

city as organism

new visions for urban life

22nd ISUF International Conference | 22-26 september 2015 Rome Italy

edited by
Giuseppe Strappa
Anna Rita Donatella Amato
Antonio Camporeale

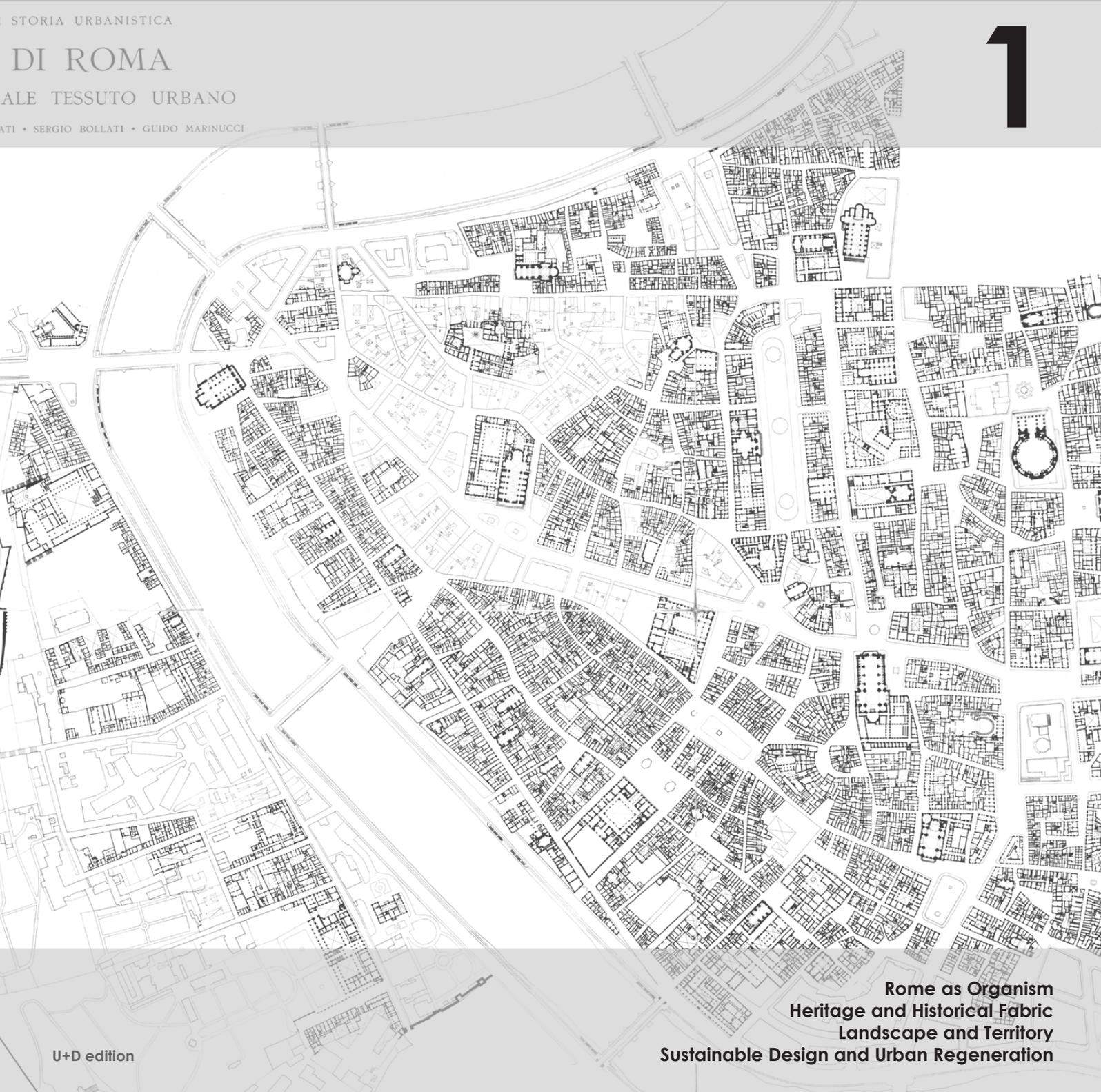
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DI ROMA

