Geotourism development in Australia: the need for prototypes
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More and more, geoparks are becoming the storytellers of our planet. They are visited by a growing number of geotourists worldwide. At their destination, travelers learn about how the earth was shaped and how this effected regional culture and nature. Geoparks are present all over the world. Stories can be found everywhere and even tiny and flat countries like Denmark and the Netherlands, with their limited geological diversity, have embraced the geopark concept. Besides the stories they have to tell, geoparks also focus on the protection of geological heritage and on sustainable development. They are helping in raising awareness about geological hazards (resulting in natural disasters), climate change, sustainable use of natural resources and respect for the environment. Therefore, it’s not only about attracting the geotourist and stimulating the regional economy. It’s also about helping us when facing the environmental challenges of our time. In Oceania, geopark initiatives so far have been limited although the continent is full of great stories. For Australia there is a lot to win. It’s time to setup an approach that fits the country’s identity. Let’s go back to the future!

A geopark prototype
Internationally, geoparks and geotourism become increasingly interrelated. Therefore, the development of geotourism can’t be seen without the presence of geoparks. But before starting all kind of nationwide activities or stimulating the creation of geoparks in a centralized way, a more smooth approach is demanded. The geopark concept definitely asks for a bottom-up initiative. To get familiar with the geopark concept, early sample regions can start to act as something to be replicated or learned from. Advantages of such a geopark prototype are:
- the chance for early and inexpensive failure;
- the ability to gather more accurate requirements;
- the possibility to address unforeseen challenges;
- the creation of space and time for aligning different opinions and visions; and
- the increased probability of funding.

The establishment of Australia’s first and only geopark was a great effort. Kanawinka has been successful in establishing local enterprises and small business, setting up training programs, creating new jobs and protecting geo-sources. The question is whether it’s a suitable prototype. Because it’s such a huge area when compared to the average geopark in the world, it may be not that easy to copy from. Prototypes need to be more compact and easy manageable. For setting up geoparks in a successful way, the following steps are described:
1. Rise of suitable areas
2. Setup of prototypes
3. Cooperation between self-acting prototypes
4. Creation of a professional geopark network
5. Expansion of the network

1. A suitable area
For Australia’s main attractions and its World Heritage sites, a strategy that’s mainly based on geotourism will be of little value. For little less visited destinations with geotourism potential, being a geopark could become a key success factor. The awareness of this should result in a regional motivation and approach. For a prototype, it’s important that the area is compact and of an easy manageable size. Geotourism potential, intrinsic motivation and compactness alone do not make an area a suitable prototype. As for any tourist destination, the 5 A’s are there to be met. Geotourism potential is a prerequisite: a geotourist is attracted by geological features, cultural heritage and natural wonders. But for being a suitable area, the elements Access, Accommodation, Amenities and Activities need attention too. To give an example of how to determine a suitable area, a case study has been done on the Glass House Mountains (QLD). To be clear, it’s just an example and not the result of any regional or local initiative yet.

Case study: Glass House Mountains
The Glass House Mountains, named by James Cook in 1770, are a group of 11 hills that rise abruptly from the coastal plain on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland. The highest mountain is Mount Beerwah at 556 meters above sea level. The traditional names for the mountains themselves are very old and reflect the Aboriginal culture surrounding the mountains. They were once lava plugs within volcanic cones representing a volcanic area: the East Australian Hotspot. The cones and surrounding Landsborough sandstone were eroded by wind and water over 25 million years to reveal the current lava plugs. The peaks are culturally significant to the traditional owners, the Gubbi Gubbi people. In Aboriginal legend, the mountains are members of a family. The area was a special meeting place where many Aboriginal people gathered for ceremonies and
trading. Many ceremonial sites are still present today. The mountains also inspired a number of works by significant Australian artists. The area has significant landscape and conservation values and is home to a great variety of birds and land animals. It’s rich in vegetation and spectacular natural look outs can be climbed. All together, it’s an attractive area for geotourists that’s easily accessible. Brisbane (airport) is only a one-hour drive away and the Sunshine Coast is even closer. There are 3 train stations located within the area. A wide selection of accommodation is available, from motels to B&B’s. Amenities are complete; there are car parks, hiking trails, bike trails, horse riding trails, wheelchair accessible tracks and signages. Rock climbing, abseiling, mountain biking, horse riding, guided tours, scenic flights and hot air ballooning; all these activities are provided thereby completing the 5 A’s. The Glass House Mountains area clearly has the potential. To really become a prototype, an intrinsic motivation needs to kick in too.

2. The setup of a prototype
From the early start, the setup of a prototype is a close cooperation between stakeholders (governments, land owners and land managers) and partners from different disciplines: geology, ecology, education, culture, tourism and the agricultural sector. Together they should work on the creation of:
- an imaginative area
- with imaginary boundaries
- that’s easy identifiable
- and easy marketable.
A prototype is not mapped in a conventional territorial sense. For the creation of an imaginative area with imaginary but clear boundaries, help is available from the indigenous Australians. Aboriginal culture is one of the world’s longest surviving cultures. Dreamtime stories are their oral form of the spiritual Dreaming and the textbooks of the Aborigines’ accumulated knowledge, spirituality and wisdom. One of its aspects is that all elements in the landscape were left by the Creation Ancestors. Its appearance has a story to tell. This symbolic approach is reintroduced when setting up a prototype. It will be looked at as it was experienced by an Aboriginal storyteller. To give an impression of this approach, the case study on the Glass House Mountains is continued.

Case study: Glass House Mountains
Let’s have a look at the map from the perspective of an Aboriginal ancestor. What can be made of this area of the Glass House Mountains National Park and its surrounding Conservation Parks, State Forests and Forest Reserves?
It’s not that difficult to transform the connected area of parks, reserves and forests into a ‘wild horse’ shaped land form. The prototype can easily be identified by a shaped figure like this. The prototype can easily be identified by a shaped figure like this.

