

**TOWARDS THE LATIN AMERICAN
AND THE CARIBBEAN
GEOPARKS NETWORK**

Preliminary document ¹

July 2015

1. Background.

What are the geoparks?

It has been many years that the Global Geoparks Network and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) are working together to valorise and strengthen ties among the communities, with their geological heritage and their territories, knowing that they consist in ties that are inextricably linked to the same history of humanity.²

The tool selected for such purpose are the so called *Global Geoparks*, which are conceived as protected spaces containing a series of geological and heritage sites of particular significance (scientific, aesthetic, historical and cultural, etc.), organized within specific boundaries and managed through participating strategies of conservation, education and geotourism.

Specifically, and in accordance with UNESCO's own terms, a geopark is *a protected area holding a heritage of international significance, also meeting the unity and aesthetic standards as well. This heritage shall be used to encourage sustainable development of local communities settled in such place.*³

In the same line, and in accordance with French expert Guy Martini, *geoparks are new territories, protected under the initiative of UNESCO, where an opening to thinking, research and reflection are promoted (using) a methodology for the conservation of geological heritage, (and developing) methods to teach several geosciences disciplines.*⁴

¹ Proposal for submission at the 1st Geoparks Symposium to be held in Arequipa, Peru, on 14 and 15 July 2015. Text: Diego Irazábal (Grutas del Palacio Geopark Coordinator; Local Government of Flores); comments and contributions: Denise Gorfinkiel (UNESCO Montevideo) and Pablo Rivas (European Geoparks Network).

² Within UNESCO, the Division of Earth Sciences has accompanied the creation process of the global geoparks from the beginning of 2001, when an agreement was signed between such Division and the European Geoparks Network (EGN). In 2004, the Global Geoparks Network was created in Paris.

³ www.unesco.org

⁴ Revista Zazpika (Journal), Nº 624; 2011

The geoparks appear from this exceptional geological heritage with an integral approach in such a way that their social, cultural and economic dimensions are being covered.

First of all, the social construction relates to the local context and to the micro-region, since geoparks are created when the same community becomes aware and mobilizes around its geological and natural heritage. These places are not institutional plans imposed from the upper spheres of the government, or theoretical constructions of the academic elite; for these reasons, they are not territories exempt from appropriation by the inhabitants. The geoparks come out from the interests of the local stakeholders, who assume their responsibility of managing and transmitting their most endearing heritage. This approach, which is technically defined as *bottom-up*, constitutes one of the most cited and encouraged feature from UNESCO.

Secondly, the intangible heritage and cultural heritage are essential since they connect the man with his territory, strengthening the identity and existence; which are factors that enrich the systemic relation of the people and their natural environment, favoring new mental models and allowing the capacity of rethinking on the territorial space, developing knowledge and fostering innovation.

Thirdly, geoparks promote an integral development, for they imply dynamism and reactivation of the intangible assets (human assets, organizational assets, social assets, knowledge, cultural assets, etc.), essential for the creation of authentic processes of economic growth, social evolution, and environmental conservation.

This active participation in the development of sustainable economic activities, is closely related to one of its main instruments, the development of *geotourism*. According to the Declaration of Arouca, it is defined as an activity that *sustains and enhances the identity of a territory, taking into consideration its geology, environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and the well-being of its residents. Geological tourism is one of the multiple components of geotourism.*

Likewise, the declaration adds that, *Geological tourism is a basic tool for the conservation, dissemination and cherishing of the history of Life on Earth, including its dynamics and mechanisms. It enables visitors to understand the past of 4600 million years so as to view the present from another perspective and project possible shared futures for the Earth and Humankind.*⁵

⁵*Geotourism in Action*; Declaration of Arouca 2011; Arouca Geopark (Portugal).

Essentially, such tourism singularity is based on the accumulating effect of life experiences. Going around the geological and heritage sites that are testimony of millions of years, walking through the historic places, tasting typical foods, observing the artistic traditions, listening to ancestral tales, recognizing cultural manifestations and enjoying the landscape and community environments, are some of the adventures offered by a geopark. The one who manages the geotourism shall need to know how to knit and enrich all such tangible and intangible components of the site.

