

# Leveraging Landscape: The First Four Years of UNESCO Global Geopark Odsherred



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**Abstract** Based on a study of the first four years of UNESCO Global Geopark Odsherred in Denmark, this chapter reflects on four questions raised in Kavaratzis et al. (Rethinking place branding, 2015): Why is place branding important? What builds place brands? Who builds place brands? And how should place management be understood and undertaken? It discusses whether, for relatively peripheral places that experience socio-economic problems, designation as global geopark may constitute a platform for addressing such issues by working with place-bound resources to achieve viable place-based development. In addition, it suggests that geopark status may allow for a more inclusive and participatory place branding process that relies on co-creating the place brand with multiple local stakeholders rather than on imposition of a place brand top-down. Given that the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) offers ‘a landscape approach for geological heritage conservation, research and sustainable development’ and relies on bottom-up local involvement, allocation of geopark status arguably creates opportunities to develop an overarching narrative and place stories that can be levered to foster pride of place and promote geotourism.

**Keywords** UNESCO Global Geopark Odsherred · Inclusive place branding · Place-based development · Place narrative · Geotourism

## 1 Introduction

In December 2013, the Danish municipality of Odsherred in north-western Zealand applied for membership of the UNESCO European Geoparks Network (EGN) and Global Geoparks Network (GGN) (Geopark Odsherred 2013). Following a review and field evaluation process, the application was accepted, and Odsherred was granted Geopark status for a four-year period in September 2014. Odsherred is

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Denmark's first and, until 2021, only geopark. The designation was up for renewal through a 'revalidation process' in 2018 based on a self-evaluation report and a field visit, and UNESCO Global Geopark Odsherred was successful in achieving a 'green card' in early 2019 for a further 4-year period (UNESCO 2017, see also Ramsay 2017).



The central requirement to qualify for UNESCO Global Geopark status is for the area to demonstrate 'geological heritage of international significance', but equally 'to explore, develop and celebrate the links between that geological heritage and all other aspects of the area's natural, cultural and intangible heritages' (UNESCO 2017) or—as UNESCO's Global Geopark site describes it:

It is about reconnecting human society at all levels to the planet we all call home and to celebrate how our planet and its 4600 million year long history has shaped every aspect of our lives and our societies.

UNESCO began its work with geoparks in 2001, and in 2004 17 European geoparks, organized in the European Geoparks Network (EGN) ([www.europeangeoparks.org](http://www.europeangeoparks.org)), and eight Chinese geoparks came together to form the Global Geoparks Network (GGN), relabelled the UNESCO Global Geoparks in 2015. As of August 2020 there are 161 designated Global Geoparks in 44 countries and many new applicants.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Guidelines and Criteria for National Geoparks seeking membership of the GGN, the primary goal of geoparks is 'Promoting Earth Heritage, Sustaining local Communities', just as the network presents 'a landscape approach for geological heritage conservation, research and sustainable development' (UNESCO 2014). Central aims are to protect and conserve the area and landscape and to educate the public and visitors in the geological heritage of the area as well as the local cultural heritage. A unique landscape and exceptional geology are *sine qua non*, but 'non-geological themes must be highlighted as an integral part' of any geopark (UNESCO 2014).

Therefore, in addition to the above goals, the aspiration is to address 'problems generated by stagnant economic development, high unemployment and associated

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<sup>1</sup>The new applicants include two Danish geoparks, *Geopark Vestjylland* [Western Jutland] ([www.geoparkvestjylland.dk](http://www.geoparkvestjylland.dk)), which achieved designation in 2021, and *Geopark Det Sydfynske Øhav* [South Funen Archipelago] ([www.naturturisme.dk](http://www.naturturisme.dk)). The UNESCO Global Geoparks is one of three UNESCO site designations, the other two being the Biospheres Reserves (granted to the Danish island of *Møn* in June 2017) and the—probably best known—World Heritage Sites.

demographic issues arising from a combination of ageing residents and rural depopulation' (Ramsay 2017, 501), and the prospective geopark must stimulate economic activity within the framework of sustainable development. This is linked to the requirement of local involvement, strong community support and, generally, a bottom-up approach to economic and cultural development. This, it is argued, may stimulate 'pride of place' of local residents and strengthen their identification with the area, which in turn may aid the protection of the geological heritage.

