



From science to decision-making: taking the risk to communicate on risks

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Geoscientists and decision-makers have the same responsibility toward the society: reducing the damaging consequences induced by natural phenomena. They have to work together, geoscientists to improve the knowledge and decision-makers to take the “best” decision, both to design and implement balanced solutions, both to communicate. Feedback shows that if the collaboration between them has already improved, a lot has still to be done, especially in terms of communication; endless litany, geoscientists don’t communicate in the right way! In a hyperspecialized technological and segmented society with sophisticated methods of communication, geoscientists don’t use appropriate tools and terminology. It’s true, and a lot of examples can be shown that highlight this! Risks is based on complex concepts, on notions that are poorly understood, even by scientists themselves, especially the concepts of probability and occurrence of phenomena. But the problem rest as well on the role and on the responsibility of the geoscientists.

Risk management experts address geosciences and technology to identify problems and define protection, including prohibitive measures (such as not allowing building in hazardous areas). Policy makers and local planners want to know where to develop territories. On one hand the identification of problems, on the other hand the needs of solutions. Dialectic is not the same.

When responsibility, money and image are the three main pillars of decision-making, long-term modeling and uncertainty, are the basic ones for geosciences. In our participative democracies people want to be actor of the development of their own territories; they want more freedom, more protection and less tax. Face to unrealistic political answers geoscientists have to explain and convince. It’s not possible to gain on everything and some are going to loose. Shall geoscientists let decision-makers communicate on topics they hardly understand? No. Shall geoscientists communicate on sociology, economy, politics...? Yes. But they have to learn how to better communicate, with decision-makers and with the population. They have to address new domains; they need and have to develop new approaches and new tools for communicating; they finally have to take responsibilities and risk!

The presentation will address the general problems of communication between geoscientists, decision-makers and population and propose approaches and examples to reduce the gap.