

My Earth science educator story – Federico Pasquaré Mariotto What I did, why I did it and what happened



I have felt the magic of geology ever since my first hiking trips in the Italian Alps with my father, a Professor of Geology from the University of Milan. I was only 6, but I distinctly remember asking him about rocks and minerals. What amazed me was the greatness of the Swiss Alps before my eyes – in particular, Mt Bernina, with its amazing whiteness, used to give me goosebumps.

Then, as I grew up, my interest in geology gradually faded over time, and at 18 I found myself wondering whether I should become a journalist. I was caught between my passion for the natural world and my equally strong passion for literature.

At the age of 19 I signed up for the undergraduate program in Literature Studies at Milan University. However, a few months afterwards, I started having second thoughts about studying literary criticism. This was when I realized that what I really wanted to do was travel, to see as many places I could, and hopefully...to make a living out of it! For a few weeks I entertained the idea of taking photojournalism as a career but, eventually, I realized that natural sciences were my primary focus.

Hence, I enrolled in Geology at Bologna University; it was a major and almost intimidating shift from the abstract world of Italian Literature. Luckily for me though, Corrado Venturini was there, a professor who stood out from his fellow academics, and made the strongest impression on me. He could blend his flawless knowledge of geology with an outstanding ability to engage students in the learning process.

Corrado was a true inspiration for me back then, and has continued to be so through the years!

After graduation I went to the United States to specialize in Marine Geology; while I was there, I decided also to take evening journalism classes at New York University. That experience was a revelation to me and confirmed that my goal in life should be to bring together two different worlds: science and journalism. When I returned from the U.S., I was determined to make a living in Earth Science communication, hopefully in an academic environment.

My lifetime opportunity came about when I was invited by Insubria University (Como, Italy) to give a course in Geohazard Communication. That ended up being my springboard to enter the academic world. When I became assistant professor though, it was clear to me that I had to start doing research not only in Communication, but in Structural Geology as well.

Thus I embarked on a new life, the life of scientific research, writing and submitting papers, reviewing them and, hopefully, ending up publishing my work. My major research interest, of structural geology applied to volcanism, enabled me to carry out fieldwork in stunning natural environments, from the Philippines to the Death Valley, from Chile to Iceland, from Stromboli Volcano to the Caucasus.



Working at Stromboli Volcano, Aeolian Islands, Italy.



With two US colleagues on top of Didi-Abuli Volcano in the Republic of Georgia.

I never gave up my teaching of Geohazard Communication though, and, in close cooperation with my mentor, Corrado Venturini, I started giving talks focused on Earth Science communication.

I participated in the National project “Edu-Geo”, to which I contributed, by developing a geological itinerary - stretching across the Swiss-Italian border – that leads visitors through a beautifully-preserved Mesozoic sequence, spanning from early Jurassic limestones to late Cretaceous terrigenous deposits.

Two years ago I began teaching Science Communication as well. This gave me the chance to reach out to more and more students and to motivate them to take on the goal of communicating Earth Science.

In 2014, together with a dozen fellow geologists and colleagues, I opened up “GeoSocial”, an NGO dedicated to disseminating geological sciences to the lay public. Our main tool is the website www.geo-social.net, a platform designed to involve a wider audience than the Italian public. Written in both English and Italian, our posts deal with such topics as seismic hazard, volcanic hazard, climate risk and geoheritage conservation.



The home page of the website www.geo-social.net, dedicated to Earth Science dissemination and geo-environmental education.

My journey as an Earth Science educator has taught me the importance of reaching out to as many people as possible. In a land like Italy, subject to all kinds of geologically-related hazards, information can make the difference between life and death!

I do feel that educating people about Earth Science and raising public awareness about geological risks and resources is a goal that’s worth pursuing with passion. We need to nurture a new generation of Earth Science educators, encouraging them to continue the task of highlighting the value of Earth’s geological wonders.

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