

## Irish Geoparks: the sustaining role of EU funded projects

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Three Irish Global Geoparks have built their foundation and ongoing success on the bedrock of mostly EU funded projects. Copper Coast Geopark and Marble Arch Caves were early members of the European Geoparks Network in 2001. Marble Arch Caves later expanded into County Cavan to become the first international Global Geopark. The Burren and Cliffs of Moher joined the network in 2011.

The Geoparks have developed EU and other project partnerships within Ireland and outside – mainly in the INTERREG Atlantic Area (including UK, Spain, Portugal) and the NEED Northern Atlantic Periphery (including Norway, Iceland). EU funding has helped secure the foundation of the Geoparks, as in the purchase and refurbishment of a deconsecrated church, now serving as the Copper Coast visitor hub, which was achieved through INTERREG and LEADER funding. The Burren and Cliffs of Moher established its educational resources with a suite of booklets, maps and school packs under a NEED project. The Marble Arch Caves developed and expanded through various cross-border projects under EU Peace Programmes (SEUPB), most recently enabling the enhancement and addition of information centres.

Geopark partnerships with local authorities and state bodies such as Failte Ireland (tourism), Heritage Council, National Parks and Wildlife Service, as well as universities, have also been crucial in developing projects and attracting funding. The two geological surveys of Ireland, GSI in Dublin and GSNI in Belfast, are long-standing partners of established and aspiring geoparks, and GSI has supported Geopark geologist employment since 2008.

Irish Geoparks and aspiring projects have attracted an estimated 20 million euro total EU funding since 2001. The overall financial benefit to their development would appear obvious. However, there are questions relating to the administrative burden of successfully facilitating projects to realize full funding. Careful selection and management of projects and programme regions are therefore important considerations.

Presented in Theme 2