## 2 Place Branding: Critical Perspectives

While the above goals and requirements do not directly rely on place branding concepts and ideas, geoparks are evidently also focused on furthering socially, environmentally and economically sustainable development of local businesses, including tourism. The geopark agenda is about making full use of place-based resources, primarily the landscape and geology, but also local history and culture, to create a narrative or storyline that will engage local residents and attract tourists (Miller and Buhay 2014) and form the basis of innovative business and other developments in the area, all of which are recognizable ambitions from a place branding perspective.

The literature on and discussions of place branding are booming and raise critical questions about the viability of many place branding practices, not least in relation to the involvement of residents and other stakeholders in co-creating place brands (Braun et al. 2013; Kaneva 2017; Casais and Monteiro 2019). In their edited volume *Rethinking Place Branding*, Kavaratzis et al. (2015) called for the rethinking of the theory and practice of the field, arguing that 'a more grounded, theoretical framework to what began and initially developed as a wholly practical activity' (Warnaby et al. 2015, 242) is needed. In addition, they vented a 'growing doubt that much official place branding is actually effective in attaining its often only vaguely delineated outcomes' and 'that the objective of much place branding is more to be seen to be doing it, rather than to achieve specific desired outcomes and impact on the place' (242).

Similar concerns are raised in Kavaratzis and Dennis' editorial 'Place branding gathering momentum' (2018) in *Place branding and public diplomacy*, where they introduce a number of pressing issues in the field. They call for recognition of the complexity of places and the 'exploration of approaches alternative to a purely managerial focus', which brings to the fore issues of identity and place brands as 'cultural phenomena carrying and re-producing cultural meanings and values' (Kavaratzis and Dennis 2018, 75). This also involves a stronger focus on 'stakeholders, their significance, their role and their further engagement in place branding' and 'the multiplicity of stakeholder groups and their conflicting interest' (Kavaratzis and Dennis 2018, 75).

This was also the focus in Kavaratzis (2012), who introduces the notion of participatory branding and stresses the importance and necessity of stakeholder

involvement and consultation in the (co-)creation of the place brand. In particular, the key role of residents and local communities is emphasized in that they form an integrated part and act as ambassadors of place brands (Kavaratzis 2012, 12). In addition to this, residents are also voters whose support is needed to render the place brand politically legitimate and viable (Braun et al. 2013).

The stakeholder perspective is further developed in Kavaratzis et al. (2017), who introduce the term inclusive place branding, stressing that places are very special and complex forms of products to be handled with great care and that place branding has a ‘potential to go beyond economic interests and goals, to focus on residents, to engage diverse stakeholders, and to embrace contradictions and marginalized groups’ (Giovanardi et al. 2017, 172).

This potential is summed up in three interrelated dimensions of place branding: strategic, cultural and socio-economic. The strategic dimension asks whether place branding can provide a vision and a plan of action for a place that may ‘successfully unify diverse stakeholders’ voices, agendas and desires to serve the interests of the many not the few’ (Giovanardi et al. 2017, 173), while the cultural perspective queries whether, when the various cultural meanings of a place are appropriated for branding purposes, the multitude of existing identities can be respected (see also Kaneva 2017) and grounded in a bottom-up process rather than being imposed top-down. Finally, the socio-economic dimension revisits Kavaratzis’ (2012) argument about the role of residents and local communities and acknowledges that place branding is inherently highly political and that democratic legitimacy is of the essence (Giovanardi et al. 2017).

The call for rethinking the field of place branding in Kavaratzis et al. (2015) is encapsulated in four questions. **Why** is place branding important? **What** builds place brands? **Who** builds place brands? And **how** should place management be understood and undertaken? (Ashworth et al. 2015, emphasis added).

These questions will be used as a framework to discuss the case of Geopark Odsherred and to suggest that geopark designation can be viewed as place branding and may offer a platform for a relatively more inclusive and bottom-up process of place(-based) development, as argued by Ramsay 2017 (501). In addition, geopark status may constitute a vehicle for creating a diverse and multifaceted place brand with at least a potential for including more stakeholders in co-creating the brand. Or, to put it differently, it will be discussed to what extent the designation as UNESCO Global Geopark can be seen as a viable strategy for a bottom-up and inclusive local development process by ‘leveraging landscape’.

This chapter draws on extensive notes from participatory observation and a review of relevant documents, and while it makes no claim to having rethought the field of place branding or to provide (definitive) answers as to how to achieve inclusive place branding, it is hoped that reflecting on the first four years of Geopark Odsherred will contribute to illustrating some of the critical issues raised by Kavaratzis (2012), Kavaratzis et al. (2015, 2017), and Kavaratzis and Dennis (2018).

