

Social volcanology meets geoheritage

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Increasingly, volcanologists are including humanistic and social scientific methods in their research, especially when the aim is to not only understand the physical characteristics of a volcanic system, but to reduce the vulnerability of people living at risk (Barclay et al., 2015; Donovan, 2010). Donovan (2010), for instance, reflects on how to ‘do social volcanology’ and it has been argued that understanding the culture of populations at risk is crucial for reducing vulnerability (Mercer et al., 2012). This argument has subsequently extended to include past volcanism and how it articulates with historical and archaeological understandings of culture, i.e. geo-cultural heritage (Riede, 2015). Notably, in cultural heritage research, it is well established that people draw a great deal of individual and collective identity from their past (e.g. Sommer, 2000) – and, importantly, this identity construction also motivates action. Based on field and archival work, we here develop the geo-cultural notion of ‘co-volcanic’ societies where people co-exist – more or less sustainably – with nearby volcanoes. We extend this perspective into the deep past by conducting three comparative case studies: La Soufrière /Soufrière Hills (Lesser Antilles), Vesuvius (Italy), and the Laacher See (Germany). Each of these volcanoes represents a major threat, but the ways in which they articulate with their surrounding communities are very different. In bringing together social volcanology and geoheritage, we bring ideas from cultural heritage studies – especially dark heritage and dark tourism (McAtackney, 2014; Strange and Kempa, 2003) – into play in order to explore how the combination of cultural and geological histories can provide an improved platform for outreach, sustainable and safe tourism, and not least for reducing vulnerability.

References

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