



Geosite inventories in World Heritage sites: essential for protection and management

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Geosite inventories are ways of formally describing, characterising and valuing a geological feature or a landscape. UNESCO Global Geoparks have the obligation to present a comprehensive geosite inventory when they submit nominations. World Heritage sites have a rigorous nomination procedure, with a comparative analysis of sites. However this does not, as yet, require a geosite inventory of geological (criterion viii) sites, even if similar types of inventories are already required for ecological sites.

As the geosite characterisation, with geosite maps of a property, is the fundamental way for establishing the nature of an area, it would seem that this process should be more widely used (e.g. at World Heritage sites).

To assess what use geosite inventories could bring to especially World Heritage sites, we take some special examples, such as the recently inscribed Tectonic Arena of the Chaîne des Puys-Limagne Fault and the adjoining city of Clermont-Ferrand. We look at the geological description of the sites, as presented in existing documents (with no explicit geosite inventory) and compare with developing inventories and maps. We show that the inventory and its spatial map enhances the knowledge of the property, raising and clarifying its perceived quality. The mapped geosite inventory highlights not only the value of the site, but helps to consolidate identification of threats posed to the site, allowing for better protection and management. Geosite inventories and geosite maps of a property can improve the nomination process by providing a more solid base for comparison and protection. Even if this has not been done before inscription, the exercise is highly valuable after inscription, as it consolidates the knowledge of the site and can orientate management and protection work.

Sites remaining without such a characterisation remain at risk of being not adequately understood, or being damaged by unsustainable development. Sites with such a mapped geosite inventory have the potential to be better understood, better managed and better protected.