Gemorphosite mapping: aims, publics and methodological proposals
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Abstract
Related to the raise of the awareness of the importance of the Earth heritage, geomorphosites receive increasing attention from the scientific community. Assessment methods, classification and conservation strategies have been developed to safeguard the geomorphological heritage for present and future generations. On the other hand, Earth heritage offers opportunities to develop educational and recreational programs as well as tourism projects. Various interpretive supports and local development projects have been engendered in the past few years to promote geoheritage.

Be it for the assessment, conservation or promotion of geomorphosites, maps are valuable from many standpoints. They can provide fundamental data for detailed geomorphosite description, serve as visual communication tools helping to guide the selection process in defining protection priority or supporting Earth heritage promotion and interpretation.

This study reviews the main achievements and the objectives yet to be accomplished in the field of geomorphosite mapping and proposes a general framework for the mapping of geomorphosites that takes into account the different aims and publics. The main focus is on mapping geomorphosites for non-specialists in the field of Earth heritage promotion (Geotourism). In this context, maps are often employed to show itineraries or points of interest. Like a scheme or a diagram, a map can also be used as a method for visualising geoscientific information. This function is particularly important since some processes, which contributed to the formation of a geomorphosite or a geomorphological landscape are no longer or not always clearly visible in the landscape. In this case, maps become interpretive media that serve popularisation purposes.

Mapping for non-specialists holds the challenging task to ensure the information transfer between the cartographer and the user. We therefore focus on both the implementation of the map by the cartographer (which information? which visualisation?) and the interpretation of the map by the user (effectiveness of the knowledge transfer). The research is based on empirical studies carried out in the Maderan valley (Canton of Uri) and in classes of the Cantons of Uri and Tessin that aim to gain knowledge about the familiarity and interests of non-specialists for geoheritage as well as about their map reading skills. The final objective is to formulate methodological proposals for geomorphosite mapping for interpretive purpose.