United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

UNESCO
Global
Geoparks

UNESCO Global Geoparks

Celebrating Earth Heritage, Sustaining local Communities

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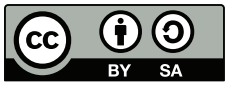

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UNESCO
Global
Geoparks

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 uses its geological heritage, in **connection with all other aspects of the area's natural and cultural heritage**, to enhance awareness and understanding of key issues facing society, such as using our Earth's resources sustainably, mitigating the effects of climate change and reducing the impact of natural disasters. By raising awareness of the importance of the area's geological heritage in history and society today, UNESCO Global Geoparks **give local people a sense of pride** in their region and strengthen their identification with the area. The creation of innovative local enterprises, new jobs and high quality training courses is stimulated as **new sources of revenue** are generated through **geotourism**, while the geological resources of the area are protected.

A bottom-up approach

UNESCO Global Geoparks empower local communities and give them the opportunity to develop cohesive partnerships with the common goal of promoting the area's significant geological processes, features, periods of time, historical themes linked to geology, or outstanding geological beauty. UNESCO Global Geoparks are established through a bottom-up process involving all relevant local and regional stakeholders and authorities in the area (e.g. land owners, community groups, tourism providers, indigenous people, and local organizations). This process requires firm commitment by the local communities, a strong local multiple partnership with long-term public and political support, and the development of a comprehensive strategy that will meet all of the communities' goals while showcasing and protecting the area's geological heritage.

Is a UNESCO Global Geopark only about geology?

No! While a UNESCO Global Geopark must demonstrate geological heritage of international significance, the purpose of a UNESCO Global Geopark is to explore, develop and celebrate the links between that geological heritage and all other aspects of the area's natural, cultural and intangible heritages. It is about reconnecting human society at all levels to the planet we all call home and to celebrate how our planet and its 4,600 million year long history has shaped every aspect of our lives and our societies.

Is there any legal status attached to the label UNESCO Global Geopark?

