Quality Assessment and Certification of Swiss Geoparks


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Geosite assessment has been developing within the Swiss Academy of Sciences for more than ten years. A strategic report was published in 1995 (Strasser et al. 1995) and a first inventory with more than 400 objects of national significance was presented in 1998 (SAS 1999).

Since then, several initiatives have been taken in several parts of Switzerland to create geoparks. A first small geopark, Il Parco delle Gole della Breggia, was established in 2001 in the Canton of Tessin within a valley eroded in a stratigraphic cut representing more than 80 million years of Earth History (Jurassic-Present).

An action, financed by the program Interreg IIIa, is currently developing in the whole Insubric region around the Monte San Giorgio for creating an Insubric Geopark. The Geopark Sarganserland-Walensee-Glarnerland covers a surface of about 1300 km² in Eastern Switzerland. It was initiated at the end of the 1990s by local geologists and was partly financed by the Swiss regional development programme Regio Plus until 2004. The focus is on structural geology and the mining industry (Imper 2003). Two other geoparks are currently in the planning phase, respectively in the Engadin and Adjacent Valleys (South-eastern Switzerland), including the current Swiss National Park, and in the Canton of Jura (Northern Switzerland), including recent paleontological discoveries (Marty & Hug 2003). Other geoparks are at the idea stage: in the Bernese Oberland (Central Alps), in the Valais (South-western Alps), and in the Creux du Van area (Jura Range) (fig. 1).

This development demonstrates that issues concerning geotopes, geoconservation and geotourism are addressed seriously in Switzerland. Nevertheless, experiences in other countries like Germany and at the European level show the necessity

Figure 1 Simplified Tectonic Map of Switzerland and the Location of Geoparks
of defining clearly what geoparks are, coordinating their development at a national level, and defining quality assessment procedures. This is the reason why the Swiss Working Group for Geotopes created in March 2004 a special Working Group dealing with Geoparks. The Working Group’s objectives are: (1) to coordinate and support geoparks projects in Switzerland; (2) to maintain international contacts concerning geoparks, especially with the European Geoparks Network and with UNESCO; (3) to develop an assessment procedure and a certification for Swiss Geoparks.

A project of guidelines inspired by the German guidelines (Mattig et al. 2003) is currently in consultation. The guidelines consider that: (1) a Swiss Geopark may be established in areas with rich and diversified geological and geomorphological heritage; (2) the geopark’s area has to be clearly delimited and sufficiently large to allow the economic development of a community; (3) a Swiss Geopark has clear structures and organization; (4) a geopark project must present a concept for sustainable tourist development based on earth science heritage; (5) sustainable tourist development of a Swiss Geopark is based principally on the creation of geotourist products and services; (6) a Swiss Geopark should improve the conservation of geotopes within its limits in collaboration with the cantonal administration; (7) a Swiss Geopark should develop pedagogic means for diffusing knowledge about geosciences; (8) a Swiss Geopark should develop a concept for public relations; (9) a Swiss Geopark is not a legal category for nature conservation; it may on the other hand overlay protected areas; (10) the promotors of a Swiss Geopark are not habilitated to protect their geological heritage, whose protection is carried out by the cantonal and/or communal administrations. A certification is to be developed for assessing the quality of geoparks currently in preparation. The certification will be carried out by the Swiss Working Group for Geotopes and, in case of positive assessment, a label is granted for a duration of 5 years.

References