



Direct interaction with the public: making it a “serious game” with role playing

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Researchers have an important role in the societal process of understanding and evaluating new technologies, but their role is often undermined by the lack of appropriate contexts where a constructive dialogue can take place, thus leading to awareness of issues and correct perception of scientific data. In the case of geoscience the problem can be even harsher, due to the often limited education on the subject, complexity of the imaginative relationship with the underground, lack of social shared representations of key geological features.

This contribution reports about an interactive session organised during the 2012 ESOF – European Science Open Forum <http://esof2012.org/> for the FP7 project RISCS – ‘Research into Impacts and Safety in CO₂ Storage’ <http://www.riscs-co2.eu/> and in collaboration with the FP7 project CGS Europe <http://www.cgseurope.net/>. The session saw the participation of about 100 people.

The RISCS project is a European project which has explored the potential environmental impacts of the geological storage of CO₂, as a technology for abating CO₂ emissions. The session was meant to introduce the participants to the information produced within the RISCS project on possible impacts of CO₂ on onshore and offshore ecosystems and human population. The objective was to experiment a process for facilitating, through dialogue and self-discovery, an understanding of the particular issues that need to be considered when evaluating the potential impacts of CO₂ storage. It was also an opportunity to test an innovative and original format for science communication, aimed at involving a large group of participants in interactive activities with experts, based on the Role Playing Game pattern.

The structure of the workshop included an exploration of participants’ questions on and interest in CCS impacts, small group interaction with researchers and a final feed-back from each group to the plenary. Each group of about 10 participants was provided the opportunity to interact with scientists; written materials such as scientific brochures were made available for each participant and one computer per table. 13 researchers were present of which 2 social researchers, who managed the session. The others took turns at the tables, at regular intervals, participating to the discussion and providing information.

Before the workshop, preparation activities took place through group work, to share and define the outcomes of the research, in relation to the objective of their communication to a not academic public. It was part of this work an integration function deployed by the social researchers which took into account both content and emotional aspects of communication issues.

The outcomes of the workshop were twofold, on one side the participants could learn and find out about CO₂ storage impact, on another side the researchers could experience themselves in a direct interaction with a variety of participants from different backgrounds and learn and get input from them for their work on such an important topic.