

# Bringing Earth Sciences to the public through actions designed to raise interest in geosciences

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People have been fascinated by volcanoes ever since the dawn of mankind and have treated them with utmost respect. Our modern life has brought a change to our perception of volcanism, and there are no longer superstitious elements associated with volcanoes in Western societies. The connection between plate tectonics, earthquakes, and volcanoes has been studied and understood. Four-dimensional models are being developed to simulate eruptions, cutting edge equipment is used to record even the tiniest seismic events and a broad array of remote sensing sensors are used on a routine basis to monitor volcanic activities from space. At the same time a dramatic gap has formed between the professionals and the public. Research and studies on volcanism use more and more specialised language, which does not translate into popular science or public communications. The media often delivers inaccurate information, going for sensational facts when they should be factual, and failing to report findings, when they should use their power to disseminate information. It seems that in our world there is no longer time for explanations, only for some quick quotes in the news if some exciting developments need to be broadcast. As a result, in today's world, the work of volcanologists is nearly as mythical as the work of volcanoes in ancient times.

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The project and the Night followed up on the successes of the previous initiatives La Noche de los Volcanes I and II, both financed under the EC's FP7 Programme. On 26 September 2014 the Night was organised for the third time, this time simultaneously on all seven islands of the Canary archipelago (Fuencaliente, Puerto de La Cruz, La Frontera, Hermigua, Ingenio, Yaiza and Pajara and also in Almagro, Ciudad Real, mainland Spain), where the volcanic environment is part of the local heritage and culture, but at the same time represents a potential hazard as well. Although the islands' population (around 2 million) lives in volcanic areas, the gap between geoscientists/volcanologists and the public is huge. At the same time, the science of volcanoes can be used to mobilise the public: a survey<sup>1</sup> conducted in 2013 during Volcanoes' Night II indicated high public interest in the topic of geology, volcanology and the work of geo-scientists. About two-thirds of the survey responders marked high or very high interest initial interest for the topic, and this was raised further during the event. Similarly, initial public interest in the work of geoscientists is also high as a baseline; the absolute majority, three quarters of the respondents, stated that they consider their work “Useful for society”. Yet, according to the past surveys, the daily work of geoscientists still appears to be somewhat of a mystery to the public. Volcanoes' Night I (La Palma) and II (La Palma, Tenerife, El Hierro, Lanzarote) already addressed this challenge, with almost 60% of the participants indicating that their understanding about the work of geoscientists substantially

<sup>1</sup> Evaluation was based on 479 collected questionnaires (282 online and 197 on paper).

improved as a direct outcome of the Night.

The objective of Volcanoes Night III was to address the still remaining gaps between geosciences and society. During the event participants were provided access to research facilities, and a complementary scheme of workshops, science cafés, excursions, presentations and challenge games were arranged to fuel the public's curiosity, interest and understanding of research activities. Participating scientists not only talked about their field of research, but also shared their experience on how students can approach science and research institutions, providing a perfect scenario to attract young people to science careers. As a backdrop to the Night volcanoes were used not only to explain the work of volcanologists but also to explain what science is about and what scientists and researchers do during their daily work. Activities during Volcanoes Night III attracted over five thousand participants this year, and as such, this action remains a successful example of raising public awareness about the work of geoscientists in Europe. Detailed evaluation of the surveys conducted during the Night is underway, and will be made available for download on the project website, together with photos and other documents of interest. <http://www.nochedevolcanes.es>

