

Paper Number: 5091

Socrates' rocks: how professional accreditation may help promoting geoethics, and why the pioneering stage is challenging

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Other than scientific curiosity, the geosciences developed from the need to understand our planet in terms of the natural capital and hazards it represents. Geological resources and geohazards relate to subsistence and protection, perhaps the most basic of human needs, and this brings an ethical dimension to the geological profession in several ways. Our exploration efforts, for example, precede exploitation, and exploitation will have impacts, whether it be on the environment or the ability to fulfil future needs. Finding a good balance between social, environmental and economic interests is a responsibility that rests with the decision makers we serve, but this does not relieve us from the obligation to consider the ethics of resourcing. Our geohazard assessments are made to prevent loss of property and loss of life, but they are only as good and effective as the standards they are held against. So what to do if standards fall short? This, again, is a matter of (geo)ethics.

A practical way to operationalise geoethics is through accreditation. The European Geologist (EurGeol) accreditation scheme considers the academic training and professional experience of candidates who, once admitted, are requested to undertake continuing education and training activities, and to abide by the EFG Code of Ethics. Insufficient professional development or violations of the code of ethics can lead to disciplinary actions, and ultimately to the EurGeol title being revoked.

We discuss the status of the EurGeol accreditation in the Netherlands, two years after it has been introduced. It is clearly in a pioneering stage, characterised by self-regulation and an increasing but still low momentum. The first legal reference to the EurGeol title is to be expected in about two years, in a decree that is to be issued under a new law on subsurface information [1]. We expect that EurGeol accreditation will then gain momentum, as based on the analysis of the more favourable conditions for accreditation that appear to exist in the UK, Ireland and Spain, the countries that jointly have about 75% of all current EurGeol title holders.

References:

[1] Wet van 30 september 2015, houdende regels omtrent de basisregistratie ondergrond (Wet basisregistratie ondergrond), Staatsblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden, Jaargang 2015, no 362

