

Engaging NGO to achieve geoconservation, earth sciences popularisation and sustainable development: the case of Hong Kong Geopark

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The success of a geopark builds on engagements of various stakeholders. However, it is extremely challenging, as Geopark is a relatively new concept that can easily cause misunderstanding, distrust and disagreement. The example of Hong Kong Geopark demonstrates the successful collaboration with an NGO that helped to achieve the geopark objectives. It was the flexibility, efficiency and professionalism of the NGO that reinforced the Hong Kong Government's determination to make possible the establishment of a geopark, as well as the implementation of geopark guidelines. The NGO started playing active roles from initial preparation of the proposal to final submission of the nomination. Its initial presentations to government departments, institutions and the public have aroused extensive interest. Concerns raised during planning were carefully attended, to avoid future management problems. In addition, the NGO offered networking and liaison for the government with national geopark and global geopark bureaus. It also advised the overall design of the Hong Kong Geopark to achieve its main goal of introducing geological conservation in Hong Kong. After the establishment of the geopark, the NGO engaged in setting up and managing geoheritage centers, initiated the Recommended Geopark Guide System to enhance the overall standard of geopark guides and geopark tours. Promotion and publicity activities associated with geoconservation, earth sciences popularisation, geotourism and sustainable development are the on-going efforts pursued by the NGO. It successfully secured sponsorship of private enterprises in running free geopark tours to raise public awareness of geoconservation, to train secondary school students to become young ambassadors to disseminate geopark message, and organize a geotourism conference in support of the global geopark movement. A NGO can be extremely useful in assisting the government in geopark development. There is no single formula for how to engage an NGO. However, the one thing that makes collaboration work is trust.

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