LALE TESSUTO URBANO

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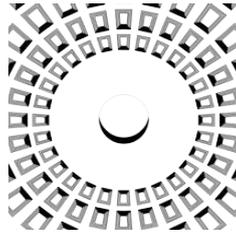
U+D edition

Rome as Organism
Heritage and Historical Fabric
Landscape and Territory
Sustainable Design and Urban Regeneration

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Heritage and Historical Fabric
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Contents Volume 1

- » Introduction 13
Giuseppe Strappa

Section 1

Plenary Session 15

- » City as a process. Rome urban form in transformation 17
Giuseppe Strappa
- » A double urban life cycle: the case of Rome 33
Giancarlo Cataldi
- » Studies for an anthropology of the territory. New achievements from Saverio Muratori's archive 43
Nicola Marzot

Section 2

Heritage and Historical Fabric

Historical Urban Fabric 56

Chair_Pisana Posocco

- » Abandoned villages, from conservation to revitalization 57
Rossella de Cadilhac
- » Learning Process from Historic Urban Fabric of Ula and Adaptation in Akyaka 67
Feray Koca

Modern and Contemporary Design in Historical Cities 76

Chair_Renato Capozzi | Fabrizio Toppetti

- » The 'consecutio temporum' in the contemporary-historical city design 77
Fabrizio Toppetti
- » Shapes and Layers 87
Kornelia Kissfazekas
- » A Comparative Study on Morphological Evolution of Inner-city Residential Blocks in Tokyo and Beijing 97
Guan Li, Wu Zhouyan, Ariga Takashi
- » Figure follows type. Notes above contemporary project in compact urban fabric 107
Manuela Raitano
- » Chiaramonte Gulfi, an experience of urban morphology 115
Renato Capozzi
- » The post-liberal city of the 19th century as a resource 125
Ida Pirstinger
- » Athens urban transformation 135
Anna Ntonou Efstratiadi
- » The architecture of the city contended between history and contemporary 145
Giovanni Multari

- » New architecture in the ancient city. The typological-procedural approach of Caniggia, Bollati and Vagnetti groups in the competition for the extension of the Chamber of Deputies
Illy Taci, Cristina Tartaglia, Giancarlo Salamone
155
- » Urban Tissues and Masonry Plastic Language. Emanuele and Gianfranco Caniggia's Houses in Via Trinità dei Pellegrini, Rome
Antonio Camporeale
165

Architectural Heritage **176**

Chair_Manuela Raitano | Karsten Ley

- » Transformation and specialization of the historical center of Santiago of Chile: the evolution of the urban fabric around the "Plaza de Armas" square
Pia Marziano
177
- » The Planning Concept of Heritage Buildings at Baluwerti Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia
Nafiah Solikhah Thoha
185
- » Repairing urban fabric with large-panel system buildings - urban redevelopment in historic cities during the last decade of the GDR
Malte Nettekoven
195
- » Four improving strategies for the current historical heritage renovation. Case study of Suzhou Creek, Shanghai
Huang Lu, Li Zhenyu
207
- » Defining Traditional Nigde House Typologies and Their Morphological Language in Ancient Inner Castle Area Nigde-Turkey
Muge Ozkan Ozbek, M. Korcan Ozbek
217
- » Metamorphoses of Venice. The methodological approach by Giuseppe Samonà and Gianugo Polesello to urban design on the fringe of the lagoon city
Angela Fiorelli, Giuliano Valeri
227
- » Tradition as an architectural 'topos': role and interpretation for the contemporary sustainable urban design
Vito De Bellis
237

Modern Architectural Legacy **246**

Chair_Jean-François Lejeune

- » The concept of organism in Louis Kahn's work: why his architecture is still relevant today
Elisabetta Barizza
247
- » The 'Three Block Project': Stasis and Transformation in an Urban Megaform
Kevin James Eugene Murray
257
- » From disintegration to reinterpretation: urban design in Montreal, 1950-2014
*François Racine**
265
- » Rural Tradition and New Architecture. The Schools of Alfredo Lambertucci
Pisana Posocco
277