### 3 Introducing Odsherred

The municipality of Odsherred, in its present form, was created in 2007 by the most recent restructuring of the local authority landscape in Denmark, which reduced the number of local authorities from 270 to 98. Three local authorities in north-western Zealand, Dragsholm, Trundholm and Nykøbing-Rørvig, were merged to re-establish the long-gone ‘herred’—Odsherred—an ancient administrative unit. In a sense, the new authority (re-)created a ‘space’ in need of becoming a ‘place’ and of carving out a new role and identity for itself (Vejre et al. 2015, 108).

Odsherred is only one hour’s drive from the Danish capital, Copenhagen, and functions as a gateway to the ferry link between Zealand and Jutland. Its relatively substantial agricultural sector is combined with tourism based to a large degree on holiday or second homes along the extensive coastline (157 km). With around 24,000 second homes, it is the Danish municipality with the largest number by far, and over the years, the Odsherred landscape has been a major driver to attract ‘landliggere’ (seasonal residents).

Nevertheless, Odsherred counts among the peripheral areas of Denmark, facing problems such as a declining and ageing population, livelihoods below average and a low educational level among the population (Geopark Odsherred 2013).<sup>2</sup> Odsherred’s local production sector is limited, and the economy is characterized by many small businesses and very reliant on tourism, the municipality itself being the biggest employer. The tax base is low, and increasing transfer payments in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis drained the municipal coffers, which brought municipal finances under the control of the Ministry of Internal Affairs until 2011.

With the establishment of the newly merged municipality also came the responsibility for local spatial planning and administration, and from that new responsibility sprang the idea to use the spectacular ice-age landscapes of Odsherred to define the identity of this new local authority and to use it for driving its development (Vejre et al. 2015). The idea to aim for geopark status first emerged in 2005 and became part of the municipal planning strategy in 2007, but the project only took off in 2008 where more stakeholders became convinced of the narrative potential of the glacial landscape of Odsherred and of its ability to act as a unifying identity and a driver of socio-economic development (Vejre et al. 2015). The geopark strategy became a core element in the local council’s Municipal Plan for 2009–2012 (continued in the Plan for 2013–2025) and was gradually incorporated in the policies, practices and communication of all municipal departments (Vejre et al. 2015).

In 2011, the municipality allocated the first budget to develop the project, and during the summer, the geopark was officially ‘opened’, and, in 2012, responsibility for driving the process towards applying was transferred to a Geopark Secretariat, a collaborative project organization consisting of Odsherred Municipality, the tourist organization and other significant local players (Geopark Odsherred 2013). These

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<sup>2</sup>See Gyimothy and Meged (2018, 3) on another ‘disadvantaged corner of rural Denmark’, the island of *Møn*.

developments mark the beginning of the focused preparatory phase, where a prospective geopark attempts to prove that designation is merited. In essence, that is done by actually setting up and running a geopark.

This period also saw increased dissemination of information about the geopark to local stakeholders, including full and part-time or seasonal residents, via meetings, folders and an info-point at Dragsholm Castle. Barriers in the process were a good measure of critical opposition to the whole idea on the part of the local press (Nordvestnyt) (Vejre et al. 2015, 122) and local community scepticism, including the challenge of unfolding the new concept of geopark and of making it ‘physical and material’ in response to questions such as ‘where is the entrance to the geopark?’

Following the filing of the application in 2013 and the field visit of two GGN evaluators during the summer of 2014, Geopark Odsherred reached its goal in September 2014. With the achievement of geopark status, the running of the geopark was taken out of municipal hands, and an independent Geopark Odsherred Foundation with a Board was set up on 1 January 2015.

#### 4 Why Geopark Odsherred?

Why are places important, and why do places attempt place branding in the first place? The reason given most often in the place branding literature is that it helps places in the increasingly fierce inter-place competition, for e.g. residents, tourists or investments brought along by an alleged heightened interrelatedness and sameness of places that result from globalization processes. This thinking relies on a discourse of ‘competition’ and ‘winning’ at the expense of other places in that ‘[p]laces, and their range of goods and services, have become increasingly interchangeable’ (Horlings and Marsden 2014, 5). In other words, place branding is seen as a zero-sum game (Warnaby et al. 2015, 244), and from this perspective, especially rural areas are disadvantaged and perceived to face ‘ecological, social and economic vulnerabilities’ (Donner et al. 2016, 274).

