



Broader Impacts of Research: Promoting Geosciences to the Public

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In Germany, there is broad recognition among the science community, policy makers and the general society that communication needs to become more effective and visible. The task is “to make the results of research work in the geosciences available and understandable to the general public”. This is important not only because of the taxpayers’ right to know, but also to highlight direct benefits provided to the people by current research work. Geoscience studies influence our daily lives and yet often go unnoticed by the general public!

There are many possible vehicles for communicating complex scientific processes, but it is necessary to consider the different interests of various target groups: adults, students and teachers, politicians and decision makers, children, etc.

A few years ago the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft (German society for the promotion of science) started the “Wissenschaft im Dialog” (Science in dialogue), an initiative with the purpose of bringing the public into closer contact with science. Highlights within this initiative, such as the organisation of “summers of science”, “years of science”, competitions for “City of Sciences” (Bremen & Bremerhaven 2005) address all the target groups of the public with their different needs, languages and motivations.

However, outreach activities by scientists are often viewed as a form of volunteer work, in addition to their other responsibilities. This argument, as well as the minimal importance, that is placed on outreach work in most departments, are factors that minimize scientists’ motivation for involvement.

The Research Center Ocean Margins (RCOM) at Bremen University promotes a different philosophy: good scientists should feel responsible and directly serve the broad needs in science and technology education. RCOM already plays an active role in strengthening outreach in the geosciences. And we place great emphasis on the integration of research and public outreach early, during the education of young new scientists. At least students should see a chance here to improve their teaching and communication skills. . . .

This talk shall serve to discuss concepts for communicating knowledge, and for building bridges to the general population. Various activities – requiring major and minor efforts - are introduced, experiences reported and future plans explained.