



Global Geoparks Network (GGN)

Guidelines for Global Geopark Field Inspections

and the

Preparation of Evaluation / Revalidation Reports

(May 2013)

1. INTRODUCTION

This document shall provide guidance to those individuals asked to perform evaluation and revalidation missions on behalf of the GGN. They are based on the IUCN 'Suggestions for conduct for field inspections...' for the World Heritage Natural sites and the experience gathered by the GGN on numerous evaluation and revalidation missions. To ensure the full transparency and accountability of the entire process, each evaluator is required to submit their CV, detailing their relevant experience, to the GGN Bureau ahead of undertaking their first mission for the GGN.

2. EVALUATION / REVALIDATION

2.1. The Procedure

Data Assembly. New application dossiers are checked for completeness by the Global Geoparks Network Secretariat at UNESCO HQ, Paris. Once the Secretariat is satisfied that applications are complete the dossiers are then forwarded to the selected evaluator(s). This is done through electronic data files or by facilitating download from, for example, the UNESCO ftp server. For revalidation missions the original application dossier and original field mission report, any previous revalidation

reports and the current self-evaluation document will be made available to the nominated field inspectors by the GGN Secretariat prior to the revalidation mission for easy reference.

Field Inspection. In most cases, missions should be undertaken by two Geopark evaluators who are sent to the area to evaluate the application and to discuss the application with the management body of the proposed Geopark and the relevant national and local authorities as well as stakeholders and local communities.

The facts stated in the application dossier are verified on the spot in cooperation with the manager(s) of the applicant Geopark. Sufficient time must be built into the itinerary to allow for a detailed examination and verification of the content of the self-evaluation form. It is necessary that the evaluators go through the self-evaluation form together with the local personnel and discuss each point. The evaluators give advice for improvement etc. to the applicant **but do not give any indication on the decision of the mission.** For revalidation missions, the procedure is similar with the mission inspectors verifying the details given in the three Revalidation Documents consisting of a comprehensive report of free size highlighting special progress, advancements and success stories of the Geopark, Document B (self-evaluation progress document) well as Document A (corresponds to the original self-evaluation). Please note also, that the two evaluators must ensure that they are present together for the entire duration of the field inspection. Flight schedules must be pre-agreed to ensure this. It is not acceptable that one evaluator is left alone for any part of the mission because the other evaluator has to rush off somewhere else.

Visa and insurance. The evaluators are responsible for arranging for their visa and the purchase of any insurance which may be necessary in respect of accident or illness. At the time of the acceptance of the mission, a valid proof of the insurance documents will be required by UNESCO to certify that the evaluators are fully covered for sickness and accidents throughout the duration of the mission. UNESCO cannot, under any circumstance be held responsible for, or reimburse any costs associated with, any sickness or accidents that may occur during the mission.

Final Recommendations. It should be understood by those who conduct field missions and the applying / revalidating area that decisions are not taken at the time of the mission. Under **no circumstances** can the field evaluation team give any indication to the inviting area on the probable outcome of the mission. This decision lies only within the GGN Bureau.

2.2. The Field Assessment

The report of the field inspection is one part of the final technical evaluation. The field evaluation report is an internal document and its distribution remains at GGN Secretariats' discretion. The report should always contain recommendations for the GGN Bureau as well as practical advice for the applicant/revalidating Geopark. Even 'green-card' Geoparks have room for improvement. In determining the relative

importance of Geopark sites, the **criteria** of a Global Geopark as stated in the GGN guidelines should be kept in mind.

2.3. The Role of the Geoparks Evaluators

Global Geopark inspections are normally carried out by two evaluators. Evaluators are chosen for their professional experience in Geoparks, general familiarity with the GGN guidelines and for the global perspective they can bring to bear on the individual area. They are eligible for membership of the Evaluation Team once they have worked in a Global Geopark for a minimum period of four years and their host Global Geopark has successfully undergone its first revalidation and its membership of the GGN has been approved for a further four year period. (i.e. green card as per the GGN Guidelines).