This place-less discourse of competitiveness is countered by many (Dale et al. 2008, 268; Horlings and Marsden 2014, 5; Donner et al. 2016, 274), and it is argued that ‘place branding may have social objectives as well as economic ones’ and contribute to ‘[c]ommunity building, local awareness’ and ‘the shaping of local identities’. (Warnaby et al. 2015, 244), and that globalization forces are ‘not best faced by applying outdated and defunct spatial planning zones or through development by opportunistic bids for short-term European funding’ (Thomas Lane et al. 2016, 203).

Instead of relying on a logic that stresses the sameness of places and the competition between them, place-based development, bound in the local context and based on endogenous or place-bound resources, should be given priority to enable especially rural areas and regions to ‘valorise their local assets and exploit hitherto unused resources’ (Donner et al. 2016, 274). It is argued that a one-size-fits-all approach to development is unlikely to be a success (Dale et al. 2008, 267) and

that ‘sustainable development initiatives (...) must foster a sense of place that is possible within the given space’ (269).

Therefore, one answer to the question of why place brands are important and why places attempt branding is that it can be used for place development. In the case of Odsherred, establishing the geopark was indeed intended to foster ‘rural district development in connection with commerce and tourism’, and ‘securing tourism as a possible economic livelihood’ (Geopark Odsherred 2013, 44). As argued in the motivation for joining EGN and GGN (Geopark Odsherred 2013, 44, emphasis added):

Odsherred’s Municipal Council, the Tourist Agency and Business Council all believe that the best way to *achieve sustainable development in Odsherred* is to become a member of the European Geoparks Network, with all the advantages that go with it.

There are other possible answers as to why gathering around a common place brand is a good idea. It may provide ‘*strategic guidance*’ for place development and allow for a process of imagining the future of the locality and also form the ‘*basis for stakeholder cooperation*’ (Ashworth et al. 2015, 4). In addition, place brands may help ‘*maximise positive place experience*’ among residents, visitors and possible investors (Ashworth et al. 2015, 4). All these goals can be found in Geopark Odsherred’s application (2013, 44, emphasis added):

#### **Geopark Odsherred as a brand**

Endorsed by the internationally recognized geopark stamp of approval, which emphasizes high quality, Odsherred’s many small businesses will have the opportunity to market their products under *a single brand*. Joint marketing of products from Geopark Odsherred also helps to give the area *a special identity*, distinguishing it from other parts of Denmark.

#### **Geopark Odsherred as an umbrella.**

Both public and private partners in Odsherred have been working separately for many years on the same things. Recognition as an international geopark will function like *an umbrella* in future collaboration, in which existing and new initiatives can *share direction*. Geopark Odsherred will make it possible in the future for the area to speak with *one common voice* on themes such as sustainable development and protection of landscape assets.

#### **Geopark Odsherred as a local gathering point.**

Recognition by the European Geoparks Network will engender *pride and identity* among the inhabitants of Odsherred and help to increase *knowledge and understanding* of the local cultural heritage.

In addition to the above, yet another reason why place brands are considered important and why places attempt branding is that they may offer ‘*solutions to practical/functional place-related problems*’ (Ashworth et al. 2015, 4). As suggested, the municipality of Odsherred did and does suffer from a number of the problems associated with being a (relatively) peripheral area in Denmark. The application for membership of the geopark network reflects ambition and hope that such place-related problems may be countered by using the place-bound resources of geology and landscape to create one brand with an overarching narrative or

connective storyline (Dominguez Garcia et al. 2013) to promote ‘Odsherred as a locality with a valuable geology’ and make it ‘interesting as a niche in relation to geotourism’ (Geopark Odsherred 2013, 44) (see also Farsani et al. 2011; Miller and Buhay 2014; Han et al. 2018).

There is, of course, a degree of competitive differentiation (Mayes 2008, 130) in aiming for ‘distinguishing Odsherred from other parts of Denmark’ (Geopark Odsherred 2013, 44) and in promoting geotourism or sense-of-place tourism to boost the already important tourism industry further. Overall, however, the application for GGN membership seems to reflect that the ‘exploitation and control over local resources is considered as more important than competition between areas’, as Donner et al. (2016, 288) describe it based on their study of four rural regions in Europe. Equally, the aspirations of the application seem to be ‘directed towards the capacities and deeds of local people and development “from within”’ (Donner et al. 2016, 288). This is also in line with a shift in the development strategies of rural areas identified by Horlings and Marsden (2014, 17) that make them less focused on agricultural-based development and more directed towards a more integrative and place-based approach that involves a wider spectrum of local stakeholders and capacities.