- » Sacred space in the architecture of Dominikus Böhm (1880-1955). Geometric-functional analysis and structural morphology
Giovanni Carbonara 287
- » Urban Integrations in historical centers during the Post-War Reconstruction. The Provincial Directorate of Posts and Telegraphs of Florence by Giovanni Michelucci
Lorenzo Bagnoli 295
- » Postcards from a Dystopian Como: two unbuilt contextual projects by Giuseppe Terragni
Luca Lanini 307

Section 3

Landscape and Territory

Reading Contemporary Landscape

315

Chair_Rita Occhiuto

- » For a new organic-city
Alessandra Capuano 317
- » Industrial Landscape between Modernity and Tradition: what meanings to accompany change by the project?
Rita Occhiuto, Paul Christian Hautecler 323
- » Territorial Planning: Vitória-ES, a case study
Aline Nogueira Costa, Luciano Muniz Abreu 331
- » Morphological mosaic of Brabant. Towards an evolutionary approach of regional development
Sukanya Krishnamurthy, Pieter Van Weselmael 339
- » Rurbanism/Urbanism/Meganism: toward different disciplines for different scales of human settlements and settlement fringes
Adelaida Del Puerto García 349

Landscapes and Territories

360

Chair_Michael P. Conzen

- » The interpretation of the territory by Saverio Muratori
Silvia Tagliazucchi 361
- » Towards a social-ecological urban morphology: integrating urban form and landscape ecology
Lars Marcus, Meta Berghauser Pont 371
- » Socio-spatial transformations in the tourist coastal region of Ecuador: new ways of life, new urban forms
Ricardo Pozo 379
- » 'La Plata' River (Buenos Aires, Argentina): traces and new territories
Viviana Colella 389
- » The 'Prognoz Platform' based analytical tool and its use for conservation, protection and reproduction of urban forests in the city of Perm
Svetlana Maximova, Piotr Lorens, Didier Vancutsem, Ekaterina Meltcova 397

Urban Landscapes 394 **406**

Chair_Pierre Gauthier

- » Typological processes, urban landscape character and development control: the case of Auckland, New Zealand 407
Xi Zheng
- » A 'socio-building' reading of the Valle d'Itria's landscape 419
Nicola Scardigno
- » New forms of the urban space in relation to nature. A didactic experience for the city of Monopoli 429
Anna Bruna Menghini
- » Signage regulation: an overview behind the production of chaotic commercial landscapes in Brazil 437
Vanessa Casarin, Alina Gonçalves Santiago
- » The fading of morphological conformity caused by street upgrading in arterial ribbon. Case study of Beijing Nanluo Guxiang in China 445
Leilei Song, Feng Song
- » Narrating Helsinki's Kalasatama. Narrative Plotting, Genre and Metaphor in Planning New Urban Morphologies 453
Lieven Ameen

Metropolitan Infrastructure **460**

Chair_Alessandra Capuano

- » Atlanta Beltline: Peripheral Interstitial Urbanism 461
Michael James Carroll
- » The Construction of Mountain-river Skeleton Based on Oriental Culture in Bengbu City 473
Junyan Yang, Ying Tan, Linlin Wang

Section 4

Landscape and Territory

Urban Regeneration **483**

Chair_Wowo Ding | Carlo Cecere

- » Practices after a Disaster: Geographical Narratives vs Territorial Dispersion 485
Lina Maria Calandra
- » Seismic vulnerability and urban morphology, tools for urban and building integration 497
Edoardo Currà, Alessandro D'Amico, Malte Michael Nettekoven
- » Exploring collaboration between the Conzenian and configurational approaches to urban morphology 509
Ye Zhang
- » Dramatic Changes in Urban Morphology: Urban Regeneration in Istanbul-Gaziosmanpasa 517
Yasemin Erkan Yazici, Zeynep Ayse Goksin, Evrim Tore
- » The Lost and Gains in Chibi City's Transition. The Reinterpretation of the Deconstruction of Historic Morphology of Chibi Historic City 527
Yanfei Jia, Yi He

