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Investigating students' perception of climate change and geo-hydrological risk in Italian public high schools

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Young generation will have to manage, in the not-too-distant future, the increase of climate-change-related hazards. Infact, extreme rainfall events, increases in mean temperatures, decreases in mean rainfall, tropical cyclones, thunderstorms, droughts are already having a significant impacts on people's life and to the environment. In light of this, the more young people will be aware of the climate change (CC) and will know how to deal with the risks induced by it, the more they will be able to take measures and adopt behaviors to reduce negative impacts as well as to influence the choices of policy makers. For this reason, knowing the perception, the degree of knowledge and the preparedness of young people to these issues is becoming increasingly important.

By means of a quantitative research method (structured questionnaire), a survey on a group of Italian high public school students, aged between 13 and 20 and located in central (Umbria region) and southern (Calabria region) Italy, was carried out. This survey focused on young people awareness, perception and preparation concerning natural risks, including landslide and flood risk, and climate change. The survey's results show the following informations: a) the questioned students are aware of the CC issue and they generally believe that human actions and lifestyle affect CC; moreover, young people are more worried than adults about how CC may affect nature and the environment; b) the findings confirm the close relationship between youth and the media in terms of perception, information, and understanding of CC and its impacts; c) besides believing that better risk communication between authorities and citizens is necessary, the students have low level of trust in local administrations and on the policy regarding geo-hydrological risk; d) young interviewed who participated in a specific educational activity on landslide and flood hazard revealed that they had a good understanding of the triggering processes of these phenomena. Even though the samples is not highly representative of the whole Italian young population, the survey shows that Italian political institutions need to plan responsible, morally sound, and convincing activities in order to win over citizens' credibility and trust, especially younger ones. Additionally, it is crucial that scientists collaborate with politicians, policy makers, and schools to i) promote shared and sustainable actions involving public, particularly the younger generation, and thus increasing people resilience; and ii) develop an integrated and multidisciplinary approach to comprehend a complex phenomenon like climate change and its effects on people and

environment.