Finally, geoparks allow a strong educational reading, oriented to interpretation, communication and conservation of geological heritage. It is desired that geosites and sites of interests have their own education and conservation programmes of geological heritage, paying attention to the links with the rest of heritage values, be natural or cultural ones. All these, shall be connected to the tourism and recreation activities, encouraging the empowerment of the citizens and the responsible use of public spaces.

Global Geoparks Network.

The Global Geoparks Network describes in its web site, that a growing number of countries are adopting and promoting these geoparks, with the purpose of combining conservation, sustainable development, and seeking a conscious and committed participation of the community. In 1999, UNESCO started to get involved actively in this field, supporting with *ad hoc* efforts of its member states, giving auspices in the work of the Global Geopark Network, promoting exchanges and cooperation.

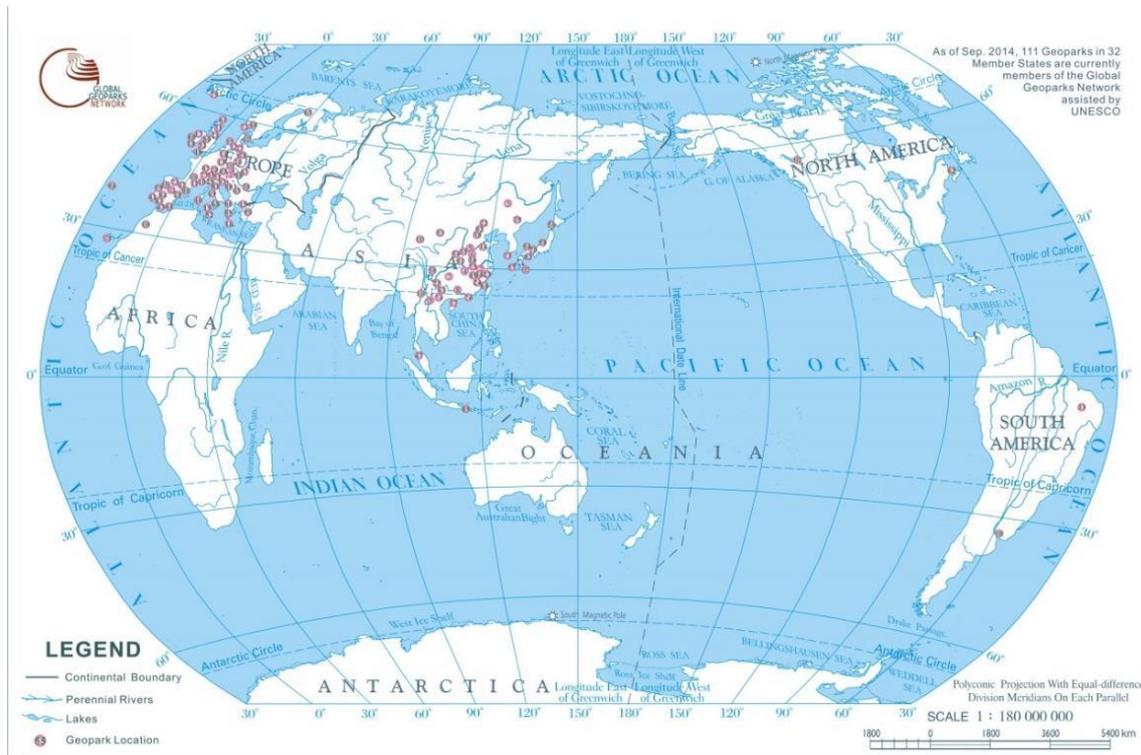
This Network is voluntary and its members are committed to work together in common projects, exchanging ideas and sharing good management practices, particularly regarding the protection of natural and cultural assets and the geological heritage.

Although the GGN meets every two years, it works on permanent basis through the regional networks: European Geoparks Network and the Asia-Pacific Geoparks Network. The first International Conference on Geoparks was held in 2004 in the city of Beijing; and ten years later, in 2014, the 6th International Conference was organized in Canada, with the participation of 500 delegates from 30 countries.

