

FAQs general public

Frequently asked questions about UNESCO Global Geoparks – General information, definitions, governance and framing issues

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What is a UNESCO Global Geopark?

1. Definition

UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development. A UNESCO Global Geopark comprises a number of geological heritage sites 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. It must also include important natural, historic, cultural tangible and intangible heritage sites.

A UNESCO Global Geopark must have geological heritage of international significance which is, during the evaluation process, assessed by geo-scientific experts, from the International Union of Geosciences (IUGS). It is based on the international peer-reviewed, published research conducted on the geological sites within the area. The experts make a globally comparative assessment to determine whether the geological sites constitute international value following a fix set of criteria and questions.

2. What are the aims of a UNESCO Global Geopark?

A UNESCO Global Geoparks has multiple aims which included the protection and conservation of its territorial geoh heritage and culturally and environmentally sustainable development of the area. UNESCO

Global Geoparks are fundamentally about people and about exploring and celebrating the links between our communities and the Earth. The Earth has shaped who we are: it has shaped our farming practices, the building materials and methods we have used for our homes, even our mythology, folklore and folk traditions. UNESCO Global Geoparks, therefore, engage in a range of activities to celebrate these links. Many UNESCO Global Geoparks have strong links to the arts communities where the synergy released by bringing science and the arts together can yield surprising results.

One of the primary aims is to promote geoscience education within local communities and to visitors by conveying the importance of the geological heritage to students, teachers, local decision-makers, and the broad public.

A UNESCO Global Geopark fosters socio-economic development that is culturally and environmentally sustainable directly affecting the area by improving human living conditions and the rural environment. It gives local people a sense of pride in their region, strengthens public identification with the area, and promotes a better understanding of the area's geological, natural, archaeological, cultural and industrial heritage. The establishment of a UNESCO Global Geopark stimulates the creation of innovative local enterprises, small businesses, sustainable tourism activities and businesses, geotrails, ... and new jobs by generating new sources of revenue (e.g. geotourism, geoproducs) while protecting the geo-resources.

3. What are the essential factors to be considered before creating a UNESCO Global Geopark?

A quick check to verify if an area has got all important assets to prepare an application for UGGp designation is the **Checklist and its explanatory notes, developed by the UGGp Council. This should be the first thing to do for anybody who has the idea in to prepare an application dossier for UNESCO. You can find it in the document on the “how to become an UNESCO Global Geopark page”**

Before considering an application for the UNESCO Geopark designation, the territory must ensure that it has a geological heritage of international value. In order to justify that, the geology of the territory must have been the subject of studies at the international level and of academic and scientific publications. While there is no international methodology regarding geoheritage inventory, an aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark must first make use of national inventories made by geological surveys in countries where they exist. However, these methodologies may not be complete and not include the characteristics of Geoparks and their specific sites of interest. Geoparks include other aspects going beyond the geological interest which are for example sustainable development, educational, tourism interests.

The ingredients to keep in mind before creating a UNESCO Global Geopark start with a project idea, and must include a multidisciplinary project team, with charismatic team members. It requires lots of negotiations, the undertaking of multidisciplinary studies to define the sites (geological and non-geological) to determine the optimum territory. It requires partnerships on local, national, and international level and must include the National UNESCO Commission. A management structure and team must be developed with a secure budget, involving local people. Most importantly, work and strategy progress over time and needs great patience (5 to 10 years development).

It is essential having a community informed and involved in the project, willing to work on it, including regional and/or local governments, economic actors, education stakeholders, schools and inhabitants, to promote sustainable tourism and development.

Becoming a UNESCO Global Geopark means becoming an active member of the UGGp network. The candidate Geopark must demonstrate adherence to the terms of the Statutes of the IGGP and Operational Guidelines for UNESCO Global Geoparks.

Before submitting an application, the aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark candidate must already function as a *de facto* UNESCO Global Geopark for at least one year.