## 5 What Constitutes Geopark Odsherred?

What are the components of place brands, and what resources are used for their construction? Ashworth et al. 2015 (5) reflect on the fact that the most common answer is ‘*promotional tactics and identity claims*’ undertaken by tourism and branding agencies. In practice, this approach to place branding, which is intended to promote places as clearly distinguishable from others, is often seen to do the exact opposite (Warnaby et al. 2015, 245).

A less managerial and wider and more nuanced perspective is that place brands consist of the multitude of ‘*associations with place-making elements*’ that together shape a sense of place, a view that ‘assumes a much stronger link between the place and the brand’ (Ashworth et al. 2015, 5) and offers a more complex and dynamic perspective on what constitutes a place brand. A related approach sees place brands as a collection of ‘*narratives or “place stories”*’ that reflect the meaning(s) of places and are formed collectively and interactively, or co-created (Ashworth et al. 2015, 5).

Geopark Odsherred takes its point of departure in embedded or place-bound resources that cannot be (re)moved: the geology. The landscape was formed during the latest (Weichsel) ice-age 17,000 years ago when the ice advanced from the east, creating depressions (such as Siddinge Fjord and Lammefjord) and three ridges, collectively known as the Odsherred arches (now captured in the logo of Geopark Odsherred, see Sect. 1). This type of glacial landscape formation is illustrated in an exemplary way in Odsherred and therefore found its way into twentieth century school wall charts across Denmark.



Odsherred used to be a peninsula joined to the rest of Zealand by a small strip of land, which was the strategic position of Dragsholm Castle. At the initiative of baron Zytphen-Adeler from Dragsholm, the mid-nineteenth century saw the beginning of land reclamation for agricultural purposes by the draining of glacial depressions such as Lammefjord, which eventually produced some of the best farmland in Odsherred.

Geopark Odsherred's 355 square kilometres present a varied landscape of 60% ice-age geology and 40% later landscape formations, the reclaimed land constituting 20% of the total area. Geology and landscape provide a source of as well as a setting for staging narratives and place stories about past and present life in Odsherred, centred around **cultural history**, **local produce** and **art**. Pre-historic monuments, the Bronze-age Sun Chariot, Dragsholm Castle and the medieval Næsholm castle ruin, all form part of the cultural history of Odsherred, as do stories about life in the many holiday homes and about the early pioneers who, following the reclamation of Lammefjord, settled 'on the fjord' to begin the process of converting it into the farmland that today produces carrots, potatoes and other root crops.

Carrots and potatoes from Lammefjord and other reclaimed areas have achieved Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status, which adds to the story about Odsherred as a favourable 'terroir' (Dale et al. 2008, 267) for producing quality crops and especially vegetables that are showcased during an annual Grand Cru food festival featuring a carrot 'tasting' and choice of Grand Cru carrot and potato of the year. In recent years, this story has been sustained by developments such as a budding local wine production and Dragsholm Castle's status as a high-end hotel and gourmet restaurant that relies on local produce and which obtained a Michelin star in 2017. Potatoes also form the basis of a local production of vodka (Nordic Soil), just as the numerous varieties of seaweed that can be harvested along the coastline are now delivered to restaurants and made into various products by Dansk Tang [Danish Seaweed]. It can all be summed up as 'food with identity' or 'sense-of-place food', traceable to the locality.<sup>3</sup>

The third theme that interacts with the landscape to generate stories about Odsherred is art. The landscape has attracted artists since the mid-nineteenth century, including its own 'colony' or group of Odsherred painters who came to live and work there in the 1930s and 1940s and were associated with and defined by the landscape, just like the other (earlier) Danish groups of painters from Skagen, Funen and Bornholm. Present-day Odsherred also boasts a large number of local artists, who open their workshops during Whitsun weekend for an 'Art Trail' which takes visitors through the landscape.

Together with the geology, the themes of cultural history, local produce and art can be said to make Odsherred as a place and conjure up associations with place-making elements to create a sense of (a special) place. As was realized early on, the landscape of Odsherred has narrative potential (Veje et al. 2015, 110) to tell a more nuanced and multifaceted story than brands that make claims to (re)presenting the

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<sup>3</sup>See Therkelsen (2017) for a discussion of the potential of creating locally situated as opposed to generic food place brands in four Danish coastal destinations, including Odsherred.

essence of a place (Hansen 2010; Ren and Blichfeldt 2011). As a place brand, it does not lend itself easily to traditional promotional tactics and identity claims but relies on being enacted and performed in the landscape.