Today, the Global Network is composed of 111 geoparks, located in 32 countries of Asia, Europe, Africa and South America, and there are also transboundary cases, such as in the Republic of Ireland-North Ireland; Slovenia-Austria; Germany-Poland.

The following map shows the localization of geoparks around the world which evidence their high concentration across the European continent and in the People's Republic of China.

WORLD MAP



The fact of belonging to a global or regional network, connects the geoparks members through their cooperation ties, without taking into account their geographical distances and cultural differences. This international context favours the development of global geoparks, fostering new learnings, which later they are reorganized thanks to the hallmarks of experiences, methodologies and action strategies. All the above allows the strengthening of territorial managing capacity, because putting a geopark into operation implies a thorough action of coordination and negotiation with the stakeholders.

From this perspective, many reference members of Global Network, of the European Network and from the same UNESCO, are urging the creation of new geoparks in Latin America, taking advantage of the ethnical, cultural, geographical and climatic diversity, and also taking into account the huge human potential of the region. Seen from the population point of view, it is noted that the Latin American continent has more than 600 million people. It is clear that the *New World* needs strategies and methods to promote the conservation of Heritage, in all its forms, for the present and future generations.

Geoparks and geoheritage in Latin America.

The geoparks of Araripe in Brazil and Grutas del Palacio in Uruguay, are the two global geoparks that joined the global network, accepted in 2005 and 2013 respectively. Both countries applied as candidates before the Global Network, and met the requirements and procedures as established. It is clear that these processes were not isolated or disconnected, for they came out from a highly encouraging regional atmosphere, since as from the beginning of year 2000, the voices of geological heritage and mining specialists sounded louder, giving place to meetings that fostered exchange of experiences on conservation and disclosure of geological knowledge, with scientific purpose and also for the promotion of geotourism.

Here is a short list of the Latin American meetings representing the most important instances as background .⁶

November 2001, Montevideo (Uruguay). *9th Latin American Congress of Geology*. Regional Meeting of International Geoscience Programme (IGCP) where many papers of the region included the initiative of UNESCO regarding Geoparks.

2003, *Publication of the Geoscience and Geoparks Museums Directory s.l. in Latin America and the Caribbean*. UNESCO

2005, *Integration of Araripe Geopark (Ceará, Brazil) to the Global Geoparks Network*.

2009, Caracas (Venezuela). *1st Latin American Congress on Geotourism Initiatives*.

May 2008, Loja (Ecuador). *Andean Meeting for Geological, Mining and Paleontological Heritage Protection*; **June 2010**, *1st International Seminar Workshop on Geological, Mining and Metallurgical Heritage*.

May 2010, Minas (Uruguay). *5th Uruguayan Congress of Geology*. Presentation of the paper: *“Geoparks in Latin America”*.

2010, Cusco (Peru). 15th Peruvian Congress of Geology. Presentation at Thematic Session of the paper *“Towards the creation of a Latin American Geoparks Network”*.

November 2010, Araripe, State of Ceará (Brazil). *1st Latin American and the Caribbean Conference of Geoparks*. This event was organized by the Araripe geopark with the support of the Global Network and UNESCO. More than 250 attending delegates signed the “Declaration of Araripe”, committing the government of the State of Ceará and the Regional University of Cairirí to make efforts and “mobilize the human, technological and economic resources to support and facilitate the development of Geoparks projects in this region, to advance for the creation of a future Latin American and the Caribbean Geoparks Network”.

⁶ Reseña realizada por Dr. César Goso, Facultad de Ciencias de la Universidad de la República

FOTO



The “Declaration of Araripe” affirms that “the conservation, valorisation and education of the Geological Heritage – the memory of the Earth–, the Natural Heritage and Cultural Heritage, tangible and intangible, are subject to sustainable development and correspond to the need and concerns of the people in the continental region of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Furthermore, specifically regarding the network operation, the Declaration states that “It shall allow the development of instruments for regional and global cooperation through exchange of experiences and management practices among Geoparks and propose a multiplicity of training actions not only from the socio-economic stakeholders of the territory but also by the future managers of new Geoparks projects”.

