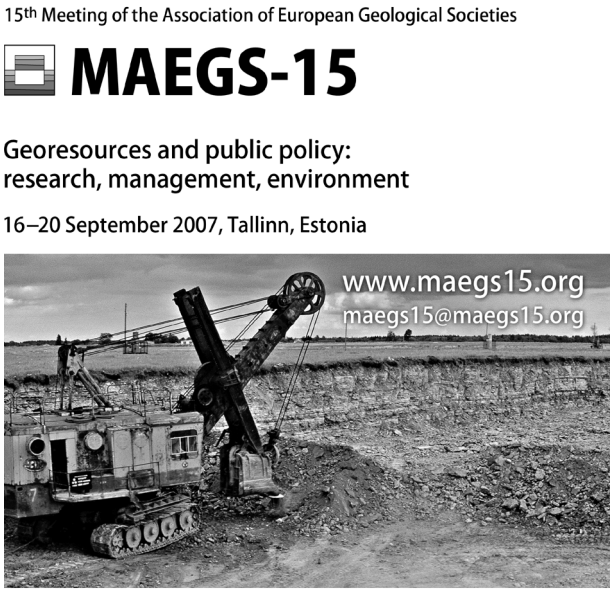
# Learned societies, their international co-operation, and sustainable use of minerals promote development of human society

This issue of the *Estonian Journal of Earth Sciences* is published on the eve of two remarkable events. To begin with the more venerable one, I would like to mention the bicentennial anniversary of the Geological Society of London, the first geological society in the world, which will be celebrated in September with a special science conference "Earth sciences in the service of society". Just a few days later, on 16 September, the 15th Meeting of the Association of European Geological Societies (MAEGS-15) will be opened in Tallinn, Estonia, under a general heading "Georesources and public policy: research, management, environment". These together, especially in the context of the International Year of the Planet Earth, clearly inspire at this point a brief expression of our understanding of the role of learned societies and minerals as promoters of the development of human society.




The International Year of Planet Earth (IYPE) is a triennial event (2007–2009) with a central year (2008) proclaimed, by Resolution 60/192 of the United Nations General Assembly at its 60th Session, as an official UN year. The activities, as stated on the organizer's website (www.yearofplanetearth.org), are mainly aimed at promoting new and exciting ways in which Earth sciences can help future generations meet the challenges involved in ensuring a safer and more prosperous world. The idea of the IYPE rose from a wide understanding among geoscientists that these sciences can be much more useful for society than they have been up to now. The initiative will seek to raise the awareness of the contribution to, and role of the Earth sciences in society in the minds of politicians, decision-makers, the media, and the general public.

The above quotations evidence that interaction of Earth sciences and society has become a central problem and subject for careful consideration by both parties participating in the process. This process has two equally important aspects: (1) science, its topical orientation, methods of research, applied implications, etc. and (2) education of and co-operation with society members in order to reach better understanding of one another.

One more aspect has been raised by society. The economic importance of useful minerals, not only of oil and uranium in the global or kukersite oil shale in the Estonian context, but also of such minerals as sand and gravel in common use, is an elementary and accepted truth. Despite of that the opposition to exploitation of deposits of different minerals is clearly growing among inhabitants of certain mining areas and partly in society as a whole. This is testified by the popularity of the Green Party at parliamentary elections in Estonia and elsewhere. There are different reasons for such a paradigm of people's behaviour, mainly generated by bad practice in the past, and now we can observe that distrust to entrepreneurs and partly also to assessors of environmental risks is playing a great role in certain mining conflicts.

In a democratic country the potential of georesources can only be used for the economic development of society by following all rules of sustainable exploitation of minerals, including consideration of different environmental and social implications. Discussions should be truthful and full, open for public. Except in special cases, people understand explanations if properly given, and this is surely promising for the future of the usage of minerals. Positive examples of such discussions were obtained when a long-time plan for oil shale exploitation in Estonia was compiled this year. Hopefully this kind of policy will become a good tradition also in other sectors of georesources.

The IYPE is a global network of Earth science actions, but in different countries or regions corresponding organizations, first of all learned or professional societies, should play a decisive role. At this point I would like to note, as an example of positive application of the above policy, the organization of MAEGS-15 by the Association of European Geological Societies together with the Estonian Geological Society.

The second circular of the meeting accentuates that the scientific focus of the MAEGS-15 conference will be on the formation, sustainable use, and management of various georesources including, but not limited to, oil and gas (including methane hydrates), oil shale and coal, mineral ores (including platinum group elements), raw materials, peat and soil, and groundwater. Special attention will be devoted to public policy and social and economic aspects related to utilization of Earth's resources. Additional topics of the conference aim at environmental and Quaternary geology, and geology and georesources of the Baltic region. Thematic sessions will have invited keynote speakers.

In order to make the outline of the meeting more essential, selected summaries of reports by keynote speakers and of several generalizing papers about mineral resources of the Baltic states are published in the Short Communications section of the present issue of the *Estonian Journal of Earth Sciences*.

This focus is very much in the same lines as discussed above and the *Estonian Journal of Earth Sciences* wishes MAEGS-15 participants a successful meeting with substantial debates suggesting new ideas for increasing the contribution of Earth sciences to the welfare of society.

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