks seeking UNESCO's assistance are invited to contact the Global Earth Observation Section, Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences at UNESCO.

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- The application should be written in English or French and submitted in 3 printed copies and 3 CD-ROMs. The text part should not exceed 30 pages. It should be duly signed by the managing and governmental entities in charge of the running and developing of the Geopark, and be endorsed by the National Commission for UNESCO in the Member State concerned.
- The application dossier should include the following topics, highlighting strong and weak points:
 1. Identification of the area
 2. Scientific description (international geological significance, geodiversity, number of geosites, etc.)
 3. General information on the area
 - geographical setting, economic situation
 - population, infrastructure, employment
 - natural landscape, climate, biology, habitats
 - human activity, cultural heritage, archaeology

4. Management plan and structure
5. Sustainable development policy strategy and importance of geotourism in this context (regional development territorial action plan)
6. Arguments for the nomination as a Geopark within the Global Network

Signature part:

7. Letter of expression of interest accompanying the application
 8. Official application signed by the competent authorities
 9. Endorsement by National Commission for UNESCO of the country where the Geopark is situated
 - 9.1. Endorsement by a National Geoparks Network (if existing in the country)
 10. Annex (self-evaluation form on Geopark details)
- UNESCO shall verify the contents of the application dossier and supporting materials and, in the case of incomplete documentation, request complementary information from the applicant. Applications can be submitted any time of the year and will be assessed by an independent expert group, which pronounces its recommendation regarding the membership of the proposed Geopark during its annual meeting. Membership to the Global Network of National Geoparks may be attributed upon a positive assessment. UNESCO shall notify the applicant and the National Commission for UNESCO in the country concerned of the decision taken.
 - Travel, accommodation and local transportation costs of expert(s) in charge of advisory missions and on-the-spot evaluation should normally be borne by the country where the Geopark is located or any other party or entity concerned with the application.
 - If in country a “National Network for Geoparks” exists, then the applicant must first become a member of the national network before submitting its dossier for membership to UNESCO, which must be certified.
 - As part of the application preparation any potential new member may wish to invite an advisor from the network to their area. The costs of such a visit should be borne by the inviting territory.

2. European Countries

- A Geopark located in Europe wishing to become member of the Global Network of National Geoparks, is invited to submit a full application dossier to the coordination office of the European Geoparks Network (EGN), which acts as the integration organization into the Global Network for the European continent. The Global Network of National Geoparks of UNESCO and the European Geoparks Network were designed in parallel on a common conceptual basis. Pursuant to this, national applications to the Global Network from European countries are implemented through the EGN. As a permanent member of the advisory board and expert committees of the EGN, UNESCO participates at every stage in the evaluation of and decision on the applications.
- UNESCO and the EGN have signed two agreements in this respect: the “Agreement for co-operation between the Division of Earth Sciences of UNESCO and the Network of European Geoparks” (2001, Almeria, Spain), and the “Madonie Declaration” (2004, Madonie Italy).
- The EGN was established in June 2000 by four European Geoparks with the aim to protect geological heritage and promote the sustainable development of their areas, further, to create a strong European thematic group of territories involved in sustainable development, and to prepare and negotiate new common European Programmes. In 2005, the EGN has reached 25 members, which are now part of the Global Network of National Geoparks.
- European candidates submit their application forms through the Coordination Unit of the European Geoparks Network, Réserve Géologique de Haute Provence, Digne-les-Bains, France from

whom up-to-date advice and assistance should be requested in advance.

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3. Reporting and periodical review

- The status of each Geopark shall be subject to a periodical review within 5 years for non-European nations and 3 years for Geoparks in Europe based on a progress report prepared by the designated authority concerned in cooperation with respective authorities that signed the original proposal, and forwarded to UNESCO through the National Commission for UNESCO.
- If on the basis of this report, the independent expert group of UNESCO considers that the status or management of the park is satisfactory since it was designated or last reviewed, this will be formally acknowledged and the Geopark will continue to be member of the Global Network.
- If it is considered that the Geopark no longer fulfils the criteria set out in the present guidelines of the Global Network, the designated authority concerned will be recommended to take appropriate steps to ensure maintenance of the accepted standards. Should the park not fulfil the criteria within one year, it shall be removed from the list and cease to be associated with the Global Network of National Geoparks.
- UNESCO shall notify the designated authority concerned and the National Commission for UNESCO of the outcome of the periodical review.
- Should a Geopark and the sovereign authority wish to withdraw from the attributed association, it shall notify the Geoparks Secretariat through its National Commission giving the reasons thereto.
- For any modification concerning the physical conditions of the Geopark like, for example, a change of its surface area, members of the Global Network have submitted an official request. At any time it is possible for an existing Geopark to modify its surface and request approval of a changed surface area. This includes also the use of the logo within these new enlarged territories.
- The designation of an area as member of the Global Network of National Geoparks shall be given appropriate publicity and promotion by the management body of the Geopark concerned. It shall also keep UNESCO regularly informed about the ongoing progress and developments in the park. This refers to special events (e.g. twinning, inaugurations) and their promotion through appropriate publicity and website links that can be easily connected and reach a worldwide public.

Geoparks Secretariat

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