» Amor vacui/Amor pleni <i>Carlo Moccia</i>	535
» Exploring Design Approaches for Urban Regeneration of Brown Fields: a Case of Hazaribagh Tannery Area <i>N. M. Esa Abrar Khan, Nabanita Islam, MD. Symum Hasan, Ifat Sultana, MD. Lutfor Rahman</i>	545
» The great dimension housing complexes as a place for urban regeneration <i>Lorenzo Diana, Edoardo Currà, Carlo Cecere</i>	555
» Harmonious or Monotonous: Urban Regeneration and the Form of Contemporary Urban Landscape <i>Mohamed M. Fageir Hussein</i>	565
» Reading Warsaw's complicated urban fabric <i>Aleksander Lupienko</i>	575
» From nature to the city and back: the case of Piazzale Clodio, Rome <i>Rosalba Belibani, Deborah Chiara Lefosse, Eride Caramia</i>	585

Conflicts and Contested Areas **594**

Chair_Nadia Charalambous

» Urban form and social segregation: the case of Mazatlán <i>Vicente Colomer Sendra, Ana Portalés Mañanós, David Urios Mondejar, Juan Colomer Alcácer</i>	595
» Territories of Social (Dis)Order: criminal landscape and spatial dynamics of St. Petersburg 'neighborhoods' <i>Marianna Muravyeva, Alexander Lukoyanov</i>	605
» Jerusalem: Urban Development in the last hundred years between Planned Growth and 'Spontaneous' Adaptations <i>Giuseppe Francesco Rociola</i>	613
» The return of an interest in Typomorphology in South African Urban Design <i>Henri Pierre Comrie</i>	625

Informal Settlements **636**

Chair_Anna Rita Donatella Amato

» Spatial and organization patterns in informal settlements. A morpho-typological approach <i>Oscar Carracedo García-Villalba</i>	637
» Understanding the City as a Whole: An Integrative Analysis of Rio de Janeiro and its Informal Settlements <i>Kimón Krenz, Fani Kostourou, Sophia Psarra, Caue Capille</i>	647
» Reading the form of informal Roma settlements in the light of everyday life <i>Milena Grbic, Olivera Stankovic Grujicic</i>	661
» Informality of sprawl? Morphogenetic evolution in post-socialist Tirana <i>Blerta Dino, Sam Griffiths, Kayvan Karimi</i>	667

Sustainable Design

680

Chair_Brenda Case Scheer

- » Sustainable Planning Framework: Case Study New Delhi
Amit Sarma 681
- » Ecological pattern mode of landscape city on the basis of habitat networks
Ying Tan, Qingshan Yao 693
- » Mediterranean Cities and Gardens. Structures and Sustainability
Giulia Annalinda Neglia 703
- » Urban Form as an Open-Ended System. Merging Maki's Group-Form With The Design Structure Matrix for a New Methodological Approach to Real Estate Planning
Nicola D'Addabbo, Valentino Danilo Matteis 713

Sustainable Design and Technologies

724

Chair_Qian Li

- » New Urban Patterns. Adaptations to sun and wind
Bengt Sundborg 725
- » Density and solar radiation in the historical urban fabrics: Colle Oppio neighbourhood's case in Rome
Michele Morganti 733
- » Microclimatic response of urban form in the Mediterranean context
Agnese Salvati, Carlo Cecere, Helena Coch 743
- » Toward an Asian Sustainable Urbanism: A Comparative Study of Model Eco-city Projects in Japan and China
Zhongjie Lin 753
- » Study Planned Economy Based Urban Plot Distribution and Urban Fabric: Casing Center District in Nanjing
Lina Zhang, Wowo Ding 765
- » Evaluation, financing, planning and design of contemporary urban interventions
Maria Rosaria Guarini, Nicola D'Addabbo, Marco Locurcio 775