This reliance on local enactment has led to the establishment of the first 7 km of a Ridge (hiking) Trail, described as the ‘backbone’ of Geopark Odsherred.<sup>4</sup> The findspot in Trundholm Mose [bog] of the Bronze-age Sun Chariot, exhibited at the National Museum of Denmark and featured both on Danish 1000-kroner notes and Odsherred’s municipal coat of arms (see Sect. 1), has been developed into a special site and a stop on a 250-km ice-age biking trail. Yet another initiative is a visitors’ field and theme route centred round the reclamation of Lammefjord and the local vegetable production, where retired and still active farmers share their personal and professional stories during the summer season.

While these places and stories all enact and communicate aspects of Geopark Odsherred and what it is about, it is less easy to sum up the geopark discursively in a few words. One way of doing that, which is used in folders by the geopark, is:

Geopark Odsherred = all the things we are proud of

This evidently suggests an inclusive pride of place and identification with the locality, but it also begs the question: who are ‘we’?

## 6 Who Constructs Geopark Odsherred?

Who are the agents of place brand formation, and who actually constructs place brands or influences their construction? The traditional answer to these questions is that place brands are constructed top-down by the organizations and ‘*institutions that undertake place branding projects*’ (Ashworth et al. 2015, 5), be they public, private or voluntary. This has been challenged by a bottom-up argument that ‘place brands are formed by individual *place consumers who make place-related decisions*’ or by groups of individuals (Ashworth et al. 2015, 5) such as residents, tourists or investors. This perspective emphasizes that the institutions and agencies who believe that they are creating and communicating a place brand do no such thing. Instead, stakeholders contribute to (co)-creating the place brand(s), while place users base their perceptions on personal experience and input from family and friends rather than relying on pre-packaged messages (Therkelsen 2015). In the words of Aitken and Campelo (2011, 916): ‘Understanding that brand meanings are socially constructed, culturally dependent, and communally “owned” promotes a radical shift in understanding brands and brand ownership’.

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<sup>4</sup>See *Stedet Tæller: Perspektiver og Erfaringer* [Place Matters: Perspectives and Insights] (2017), which accounts for 36 projects across Denmark funded by the philanthropic foundation Realdania, and aimed at leveraging *place-bound* resources to develop peripheral regions.

Designation as UNESCO Global Geopark rests on ambitions to generate local involvement and community support, to promote pride of place and local empowerment, and to rely on a bottom-up process to achieve economic and cultural development. Fulfilling these ambitions is no mean task and did indeed prove a challenge for the aspiring geopark. In her industrial PhD thesis, Paya Hauch Fenger (2018) argues that, in working towards designation as geopark, the Odsherred municipality

tried to establish a geopark primarily through the establishment of dissemination signs, designation of geopark sites, and through a strictly coordinated visual and oral narrative—without active involvement of citizens as co-designers,

but also that staging ‘a festival can be used as a platform for the involvement of citizens in the construction of a geopark’ (Fenger 2018, 6, translations by author).

The initial thinking was that local citizens were to be informed of, rather than involved in, the geopark development to enable them to communicate the geopark concept and narrative, which essentially made them ‘passive recipients of a didactic project’ (Fenger 2018, 170), where the strengths and qualities of the area would be defined and constructed top-down. While locals did notice the new signs in the landscape and read about the establishment of the geopark in the paper, the attempt by the municipality and what might be seen as elite stakeholders to stage and orchestrate **their** local area and community as a geopark met with a good measure of scepticism and opposition (Fenger 2018; see also Stubbs and Warnaby 2015, 102).

The first geopark festival in Odsherred was an attempt to counter that scepticism and to use local curiosity about the project to engage citizens in the creation of the geopark. With Paya Hauch Fenger as project coordinator, it was planned and organized in private homes and local communities during the first half of 2014 and took place in July. The festival programme stresses the inclusion and involvement of local stakeholders (Geopark Odsherred 2014, translations by author and emphasis added):

[The] Geopark Festival has been organized by citizens, second home owners and visitors who are all attached to Odsherred, who believe that it is a very special place, who are proud to live and visit here and willing to spend time and effort on sharing it with others.

The programme also underlines that it has been a voluntary, civil society process reflecting ownership and willingness to engage, despite the fact that ‘there is no money’:

Over and over it has turned out that a lot of people in Odsherred are willing to get involved without any, or very little, remuneration because **we** think it is fun. Because **we** can. And because it is **our** festival, which is fantastic and very touching.