It is equally important for applicants to have already been in contact with their National Commission, the UNESCO Secretariat, the GGN and its global members and experts, possibly during some of the international conferences and workshops. Applicants should already be familiar with the philosophy of the Geoparks before applying. A candidate can request advice from the GGN Secretariat or the UNESCO Secretariat during the preparation phase and ask for assistance from a GGN expert. They can also apply for the Mentorship Programme or Grants for Aspiring UNESCO Global Geoparks organized by UNESCO and GGN, which calls are published on UNESCO website news.

4. How are UNESCO Global Geoparks established and managed?

The establishment of a UNESCO Global Geopark is a bottom-up process involving a strong local multiple partnership with long-term public and political support. The initiative to develop this partnership involves a strong commitment by local communities to develop a plan, which meets all of their goals while displaying and protecting an area's geological heritage.

A UNESCO Global Geopark provides an opportunity to develop cohesive partnerships with common goals between landowners, managers, businesses, tourism providers, and other local organizations to promote its geological processes, features, a unified landscape, and historical themes linked to geology. It is possible to have multiple partners representing many different interest groups. These can include stakeholders and local enterprises in fields of education, tourism and research, as well as local and national authorities, community leaders, private interests, Geological Surveys, research and educational institutions, and tourism providers. Partners agree to co-operate in the management, to adhere to the Guidelines for UNESCO Global Geoparks, and to promote the Geopark, while respecting the strict rules for the use of the UNESCO logo. Partners also contribute to defining the terms of co-operation and activities within a UNESCO Global Geopark.

UNESCO Global Geoparks are managed by a body having legal existence recognized under national legislation. This management body should be appropriately equipped to address the entire area and should include all relevant local and regional actors and authorities. UNESCO Global Geoparks require a management plan, agreed upon by all the partners, that provides for the social and economic needs of the local populations, protects the landscape in which they live and conserves their cultural identity. This plan must be comprehensive, incorporating the governance, development, communication, protection, infrastructure, finances, and partnerships of the UNESCO Global Geopark.

To be managed properly, UNESCO Global Geoparks must have their own budget, allowing the continuity of implemented actions. In the same way, they have to acquire a management plan for at least 4 years, showing that the territory is orienting its strategy to the UNESCO Global Geopark creation and development. To be properly equipped, all aspiring UNESCO Global Geoparks need to have a vision document, setting out their strategy and main concept for future development. Management plans take time to develop and establish and need to be realistic and achievable. Therefore, a fully elaborated management plan will be checked in detail during the first revalidation of a UGGp. The management plans could include:

- Geopark personnel and capacity building
- Geoconservation strategy including protective and conservation measures and activities
- Heritage interpretation infrastructure, tools and publications
- Geoeducation strategy including partners, educational programmes and tools
- Geotourism strategy including services and activities
- Sustainable local development, partners and activities
- Geopark promotional activities and tools
- Networking and Partnerships

A UNESCO Global Geopark is not only about cooperation with the local people living in the UNESCO Global Geopark area, but also about cooperating with other UNESCO Global Geoparks through the Global Geoparks Network (GGN), and regional networks for UNESCO Global Geoparks, in order to learn from each other and, as a network, improve the quality of the label UNESCO Global Geopark. Working together with international partners and to be a member of the GGN is obligatory for UNESCO Global Geoparks. By

working together across borders, UNESCO Global Geoparks contribute to increasing understanding among different communities and as such help peace-building processes.

5. Has a UNESCO Global Geopark a required minimum or a maximum size?

No, however, a UNESCO Global Geopark must be populated and cover a sufficiently large area to allow a sustainable development of the territory. It must have a clear boundary and be managed by a clearly defined management structure involving partners and local stakeholders. The Geopark territory must be coherent from the cultural and historical point of view, adapted to local administrative and political conditions and easy to be managed by its size. The territory could be adjusted in time and for example enlarged.

It is obvious that huge areas, such as the Alxa Desert UNESCO Global Geopark (China) with its 68,374 km², are by their nature more difficult to manage and require a considerable effort to demonstrate a coherent image. The smallest UNESCO Global Geopark is the English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark (UK), with a land area of 62 km² and a sea area 41 km²; however, its population is sufficient to allow a sustainable local economic development.