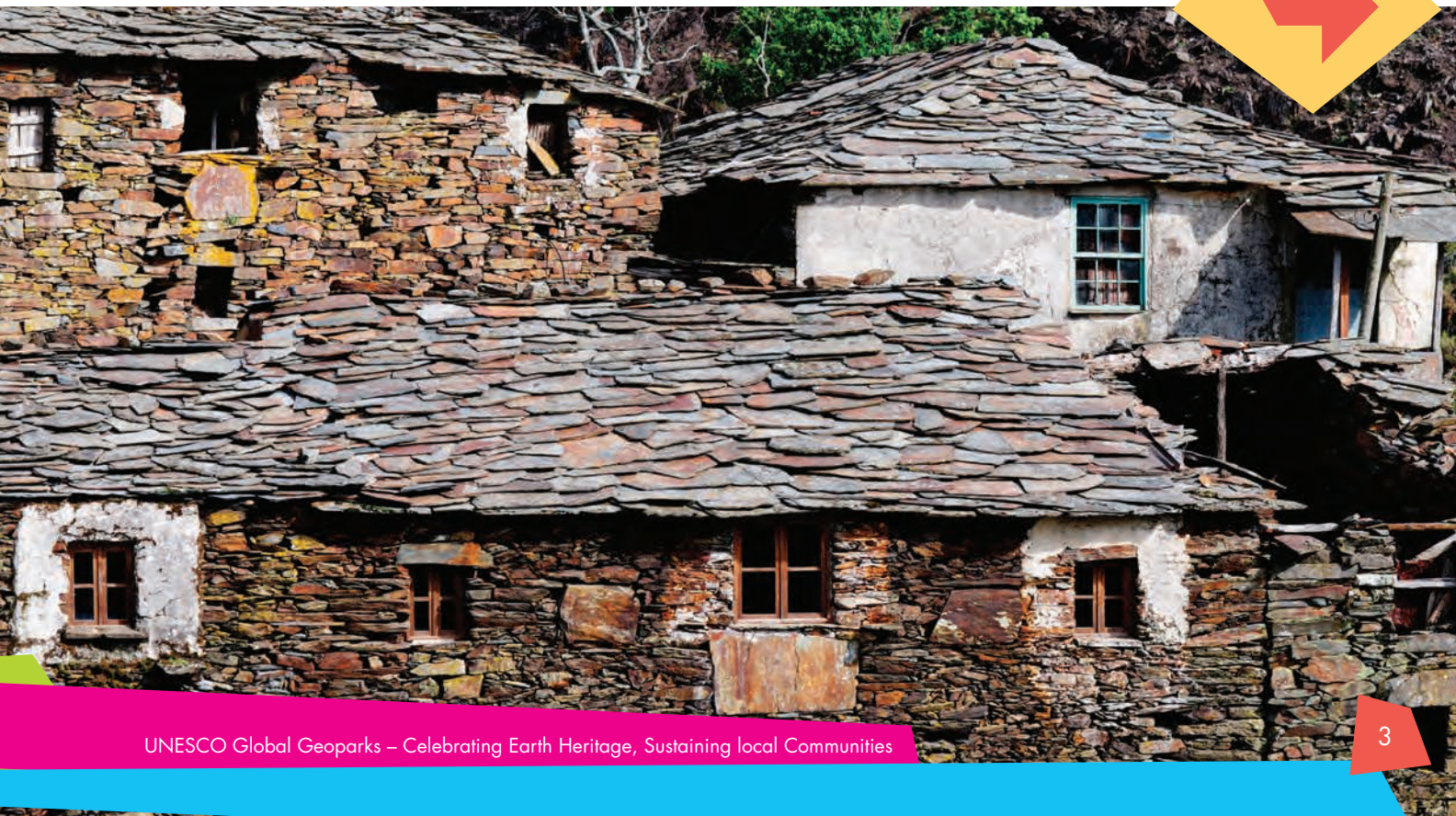
No, "UNESCO Global Geopark" is not a legislative designation – though the defining geological heritage sites within a UNESCO Global Geopark must be protected under indigenous, local, regional or national legislation as appropriate. UNESCO Global Geopark status does not imply restrictions on any economic activity inside a UNESCO Global Geopark where that activity complies with indigenous, local, regional and/or national legislation.

Once a UNESCO Global Geopark, always a UNESCO Global Geopark?

No, a UNESCO Global Geopark is given this designation for a period of four years after which the functioning and quality of each UNESCO Global Geopark is thoroughly re-examined during a revalidation process. As part of the revalidation process, the UNESCO Global Geopark under review has to prepare a progress report and a field mission will be undertaken by two evaluators to revalidate the quality of the UNESCO Global Geopark. If, on the basis of the field evaluation report, the UNESCO Global Geopark continues to fulfil the criteria the area will continue as a UNESCO Global Geopark for a further four-year period (so-called "green card"). If the area no longer fulfils the criteria, the management body will be informed to take appropriate steps within a two-year period (so-called "yellow card"). Should the UNESCO Global Geopark not fulfil the criteria within two years after receiving a "yellow card", the area will lose its status as a UNESCO Global Geopark (so-called "red card").

UNESCO Global Geoparks, Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites: a complete picture

UNESCO Global Geoparks, together with the other two UNESCO site designations Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites, give a complete picture of celebrating our heritage while at the same time conserving the world's cultural, biological and geological diversity, and promoting 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 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 in synergy with the other designations.



Four essentials

Geological heritage of international value

Management

Visibility

Networking

Geological heritage of international value

In order to become a UNESCO Global Geopark, the area must have geological heritage of international value. This is assessed by scientific professionals, as part of the "UNESCO Global Geopark Evaluation Team". Based on the international peer-reviewed, published research conducted on the geological sites within the area, the scientific professionals make a globally comparative assessment to determine whether the geological sites constitute international value.

Management

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.

