

Assessing the economic impact of Geoparks

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Geopark designations are expected to provide positive economic benefits to local businesses, communities and urban areas. In order for a region to retain its International Geopark designation, the coordinators for the geopark, must demonstrate that the geopark is promoting positive economic benefits to the region. Given, however, that geoparks are often ungated, with geographical boundaries on a map rather than on the ground, and the fact that unique geological sites are promoted rather than a location within a gated area, this leads to challenges on how to actually measure these forecasted benefits. Further to this, the geopark does not have site managers, instead businesses are encouraged to provide activities at various sites that geopark enthusiasts can pay to experience.

This paper reviews the literature on the various methods that can be used to assess the economic impact of geoparks, as well as providing a framework for determining which method would be most likely to provide the best measurement given the number of tourists, the spatial area that the geopark encompasses and the numbers, size and type of events that might occur in the region as a result of the geopark. The methods will comprise not only surveys of tourists to the region, but will also provide guidelines on how businesses can help document the economic impact of conducting business within the geopark and/or supporting the designation. Although the literature is not prolific with respect to assessing economic impacts of geoparks, information regarding other designated areas such as national and provincial parks, as well as gated and ungated events will be examined for examples and best practices.

Presented in Theme 1