

UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARKS

*Patrick McKeever¹

1. Ecology and Earthscience division, Natural Science Sector, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Since 2004, UNESCO has endorsed areas of international geological heritage significance with a sustainable economic development plan through the Global Geoparks label. However in November 2015, the 38th session of the General Conference of UNESCO, by acclamation, adopted the new designation of UNESCO Global Geoparks and agreed to adopt all pre-existing Global Geoparks as new UNESCO Global Geoparks. This marks the first time since the ratification of the Convention concerning the protection of the World Natural and Cultural Heritage in 1972 (which allowed for the creation of World Heritage Sites) that UNESCO has created a new site-designation of this kind and the first time it has adopted a series of pre-existing sites.

While world heritage sites focus on the fulfilment of one of 10 criteria that demonstrates outstanding universal value, UNESCO Global Geoparks have the concept of community empowerment and sustainable development at their core through appreciation of geological heritage of international value and its link to other aspects of natural, cultural and intangible heritage. Using examples, this presentation will present examples of UNESCO Global Geoparks, explain the concept behind them and discuss the various changes that have resulted from the recent decision by UNESCO.

Keywords: Geopark, International Geosciences and Geoparks Program, UNESCO