November 2010, Juazeiro do Norte (Brazil). *1st Latin American and the Caribbean Workshop on Geoparks.*

April 2011, Melipeuco (Chile). *1st Symposium of Geoparks and Geotourism in Chile.*

May 2011, Neuquén (Argentina). *18th Argentine Geological Congress: Geology, a bridge between nature and man.*

May 2011, Yaracuy (Venezuela). *2nd National Congress of Geotourism.*

August 2011, Medellín (Colombia). *14th Latin American Congress of Geology: Geosciences for the development Latin America.*

September 2011, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). *2nd Latin American and the Caribbean Congress on Geotourism.*

November 2011, Flores (Uruguay). *Regional Workshop “Geoparks: an alternative for local development”*.

In such event, the authorities of UNESCO informed on the procedures for applying before the Global Network and the management methods applied in geoparks. While the Latin American delegations presented speeches on different experiences related to the existing projects in the region.

Thanks to the encouraging environment created at this workshop, the technical team that at such time was the aspiring geopark Grutas del Palacio, with the support of the local government of Flores (Council of Department of Flores), the School of Sciences (University of the Republic), and the “Grupo Porongos” which is an environmental NGO, strengthened the internal cohesion, deepening efforts for the network reorganization of geosites and sites of interests, community stakeholders were coordinated, and documentations for the application dossier were drafted, which was finally submitted next year, in December 2012.

November 2013, San Martín de los Andes (Argentina). *Ist Argentine Symposium on Geological Heritage, Geoparks and Geotourism; 3rd Meeting of Latin American Geoparks*.

May 2015, Mexico city (Mexico). *Regional Workshop of Geoparks and Geoheritage; fostering geoheritage in Latin America*.

This event was organized by the Institute of Geography at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, with the support of the Global Geoparks Network, European Geoparks Network, and UNESCO, which served to establish the bases for organizing the Latin American Geoparks Network.

At the workshop, the following projects were presented for application:

- Rio Coco, Madriz – Nicaragua.
- Valle del Colca and Valle de Volcanes of Andahua – Peru.
- Tungurahua Volcano – Ecuador.
- Grutas del Palacio – Uruguay (Global Geopark).
- Imbabura – Ecuador.
- San Martín de los Andes – Argentina.
- Kütralkura – Chile.
- La Huasteca – Mexico.
- El Oro-Tlalpujahuá – Mexico.
- Entre Cañones – Mexico.
- Comarca Minera de Hidalgo – Mexico.

- Loreto-Comondú Region – Mexico.
- La Mixteca Alta – Mexico.

With the support of UNESCO Office in Montevideo (Denise Gorfinkiel), and UNESCO Office in Quito (Jorge Ellis), the representatives of the Latin American countries agreed on the schedule and established objectives for the organization of the Network, with the attempt of advancing forward to the symposium to be held in July during the same year, in the city of Arequipa, Peru.

At the meeting held at the Institute of Geography of the UNAM, attended the representatives from Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay. Grutas del Palacio, as Uruguay's global geopark present at such meeting, assumed the responsibility of coordinating the primary efforts, gathering the necessary information for the draft of this document.

Finally, it is noted that the presentations at such event included lectures describing the different realities on global geoparks: *An introduction to the global geoparks* (Patrick Mc Keever); *Operation and management of global geoparks* (Nickolas Zouros); *Education in geoparks* (Kristin Rangnes); *Tourism and economic impact* (Artur Sa); *Geoparks as tools for the local economic development* (Denise Gorfinkiel); *Involvement of the local communities* (Martina Paskova); *Intangible heritage of geoparks* (Guy Martini); *Global Geoparks Network* (Pablo Rivas); *National Committees of Global Geoparks* (Luis Alcalá). ⁷

⁷ Lectures are available at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7ifO4dH7S1BTy5Vay0XAI5vEzIXSHdi>



Participants at the workshop in Mexico city, May 2015. IG – UNAM.

⁷ Lectures are available at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7ifO4dH7S1BTy5Vay0XAI5vEzIXSHdi>

July 2015, Arequipa (Peru). *1st Symposium on Geoparks; Geological Heritage and Geotourism.* As stated on the web site, the symposium attempts, among other aims, “to raise awareness on the role of Geoparks as a strategy for the sustainable economic and social development, and encourage the creation of these spaces...”

