



A new network on mountain geomorphosites

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Since about two decades, the value of geoheritage in mountain areas has been re-discovered in various parts of the Alps (Reynard et al., 2010) and other mountain ranges, and various initiatives (protection of sites worthy of protection, inventories of geomorphosites, geotourist promotion, creation of geoparks, etc.) to conserve or promote mountain geoheritage have been developed.

As mountains are recognized as natural areas with a very high geodiversity, and at the same time as areas with a great potential for the development of soft tourism, a new Network on Mountain Geomorphosites was created in October 2012 in conclusion to a workshop organized by the University of Lausanne (Switzerland). The Network is open to all researchers active in geoheritage, geoconservation and geotourism studies in mountain areas. For the first years research will focus on three main issues:

- Geoheritage and natural processes: Mountains are very sensitive areas where climate change impacts are very acute and where active geomorphological processes rapidly modify landscapes. It is hypothesized that geoheritage will be highly impacted by global change in the future. Nevertheless, at the moment, very little research is carried out on the evolution of landforms recognized as geoheritage and no specific management measures have been developed. Also, the tourist activities related to geoheritage, especially the trails developed to visit geomorphosites, are sensitive to geomorphological processes in mountain areas in a context of global change, and need, therefore, to be better addressed by geomorphologists.

- Geotourism: During the last two decades numerous initiatives have developed geotourism in mountain areas. Nevertheless, studies addressing issues such as the needs of the potential public(s) of geotourism, the evaluation of the quality of the geotourist products developed by scientists and/or local authorities, and the assessment of the economic benefits of geotourism for the regional economy are quite scarce. There is, therefore, a real need to fill the gap of empirical data on the social-economical impacts of geotourism, and on the relationship between the geotourist products developed by the scientific community and the expectations of the public and the tourist sector. The collaboration with social scientists (economists, sociologists) will help to fulfill this objective.

- Environmental education: During the last years, a lot of work has been done on the assessment of geoheritage and the selection of sites worthy of promotion and/or protection but few attempts have addressed the question of using geoheritage to communicate on more general issues such as the dynamics and sensitivity of mountain environments or the impacts of climate change on mountain areas. It is, therefore, necessary to develop communication and learning methods – in particular by using new communication technologies – to improve environmental education based on geoheritage site promotion for several kinds of publics, in particular tourists (to improve their

awareness of the sensitivity of mountain environments) and scholars.

These three research objectives will be fulfilled by the development of common research, in particular cross-border case studies, and by the elaboration of specific courses for Ph.D. and master students. Collaboration with existing mountain networks (scientific, nature parks, etc.) is expected.