



Spelling out the fear. Thoughts on science communication from a dangerous country

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The rapid growth of population and the increasing costs of natural disaster demand for an effective hazard mitigation. A key element for mitigation is a good and widespread understanding of the adverse natural phenomena. But science communication is a complex matter especially when dealing with natural hazards, where the heaviness of responsibility is further loaded with the uncertainty of phenomena. The society needs the scientific advice and science explores the natural processes, depict scenarios and provide probabilistic frameworks for the assessment of the associated hazard. Yet, the message can be easily misunderstood, the same words can have different meaning for different stakeholders. Denial is another problem: when our lives are at stake we rarely listen: the scientific advice can be disregarded, or received with disappointment. In the worst case, scientists can be charged with offence, as occurred in Italy where seismologists were accused of manslaughter in the aftermath of the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake. Scientists need to provide all the necessary information to let the people take informed decisions. This means we need to find effective ways to discuss unpleasant scenarios, and to address scary topics that often lack definite solutions, facing the risk that our very communication strategies may be used against ourselves. The outreach video on volcanic hazard presented here will offer the opportunity to draw some general considerations on where and why the scientific knowledge gets lost. Without easy solutions at hand, this talk will highlight some of the elements into play, in an attempt to understand the rule of a game and the role of science in the society.