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Mapping Lava Flows from Satellite Remote Sensing Imagery through Random Forest Classification

Long LI^{1,2}, Carmen SOLANA³, Frank CANTERS⁴, Matthieu KERVYN¹

1. Department of Geography & Earth System Science, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Pleinlaan 2, Brussels 1050, Belgium (corresponding author: long.li@vub.ac.be)
2. School of Environmental Science and Spatial Informatics, China University of Mining and Technology, Daxue Road 1, Xuzhou 221116, China
3. School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Portsmouth, Burnaby Building, Burnaby Road, Portsmouth PO1 3QL, UK
4. Cartography and GIS Research Group, Department of Geography, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Pleinlaan 2, Brussels 1050, Belgium

Abstract

Mapping lava flows using satellite images is an important application of remote sensing in volcanology. Several volcanoes have been mapped through remote sensing using a wide range of data, from optical to thermal infrared and radar images, using techniques such as manual mapping, supervised/unsupervised classification, and elevation subtraction. So far, spectral-based mapping applications mainly focus on the use of traditional pixel-based classifiers, without much investigation into the added value of object-based approaches and into advantages of using machine learning algorithms. In this study, Nyamuragira, characterized by a series of more than 20 overlapping lava flows erupted over the last century, was used as a case study. The random forest classifier was tested to map lava flows based on pixels and objects. Image classification was conducted for the 20 individual flows and for 8 groups of flows of similar age using Landsat 8 imagery and a DEM of the volcano, both at 30-meter spatial resolution. Results show that object-based classification produces maps with continuous and homogeneous lava surfaces, in agreement with the physical characteristics of lava flows, while lava flows mapped through the pixel-based classification are heterogeneous and fragmented including much “salt and pepper noise”. In terms of accuracy, both pixel-based and object-based classification performs well but

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