

Class subject “The Social Role of the Geologist”: Impact and reflections

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The subject “The Social Role of the Geologist” (El Rol Social del Geólogo” in Spanish) was born after 2011 student manifestations in Chile, demanding the government improve the education system. This led the Department of Geology of Universidad de Chile to create a space of reflection where geology students could reflect on their social duty and develop social projects.

The participation in one class, in autumn of 2014, led to a series of reflections and conclusions that are laid out in this work.

Almost all the projects developed by the students were related to educating society in some geological aspect. This led to the main reflection of this work, that Chileans have a lack of knowledge of their geological context, which is a very risky situation, considering that Chile is one of the most hazardous countries in the world. It has had the biggest earthquake ever registered and is home to one of the largest mountain ranges with volcanoes and mountains as tall as 6890 m a.s.l. situated throughout the country.

The main projects carried out by the students can be divided in 3 subjects: “Knowledge of Geosciences: education, divulgation and preservation”, “Geological hazard and territorial planification” and “Social inequality and environmental impact”.

The class had a real impact in some students, especially in the subject “Knowledge of Geosciences”. Two students did their degree dissertations on the education, divulgation and preservation of geosites in southern Chile. Additionally, some students reached a compromise within their closer social circle, teaching about the geology and hazard in their immediate surroundings or places where they used to go for vacations or to do outdoor sports. However, some students demonstrated little interest in the subject and made no real compromise with their community.

We think those opportunities, where students are encouraged to think and question their duty and responsibility to society, are essential in every geologist’s ethical formation; especially in a national situation where people are not happy with their education system and discussion is needed.