Organisation der Vereinten Nationen für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur

Nationalkomitee für UNESCO Global Geoparks in Deutschland

Criteria for UNESCO Global Geoparks in Germany

Adopted by the German National Committee for UNESCO Global Geoparks at its meeting on 22 April 2016, the criteria are based on the Operational Guidelines for UNESCO Global Geoparks. They complement and further specify the objectives defined in these Operational Guidelines with respect to the particular context of the Federal Republic of Germany. In case the terms of the Operational Guidelines prove to be sufficiently specific and/or sufficiently advanced, those terms are either not quoted at all or being paraphrased. The National Committee shall review the criteria every four years.

1. Geoscientific significance

A geopark is an area encompassing landscapes and geosites of global geoscientific significance. The area of a geopark is geographically contiguous and has a clearly defined boundary. Cross-border geosites and landscapes should be integrated into one geopark.

2. Representativeness

A nominated geopark must include landscapes and geosites that are not yet adequately represented by UNESCO Global Geoparks or other UNESCO designated sites (World Heritage sites and/or biosphere reserves) in Germany. The geosites must be representative of the landscape and its geological history.

3. Overlap with other UNESCO designated sites

If a nominated geopark encompasses one (or more) UNESCO designated site(s), is located entirely within the territory of this/these site(s) or has considerable overlap with its/their territory, it must be explained why the objectives of the nominated geopark cannot be fulfilled by the existing designation. If such evidence is provided, the management systems of both the new geopark and the existing UNESCO designated site(s) must be coordinated and comprehensibly described in the initial application to the German Government.

4. Size

A geopark must be sufficient in size to fulfil its functions and must fully represent the features and processes characteristic for the geopark. It generally comprises an area of at least 30,000 and no more than 200,000 hectares. Deviations in size are possible if justified.

5. Recognition

Being recognised as a National Geopark in Germany is a prerequisite for submitting applications to UNESCO.

6. Geosite and nature conservation

In the geopark, important geosites and archaeological monuments in the ground are to be legally protected, either as areas under the EU Habitats Directive, as nature reserves, as water protection areas or through other legal instruments, considering also their geoscientific significance. The size of the legally protected areas shall make up an adequate proportion of the total geopark area in order to preserve the characteristics determining its overall value. The reference percentage for protected areas of the entire geopark, including landscape protection areas, is at least 10%. A geosite management concept is needed; it shall include an overview of the geosites and their condition as well as the measures foreseen for their protection and maintenance.

7. Societal challenges

Amongst the major societal challenges also faced by geoparks are climate change, loss of biodiversity, protection of soils and freshwater, food security, natural disasters, energy, finiteness of natural (geo-)resources and demographics. Each individual geopark shall identify relevant challenges of its region; it shall develop and implement measures (e.g. moderating, reconciling interests, forming networks of stakeholders and offering advice to them, as well as education, communication and public relations), which could serve as exemplary approaches to the international community.

8. Education and research

Promoting education is one of the core tasks of a geopark. Educational programmes should be laid down in a didactic-methodological concept and promote basic geoscientific knowledge as well as social competencies for shaping a sustainable future (“Gestaltungskompetenz”). The guiding principle is Education for Sustainable Development. Educational programmes must address the major societal challenges, taking into account the specific characteristics of the geopark. Educational targets and measures must be developed and evaluated taking into account all providers of education. Partners such as universities, non-university research institutions, museums, associations and UNESCO Associated Schools should be involved. Within the limits of its capacities, a geopark should also support problem-oriented disciplinary and interdisciplinary research including through international cooperation. The most recent research results shall be incorporated in management, education and communication measures.

9. International cooperation

Membership in the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) brings with it international obligations. A geopark is to establish and cultivate international partnerships – especially with geoparks in countries of the southern hemisphere – and be an active member of the GGN. A nominated geopark is expected to have already engaged in international exchange of knowledge prior to submission of the application, for example at international conferences or through expert missions of representatives from recognised geoparks to the nominated area. Whenever required, other geoparks are to be supported worldwide, e.g. by providing financial or staff support to revalidation missions abroad and to international missions in Germany. In the field of international cooperation a geopark shall promulgate the social, political and cultural discourses currently underway in Germany, in particular German approaches and solutions to relevant societal challenges.

10. Foreign cultural and educational policy

A geopark cooperates, where appropriate, with stakeholders of the International Geoscience Programme of UNESCO, other relevant programmes and scientific networks of UNESCO as well as with the partners of Germany’s cultural relations and education policy.

11. Staff and equipment

A geopark is serviced by a clearly structured and efficient administration with a sufficient number of full-time qualified specialist and administrative staff. It needs adequate financial resources in relation to the functions of the geopark and its total surface area. Staff expertise must especially cover geosciences, regional development and education as well as competences with regard to the issues referred to in criterion 7. The authorities responsible must commit to providing the budgetary requirements in the initial application to the Federal Government. The administration is not required to fulfil all functions of a geopark itself; it can also contractually assign them to partners.

12. Regional planning and participation

A geopark and its objectives shall be integrated into the development goals and guiding principles of the respective region as well as into spatial planning. Structurally and institutionally, it shall involve the population, decision-makers and stakeholders of the region in shaping the geopark as a region for living, economic and recreational development.

13. Sustainable development on the ground

Within all relevant economic sectors and areas of life, a geopark should contribute to economic development in an environmentally and socially responsible manner, taking into account regional particularities as well as global and intergenerational justice. The geopark shall particularly encourage the industrial sector, crafts, agriculture and forestry to adhere to the principles of sustainable development in energy consumption, use of raw materials, protection of soils and fresh water as well as waste management.

14. Sustainable Tourism

A geopark cooperates with regional and, where appropriate, national and international stakeholders of the tourism sector. It promotes international dialogue. The overarching goal is to present the geopark and its geological, ecological, archaeological, historical and cultural characteristics by means of a comprehensive educational and recreational programme. Essential elements of tourist development are visitor guidance, (where possible) accessibility by public transport, accessibility for all, marketing of regional products, a visitor centre and networking of all relevant services. Information, materials and visitor centres are to be designed in compliance with latest didactic-methodological approaches and must be multilingual as a matter of principle.

15. Management Plan

At the time of application a management plan that has been developed and adopted in a participatory manner must be submitted. The management plan serves as an integrated planning and implementation concept setting targets and measures. It should reveal how and over what period of time the targets set for protection, maintenance, use, development and education shall be implemented – also in cooperation with universities, non-university research facilities, museums, associations and UNESCO Associated Schools. Basic components of a management plan, including the aforementioned concepts, are:

- a cost and financing plan,

- maintenance and conservation plans,

- measures to prevent unsustainable trade in geological materials,

- sustainability strategies for regional economic development, education and tourism,

- participation and public relations, as well as

- quality assurance and monitoring of targets.