

**BUILT HERITAGE IN POST-
DISASTER SCENARIOS.
IMPROVING RESILIENCE
AND AWARENESS
TOWARDS PRESERVATION,
RISK MITIGATION AND
GOVERNANCE STRATEGIES**

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BOOK REVIEW OF

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Figure 1. Built Heritage in post-Disaster Scenarios. Improving Resilience and Awareness Towards Preservation, Risk Mitigation and Governance Strategies, Book cover.

The earthquakes that occurred in Emilia Romagna on 20 and 29 May 2012 had a significant impact on a large area of densely populated and industrialised territory. In contrast to other Italian cases, in which the seismic event occurred in inland areas already affected by enduring crises, further exacerbating their pre-existing conditions, in Emilia Romagna the state of health of the territory probably played a decisive role in the promptness and efficiency of an institutional, socio-economic, political and logistical response, adequate to quickly prepare the reconstruction of the contexts affected by the disaster, also through participatory processes with the citizens. This followed some cardinal principles, including the avoidance of the creation of new towns, special attention and funding lines dedicated to the reconstruction of the historical and cultural heritage, support for the productive sectors, and the maintenance of continuity in monitoring procedures¹. Following the experience conducted - we can now affirm - with largely positive results and relatively quickly compared

¹As Enrico Cocchi, Director of the Regional Agency for Reconstruction – Earthquake 2012, notes in his text, the intervention models employed by the Civil Protection during the initial emergency phase differed from those employed in subsequent reconstruction phases. Unlike in other countries, there is no ‘reconstruction system’ in Italy that can be based on consolidated and structured technical-regulatory processes at a national level. Instead, there has been a tendency to adopt different approaches from time to time in terms of laws and organisational models.

to the peculiar and unflattering slowness of reconstruction processes in Italy, the Emilia Romagna Region financed the International Academy project 'After the Damages', with the aim of guaranteeing a three-year educational offer through Summer Schools on the themes of reconstruction, risk management and post-disaster policies. The volume *Built Heritage in Post-Disaster Scenarios. Improving resilience and awareness towards preservation, risk mitigation and governance strategies*, edited by a team of professors from the University of Ferrara, namely Marcello Balzani, Federica Maietti, Manlio Montuori and Fabiana Raco, is the first editorial outcome of the Academy's activities and encompasses a series of contributions offered by scholars, professionals and public administration representatives within the framework of the first edition of the International Summer School, held online due to the restrictions caused by the COVID pandemic from 1 to 15 July 2020.

The set of essays, as the title of the volume testifies, focuses on practices for the safeguarding, recovery and restoration of architectural and monumental heritage sites following the earthquake, closely linking the research conducted in the Department of Architecture in Ferrara with the Summer School programme. And in this peculiarity, that is, in establishing a solid bridge between research and university and post-graduate education on the subject of reconstruction, lies perhaps the most interesting character of this collective volume.

Within this framework, the book is divided into three sections that bring together, not without some logical jumps, the large and heterogeneous number of contributions received. The first section contains essays linked to the lectures given by experts invited to the Summer School, whose texts deal with general themes, also through case studies not related to the case of the Emilia-Romagna earthquake. These themes include: the problems and methods of intervention in historic centres and natural landscapes; the management of the emergency phase; the financing processes for the reconstruction and conservation of the physical and cultural heritage; non-invasive methods for the protection of valuable buildings and for the resilience of primary goods supply chains; the contribution of new technologies to the knowledge, preservation, recovery and prevention of damage to buildings; and intervention measures at national and local level in response to global crises. The second section gathers thematic papers where the processes and techniques of intervention are strongly based on innovation and integration between disciplines and tools, applying them to artefacts and contexts that focus more on the case of Emilia Romagna. Finally, the

third section opens up once again to a more international horizon, gathering contributions that embrace a multi-scalar dimension of the application of methods and techniques for the monitoring, evaluation and recovery of historical and modern heritage.

If, as many of the contributors rightly point out, reconstruction is a phase that requires multifactorial and concatenated interventions on a multitude of aspects, involving a plurality of disciplines in a true collective work of recovery, in this case the specificity of the theme addressed by the volume perhaps suffers from an excessive preponderance of contributions that belong to highly technological sectors, relating to surveying, restoration and techniques for the consolidation and protection of artefacts, leaving aside the social, anthropological, psychological and cultural issues introduced by Marcello Balzani in his essay. These themes not only accompany, but also support and encompass, in a wider context, the great theme of heritage intended, according to a now consolidated definition, as a set of tangible and intangible assets belonging to a community. This gap between the human and technical dimensions, which is evident in the body of contributions collected, is probably a direct consequence of the peculiar nature of the disaster that struck Emilia Romagna in 2012: its extension, albeit vast, and its enormous damage to property and people fell on a dynamic community, on a thriving and resilient context, central, inhabited and accessible, which, as already mentioned, did not suffer from the state of isolation and widespread and prolonged crisis characteristic of the inland areas of the Apennines or of southern Italy affected by recent seismic events. The spirit of identity, collective memory and personal micro-stories that characterise the lively and industrious communities of Emilia-Romagna have not been significantly compromised by the disaster, in comparison to other Italian cases. The damage produced did not assume such dimensions as to interrupt histories already in decline. Here, material conservation could immediately be traced back to the care of a collective memory. These factors may account for the region's rapid capacity for recovery, its efficient operational response, and its relative ease of penetration compared to recent Italian history in terms of reconstruction policies. Indeed, the strong resourcefulness seems to have led to the rejection of hypotheses that proposed to redeem the disaster as an opportunity for a profound regenerative action of the territory, or to open a fertile debate on the relationship between the new and the old, between rural territory and urban centres, between stable and temporary². There is in fact another crucial aspect, which Balzani does not

² For further reading, please refer to VV. AA., eds. (2013), *Le forme della ricostruzione. Terremoto Emilia*, Associazione Nazionale Centri Storico-Artistici Regione Emilia Romagna, Alinea Editrice, Città di Castello. With regard to the relationship between permanence and temporariness in emergency architecture, please consult R. Bologna (2018), *Complementarity between permanent and temporary*, 'Agathon', 4, pp. 81-88.

³ M. Agnoletto (2017), *L'Italia sismica. Specimen di un diario sui cataclismi*, "Domus", 1013, pp.118-127.

omit to emphasise in his lucid examination: in order for the 'after' not to be confronted with a condition of disaster, a dynamic attitude is required that has the ambition and ability to work on the 'before', i.e. on the planning of the emergency understood not as an exceptional event, but as an endemic, recurring condition, inherent to the hydro-geological, anthropological and social history of our country. Disasters in common parlance are often called 'natural', although they are to a large extent the result of anthropic factors and more generally of the interaction between human societies and the environment³. The responses offered to affected communities today contribute decisively to determining the way of life of entire groups of citizens, often intervening in ways that are not fully considered, when not entirely improvised, on the psycho-social, economic, institutional and ecological-environmental balance of the entire community. Today in Italy, urban design in relation to architecture for emergencies, when present, focuses solely on merely quantitative, logistical and functional data. It is hoped that factors that appear to be of little consequence, such as the sense of place, the distinctive settlement patterns and the intimate connections between a building heritage and the community that inhabits it, between houses, monuments, shops, community services and open spaces for relations, will no longer be overlooked in the public debate. However, it is evident that such a capacity for project management remains a distant prospect in the urban policies of our country's central and local administrations.