

# Enhancing youth potential through Civic Service: ethical reflections arising from a geo-educational project

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## The National Civic Service of Italy

Different forms of Civic Service are present in Europe. In Italy, the Servizio Civile Nazionale - SCN (national civic service) started as an alternative to military service in 2001 with the law 6/2001, and since 2005 is performed upon a voluntary basis.

The Civic Service is conceived as an opportunity to volunteers (young people of both genders from 18 to 28 years old) who intend to grow in social, civic, cultural and professional dimensions while performing experiences of social solidarity, national and international cooperation, protection and preservation of national heritage ([www.serviziocivile.gov.it](http://www.serviziocivile.gov.it)).

Main areas of interventions include: environment, assistance, education and cultural promotion, civic protection, artistic and cultural heritage, civic service abroad.

Ethical implications emerged during an ongoing Earth Sciences education project funded by SCN and involving young volunteers at Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia (INGV), "Science and Outreach: a comprehensive approach to the divulgation of knowledge of Earth Sciences (<http://istituto.ingv.it/I-ingv/servizio-civile>)".

## Ethical reflections

According to SCN's ethical charter, a challenge was to welcome a group of young people in a public research organization, and to integrate them in the limited time lapse of one year. The European Charter for Researchers came as a valuable help. Its principles specify roles, responsibilities and entitlements of researchers and employers.

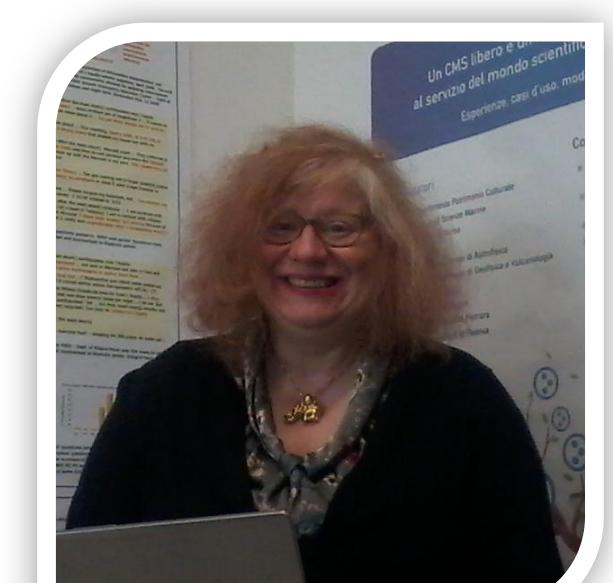
Educational and outreach activities were framed in the more general principle of public engagement. Access to training and continuous development was pursued to strengthen volunteers' contributions to the project and improve their further employability. Volunteers have been:

- ✓ informed of research seminars held by INGV and other institutions;
- ✓ asked to report and present their work through presentations, posters and articles, in Italian and English, in internal seminars, conferences, and dedicated website;
- ✓ solicited to attend additional seminars beyond the initial training phase; these seminars have been specifically organized to increase volunteers' competences about complementary issues; for example, topics included open access and resources, gender issues, proposal writing;
- ✓ involved in administrative management of the project.

A specific module about Geoethics was also proposed for the initial training phase of possible future SCN projects about education and environment.

More than a nice opportunity for personal growth, the volunteering period should result in a pathway to new skills and eventually a new job, enabling young people to think and shape their present and future.

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## The Charter of Ethics of National Civic Service of Italy

Each organization hosting Civic Service projects signs up an ethical charter, regulating relationships between volunteers and the hosting organization. It must be aware:

- of putting into effect a law aimed to involve young generations in homeland defense with non violent means through services of social utility;
- that the Civic Service wants young people to spend one year of their life in a critical phase in which they reach the responsibilities of adults;
- that adopted working method is learning by doing, working with tutors having to increase skills and exploit the full potential of volunteers;
- of recognizing the volunteers' right to work to reach the project's objectives, and not only for the benefits of the hosting organization;
- that volunteers should work with well defined procedures, clear since the beginning;
- of requiring from volunteers their full commitment to learn and responsibly participate to project's activities as well as to fully express and increase their expertise, skills and personal resources (<http://www.serviziocivile.gov.it>)