

Session OS1 - Earthquakes and society: Is the way seismologists communicate satisfactory? Oral presentation

OS1/Fr/O6 - Web-mediated communication experiences at Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia (INGV)

G. Rubbia¹, F. Mele¹

¹*Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia*

The newer communication tools have changed the relationship between science and society. Internet pervasiveness led citizens to rapidly inform through on line sources, and, on the other hand, to provide themselves information. From an institutional communication perspective this new sociotechnical landscape forces scientists to rapidly adequate to web population requirements.

Questions and comments posted to INGV web sites during the 2009 L'Aquila (Italy) seismic sequence gave significant hints about demand of information. They included: questions concerning possible evolution of the sequence; clarifications about news reported by media, asking for detailed explanations and/or qualified opinions; requests for help in providing information to population; notices about information available on INGV web sites; communication of felt seismic effects.

People who post questions to INGV institutional web sites are themselves information suppliers, in providing: what they felt, in case of posting macroseismic effects; what they heard about the earthquake from other sources; how they feel (worried, confident, grateful ...); what they know and what they want to know; what they actually understand from the scientific website.

From the point of view of a scientific organization, this kind of web-mediated communication is precious in that it can reveal and provide many clues about: 1) public expectations and understanding of on going scientific activities 2) to what extent information dissemination, communication and outreach activities can be considered effective or to which extent they need improvements. A mutual approaching is needed. Seismologists acting as responders during an emergency perform a delicate job: they have to be transparent and make themselves understood; comprehension of scientific information would benefit of appropriate outreach activities carried on during all the time.

Consisting the INGV web disseminating system of several institutional and thematic web sites, similar patterns of questions and comments emerge: "network effect", when questions are posted at the end of a navigation session through different web sites, and may not pertain to the content of that specific website; "resonance effect", when more questions about earthquakes are posted soon after a big one. A "welcome" effect is also manifest, as experts providing accurate replies in a timely fashion stimulate web visitors in posting new questions.

Case studies of web-mediated communication will be discussed, as experimented by the Institute through the nodes of its web disseminating system.