Challenges and opportunities of Geoparks as an instrument of regionalization

HENNING ZELLMER - *Geopark Harz, Braunschweiger Land, Ostfalen, Niedernhof 6, 38154 Königslutter, Germany <hzell@web.de>*

In the last decades globalization and demographic changes have led to newly defined regions everywhere in Europe. On one hand it is necessary to find new ways for sustainable and affordable administrations, on the other hand, it is important to provide the region with an attracting image outwards and a respected identity for the inhabitants. While the changes in administration is often causing tough political processes between municipalities, counties, cities and states in different ways, Geoparks can do a lot for the image and the attraction of a region. The Geopark Harz. Braunschweiger Land. Ostfalen is a good example, of how Geoparks clearly differ to structures like nature reserves, national parks and biosphere reserves, and how they can help to find particular ways to a future-oriented regionalization.

Geoparks are not a new class of extra reserves, but comprise the entire range of natural and cultural development of a geographically and geologically defined region. This includes cities, business and industrial areas, which are related to the regional resources and dependent cultural development. Describing these relationships is the way a Geopark is able to summarize the full potential of a region.

Although Geoparks support the protection of geological sites, biotopes, monuments, etc. on the basis of existing laws, they also allow the participation of active economic ranges subsumed in the overall network. Geoparks promote sustainable economy in particular. They collect and pool the information about a region on the basis of their geological foundations. Here, the focus is set on the field of education (kindergartens, schools, universities, adult education, environmental education, tour guide training) as well as on the tourism and leisure industry (infrastructure, events, exhibitions, tourism offers).

Presented in Theme 2