Practices after a Disaster: Geographical Narratives vs Territorial Dispersion

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Keywords: Participatory Geography, Geographical Narrative, Disaster, Earthquake, L'Aquila

Abstract

After the earthquake on 6 April 2009, L'Aquila becomes more fragmented and dispersed physically, socially, and culturally. This transformation is closely bound up with some emergency solutions as the realization of segmented and separated residential zones that determine internal inequalities. L'Aquila knows a growing sense of fear, mistrust, uneasiness and a decreasing sense of cohesion towards a social polarization typical of larger cities. What most damages the community capacity to retain its potential for communication, participation, exchange, sociability is the sudden or accelerated replacement of open and public spaces with separated and private areas.

485

In the context of the urban transformation after the disaster that changed daily life of people and communities within the Municipality of L'Aquila, participation can represent a practice of regeneration to face urban fragmentation and territorial dispersion (Calandra, 2012). Some researchers of the Department of Human Studies, University of L'Aquila (Italy), have developed and are applying, according to the "trial-and-error" strategy, a methodology of communication and participation in research practices. It will be explained the geographical narrative issued from the participatory/participating research that involved citizens, students and scientists together (Cahill, 2007; Fuller, Kitchin, 2004; Pain, 2014) and that emphasizes the importance of places in the everyday life of people for their psycho-physical health and for the welfare of the entire community.

Introduction

The earthquake that hit the city of L'Aquila on 6th April 2009 resulted in a profound transformation of the urban fabric, with significant consequences for the behaviour and habits of its inhabitants¹. Suddenly the whole territory became more fragmented, as well as physically, socially and culturally dispersed. Such a process was closely related to the adoption of some emergency solutions and the development of new residential zones that were in themselves separated and segmented, resulting in spatial inequalities. These zones, named C.A.S.E. (*Complessi antisismici sostenibili ed ecocompatibili*: earthquake-proof sustainable and eco-friendly housing complexes), consist of 19 residential complexes that are scattered throughout the territory, including 186 buildings (4,500 dwellings) (figure 1). The design of the new 'temporary territory' also included M.A.P. (*Moduli abitativi provvisori*: temporary housing units) and M.U.S.P. (*Moduli ad uso scolastico provvisori*: temporary school units).

The sudden or accelerated replacement of open and public spaces with separate and private areas is resulting in an adverse impact on the city's ability to regain its potential for communication, participation and sociability amongst politicians and communities.

In this context, some researchers from the Department of human studies (DHS), University of L'Aquila, have developed and applied (with the contribution of students and private citizens) a research methodology based on communication and participation. According to the trial-and-error strategy, the research takes the shape of a regeneration practice to face urban fragmentation and territorial dispersion.