Visibility

UNESCO Global Geoparks promote sustainable local economic development mainly through geotourism. In order to stimulate the geotourism in the area, it is crucial that a UNESCO Global Geopark has visibility. Visitors as well as local people need to be able to find relevant information on the UNESCO Global Geopark. As such, UNESCO Global Geoparks need to provide information via a dedicated website, leaflets, and detailed map of the area that connects the area's geological and other sites. A UNESCO Global Geopark should also have a corporate identity.

Networking

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, see box page 6), 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 is the main reason for UNESCO Global Geoparks to be a member of an international network such as the GGN. Membership 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.

Box

The Global Geoparks Network

The Global Geoparks Network (GGN), of which membership is obligatory for UNESCO Global Geoparks, is a legally constituted not-for-profit organisation with an annual membership fee. The GGN was founded in 2004 and is a dynamic network where members are committed to work together, exchange ideas of best practise, and join in common projects to raise the quality standards of all products and practises of a UNESCO Global Geopark. While the GGN as a whole comes together every two years, it functions through the operation of regional networks, such as the European Geoparks Network that meets twice a year to develop and promote joint activities.

Box

Transnational UNESCO Global Geoparks

In many cases, geological boundaries, shaped by rivers, mountain ranges, oceans and deserts, do not follow the boundaries drawn by people. UNESCO Global Geoparks, too, do not always follow human-made borders. Some UNESCO Global Geoparks therefore naturally cross national borders, connecting the peoples of different countries and encouraging intimate regional, cross-border cooperation. It is through this strong cross-border cooperation that transnational UNESCO Global Geoparks strengthen the relationship between countries and contribute to peacebuilding efforts. In 2008, the Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark expanded from Northern Ireland across the border into the Republic of Ireland, becoming the world's first transnational Global Geopark. Situated in a former conflict area, this UNESCO Global Geopark is now seen as a global model for peacebuilding and community cohesion. UNESCO actively supports the creation of transnational UNESCO Global Geoparks – especially in regions of the world where there are none yet.

- Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark, Republic of Ireland & the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- Novohrad – Nógrád UNESCO Global Geopark, Hungary & Slovakia
- Muskau Arch UNESCO Global Geopark, Germany & Poland
- Karawanken / Karavanke UNESCO Global Geopark, Austria & Slovenia

Top 10 topics

within UNESCO Global Geoparks

- Natural Resources
- Geological Hazards
- Climate Change
- Education
- Science
- Culture
- Women
- Sustainable Development
- Local and indigenous Knowledge
- Geoconservation

Natural Resources

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 non-renewable and its exploitation has to be treated wisely. 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.

Geological Hazards

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.

Climate Change

UNESCO Global Geoparks hold records of past climate change and are educators on current climate change as well as adopting a best practise approach to utilising 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.

Education

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.

Science

UNESCO Global Geoparks are special areas where the geological heritage, or geodiversity, is of international importance. UNESCO Global Geoparks are thus 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.

Culture

The motto of UNESCO Global Geoparks is "Celebrating Earth Heritage, Sustaining Local Communities". 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 practises, 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.

Women

UNESCO Global Geoparks have a strong emphasize on empowering women whether through focussed education programmes or through the development of women's cooperatives. UNESCO Global 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.

Sustainable Development

Even if an area has outstanding, world-famous geological heritage of outstanding universal value it cannot be a UNESCO Global Geopark unless the area also has a plan for the sustainable development of the people who live there. This may take the form of sustainable tourism through, for example, the development of walking or cycling trails, training of local people to act as guides, encouraging tourism and accommodation providers to follow international best practise in environmental sustainability. But it can also be about simply engaging with local people and respecting their traditional way of life in a way that empowers them and respects their human rights and dignity. Unless a UNESCO Global Geopark has the support of local people it will not succeed. 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.

Local and indigenous Knowledge

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.