On the other hand, at this event, the creation of the Latin American and the Caribbean Geoparks Network shall be specifically discussed, with presentation of the advances reached up to such date. It shall be a great opportunity to establish the main frames for the structure, membership and functioning.

1^{er} Simposio de Geoparques
Educando en Geociencias para el desarrollo sostenible

Patrimonio Geológico y Geoturismo

Lugar: **Arequipa**
Fecha: **14 al 17 de julio**

2015

Expositores de:

Valle de los volcanes

INFORMES:

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2. Justification.

Certainly, Latin America has come through a long way regarding the promotion of its geological and natural heritage, evidencing a strong commitment for its conservation, responsible use and sustainable development.

During the last ten years, a great number of meetings, symposiums, workshops and field works served as scenario for the exchange of experiences and for knowledge development, and also referential specialists from Europe and Asia have participated in different events who through the Global Geoparks Network and UNESCO have decisively contributed for the strengthening of Latin American initiatives.

Accordingly, time has come to formalize the creation of a network to join the group and give unity to the different geoparks that are existing in the region, not only the ones that have been formally recognized already by the Global Network, but also the aspiring projects for geoparks that have advanced through different steps, meeting the minimum requirements. The scientific community related to all these experiences and the people living in such territories, deserve a space to extend the roots with the great family of global geoparks. For this purpose, the favorable present conditions should be taken into account, which shall be briefly described as follows:

First of all, many countries have presented projects aspiring to become a geopark, added to the pioneer project of Araripe in Brazil and Grutas del Palacio of Uruguay. In fact, at present the primary conditions are available to advance with actions of coordination and cooperation with the already recognized geoparks and the aspiring territories.⁸

However, it is noted that in many countries of this continent, there are initiatives and projects that although they have advanced at different levels of development and completion, they could participate in a network to be reinforced, since they share the same objectives, based on heritage of unique geological, natural and cultural characteristics. The representatives of these territories have participated in many of the events mentioned above, in their capacities as scientific experts, academics, from the governmental sphere, or as independent consultants.

Secondly, having started as a voluntary network of territories under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), this initiative is expected to become the **International Geosciences and Geoparks Program (IGGP)**, within the

⁸ During 2015, the Global Geoparks Network received a great number of applications and expressions of interest for the creation of new Global Geoparks in Latin America.

structure of such organization. In November 2015, the General Conference of UNESCO shall eventually decide on the new structure of the UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARKS, which shall have great significance both for the existing geoparks and the aspiring ones.

Thus, what has been described above implies that we are at a global environment conducive to the global geoparks, based on a reinforced image and institutional support. The future Latin American and the Caribbean Network shall not only create new territories, but also shall reinforce their internal capacities, in line with the new global challenges.

In third place, closely related to the above, the Latin American stakeholders have the conditions and are willing to create a network, having clearly identified the objectives and challenges establishing a proper schedule. All these ideas were stated at the different meetings and described in the contents of this document.⁹

The problems and limitations described by present projects (aspiring geoparks), the objectives to be included for the future Network and challenges identified for their development, are listed below.

I. Challenges and/or problems for the aspiring geoparks in this region:

- Lack of knowledge on the subject (geoheritage and geoparks) within the country, mainly at community level, both in the private and public sector.
- Sense of competition or rivalry with other programmes and events related to historical, cultural and natural heritage.
- Poor sense of commitment by the political and governmental authorities (decision makers, etc.).
- Dispersion and failure in coordinating efforts.
- Cultural and institutional barriers to develop new tourism modalities (geotourism).
- Poor educational policies regarding disaster prevention.
- Insufficient qualification of technical staff for the formulation and implementation of

⁹ For the draft of this document and also as a road map for the creation of a Latin American Geoparks Network, some consultations were made to the aspiring projects on the problems they are having in their territory, the objectives the Network should include, and identification of challenges during the development. Responses were provided by the Geopark Project of Mixteca Alta, Oaxaca (Mexico), prepared by **José Luis Palacio** (Institute of Geography – UNAM); the Project of Cañón del Colca and Valle de los Volcanes of Andahuay (Peru), prepared by **Bilberto Zavala Carrión** (Geological Mining and Metallurgical Institute); the Project Tungurahua Volcano (Ecuador), prepared by **Enrique Mayorga** (San Pedro de Pelileo Municipality); and by the Global Geopark Grutas del Palacio (Flores, Uruguay), provided by **Diego Irazábal** and **César Goso** (Local Government of Flores and University of the Republic, respectively).

the projects.

