



Geotopics in the press - gaining more importance

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Not too long ago, geological themes were almost completely neglected by the general public and, hence, by the mass media, particularly widely distributed newspapers. This has changed considerably during the last couple of years. The reasons are manifold even if we neglect last year's eruption of the volcano in Iceland and its consequences for the air traffic. Availability of resources affects more directly than in former times every consumer. National economies are not self sustaining any more. Trade of geo resources is global and Central European countries are dependent on Russian natural gas, Middle Eastern crude oil, Coltan from Congo but also on rare earths from China. More and rarer commodities are essential for modern life, e.g. for electronic components. This not only fosters the formation of monopolies but also directs the focus towards political, social and environmental conditions that are linked to the condition of the production of these commodities ("blood diamonds"). Domestically, in particular public awareness of environmental impact of production and even exploration of deposits has become definitely one of the most important issues in the course of the development of projects. Here, media and in particular the press have – even on a local level – an influence on public acceptance. A prominent example of this development is the underground storage of CO₂. After a long period of occasional and fairly neutral coverage, the topic has moved to front pages even of more popular newspapers. Currently, they mainly provide a platform for groups opposing the technology because "Bad news is good news." Obviously, the level of personal concern by "bad news" is one of the main drivers for non-acceptance. Sometimes, it becomes obvious that particular topics are launched e.g. by interested stakeholders bringing already publicly available information all of a sudden on the information market giving it an aura of disclosing a secret.

In many cases, geological or geophysical topics are difficult to convey due to their complexity. Most people have less experience or access to their causal relationships. This makes it easier to load the coverage with irrational fears. On the other hand, new requirements of dealing with the public also demand a learning process from scientific personnel in research as well as in the industry. To bridge the gap between public and science will be a particular and increasing challenge for journalists. The demand of journalists with a background in natural science will definitely increase with the degree of complexity of topics that have to be conveyed to the general public. A well founded but at the same time comprehensible presentation of geo-scientific tasks could definitely rationalize discussions.