Seismic hazard communication in Istanbul

Johanna Ickert

School of Geography, Earth, & Environmental Sciences (SoGEES), Plymouth University, Plymouth, UK
(johanna.ickert@plymouth.co.uk)

Conflicting societal conceptions of earthquake safety provide challenges but also opportunities for the communication of seismic hazards. This paradox is exemplified in the controversial social reactions to the ongoing 'urban renewal projects' in Istanbul. Seismologists estimate that there is a high probability that a major earthquake will strike Istanbul in the next decade or so. Detailed earthquake risk analysis, and direct experience of the losses suffered during the major earthquakes that struck Turkey in 1999 and 2011, have engendered a broad societal recognition of the need for extensive earthquake preparedness and response planning. However, there has been dissent concerning the democratic legitimation of some of Istanbul's mitigation measures, most notably the implementation of the 'Law for the Regeneration of Areas Under Disaster Risk' (Law 6306, known as the 'disaster law') in May 2012. The strong interconnections between geological 'matters of fact' and societal 'matters of concern' raise fundamental questions for geocommunication on how to deal with this societal complexity, particularly in terms of maintaining trust in the geoscientist. There is a growing recognition among geoscientists that achieving disaster resilience in Istanbul is not solely the domain of 'earthquake experts' but rather requires a shared societal responsibility. However, the question arises as to how geocommunication can be designed to respond to this increased demand for interdisciplinarity and civil participation. This research will confront this question, exploring ways to combine qualitative and quantitative analyses, values and preferred norms with facts and observations, and be organised around an interactive web-based documentary platform that integrates multiple knowledge bases and seeks to help connect different communication cultures.