

Work Report of IGU -Commission on Geoparks (Draft)

At the end of 2007, the IGU Executive Committee decided to launch the Commission on Geoparks, an initiative that could bring a geographical perspective to a developed UNESCO program for the management and protection of the natural and cultural heritage. According to UNESCO, a **GEOPARK** is *a nationally protected area containing a number of geological heritage sites of particular importance, rarity or aesthetic appeal*. These Earth heritage sites are part of an integrated concept of protection, education and sustainable development. A GEOPARK achieves its goals through a three-pronged approach:

1. Conservation.

A GEOPARK seeks to conserve significant geological features, and explore and demonstrate methods for excellence conservation management. The management authority of each GEOPARK ensures adequate protection measures in consultation with collaborating universities, geological surveys or relevant statutory bodies in accordance with local traditions and legislative obligations.

2. Education

A GEOPARK organizes activities and provides logistic support to communicate geoscientific knowledge and environmental concepts to the public. This is accomplished through protected and interpreted geosites, museums, information centres, trails, guided tours, school-class excursions, popular literature, maps, educational materials and displays, seminars and so on. A GEOPARK also fosters scientific research and cooperation with universities and research institutes, stimulating the dialogue between the geosciences and local populations.

3. Geotourism

A GEOPARK stimulates economic activity and sustainable development through geotourism. By attracting increasing numbers of visitors, a GEOPARK stimulates local socio-economic development through the promotion of a quality label linked with the local natural heritage. It encourages the creation of local enterprises and cottage industries involved in geotourism and geoproducts.

Initially developed by geologists, the concept and its criteria were taken seriously enough by UNESCO to develop and disseminate the Global Network on Geoparks. 53 National Geoparks in 17 countries are currently members of the Global Network of National Geoparks.

Since 2000, geographers and geologists have met on several occasions to discuss the pertinence of an interdisciplinary perspective on Geoparks, linking geo-conservation with endogenous local development. The latter has been one of the topics seriously undertaken by geographers during the last decades. The geographical perspective on Geoparks includes integrating landscape as its main concept; requires a holistic approach and trans-disciplinary research to promote multicultural participatory bridges, and links local knowledge and practice into the research-development agenda. It encourages solid scientific inter-union linkages and focuses on establishing

Geoparks in the world. It also promotes the research relations in the world and the exchanges in developing countries and developed countries.

Vision of IGU Commission on Geoparks

To promote the development of Geoparks from the Geographical perspectives.

The Commission's specific objectives

- (1) communicate the role of Geoparks as tools of education, recreation and nature conservation;
- (2) further develop the concept of sustainability as applied to Geoparks;
- (3) communicate the importance of understanding a broad range of processes that affect the sustainable development of Geoparks, including the natural environment, political, and socio-economic processes;
- (4) communicate the results of the research by members of the Commission to various academic, industry and policy arenas in order to influence policy in an effective and appropriate manner.

Members of the Steering Committee, 2008 -2012

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Note: The members in South America and Australia will be developed soon by the recommendation.

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Work plan 2008–2012

The IGU Commission on Geoparks started as Task Force in 2004. As one of the organizers, IGU-COG held the International Conference on Geoparks: Interpretation and Sustainable Development in Yuntaishan Geopark in China from 11th to 14th October, 2007. In the future, it will cooperate with other relevant Commissions and organizations to further its effort. CoG will use years 1–2 (2008–2009) to develop the Commission’s research programme and develop the methodological frameworks to analyse issues of the Geoparks, including relationships with associated institutions and IGU Task Forces and Commissions. Years 3–4 (2010–2012) will focus on the development of comparative studies on Geoparks, tourism and corresponding social, economic, environmental and political change.

The Commission will also concentrate on the communication and transfer of research results in policy relevant terms to policy makers and industry as well as continuing the scientific publishing programme of the Commission. The Commission therefore seeks to continue its activities for the next four years as outlined in relation to its existing objectives.

Action plan

1. Development of a website for CoG

In order to meet the objectives of the COG, namely, to educate others about Geoparks, the site would have 3 major subAreas.

SubArea 1: Research on Geoparks

Encourage submission of research by interested researchers (both from the commission and others), and place complimentary request for submissions in journal, newsletters, etc of IGU and other organizations.

- * Articles submitted and reviewed by the Commission.
- * Possible publication fee on the site will be charged reasonably for paying the review expense.
- * Quarterly update with articles listed by quarter.
- * Manuscript specifications and directions on the site.

SubArea 2: Geopark Highlights

Geoparks will be encouraged to develop a short (15-20 minute) video highlighting their park including where it is and how to get there. Contact info for Tour directors also available

SubArea 3: Geopark Forum (discussion board)

Maintain a forum for discussion of issues about Geoparks, it can include updates from members about activities upcoming at their Geopark and no charge, but must log in with email address and password

2. Develop brochure outlining

- * Info on the website of IGU-COG
- * Identify benefits of being a sponsor (number of members, etc)
- * Identify the cost, who to contact, what is required, etc

3. Develop the members

Develop the Geopark members and provide them the platform for the communication and exchange, provide the regular newsletters on website and help them for the development from the geographical perspectives.

4. Programs application

Apply for the programs related to Geoparks and increase the influence of IGU-CoG. This part will be discussed more detailedly about the specific programs according to the situation of the programs.