Geoconservation

UNESCO Global Geoparks are areas that use the concept of sustainability, value the heritage of Mother Earth and recognize the need to protect it. The defining geological sites in UNESCO Global Geoparks are protected by indigenous, local, regional and/or national law and management authorities, in cooperation with the appropriate agencies, which allow for the necessary monitoring and maintenance of these sites. Appropriate protection measures for each site are set out in individual site management plans. The management body of a UNESCO Global Geopark will also not participate directly in the sale of geological objects such as fossils, minerals, polished rocks and ornamental rocks of the type normally found in so-called "rock-shops" within the area, and many actively discourage unsustainable trade in geological materials as a whole. It does not refer to material for normal industrial and household use which is sourced by quarrying and/or mining and which will be subject to regulation under national and/or international legislation.

Under certain circumstances and where clearly justified as a responsible activity the management body may permit sustainable collecting of geological materials for scientific and educational purposes from naturally renewable sites within the UNESCO Global 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 UNESCO Global Geopark in relation to local circumstances. Such circumstances will be subject to debate and approval on a case by case basis.

Box

Area extensions

It is possible for a UNESCO Global Geopark to extend its area following the procedure below:

– The UNESCO Global Geopark wants to extend its area by <10% and the new proposed area doesn't cross new international boundaries.

The UNESCO Global Geopark needs to submit a letter through the official channel indicating the reasons for the extension and the way the new area still fulfills the criteria for a UNESCO Global Geopark. The UNESCO Global Geoparks Council will decide on whether or not to approve the change.

– The UNESCO Global Geopark wants to extend its area by >10% and/or the new proposed area crosses new international boundaries.

The UNESCO Global Geopark needs to submit a new application following the same procedure as for an aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark (see page 13).

Application process

Aspiring UNESCO Global Geoparks are strongly encouraged to contact and learn from established UNESCO Global Geoparks and their National Geoparks Committee (if it exists in their country)

Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark sends a letter of intent* through the official channel**

1 October – 30 November
Applicant submits its application dossier (see box pages 14–15) through the official channel**

January – March
Intergovernmental check that enables UNESCO's Member States to exercise their oversight responsibility

After 1 December
UNESCO Secretariat checks if the application dossier is complete
Once complete and correctly formatted, the UNESCO Secretariat will further process it

Desk-top assessment of the international value of the geological sites of the applicant area by scientific professionals

1 May – 15 August
Field evaluation mission by up to two evaluators and the preparation of a field evaluation report

September
The UNESCO Global Geoparks Council reviews the application, the desk-top assessment of the geological heritage and the field evaluation report, and may recommend to…

…accept the application

The UNESCO Global Geoparks Bureau recommends to the Director-General to include an item regarding the nomination of the applicant area on the agenda of the Executive Board of UNESCO

Spring session of the Executive Board of UNESCO
The Executive Board decides on endorsing the nomination

Upon endorsement of the nomination by the Executive Board, the applicant area becomes a UNESCO Global Geopark

The UNESCO Global Geopark must become a member of the GGN by submitting a statement accepting its duties and membership commitments

…defer the application for a maximum of two years to allow for improvements to be made

The applicant prepares a report addressing the improvements that have been made during the deferral period

The UNESCO Global Geoparks Council reviews the deferred application and may recommend to…

…accept the application

…reject the application

…reject the application

The applicant needs to reapply in order to be considered for the designation "UNESCO Global Geopark"

* ideally this letter should arrive by 1 July of the year of application

** the National Commission for UNESCO or the government body in charge of relations with UNESCO to the UNESCO Secretariat involving, if applicable, the National Geoparks Committee

Box

Application dossier

Format of e-file: Max. 5MB by email, 50MB by weblink (e.g. Dropbox, WeTransfer etc.)

Do not send a paper dossier.

Timescale: Applications are only accepted annually between 1 October and 30 November.

Before any formal application, any aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark must submit an expression of interest via the official channel as defined by your National Commission for UNESCO or government body in charge of relations with UNESCO, involving, if applicable, your National Geoparks Committee.

