



New documents related to the UNESCO International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme (IGGP)

Checklist and explanatory notes – a dashboard for internal use

In line with the Guidelines for UNESCO Global Geoparks and following the decision of the UNESCO Global Geoparks Council in its 4th session in Lombok, Indonesia (September 2019) it was decided to draft and finalize a checklist for aspiring UNESCO Global Geoparks. This document, together with an explanatory note, has been prepared and issued to provide further clarity and guidance to aspiring UNESCO Global Geoparks managers on the criteria and process, and is also in line with the outcome of the IOS evaluation of the IGGP. These tools were prepared in cooperation with the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) and the UNESCO Global Geoparks Bureau and Council in order to provide guidance, clarity and consistency in the process. We intend to update them whenever necessary with relevant information and examples. Please note that the checklist and explanatory notes are intended as a quick and easy dashboard to measure the preparedness of an aspiring site on a regular basis and do not replace the application file and the Form A, nor do they need to be submitted with the application file. They are strictly for internal use and do not need to be discussed in the evaluation mission if not wished so.

A revised form A

Still in response to the request for further transparency and consistency, and to exclude subjective interpretation of the Statutes and Operational Guidelines, the Secretariat, in consultation with the GGN and the UGGp Council and Bureau started reviewing the previous Form A over a period of several months with numerous discussion and drafting meetings. This self-assessment form for aspiring UNESCO Global Geoparks that accompanies the application dossier, which can be later developed into a progress form (new Form B), needed an update, to align it better with the statutory documents and criteria, and to give a clearer guidance to applying site managers and evaluators alike. Feedback from site managers and evaluators over the years that the document was in use learned us that the Form A left too much room for interpretation, lacked important information on aspects such as the Sustainable Development Goals, didn't allow a proper assessment of the quality of all important criteria as set out in the Operational Guidelines for UNESCO Global Geoparks. Also, as the application dossier has a limited number of pages, we drafted the revised form to allow applicants to elaborate on the different activities they implement, and in particular the quality of them, providing further information in annexes if so desired.

What changed?

We kept what worked from the previous Form A but elaborated and restructured it on important aspects. While we are aware that the list of questions increased, we believe that the revised form allows aspiring site managers to express better their diversity, quality and creativity. The document does not intend to put the bar higher; it just wishes to guide applicants with questions that offer them an opportunity to explain better how they can implement the different criteria from the Operational Guidelines, in respect of their own local context. In that sense, the revised form now also includes questions related to sustainable development, geo-conservation and in particular legal instruments to protect geological heritage, the involvement of the local and indigenous population, climate change and disaster risk reduction, among others. In addition, the order of the questions now also follows the order of the criteria from the Operational Guidelines.

The scoring system was also reviewed accordingly. The principle here is that important criteria receive a higher weight. Important criteria are those that refer to the basic pillars of a functioning UNESCO Global Geopark, as per the Operational Guidelines and determined by the UGGp Council in its last meeting with the checklist. The total number of points depends on the number of applicable questions – the system has been adapted so as not to penalize sites that do not have indigenous peoples, illegal mining, other designated sites, or other non-applicable questions. In line with the principle of self-assessment, the applicant can score anywhere between 0 and the maximum number of points for that question. There is also no minimum score to attain – the self- assessment form is not intended to judge whether an applicant meets the minimum to make it as a UGGp. The document allows space for improvement over time. We are convinced that a point-based evaluation system is necessary to ensure objectivity and comparability in the evaluation. However, we are aware that the points and weighting proposed must be tested in real circumstances and adapted in function of the feedback.

Next steps

The secretariat shared a first draft of the Form A with UNESCO National Commissions and national Geopark Committees in the course of the summer. We received very constructive feedback and wish to expand the consultation phase, in order to make sure it is carried by a broad base, before we bring it for consideration and adoption to the next UNESCO Global Geoparks Council (8 and 9 December 2020). From the feedback, we learned that some of the questions need further explanation, reason why, together with GGN and the UGGP Council, we intend to give an extensive presentation of the new documents during the GGN Digital Platform (16 and 17 October). There will be ample time for questions and answers. We would very much welcome your presence during that session, whereupon you will have a period of two weeks to submit feedback.

The logic next step is that we revise the form B, the application and revalidation form, and corresponding progress reports, as well as the evaluator's report forms along the same principles. Of course, we count on the feedback and support from all our partners for those documents, in due time.

The new version of Form A will incorporate the comments received up to now, prior to further consultation.

We wish you a good reading, and please contact us on c.besombes@unesco.org for any questions you may have already at this stage.