6. Is a UNESCO Global Geopark a new category of protected area?

A UNESCO Global Geopark is not a formal legislative designation, though the defining geological heritage sites within a UNESCO Global Geopark must be protected under indigenous, local, regional or national legislation as appropriate. UNESCO Global Geopark status does not imply restrictions on any economic activity inside a UNESCO Global Geopark where that activity complies with indigenous, local, regional and/or national legislation.

A UNESCO Global Geopark is not a new category of protected area or landscape: therefore, a Geopark can differ from National Parks or Nature Parks, which are subject to the protection and regulation of national environmental laws.

Local, state, or federal management authorities ensure appropriate site protection measures within individual site management plans, in cooperation with the appropriate agencies, to guarantee effective conservation and protection and provide necessary monitoring and maintenance of the proposed area. Sites remain under the sole jurisdiction of the landowners and managers, whether private, or local, state, tribal, or federal agencies. UNESCO does not have any type of management authority over the UNESCO Global Geopark area.

7. Is there a limited number of UNESCO Global Geoparks within any one country?

No, there is no limited number of UNESCO Global Geoparks within a country but in terms of the number of applying Geopark projects, the number is limited. In order to guarantee a balanced geographical representation of countries the number of active UNESCO Global Geopark applications is restricted to two per country.

Any aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark less than 100 km away to another UNESCO Global Geopark has to carry on an independent study to be sure that geological heritage is complementary or consider merging with the existent UNESCO Global Geopark.

8. What are typical activities within a UNESCO Global Geopark?

A UNESCO Global Geopark organizes stimulating activities within its communities, which are related to its geological theme and encourages the promotion of local agricultural and traditional craft products. It further develops and provides informational material on geology and nature, printing leaflets and other material, and creates and maintains websites.

Other typical activities in a UNESCO Global Geopark include the development of walking and cycling trails, the training of local people to act as guides, education courses and guided tours, provision of information, interpretation and research activities, signage and the development of modern museums and visitor centers. UNESCO Global Geoparks also work closely together with other UNESCO Global Geoparks stimulating research, education, branding, etc.

It is a pre-requisite that all UNESCO Global Geoparks develop and operate educational activities for all ages to spread awareness of our geological heritage and its links to other aspects of our natural, cultural and intangible heritages. UNESCO Global Geoparks offer educational programmes for schools or offer special activities for children through “Kids Clubs” or special “Fossil Fun Days”. UNESCO Global Geoparks also offer education, both formal and informal, for adults and retired people while many provide training for local people who can then, in turn, teach others.

Many UNESCO Global Geoparks promote awareness of geological hazards, including volcanoes, earthquakes and tsunamis, and many help prepare disaster mitigation strategies among local communities. Through educational activities for the local people and visitors, many UNESCO Global Geoparks give information on the source of geological hazards and ways to reduce their impact including disaster response strategies. These efforts build important capacity and contribute to building more resilient communities that have the knowledge and skills to effectively respond to potential geological hazards.

UNESCO Global Geoparks have activities to sensitize on climate change. They hold records of past climate change and are educators on current climate change as well as adopting a best practice approach to utilizing renewable energy and employing the best standards of “green tourism.” While some UNESCO Global Geoparks stimulate green growth in the region through innovative projects, others serve as outdoor museums on the effects of current climate change thus giving the opportunity to show visitors how climate change can affect our environment. Such community and educational activities and projects are important in order to raise awareness on the potential impact of climate change on the region, and to provide the local communities with the knowledge to mitigate and adapt to the potential effects of climate change.

Geoparks are a platform for the development, nurturing and promotion of local cottage industry and craft products. In some UNESCO Global Geoparks women’s cooperatives also provide an opportunity for women to obtain additional income in their own area and on their own terms. They can, for example, operate accommodation services for visitors.