- Difficulties in creating and releasing a common message (communication, visibility), both within and outside the territory.
- Difficulties for the coordination of local and national stakeholders for their diversity and heterogeneous nature.
- Asymmetries in services, infrastructure, and in scientific and cultural contents related to geosites and sites of interest.
- Difficulties to understand and measure the value of what is intangible.

II. Objectives to be assigned to the Latin American Geoparks Network:

- Sharing common features of Latin American identity.
- Promote recognition and interpretation on the concept of geoheritage, and their relations with other heritage values.
- Promote creation of new global geoparks in the region.
- Encourage the exchange of experiences on the valorisation and management of geoheritage.
- Develop knowledge and methods for their management and operation.
- Appoint a technical group of support for all the members of the network (to provide counseling, training, etc.).
- Maintain relationship and encourage exchange with other regional network, such as the European and Asian-Pacific.
- Organize meetings in member countries.
- Set up a web site and a “virtual route of geoparks”.

III. Identified challenges:

- Develop and implement a work plan so as to reach the objectives with efficacy and efficiency.
- Be proactive.
- Encourage and facilitate participation of member territories, sustainable in time.
- Include integration of indigenous communities in the project, which is a strength and a distinguishing feature in the case of Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Ensure the necessary financing means.
- Ensure the necessary political and governmental support.
- Reinforce the technical and institutional capacity to support the evaluating missions of the aspiring geoparks.

It is clear that this variety of subjects and circumstances that branch out in different directions, evidence the need for a prompt action to organize a network that would allow feedback and establish synergies between projects and the global geoparks of Latin America; a correct approach and an adequate work plan, shall constitute a proper and effective tool for the development of these territories and their communities.

3. Organization proposal.

In order to achieve the proposed objectives, the Latin American and the Caribbean Geoparks Network shall need an appropriate organizational structure, flexible and capable of adapting to the needs and possibilities of its members. In addition, this organization should be in line with the policies of the Global Geoparks Network and UNESCO, which shall be the ones to assess the corresponding procedures.

The participation of the members to the Network shall be voluntary and shall follow the foundation rules, to be approved after a series of consultation and exchange of ideas.

Here is a brief description of membership and structure for functioning. It is a rough proposal that should be improved with more precision and reinforced through the functioning process.¹⁰

Who are eligible to become members of the Network?

To begin with, four categories of members are identified, that shall be submitted for consultation and defined in detail.

1. **Full members:** are the Geoparks that belong to the Global Network and are recognized as such by UNESCO. These members have full rights and obligations when they participate in the Network.

2. **Aspiring members:** are such Geoparks Projects that have reached certain level of development and consolidation, though they are not formally integrated to the Global Network. Usually, the aspiration projects have already been submitted or are about to submit the application, since they meet the basic requirements and are functioning for at least one year.

¹⁰ It is noted that the structure of European Geoparks Network was taken as model.

3. **Invited members:** are such Geoparks Projects that although they do not meet with the minimum requirement of organization and preparation to reach the category 2 (Aspiring member), they have certain conditions that entitle them to participate in the Network, as invited members with limited rights.

4. **Special members:** are the organizations and/or persons that are recognized for their valuable knowledge and commitment with the objectives. These members may consist of international experts, professionals, advanced students or organizations. The difference from the other 3 categories consists in that special members are not required to participate or be exclusively involved with a Latin American geopark, and may be assumed individually.