Role of evaluators

The role of the evaluators is to provide technical and advisory services on:

- ◆ Evaluation of new applications;
- ◆ Monitoring and revalidating the status of existing Global Geoparks;
- ◆ Participation in training and technical workshops;
- ◆ Management of information;
- ◆ Communication and promotion activities;
- ◆ Advice on international assistance; and
- ◆ General standard-setting on Global Geopark management and development.

The field review is one component of the evaluation process but has an important and often a high profile with media attention and meetings with high level officials. Consequently there is a need to be knowledgeable about the GGN, UNESCO and to be able to articulate clearly a basic description of those organizations and the Geoparks concept.

The main objectives of Geopark inspections are to: (1) become familiar with all aspects of the Geopark; (2) review the application and self evaluation and other documents of the application dossier; (3) carefully review boundaries, threats and management; (4) discuss and give profile especially to Geopark networking issues generally and (5) to provide constructive commentary and recommendations as and where appropriate. Time required to review a Geopark is highly dependent on the size and complexity of the area. A minimum of 3 full days excluding travel to and from the area is recommended.

It is important that the evaluators acknowledge that he/she is there in an independent advisory capacity only. Decisions on the suitability of the area for the GGN are not made during the field visit and the report of the field mission is an internal one to the GGN Secretariat. The need to be impartial should not be compromised. The evaluators should be aware of the appropriate ethical and cultural considerations that protocol demands.

2.4. Logistics

Arrangements for field visits are done directly through the applying/revalidating Geopark. The host will be asked to prepare an itinerary and make local travel arrangements and communicate those to the UNESCO (as appropriate) and the evaluators in advance (at least 4 weeks before the mission takes place). The applying/revalidating area covers costs of a field mission for both experts. This includes travel to and from the Geopark area, travel within the Geopark area, all accommodation and food associated with the mission and any further costs incurred by the evaluators such as visa, airport hotel costs, parking, etc..

Obviously, the Geoparks evaluators should be adequately equipped for the trip and will have studied in advance the application or revalidation documents and be supplied with basic references and promotional documents on the GGN and on the Geopark concerned.

3. MISCELLANEOUS TIPS

The following is a short, random check-list of tips collected from past experience in conducting evaluations.

Gifts. It is customary for the host territory to present small gifts or tokens of appreciation to the evaluators. These gifts should not have any significant value. No payment must be accepted while on GGN mission.

Be Prepared. Have good field clothes, camera equipment, (binoculars,) rainwear, and first aid essentials.

Be Tough. You are not going to a Rotary Club meeting and you are not there to win a popularity contest. Let it be known that in order to keep high level of quality, missions require evaluators to be "strict." Insist to see sites which seem important to you and may not be on the visiting plan.

Be Diplomatic. Your role is advisory only – it is the GGN Bureau that decides on membership. The "politics" of the case should be left up to them.

Be Open. There are always more than two sides to a story and two opinions on a site. Try not to arrive with a preconceived judgement. Receive views from all sectors and sides in forming a balanced judgement in the end.

Be Constructive. Every territory has its warts and its problems. Every manager is open to your advice. You can often be of great assistance to the Geopark by including recommendations in the evaluation/revalidation report that will eventually go back to the Geopark. Indeed, no evaluation report is complete without making some constructive observations on strengthening the Geoparks concept locally.

Be Global. Looking at a Geopark in isolation will usually lead to a positive recommendation. You must take a global view and your perspective must extend beyond the national scale, including the view on networking perspective.

Beware. There are hazards to watch out for. A serious warning is needed on the media who can be canny in soliciting statements that can then show up the next day in embarrassing headlines. Although it is appropriate to respond to media enquiries, the assessment team needs to be guarded in any public pronouncements.

It is also useful to feel the pulse on the motivation for applying for GGN status. In some cases, "getting the label" and promotion of tourism is the primary motivation. In others the GGN membership may be being used inappropriately to help prevent a development threat to a geological heritage site of local importance. Unless the applying Geopark clearly meets the criteria, such cases should be closely scrutinised.

Be Appreciative. Field missions bring you in contact with many individuals who are usually eager to assist in a "show and tell" of their area. It has been good PR to bring along small tokens of appreciation for those who make a special effort on your behalf. A thank-you letter at the end of the mission is also a customary gesture.