



Geoethics: the responsibility of geoscientists in making society more aware of natural hazards

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The damage due to geological hazards, with frequent loss of human lives, is not entirely avoidable, but can be greatly reduced through the correct land use that respects the natural processes, through prevention and mitigation efforts, through an effective and correct information to the population. Often not responsible behaviors by politicians, as well as the need for heavy investments and the lack of information make difficult the solution of problems and slow the path to a proper management of the environment, the only way to provide a significant mitigation of damages of the geological disasters.

In many countries (including Italy) the importance of the Geoscientists's role is not yet sufficiently recognized, despite it is evident the necessity of a greater attention to geological problems by policy makers and public opinion, as well as a more adequate information about natural risks to the society. The commitment to ensure prevention and mitigation of geological hazards must be considered an ethical value and duty for those who possess the appropriate knowledge and skills.

Within the above context, Geoscientists have a key role to play as experts in analyzing and managing the territory's vulnerability: they must take responsibility to share and communicate their knowledge more effectively with all private and public stakeholders involved, paying attention to providing balanced information about risks and addressing inevitable uncertainties in natural hazard mapping, assessment, warning, and forecasting. But Geoscientists need to be more aware of their ethical responsibility, of their social duty to serve the society, care about and protect territory, and to facilitate the desirable shift from a culture of emergency to a culture of prevention.

The search for balance between short-term economic issues and wider social impacts from natural hazards is an increasingly urgent need. Geoethics must be central to society's responses to natural hazard threats.