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*'Understanding volcanoes and society: the key for risk mitigation'*



## **Risk communication: understanding the social barriers of volcanoes resources**

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In Chile there is an urgent demand for including renewable energy resources due to the dependency of oil imports and the severe potential impact of the global warming in the country. Although scientific and technological development have allowed to identify renewable and clean energy sources in Chile – most notable solar and geothermal sources– there are numerous examples pointing out the challenge of integrating the Chilean energy needs with local communities' interests. The fact that several energy projects have generated social resistance, including renewable energies initiatives, highlights the social component of energy technology and production. This scenario has prompted scholars to recognize and examine the role of risk communication, understanding it as a two ways exchange process that looks for ways to involve communities into environmental decisions making process, increasing the level of public acceptance. Having this concept as a backdrop and based on Iris Marion Young's definition of citizen participation, this paper analyzes how people perceived geothermal resources and what is the role of communication in this process. This exploratory research studies the community that surrounds Villarrica volcano, one of the most active volcanoes in Chile. This work suggests that social barriers such as lack of information, perceived local costs and benefits and community participation in early stages of energy projects affect the social acceptance of geothermal energy. At the same time, this research emphasizes that the communication approach used to develop geothermal energy has been lineal and hierarchical, affecting negatively the social perception of volcanoes resources.