

IUGS Task Group on GeoHeritage

Terms of Reference

BACKGROUND

Although the concept of natural heritage has been in existence for several decades, throughout this time it has mainly focused on biological aspects. Unfortunately there appears to be a fracture between geosciences and society, and the relevance of geology was overlooked in the original concept. GeoHeritage requires a wide scope of interests from the geoscientific community. It must deal with research, education, outreach and history of science. Moreover, the processes differ between individuals and national cultures as well as the ability for influencing regulation (national or international laws) even if terrenes and terrains cross national boundaries.

Successful application of the geosciences is a global activity within which geoscientists work, learn, collaborate and contribute, often across international boundaries. The health of the discipline of geoscience, and of its practitioners, is fundamentally dependent on there being a sustained contribution to the well-being of society, strong public awareness including their support of the Earth sciences and, most importantly, the continuing increase of new geoheritage development for education, protection (preservation of some standards and outreach) and for geotouristic expansion.

The IUGS GeoHeritage Task Group will have to address a number of key issues; the most pressing involves dealing with a number of different regulations which occur in different countries on the one hand, and to help other countries to develop their own regulations where none exist. This question is therefore acute both in developed and developing nations.

Knowledge of the number of geosites and their distribution, both in terms of discipline and location, is currently very poor on a global scale. There is even greater uncertainty with respect to predicting the number of potential geosites. Historically, the IUGS once supported a Working Group on Geosites and this database, although useful, has not been updated for over a decade. IUGS participation in various activities related to geological heritage has thus far been responsive or marginal and is now involved in the following:

1. IUGS has ownership of an outdated list of geosites
2. IUGS has one voting seat on the European GeoPark Network
3. IUGS has one voting seat on the UNESCO Global GeoPark Network Board
4. IUGS provides liaison assistance and evaluation guidance to the IUCN World Heritage Site list
5. IUGS has one Affiliated Organization directly involved in geoheritage: ProGEO
6. IUGS endorses the journal GeoHeritage (Springer)
7. IUGS established the Beijing Office for Geological Heritage (essentially inactive)

The establishment of an IUGS Task Group on GeoHeritage will enable the Union to take a true leadership role in raising the quality of our understanding of geosites and geoheritage around the world. The Task Group will provide a much needed umbrella for coordination on Geoheritage issues included in different responsibilities in which IUGS is currently involved. There are global networks for some related concepts, such as the Global Geoparks or the World Heritage List of UNESCO. It is at work in some parts of the world, as it is case of the ProGEO network dealing with geosites, but

nothing exists for the majority of unrecognized geosites around the world. The ability to address the issue remains elusive for most nations and organizations.

GOALS

Through the leadership of individuals and organizations with background in this particular issue, the IUGS Task Group on GeoHeritage will facilitate the development of national and international awareness and understanding of the underlying concepts. The Task Group will also help to understand and recognize the various types of geosites (educative, recreative, protective ...) around the world and to promote in developing countries the will to develop their own geoheritage.

APPROACH

The Task Group will work mainly through modern means of communication including discussions, meetings and information exchange via email and teleconferences, although some meetings may be required from time to time (e.g. biennially) to anchor some decisions. As a consequence this group will function at little cost to IUGS and member organizations.

Three main objectives will be addressed:

(1)- To develop an inventory of geoheritage sites. The large majority of these sites are isolated (a quarry, a single outcrop) and probably will never belong to any kind of geopark but they are valuable for education and for testimony of the history of the earth. Several organization (national, disciplinary i.e. paleontologists) are working or have the will to work on them. Their list and content should be available from any computer

(2)- To compile the regulations on trade of ex-situ objects (fossils, mineral, meteorites) existing in different countries, which are usually difficult to obtain. The availability of this information on a website would be of a great help to geologist and other kind of people who have to deal with that matter (customs, ...)

(3)- To provide a single point of reference and coordination for the current diverse and disparate activities in geoheritage being undertaken by the Union.

PRODUCTION AND RESULTS

The Task Group will investigate and generate a series of items which will be compiled and made available globally through a new Task Group website. Relevant material and syntheses will be published and/or distributed as appropriate under the auspices of the IUGS, such as:

- Texts of laws dealing with geoheritage in different countries.
- Methods and descriptions used in different countries to establish inventories of national heritage.
- Any information that could be useful to other countries, being an echo of some specialized groups such as paleontologists, geomorphologists, etc.
- A list of geosites, with content (only for sites which do not present any special risk. This list could be established site by site or be issued following inventories established by different kinds of organizations (national committees, disciplinary groups ...).

The Task Group on Geoheritage should serve the community at a global scale. This Task Group should be publication-focused with agreed product goals, including the production of documents either on geoheritage (geosites) or on *ex situ* geoheritage (trade of fossils, minerals ...) for exchange between countries. It will encourage

submissions to technical journals and conference sessions on geoheritage matters, at national or international levels.

PARTICIPANTS

Representatives of institutes, national committees, societies and other geoscience organizations interested in geoheritage, national or international, may be invited to contribute to the interaction and outcomes of this Task Group. Participants will be identified via two avenues. 1) Known organizations and individuals which have undertaken efforts to address GeoHeritage, and 2) those that have the intent and interest, but need and seek assistance in developing the appropriate framework. The IUGS Task Group intends to contact National Bodies and Affiliated Organizations inviting them to nominate relevant candidates to the Task Group who would contribute substantially towards addressing the Group's objectives.

TENTATIVE LIST OF TASK GROUP OFFICERS:

Chairman: Prof. Patrick De Wever (France)

Secretary General: Prof. Carmen Hidalgo (Spain) assisted by Dr. Alain Blicck (France)

Councilors:

Prof. Jacques Charvet, VP IUGS, delegate European Geoparks Network (France)

Mr. Colin Simpson, Councilor IUGS, delegate to UNESCO GGN Board (Australia)

Prof. Abdelfatah Tahiri (Morocco, Institut scientifique, Rabat)

Dr. Enrique Diaz-Martinez (Spain national ProGEO representative)

Luca Demicheli (Belgium, EuroGeoSurveys)

Zhao Xun (China, IUGS Beijing Office for GeoHeritage)

Jose Brilha, (Portugal, Editor in Chief GeoHeritage)

Italic = not yet contacted

Individuals interested in participating in this new Task Group and contributing to the goals of the mission should directly contact the Interim Task Group Chair or Secretary General.

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