The festival was not devoid of tensions between various groups of stakeholders, such as culture professionals and ordinary citizens, as to the right to define the geopark and as to who was entitled to act as gatekeepers of what events went into the official programme. Nevertheless, the first geopark festival served the purpose of engaging local people and involving local stakeholders in constructing Geopark

Odsherred, shifting the role of some local citizens and communities from that of consumers to producers of culture (see also Therkelsen 2015).

Since 2014, the Geopark festival has become a recurring event, but whether quite the same degree of enthusiasm and co-creation has been achieved in ensuing festivals is perhaps doubtful. Some events, such as the organization of an amateur biking ride in the Odsherred hills (Geopark Bjerg Grand Prix), have of necessity been professionalized and run by external partners, but every year the Geopark Secretariat invites ideas and proposals from local producers of events. This is seen by the secretariat as facilitating rather than controlling the planning process, but it does not mean that even now, all local citizens have heard about the geopark, or are necessarily engaged or interested. As Paya Hauch Fenger put it during the defence of her PhD thesis in November 2018: ‘My hairdresser may read about the geopark in the paper, but it is nothing to do with her’.

According to Jakob Walløe Hansen (personal communication), geologist at the Geopark Secretariat, the ambition to broaden the engagement may only be achievable in the long term when today’s schoolchildren in Odsherred grow up. From 2014 to 2018, the children in Odsherred’s schools have been through a Geokids programme, devised and supervised by two local artists, which has introduced them to the geological development and cultural history of the area and engaged them in activities such as preparing a dish from local produce and creating their own artwork in the form of a mask made from ice-age clay. The approximately 3500 masks created by the children have been fitted on iron poles and placed in the hills near the village of Veddinge, where they form an impressive sight in the landscape and add a new setting for stories of Odsherred and the geopark. Educational activities for the public of all ages, but especially children, are a central prerequisite for a UNESCO Global Geopark, and it is hoped that Geokids and similar projects may foster ‘pride of place’ and identity-building in the future generations.



Another way of stimulating identification and engaging local communities is a competition to become Village of the Year through a local community makeover project. The competition, which started in 2013, has itself undergone a makeover to anchor it more firmly in the geopark context. Three local communities, which may include holiday home communities, compete for funding to work with their very local place and its resources to e.g. improve accessibility to the surrounding landscape by establishing a path or to showcase in some other way the link between the community and one or more of the other central themes of the geopark: cultural history, local produce and art. In contrast to the early designation of geopark sites top-down, the competition invites local communities to define and create their own geo-sites bottom-up.

The winner of the competition becomes Geopark Village or Community of the year and joins Geopark Odsherred's network of partners that includes local businesses and organizations to ensure a broad base of stakeholders who work jointly in developing and branding the geopark.

Finally, the Folkemøde (democratic festival) in Odsherred, first organized in September 2017 and modelled on the (Danish) people's democratic festival held in the island of Bornholm in June, provides opportunities for showcasing and discussing the geopark and its future amongst a number of other debates about life and democracy in Odsherred. Again, many locals may not attend, nor feel that they have a stake in it or that it is anything to do with them, but in response to the question of who constructs Geopark Odsherred, it seems fair to argue that openings are there to contribute to its construction.

## 7 How Is Geopark Odsherred Managed?

How should place brand management be understood and undertaken, and what influences it? This fourth and final question relates to the practice of place management and essentially sums up aspects of the three other questions. Ashworth et al. 2015 (6–7) suggest that place brand management is often seen as merely promotional activities to attract place users or, in a slightly wider perspective, as image or reputation management to re-image a place in order ‘to “correct” a negative image or to increase awareness of the place’ (6). This suggests a top-down approach and is related to a critical view of place management as a power exercise serving elite interests. As Lichrou et al. 2017 (1) warn, ‘[p]lace branding produces, reproduces, circulates and, perhaps, imposes place imaginaries that affect the lives of real people, reconstructing and reinforcing narratives of power’.

A contrasting view is that place brand management has at least the potential to be a bottom-up exercise in community-building, focused on internal audiences and aimed at identifying directions for the future and at increasing place attachment. It rests on the argument that, in contrast to consumer brands, place brands cannot be ‘owned’, and that ‘asking who owns the place brand is the wrong question’, the right question possibly being ‘who has a stake in the place brand’ (Stubbs and Warnaby 2015, 103), which means that those responsible for place brand development and management ‘should be open to the widest possible stakeholder participation in terms of brand development’ (115).

Evidently, the Geopark Odsherred place brand is managed and used for image and promotional purposes by the Geopark Foundation, Odsherred Municipality, Visit Odsherred and a number of other stakeholders and partners, and the fact that the geopark and the municipality are coterminous may be seen as a strength, as suggested by Pasquinelli (2010, 570) in that ‘any branding initiative should be undertaken and managed at a geographical level which is politically in charge of and accountable for the developmental policy that is the backbone of the brand’.

