



Earthquake ethics through scientific knowledge, historical memory and societal awareness: the experience of direct internet information.

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The experience of collection of data on earthquake effects and diffusion of information to people, carried on through the site “haisentitoilterremoto.it” (didyoufeelit) managed by the Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia (INGV), has evidenced a constantly growing interest by Italian citizens. Started in 2007, the site has collected more than 520,000 compiled intensity questionnaires, producing intensity maps of almost 6,000 earthquakes. One of the most peculiar feature of this experience is constituted by a bi-directional information exchange. Every person can record observed effects of the earthquake and, at the same time, look at the generated maps. Seismologists, on the other side, can find each earthquake described in real time through its effects on the whole territory. In this way people, giving punctual information, receive global information from the community, mediated and interpreted by seismological knowledge. The relationship amongst seismologists, mass media and civil society is, thus, deep and rich. The presence of almost 20,000 permanent subscribers distributed on the whole Italian territory, alerted in case of earthquake, has reinforced the participation: the subscriber is constantly informed by the seismologists, through e-mail, about events occurred in his-her area, even if with very small magnitude. The “alert” service provides the possibility to remember that earthquakes are a phenomenon continuously present, on the other hand it shows that high magnitude events are very rare. This kind of information is helpful as it is fully complementary to that one given by media.

We analyze the effects of our activity on society and mass media. The knowledge of seismic phenomena is present in each person, having roots on fear, idea of death and destruction, often with the deep belief of very rare occurrence. This position feeds refusal and repression. When a strong earthquake occurs, surprise immediately changes into shock and desperation. A positive approach to the topic should comprise: 1) a better knowledge of seismic activity, 2) acceptance of earthquakes as a constant presence, 3) understanding concepts related to probability, geological time, rare occurrence of catastrophic events, 4) disposition toward the correct solutions like buildings reinforcements, earthquake simulation activities, etc. Our activity has social and ethical implications, that have to be analyzed in order to find an equilibrium between alarmism and hazard undervaluation.