



Geoheritage and the ICG: Developing IUGS policy and practice

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“The term ‘geodiversity’ encompasses all aspects of the natural non-living materials and processes that formed our planet and continue to shape both its interior and surface today. This broad definition not only includes geological materials (such as modern sediments, rocks, minerals, meteorites and fossils), the processes that formed them (including by rivers and volcanic activity) and the landforms created by such processes (for example cliffs and glacier-cut valleys), it also includes Earth materials removed from a natural to a cultural context, for instance to museums or used as building stones or in jewelry.”. (ICG Terms of Reference, 2018)

The first 18 months since the establishment of the ICG at the 35th ICG in Cape Town (August 2016) has been a time of consolidating its role and position within the IUGS, crucially including the development of a comprehensive Terms of Reference as a framework for activity and decision making. This process has included consolidating ToRs for its two component subcommissions, the Heritage Sites and Collections Subcommission (HSCS) (<http://geoheritage-iugs.mnhn.fr>) and the Heritage Stones Subcommission (HSS) (<http://globalheritagestone.com/>) and the establishment of an advisory panel of experienced ‘Voting Members’ for the HSCS and the full Commission. Within this structure, all proposals for the formal adoption of any policy or guidelines generated within either subcommission must first be submitted to the Voting Members of that Subcommission for approval and then to the full Commission for further consideration and scrutiny. Only on completion of this process will the proposal be considered appropriate for submission to the IUGS Executive Committee for ratification and adoption as IUGS policy, practice or recommended guidelines.

In this context, the HSS has a well-developed procedure for establishing Global Heritage Stone Resources (GHSR), as a way of raising awareness of natural stones as a cultural and historical resource (including protecting stone resources. In 2017, IUGS formally approved six such resources: Portland Stone (UK), Larvikite (Norway), Petit granit (Belgium), Podpec limestone (Slovenia), Halllandia gneiss (Sweden), Carrara marble (Italy). Most of the work of the HSCS - which focuses on the process of documentation, selection, conservation and promotion of primarily scientific geoheritage, including sites and collections - however, is likely to be carried out by Working Groups focussed on specific themes and issues. In this context, the first Working Group of the HSCS was formed in April 2017 to develop criteria for the scientific assessment of proposals for new UNESCO Global Geoparks, to aid IUGS appointed scientific assessors (a process enshrined in the agreement between IUGS and UNESCO within the Statutes of the IGGP). The formation of several other WGs are now under discussion, including in collaboration with other bodies, including concerning Global Geosites, Palaeontological Heritage, Geomorphosites and Museum Collections. At all times, the HSCS aims to promote collaborative activities, working together towards shared goals. The challenge is to ensure that we really can begin to influence policy and practice at a global scale through our new discipline of geoheritage, one which provides the strongest of connections between society and the geosciences.