



Volcanic risk: the responsibility of science in communication

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The knowledge of the places where we live comes both from the experience handed down from one generation to the other and from scientific knowledge. In some cases, natural risks are "invisible", such as earthquakes, in some other cases, natural risks are seemingly "invisible", such as a wall in danger of collapse or a valley in a flood zone. And besides all this, there is volcanic risk, where the power of the forces of nature appears in all its beauty and majesty.

The possibility to see volcanoes, to perceive their changes, to observe them closely and the need to live with them, makes it very important for the population living in these areas to have an adequate knowledge of the risk, a knowledge that should be based on scientific research.

In Italy the experience of the Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia in the Vesuvio area, in the Aeolian Islands and around Etna shows how vital it is to make people aware of volcanic risk. Thanks to the support of the scientific community, the population can develop the best possible coexistence with volcanoes and with the risk they represent.

These are extreme situations, but they are the starting point for educational and informative activities continuing to evolve and upgrade in parallel to the availability of new technologies and media and the progress of research that INGV has been conducting for years through specific projects.

The scientific community and individual researchers have the ethical duty to share with the community the knowledge on risk, a responsibility that becomes especially important in those areas affected by volcanic risk. It is from this educational action that depends on the awareness of the populations with regard to the risk they are exposed to, that results in a responsible behavior in case of emergency, and that becomes the main variable for the safety of communities coexisting with active volcanoes.