

A Critical Analysis of the Creation of Geoparks in Brazil: Challenges and Possibilities

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Abstract : The International Geosciences and Geoparks Programme (IGGP) were officially created in 2015 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to enhance the protection of the geological heritage and fill the gaps on the World Heritage Convention. According to UNESCO, a Global Geopark is an unified area where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed based on a concept of sustainable development. Tourism is seen as a main activity to develop new sources of revenue. Currently (November 2022), UNESCO recognized 177 Global Geoparks, of which more than 50% are in Europe, 40% in Asia, 6% in Latin America, and the remaining 4% are distributed between Africa and Anglo-Saxon America. This picture shows the existence of a much uneven geographical distribution of these areas across the planet. Currently, there are three Geoparks in Brazil; however, the first of them was accepted by the Global Geoparks Network in 2006 and, just fifteen years later, two other Brazilian Geoparks also obtained the UNESCO title. Therefore, this paper aims to provide an overview of the current geopark situation in Brazil and to identify the main challenges faced by the implementation of these areas in the country. To this end, the Brazilian history and its main characteristics regarding the development of geoparks over the years will be briefly presented. Then, the results obtained from interviews with those responsible for each of the current 29 aspiring geoparks in Brazil will be presented. Finally, the main challenges related to the implementation of Geoparks in the country will be listed. Among these challenges, the answers obtained through the interviews revealed conflicts and problems that pose hindrances both to the start of the development of a Geopark project and to its continuity and implementation. It is clear that the task of getting multiple social actors, or stakeholders, to engage with the Geopark, one of UNESCO's guidelines, is one of its most complex aspects. Therefore, among the main challenges, stand out the difficulty of establishing solid partnerships, what directly reflects divergences between the different social actors and their goals. This difficulty in establishing partnerships happens for a number of reasons. One of them is that the investment in a Geopark project can be high and investors often expect a short-term financial return. In addition, political support from the public sector is often costly as well, since the possible results and positive influences of a Geopark in a given area will only be experienced during future mandates. These results demonstrate that the research on Geoparks goes far beyond the geological perspective linked to its origins, and is deeply embedded in political and economic issues.

Keywords : Brazil, geoparks, tourism, UNESCO

Conference Title : ICGG 2023 : International Conference on Geography and Geosciences

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : January 23-24, 2023