Once ready, your comprehensive and carefully formatted application dossier must be submitted through the same official channel.

The application dossier must precisely follow the format and topics below, highlighting strong and weak points and will be studied by an independent group of experts verifying the UNESCO Global Geopark project through a desktop study. The topics will demonstrate whether the applying area is already a de facto functioning Geopark fulfilling the criteria to become a UNESCO Global Geopark, and whether or not an examination mission should be carried out. If the application dossier is considered to be complete and ready for assessment, the UNESCO Global Geoparks Council will approve an evaluation mission to the applying area. The application dossier must demonstrate that the area has already been functioning as a de facto Global Geopark for at least one year. Do not send entire brochures, publications, leaflets, etc., these should be provided only to field evaluators on site.

A – Identification of the Area

1. Name of the proposed Geopark
2. Location of the proposed Geopark (please include a geographical map and the geographic coordinates longitude and latitude coordinates)
3. Surface area, physical and human geography characteristics of the proposed Geopark
4. Organization in charge and management structure (description, function and organogram) of the proposed Geopark
5. Application contact person (name, position, tel./fax, e-mail)

B – Geological Heritage

1. General geological description of the proposed Geopark
2. Listing and description of geological sites within the proposed Geopark
3. Details on the interest of these sites in terms of their international, national, regional or local value (for example scientific, educational, aesthetic)
4. Listing and description of other sites of natural, cultural and intangible heritage interest and how they are related to the geological sites and how they are integrated into the proposed Geopark

C – Geoconservation

1. Current or potential pressure on the proposed Geopark
2. Current status in terms of protection of geological sites within the proposed Geopark
3. Data on the management and maintenance of all heritage sites (geological and non-geological)

D – Economic Activity & Business Plan (including detailed financial information)

1. Economic activity in the proposed Geopark
2. Existing and planned facilities for the proposed Geopark (e.g. geo-education, geotourism, tourism infrastructure etc.)
3. Analysis of geotourism potential of the proposed Geopark
4. Overview and policies for the sustainable development of:
   – geo-tourism and economy
   – geo-education
   – geo-heritage

   Please include examples illustrating activities in these sectors.
5. Policies for, and examples of, community empowerment (involvement and consultation) in the proposed Geopark
6. Policies for, and examples of, public and stakeholder awareness in the proposed Geopark

E – Interest and arguments for becoming a UNESCO Global Geopark

Annexes

Annex 1: Self-evaluation document (available on the UNESCO website)

Annex 2: An additional and separate copy of section B "Geological Heritage" of the application, prefaced by a geological summary of a maximum of 150 words (this will be used only for the geological desktop evaluators from IUGS – International Union of Geological Sciences).

Annex 3: An explicit endorsement of any relevant local and regional authorities and a letter of support from the National Commission for UNESCO or the government body in charge of relations with UNESCO.

Annex 4: A large scale map of the proposed UNESCO Global Geopark showing the clearly defined boundary of the proposed Geopark and marking all the geosites, museums, towns and villages, other sites of cultural and natural heritage, tourism facilities including visitor and information centres/points, guest accommodation facilities, recreational facilities and public transport facilities. While 1:50,000 is ideal, if your country does not map at that scale then the nearest large scale map will suffice.

Annex 5: 1-page geological and geographic summary, including a detailed map indicating the location (examples are available on the UNESCO website)

"The UNESCO Global Geoparks are international treasures, not just in terms of their geological interest but the enthusiasm and dedication of their local champions who work so hard to maintain them and to make the most of the educational and economic opportunities they offer. They are a great illustration of local communities working very effectively in some of the most remote and beautiful areas of our planet."

Dr Beth Taylor, Director Natural Sciences,
UK National Commission for UNESCO

For further information, please contact:

UNESCO Global Geoparks
Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences
UNESCO
7, place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP
France

unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/earth-sciences/
pj.mckeever@unesco.org

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