

THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL UNESCO CONFERENCE ON GEOPARKS

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A five-day international conference on the above topic was organized during 22-26 June 2008, by UNESCO in association with the TERRA vita Global Geopark and several other agencies, at the Convention Hall of Osnabrueck, North Germany. The theme for the conference was 'Communicating our earth Heritage'. Approximately 500 participants from more than 60 countries across five continents were present at the conference, with 173 paper contributions. The participants included senior government officials, management and staff from various geoparks, and practitioners in the fields of tourism, education and cultural heritage. Prior to the official start of the conference, the 1st Global Geoparks Fair was inaugurated on 21st June by Prof. Hans-Gert Pottering, President of the European Parliament and Walter Hirche, President of German UNESCO Commission. Global geoparks mainly from several European countries and Asia-Pacific countries participated in the fair, wherein certain geotouristic products (e.g. posters, wall hangings, moulds, casts, graphic animations, museum artifacts, etc.) were displayed and certain products (e.g. booklets, pamphlets, souvenir items, educational CD-ROM's/DVD's etc.) distributed to the visitors. A 'public geopark party' was organized on the evening of 21st. The fair ended on the evening of 22nd June.

The opening ceremony on 23rd June was addressed by Landrat Manfred Hugo, President of TERRA vita Global Geopark, Dr. Margarete Patzak, IGCP Assistant of UNESCO's Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences, Christoph Ehrenberg, Federal Ministry for Education and Research, Prof. Werner Wamhoff, German Environmental Foundation, Prof. Antonio Brambati, IUGS Executive Committee, Prof. Ibrahim Komoo, Coordinator of the Asian-Pacific Geopark Network and Prof.

Nickolas Zouros, Coordinator of the European Geoparks Network (EGN). This was followed by two key-note talks on 'Selling Nature – How to Communicate Geological Heritage of our Planet' by Klaus Liedtke, Editor-in-Chief of National Geographic, Germany and Eduardo F.J. de Mulder, former President of IUGS.

There were parallel lecture sessions in four halls, from the afternoon of 23rd till the afternoon of 24th, on ten different sub-themes, viz. *communicating geological heritage, young people and geoparks, socio-economic benefits of geopark, climate change and geoparks, quality management in geoparks, European Union and geoparks, tourism and geoparks, presentation of new and aspiring geoparks, criteria to join the geopark family and bridging the gap between geology and soil sciences*. The academic sessions focused on four subjects, viz. *How best to communicate the fascination of these topics to a wider public, How to integrate them in tourism offers, Can they enhance regional development, and what is the task of the Global Geoparks in this process*.

On 25th, workshops were held on seven different themes, viz. *Development of sustainable tourism packages – how to create benefits for Nature and people, Socio-economic effects of geoparks – how to measure the social and economic impact of a regional structure, How to develop a 'Student's Company' – a new idea to teach students how economy works in reality, How to join the geopark network – application rules and ways to contribute to the work of the Global Network of Geoparks, Literature workshop – how to motivate people to focus their writing skills on Nature and landscape, How to build a network of volunteers – can voluntary work be organized and integrated into the work of geoparks?, How to create impact geopark training for income generating*

activities – can a geopark help young people to find new perspectives for a job? In the afternoon, there was a field trip to the Varus Battlefield.

On 26th, reports from the workshops and the youth camp 'Meet your geopark' were presented. In the post-lunch session, there was a key-note speech on 'The future of geotourism' by Prof. Ross K. Dowling, Foundation Professor of Tourism, of Edith Cowan University, Western Australia. This was followed by the conference declaration and announcement of the 2010 venue. In the bidding for hosting the 4th biennial conference in 2010, Langkawi Geopark of Malaysia beat two other bidders viz. the Araripe Geopark of Brazil and the Lesvos Petrified Forest Geopark of Greece.

Although a total of five papers were submitted from India, only two were orally presented. The author has presented papers on two different sub-themes, and titled, *'Indian geoconservation and geoscience promotional initiatives – prospects for the geopark developmental process'* and *'Integrating geosciences with tourism for socio-economic benefits – instances from Northeast India'*.

The post-conference field trips started from 27th, mainly in two different localities viz. the TERRA vita Global Geopark and the Vulkanfeld Global Geopark. The former geopark focuses on geosites pertaining to carboniferous to cretaceous ages, including therein various geomorphological features, traces of ice age, mining history on coal and limestone, iron ore, dinosaur footprints etc. The latter geopark comprises about 270 volcanic eruption centres, inherent as 'maars', ice-caves, cold water geysers, geoseums and numerous other geoinstitutions. Germany has a total of 6 operational geoparks, all being affiliated to the EGN and UNESCO's Global Geoparks Network (GGN).