9. Do UNESCO Global Geoparks do scientific research?

UNESCO Global Geoparks are encouraged to work with academic institutions to engage in active scientific research in the Earth Sciences, and other disciplines as appropriate, to advance our knowledge about the Earth and its processes. A UNESCO Global Geopark is not a museum, it is an active laboratory where people can become engaged in science from the highest academic research level to the level of the curious visitor. A UNESCO Global Geopark must take great care not to alienate the public from science and absolutely must avoid the use of technical-scientific language on information boards, signs, leaflets, maps and books which are aimed at the general public.

10. What does community involvement and empowerment entail in a UNESCO Global Geopark?

UNESCO Global Geoparks actively involve local and indigenous peoples, preserving and celebrating their culture. By involving local and indigenous communities, UNESCO Global Geoparks recognize the importance of these communities, their culture and the link between these communities and their land. It is one of the criteria of UNESCO Global Geoparks that local and indigenous knowledge, practice and management systems, alongside science, are included in the planning and management of the area.

Local communities have to be beneficiaries of the UNESCO Global Geopark. Moreover, their traditions, skills, experiences and local knowledge about their environment and landscape have to be part of the UNESCO Global Geopark’s identity and clearly recognized in information for visitors, in publications and in public programmes.

Examples of community involvement are:

- Comprehensive information campaign of local communities in a Geopark’s territory about the Geopark, the related philosophy, the intended objectives and the options for local communities to participate in the development of the Geopark;
- Assessment of local capacities and needs: Intensive dialogue between Geopark management and local communities on how local strengths and values (e.g. skills, traditions, products, knowledge) could be integrated into the overall development of the Geopark and how local communities could benefit;

- Provision of tailored training for local communities, e.g. as tour guides, on the marketing of local products, developing new products, and/or providing services in the Geopark (e.g. accommodation, food or transport);
- Allocate tasks to local communities, such as maintaining the infrastructure of a Geopark and managing some of its facilities (e.g. information centers and information points);
- Collaborate with local institutions and other partners like, associations, schools, universities and geological surveys in order to develop and deliver educational programmes.

11. How does a UGGp deal with Natural Resources?

UNESCO Global Geoparks inform people about the sustainable use and need for natural resources, whether they are mined, quarried or harnessed from the surrounding environment, while at the same time promoting respect for the environment and the integrity of the landscape. Since the dawn of humanity natural resources provided by the Earth's solid crust have been the basis for our social and economic development. These resources include minerals, hydrocarbons, rare earth elements, geothermal energy, air and water, and their sustainable use is vital for the continued future well-being of society. Any element which can be found on Earth has its origin in geology and geological processes, is nonrenewable and its exploitation has to be treated wisely.

12. Can industrial activities and construction projects take place in a UNESCO Global Geopark?

Geoparks are about sustainable development aligned with viable economic development for territories. Thus, sustainable development and social activities are essential parts of a UNESCO Global Geopark. However, every activity has to be sustainable and compatible with the preservation of the territory's geological heritage, and not damaging the integrity of the geological sites.

13. Is the selling of any original geological material (e.g. rocks, minerals, and fossils) permitted within a UNESCO Global Geopark?

No, the selling or destruction of the geological value of a UNESCO Global Geopark or of material either from within the Geopark or from anywhere else in the world is not permitted. Members of the Management Group of a UNESCO Global Geopark must not participate in the sale of geological objects within the UNESCO Global Geopark area, regardless of their country of origin, and should actively discourage unsustainable sale or trade in geological material as a whole, including the sale of minerals and fossils.

Where clearly justified as a responsible activity and as part of delivering the most effective and sustainable means of site management, it may permit sustainable collecting of geological materials for scientific and educational purposes from naturally renewable sites within the Geopark. Trade of geological materials (in accordance with national legislation on Earth heritage conservation) based on such a system may be tolerated in exceptional circumstances, provided it is clearly and publicly explained, justified and monitored as the best option for the Geopark in relation to local circumstances. Such circumstances will be subject to debate and approval by the UNESCO Global Geopark Council on a case-by-case basis. Selling of polished building rock material, artwork made out of building stone would be permitted.

14. What to do if a National Geoparks Network exists in a country?

If a formal National Geoparks Network exists in a country, then the applicant must first become a certified member of that national network before submitting its application. Comments made by the nationally competent body during a successful application procedure at the national level could provide valuable appendices to the dossier.