The initiative and drive to establish the geopark originated with the Odsherred municipality when geopark designation came to be seen as a strategy and platform for addressing socio-economic development and regeneration issues. Today, the geopark is managed by the Foundation and Secretariat in close cooperation with the municipality, and it is used for image management, such as promoting Odsherred as an attractive place to live, visit, set up business and work, with the present (2017–2020) municipal settlement strategy focusing on attracting active empty nesters, young families with children and entrepreneurs.

Given that tourism makes such a major contribution to Odsherred’s economy, providing one third of private jobs and adding 100,000 residents and visitors to a population of 33,000 during the summer season, the geopark also features prominently in promotional activities for potential visitors and tourists ([www.visitodsherred.dk](http://www.visitodsherred.dk)), and it is the explicit goal of the Geopark Board to enhance further awareness of the geopark among full and part-time residents and visitors in the future (Geopark Odsherred 2018).

There is no doubt a substantial element of a top-down, tightly orchestrated approach to the management of Geopark Odsherred but, at the same time, the first four years of the geopark reflect that it has been combined with a more consultative and bottom-up process to enhance community-building and involve and engage various internal audiences or stakeholder groups that include school children, local organizations and businesses, and the owners of the approximately 24,000 second homes, many of whom have a high degree of attachment to the area.

So far, the geopark seems to have delivered on the elements discussed by Dominguez Garcia et al. (2013) to query ‘how place branding—as a means to create place distinctiveness and attractiveness—can be combined with an endogenous approach’ (137). The nurturing of an internal brand and connective storyline or narrative based on the landscape, cultural history, local produce and art has increased the visibility of Odsherred both internally and externally, led to the development of new products and services, and given rise to a reorganization and coordination of activities (Dominguez Garcia et al. 2013).

## 8 Conclusion: Four More Years

The successful application for another four-year period as UNESCO Global Geopark suggests that Geopark Odsherred has delivered on the promises made in the original application, which was confirmed by a self-evaluation report and a field visit by two (new) evaluators. The two evaluators (from Canada and China), who visited in August 2018, recommended that Geopark Odsherred be given a ‘green card’ to continue and even found that the strengths and achievements of the geopark were understated in the self-evaluation report.

While the Geopark Foundation’s strategy for 2019 to 2024 lists many achievements and projects that have been realized during the first four years, it also acknowledges that there is still some way to go to realize ‘the potential the UNESCO designation entails’ (Geopark Odsherred 2018, 9, translations by author). Communicating the concept of geoparks continues to be a challenge, as is knowledge and ownership of the geopark, especially among local residents (Geopark Odsherred 2018, 6–7).

Even if the Foundation has managed to attract external funding for specific projects, it is still very dependent on municipal co-financing, and therefore needs to facilitate and provide platforms for sustainable development in and of Odsherred—and to be seen locally to be making that contribution. As stated in the strategy, ‘[t]he Geopark contributes to the “re-invention” of Odsherred, providing us with a clear profile as a municipality and place. This may result in an increase of the number of new residents and visitors to provide the basis for boosting incomes and job creation’, and, in close cooperation with the municipality and other local partners, ‘to facilitate sustainable business development and jobs that are not threatened by relocation and social dumping’ (Geopark Odsherred 2018, 9).

The strategy for the next 4 years is based on the vision—and challenge—of working with the UN sustainable development goals relevant to Odsherred, the challenge being to translate the global UN goals into local action and ownership. A first attempt was made in the Geopark Festival 2019, where three of the 17 goals were in focus: sustainable communities, growth and consumption.

Finally, it is the Board's vision and ambition that, by 2024, Geopark Odsherred is recognized as one of the leading geoparks in Europe, cooperating and sharing its insights with emerging Danish and international geoparks.

Based on the experience of Geopark Odsherred, this chapter argues that geoparks should be considered complex and multifaceted place brands and that working to obtain geopark designation constitutes a place branding platform that allows for stakeholder inclusion and engagement by offering an overarching place narrative. The 2019–2024 geopark strategy (2018, 1) sums it up as follows:

Taking their point of departure in a special landscape with a unique geological heritage, geoparks work with partnerships, identity, dissemination and research to create sustainable development.

Arguably, this might be rephrased as working inclusively with place-bound resources to achieve sustainable place-based development and a viable place brand—or 'leveraging landscape'.

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