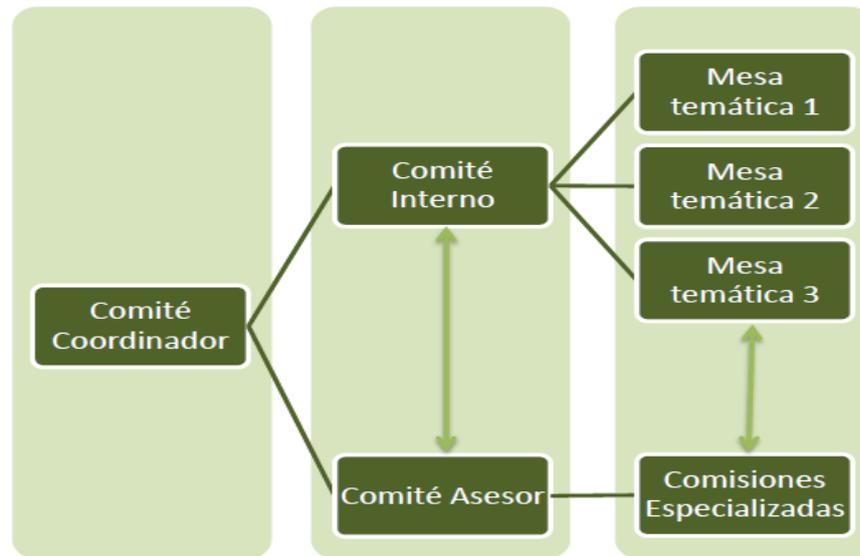
Examples of special members include the representatives of the Global Network, from the European Network, Programmes of UNESCO, scientists and referential scholars on the subject in Latin America and the world.

Collaborating partners and sponsors: it is possible to appoint collaborating partners and sponsors of the Network without the need of becoming a member. This category includes the International Organizations, states, universities, research centers, banks, foundations, corporations, etc., taking into account their relevance and involvement with the Global Geoparks in Latin America, they may join the Network to meet the specific objectives that shall be set forth and approved by the relevant authorities of the Network.



How is the organizational structure?

It is proposed the functioning operation of the Network in accordance with the following structure, distributed in three main blocks: Executive Council; Advisory Board and Consultative Council; Thematic Boards and Specialized Committees.



Coordination Committee: has a similar structure with the coordination committee of the European Geoparks Network (EGN) and it is the top authority of the Network. Only the representatives of the Global Geoparks (full members) and of the Global Geoparks Network are entitled to be members of the Coordination Committee. This Committee officially represents the Network and has power to resolve the issues submitted for consideration, and shall have an operational secretariat, directed by a coordinator and a sub-coordinator, who shall be appointed by the Coordination Committee and shall hold office during two years, and may be reelected for such office. The members of the Coordination Committee (CC) shall be proposed by the intervening geopark and by the Global Network in the case of their institutional representatives.

For certain strategic decisions, the Coordination Committee may join *ad hoc*, the members of the Advisory Committee. Like in the European Geoparks Network, UNESCO reserves the right of exercising veto against any decision of the Coordination Committee.

Internal Committee and Thematic Boards. The former (Internal Committee) shall be composed by representatives of full and aspiring members, and shall have the following main functions: 1) Advise the Coordination Committee in taking decisions, define strategic policies, etc. 2) Implement programmes and activities. 3) Assume the role of communication channel.

While the Thematic Boards are centered in certain topics related to geoheritage and geoparks; as for instance: processes of geoeducation, geoconservation, geotourism, etc. The Thematic Boards may be composed by the four categories of members: full, aspiring, invited, and special members.

Advisory Committee and Specialized Committees: They are mostly composed by special members and have the function of advising the Coordination Committee, the Advisory Board and Thematic Boards, in matters related to strategic issues, research, global relationship, and also the nomination and integration of new territories in the Network. The Advisory Committee provides a place for consultation and shall be composed by individuals with expert knowledge (for example, Earth Sciences, Local Development, Tourism, etc.), with recognized career in institutions.

The Specialized Committees are not permanent bodies, and shall be gathered to conduct certain study or research in specific subjects, with the purpose of developing knowledge and materials for decision making in formal instances. These committees shall be recognized and approved by the Coordination Committee.

*Grutas del Palacio Geopark
Trinidad – Flores, Uruguay
July 2015*