Geoethics literacy: Values clarification as an initial step into geoethical issues

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Ethics are built on values. Values underly ethics. How are they related? Can we talk about ethics without reference to values? Do values necessarily imply ethics? Do they form a unit, as in ‘ethical values’? Are values and ethics driven by beliefs, or should values remain unchanged despite changing beliefs? Those are some of the questions that people will ask when confronted with the idea of ethics in life and in the geosciences. Values include honesty, compassion, nature, learning, quality, patience, truth, respect, individualism, creativity, wealth, justice, fame, humour, harmony, power, peace and beauty. How are these related to ethics? How are they related to geoethics? Often an ethical dilemma stems from two or more underlying value conflicts, such as individual identity and social value.

It is not easy to understand the principles and dynamics of such relations. Reading can of course help. However, for newcomers to the area, as well as those already familiar with concepts and dilemmas, one way into this quagmire is by using a values clarification exercise or game (VCE or VCG). A VCE can be a useful geoethics literacy tool to help people explore the complexities of the above relationships, to allow them to express their own ideas, to confront their ideas with those of others and to gain a rich understanding of the values that underly geoethics.

We have designed and used VCEs and VCGs in a variety of settings, such as:

- A workshop for farmers in Costa Rica, organized by CIRAD and CATIE.
- A session on sustainability in an international conference on simulation/games.
- In an online conference organized by the Earth Action Hub, a global, online community dedicated to supporting one another in taking climate and environmental action.
- An online workshop for the Eastern Mediterranean University (EMUNI) on the topic of blue economy values.

Our EGU Geoethics session will summarise our previous experience of this kind of methodology, indicating that it is relatively easy to implement, show some sample materials (such as values cards and debriefing forms) and outline a blueprint for such an exercise to be used for geoethics literacy. We will also answer audience questions.