Wild horses use powerful kicks, often with both back legs at the same time, to ward off predators. Wild horses use powerful kicks, often with both back legs at the same time, to ward off predators.

There is a link with the Glass House Mountains: one of the mountains is called Wild Horse Mountain. From this lookout, there is a clear view on the whole area and its mountains. Translating the name Wild Horse Geopark into a name in Gubbi Gubbi language would recognize the long history of the area. The Gubi Gubi word for horse is ‘Yaramana’ while Bangurran means ‘wild’ or ‘very angry’. The ‘Yaramana Bangurran Geopark’ makes a clear appearance on the map of Southern Queensland:

Marketing activities can be set up easily with such a simple design that’s distinctive, recognizable, advertisable and visualizable. For the geopark prototype, it opens up the possibility to become an individual famous brand.

When the area has been set, interesting sites have to be identified. The majority of them ought to be part of the geological heritage. But there is also a need for archaeological, biological, historical and cultural sites and to make up a network of them. Interdisciplinary detailed research studies should identify the chances for improving geotourism facilitation and geoheritage protection. Based on the outcome, plans related to the prototype’s system components (stock of natural resources, production installations, residential settlements and utilities and infrastructure) are defined and prioritized. The result is a multi-stakeholder approach in developing social, economic and cultural projects, supporting active participation and involvement of the local communities. Furthermore, the setup of a prototype is about initiating innovative activities in education, advertising and public awareness. New projects, new products and new approaches have to be generated according to the local traditions, preserving the local identity.

3. Cooperation between self-acting prototypes
Every prototype has to go through the setup process by itself to give right to the heart of local
communities. Ideally, there will arise a variety of prototypes across the country, preferably spread over the different states, where each prototype is build around different stories in genesis. The more variation between prototypes, the more there can be learned from each other and the greater the attractiveness for geotourists. See the picture below for an example of what would be a great variety of prototypes. The example prototypes are:

- **Sea Turtle Geopark** – WA (Nambung NP/Leda NR/Wanagarren NR/Cervantes)
- **Dorsal Fin Geopark** - TAS (Queenstown/ Strahan/ Zeehan)

\[\text{Image 50x28 to 394x292}\]

- **Dingo Puppy Geopark** - NSW (Morton NP/Bundanoon/Ulladella)
- **Litchfield Snake Geopark** - NT (LitchfieldNP/ Batchelor/Adelaide River)

Their design is based on the same approach that was used in the case study of the Glass House Mountains. But again, it’s not related to any existing local initiative. Although the prototypes have their own ideas and strategy and do their own implementation, at some point they start to cooperate on an ad hoc basis. For instance, when setting up a project that has been implemented already by another prototype, the experiences will be shared with the initiator. Another example is where a prototype faces serious blocking issues in its development process. In that case, it will inform other prototypes about the issue. Cooperation at this stage is meant to learn from each others mistakes and successes. This should make it easier for every prototype to reach its individual goals and objectives.

4. **A professional network**

After some period, probably 2 or 3 years, when the individual prototypes have successfully created a geopark that is visited by a relevant number of geotourists, cooperation between them is enhanced. Activities are designed to give it a more formal and regular character. Together with Kanawinka Geopark, the prototypes start an Australian Geopark Network. Now it’s time to gather experiences and to work on some kind of joint strategy. Regular meetings are held to define national projects dealing with public awareness, cultural events, promotion, and informal education. Australia is presented as a geotourism destination par excellence. And although the network acts independently from any international geopark network, cooperation is started with foreign geoparks, for example with parks from China. China is already Australia’s fastest growing inbound tourism market and more knowledge of Chinese geoparks can be an advantage when serving the geotourists from this country.

5. **Expansion of the network**

New local geopark initiatives don’t have to go through the whole process by themselves. The designing part is still their own job, but for the rest of the setup process, they can rely heavily on the experiences and information that’s available via the Australian Geopark Network. Off course, plans and activities have to be designed by the initiators and have to meet the local incentive. But due to the existing variety of the network, it’s not that useful anymore to invent the geopark concept over and over. The prototype stage has ended. Membership to the network is offered to new initiatives when they succeed. At this stage, when the network gets more and more national coverage, it’s time to study the changes of an Oceania or a South Pacific Geopark Network. There might be a good match with other initiatives in the South Pacific. The geopark concept seems very promising for New Zealand too. An initiative towards the Bank Peninsula Geopark was raised in 2013. The Cook Islands already focused on a geotourism strategy in its Tourism Master Plan back in 2006.

[Prototypes of Australia?]

\[\text{Image 439x405 to 604x425}\]

\[\text{Image 640x486 to 806x505}\]
It would be a missed opportunity if Australia does not embrace the geopark concept. When facilitated, geotourism potential can be used which will benefit the economy. Education of tourists and local people will help in understanding the past and in challenging current and future environmental problems. The protection of geological sites will be more ensured.

This paper is not intended to be a rigid process manual for geopark development. It presents the process of building geoparks on the grounds of imaginative design, interdisciplinary studies and stakeholder identification, and local heritage evaluation. Initiatives and large support of local communities should finally result in national projects dealing with public awareness, cultural events, promotion, and informal education. The approach as described in this document keeps close to the countries identity. There is room for imagination and creativity in combination with serious business.

Hopefully, this document will inspire local communities to make steps forward regarding geotourism and geopark development. In the end (and in the beginning!), it’s all about their intrinsic motivation, creativity and imagination. Australian Geoparks could act as appropriate successors of the Aboriginal storytellers from the past, thereby becoming the storytellers of our time..........

Jaap Spee, July 2015
A path towards a Geopark?