

“WE ARE THE WORLD”: TELLING GREAT STORIES ABOUT OUR URBAN GEOHERITAGE.

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ABSTRACT: In their famous song for Africa called, “We are the World”, Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie wrote “It’s true we’ll make a better day.....by turning stones to bread”. This was their plea for the future of human civilisation. It was also a message for sustainable development. The population of our planet is growing at a rate unparalleled in human history. Most of the population in our world now lives in urban centres and the pressures on the planet and its cities for water, space, biological conservation, resources and harmonious liveability are unprecedented.

Our cities are built on natural, geological landscapes. These same landscapes have been sustained for millions of years against the ravages of geological change, but will they last and support us into the future, when our anthropogenic advance is threatening the future stability of nations? Our climates are changing, our water supply is threatened, our resources are running out, and the likelihood of geological catastrophes is increasing as we spread our urban centres into hazardous regions of geological instability.

As interpreters know well, stories told about places with passion will help their audience not only to understand their importance but also to love, and wish to care for, and therefore conserve them. Telling great stories is a way of saying that we can interpret and appreciate our heritage and culture. Likewise telling great stories about our geological heritage or more simply “geointerpretation” is the way that we can inform, educate and even entertain the public about the wonders and critical importance of the earth system on which we live.

There are great stories to tell about geology in urban areas. From active volcanoes such as Mt. Vesuvius in Naples, to the earliest recognition of magmatism in Edinburgh, our geological tales are a gripping story of our past, present and future. Magnificent glaciers once carved through Adelaide and they have only recently retreated from Vancouver. Mountain building effects of fault generated earthquakes regularly shake the inhabitants of San Francisco, Santiago and Tokyo.

If we tell good stories about our world – the geological world – using banana benders, overflowing sandwiches and toilet rolls to bring recognition and humour to geological tales of tremors, tsunamis and time, we will as Michael sang, truly “make a better day”. Good stories, like good advice, will show that as geologists, “We are the World”!

KEYWORDS – Urbanisation, Sustainability, Geotourism, Geoheritage, Geoconservation, Geointerpretation