15. What is the Global Geoparks Network?

It is compulsory to be member of the Global Geoparks Network (GGN), which includes a membership fee, and participation in the network (Membership fee 1500 EUR). The GGN is an association under the French law and together with the International Union of Geological Sciences the main partner NGO of UNESCO for UNESCO Global Geoparks. It provides a framework to support and stimulate its members for mutual exchange to bring sustainable territorial development to the Geopark by using that territory's geological heritage, primarily through the development of geotourism. The GGN provides a platform of cooperation and exchange between experts and practitioners in geological heritage issues and for best practices under the umbrella of UNESCO and promotes the concept on international occasions (fairs, conferences,

exhibitions ...). Together with UNESCO, the GGN holds international training courses and conferences and provides individual capacity building. The network will ultimately comprise all regions of the world, bringing together groups that share a common values, interests or backgrounds.

The GGN functions through the operation of regional networks:

- European Geoparks Network (EGN): <http://www.europeangeoparks.org/>
- Asia Pacific Geoparks Network (APGN): <http://asiapacificgeoparks.org/>
- Latin America and the Caribbean Geoparks Network (GeoLAC): http://www.redgeolac.org/index_en.html
- African UNESCO Global Geoparks Network (AUGN): <https://www.visitgeoparks.org/african-geopark-network>

UNESCO Global Geoparks within UNESCO designated sites

1. What is the difference between UNESCO Global Geoparks, Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites?
UNESCO Global Geoparks, together with the other two UNESCO designated sites Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites, give a complete picture of promoting our heritage while at the same time conserving the world's cultural, biological and geological diversity, and supporting sustainable economic development.

While Biosphere Reserves focus on the harmonised management of biological and cultural diversity and World Heritage Sites promote the conservation of natural and cultural sites of outstanding universal value, UNESCO Global Geoparks give international recognition for sites with international significance that promote the importance and significance of protecting the Earth's geodiversity through actively engaging with the local communities.

In case an aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark includes a World Heritage Site or Biosphere Reserve, a clear justification and evidence has to be provided on how UNESCO Global Geopark status will add value by being both independently branded and working in synergy with the other designations.

2. What is the role of UNESCO?
UNESCO provides the UNESCO Global Geoparks Secretariat, contributes to and stimulates global 'networking', and co-organizes the International Geoparks Conferences.

The Secretariat has three main missions regarding the UNESCO Global Geoparks: capacity building, improving governance and promotion. As examples, The Secretariat maintains a website, analyses application files, organizes evaluation and revalidation missions, organizes Council meetings, etc. UNESCO has also a standard-setting role and provides policy advice under high quality requirements. UNESCO Secretariat works on the improvement of governance and provides visibility and global attention for the Network members and represents with its strict quality control a label of excellence.

UNESCO serves as the global umbrella partner that organizes/co-organizes and coordinates conferences and workshops, oversees and coordinates the application procedures and standards, produces publications. UNESCO together with the GGN provides a global platform of active cooperation between experts and practitioners in geological heritage and facilitates exchange between the global network partners.

3. Does UNESCO provide training courses?
The UNESCO Natural Sciences Sector and the Global Geoparks Network organize an annual Intensive Course on UNESCO Global Geoparks which focuses on geoconservation, Geopark management and operation, geotourism development, educational activities and local development. Currently this course is hosted every year by the Lesvos Petrified Forest UNESCO Global Geopark.

UNESCO and the GGN co-organize meetings and workshops in Member States all around the world. These are linked with national and international UNESCO Global Geoparks conferences and aim to support

interested regions to adopt the Geoparks concept, facilitate planning and the preparation of a business plan, as well as providing assistance in drafting applications.

UNESCO, through the International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme (IGGP), organizes a mentorships and knowledge programme. This programme supports and trains representatives of sites interested to join the UNESCO Global Geoparks by sending them to existing UNESCO Global Geoparks to introduce them to the day-to-day running of a Geopark.