The Cape Town Statement on Geoethics and the IAPG network

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Recently the interest by geoscientists in ethical and social aspects of geoscience has grown considerably. Geoethics is defined as the “Research and reflection on the values that underpin appropriate behaviours and practices, wherever human activities interact with the Earth system. Geoethics deals with the ethical, social and cultural implications of geoscience knowledge, education, research, practice, and communication, and with the social role and responsibility of geoscientists in conducting their activities” (Peppoloni and Di Capua, 2014).

This definition includes aspects of general ethics, research integrity, professional ethics and environmental ethics. It recalls the geoscientist to an individual ethical conduct, characterized by the awareness of being also a social actor, of possessing a scientific knowledge that can be put to the service of society and employed for a more functional interaction between humans and the Earth system. Geoethics is now recognized as an emerging field in geosciences (Bobrowsky et al., 2017). It sharpens categories to face the many issues that involve both the scientific communities and societies: Earth stewardship, environment respect, prevention, adaptation, sustainability, as well as aspects of intellectual freedom, responsibility and honesty of geoscientists (Peppoloni et al., 2015; Peppoloni and Di Capua, 2016).

The IAPG - International Association for Promoting Geoethics (http://www.geoethics.org), is a scientific and multidisciplinary community, founded in 2012 as a non-profit organization, with more than 1800 members in 123 countries on 5 continents. It aims to develop contents, widen the discussion and create awareness about issues of geoethics.

In its 5 years of activity IAPG has worked to transform geoethics into a real scientific thought, with contents and definitions, to assure its scientific authoritativeness and credibility by developing a coherent
conceptual substratum (for a summary see Peppoloni and Di Capua, 2014, 2017; Bobrowsky et al., 2017). IAPG has provided geoscientists with a set of reference values, methods and tools, able to orient their activity and increase the awareness about the importance of their role into society. To date, IAPG has been involved in more than 80 international events and cooperates with other international organizations whose aims are complementary, such as IUGS - International Union of Geological Sciences, AGU - American Geophysical Union, GSA - Geological Society of America, GSL - Geological Society of London, AGI - American Geosciences Institute, IAH - International Association of Hydrogeologists, EFG - European Federation of Geologists, EGS - EuroGeoSurveys, IGEO - International Geoscience Education Organisation, ICPHS - International Council for Philosophy and Human Sciences, IAEG - International Association for Engineering Geology and the Environment, AAWG - African Association of Women in Geosciences, IUGS-IFG - Initiative on Forensic Geology, etc.

The huge activity of the IAPG includes also the publication of several books (Gundersen, 2017; Lollino et al., 2014; Peppoloni and Di Capua, 2012 and 2015; Peppoloni et al., 2017; Wyss and Peppoloni, 2014) and articles (http://www.geoethics.org/articles-geoethics) in peer-reviewed international journals. Moreover, some IAPG members are working to develop geoethical issues within the European project ENVRIplus (http://www.envriplus.eu/), which is dedicated to the environmental and solid Earth research infrastructures.

The more significant result of all these efforts is that now many prestigious geoscience organizations recognize geoethics as a fundamental issue, worthy of attention.

The Cape Town Statement on Geoethics (CTSG: http://www.geoethics.org/ctsg) is one of the main documents, internationally recognized, produced by the IAPG. It is a product of an international effort, currently supported and endorsed by 18 geoscience organizations. This document, available on the IAPG website, summarizes fundamental values of geoethics and ethical duties of geoscientists. The statement includes also the “Geoethical Promise” (http://www.geoethics.org/geopromise), addressed to early-career geoscientists modeled after the Hippocratic oath of medicine. The formula of the promise summarizes all the concepts and the values of geoethics: the responsibility towards society and the environment in conducting our profession as geoscientists, the duty to be qualified and to assure competence, intellectual honesty, the care to spread geological knowledge, the respect for Earth processes, etc. In order to increase its global impact, the CTSG is going to be translated into more than 30 languages, thanks to the cooperation of dozens of colleagues. Providing access in a number of languages means to enhance the cultural diversity as an element of union, through which all geoscientists can share universal values and strengthen their common identity in social diversity.
References