Practices after the earthquake: the participatory/participating research action

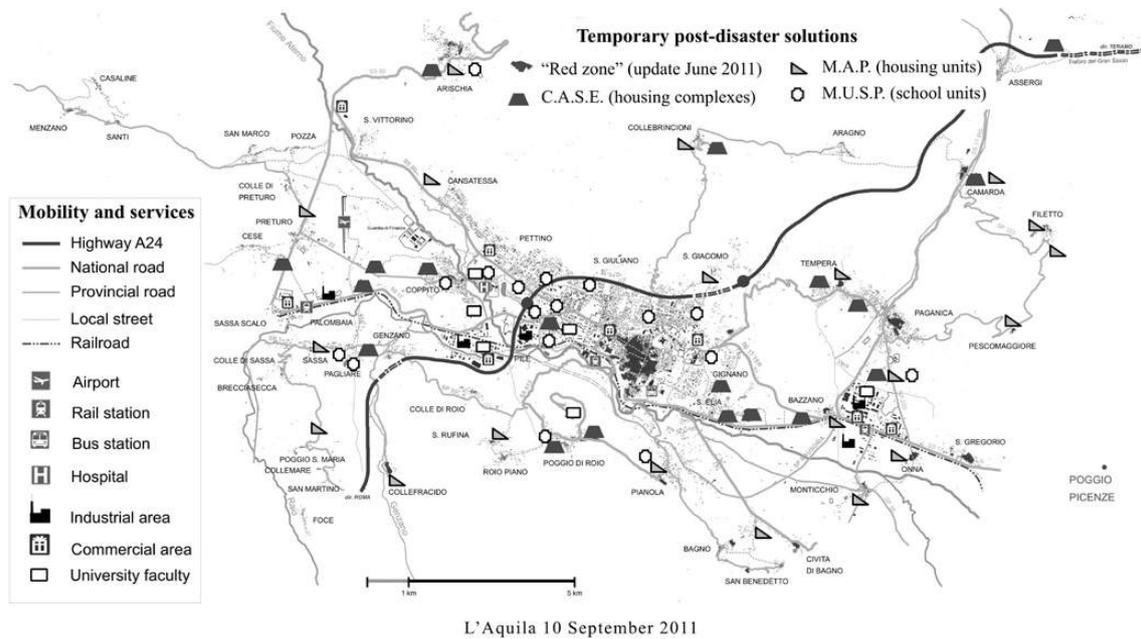
486 The Participatory-Participating Research Action (PPRA) was conceived in the *tendone* (big tent) of Piazza Duomo, where, since February 2010, a number of associations and citizens have been promoting activities to stimulate the public debate and participation within the city, including several events of national prominence. Specifically, a group of citizens involved in the *Tavolo comunicazione* (communication group), established within the "Assembly of Piazza Duomo"², defined and promoted the C.As.A. Initiative (*Comunicazione per l'ascolto attivo*: communication for active listening). A number of researchers, PhD students and students from the University DHS Cartolab laboratory also joined in the project.

Following S. Kemmis and R. McTaggart, "Participatory action research aims to help people recover, and release themselves from, the constraints of irrational, unproductive, unjust, and unsatisfying social structures that limit their self-development and self-determination. It is a process in which people explore the ways in which their practices are shaped and constrained by wider social (cultural, economic, and political) structures and consider whether they can intervene to release themselves from these constraints - or, if they cannot, how best to work within and around them to minimize the extent to which they contribute to irrationality, lack of productivity (inefficiency), injustice, and dissatisfactions (alienation) as people whose work and lives contribute to the structuring of a shared social life" (Kemmis, McTaggart, 2005; Blake, 2007).

¹The Municipality of L'Aquila covers an area of 467 square kilometres, including much of the Gran Sasso Massif, the highest peak in the Apennines. As of January 2009, the residents were 72,800; in 2013 just over 68,000. The Municipality consists of about fifty historical villages (from 3-4,000 inhabitants to a few hundred, for a total of 235 hectares) surrounding L'Aquila (13th century). The latter, with a prestigious historical centre enclosed by walls, covering an area of 168 hectares, is the capital city of Abruzzo and home to a University. Approximately 10,000 people (and over 5-6,000 university students) lived in the city centre of L'Aquila before the earthquake. The heart of the town was filled with public services, professional offices, businesses and cultural activities. Finally, a number of neighbourhoods, in a nearly continuous network, were developed outside of the city walls (Comune dell'Aquila, 2012).

²Please refer to: *L'Aquila Anno 1: Spazi Aperti per un'agenda aquilana*, Instant report (21 March 2010) and Mid-term report (18 April 2010); *Opuscolo informativo - Spazi Aperti* (available for download at <http://territoriaq.com/2012/11/26/266/>).

Figure 1. The territory of L'Aquila after the earthquake of 6h April 2009.



The primary focus of the C.As.A. Initiative was to look at the territorial configuration before and after the earthquake, in order to give insight into the changes that affected the individual and collective behaviour.

The activity took place from June to September 2010 in 9 C.A.S.E. sites (figure 2). For each site, it involved several days of brainstorming, in-depth interviews and data collection through a questionnaire. Over 300 households took part in the survey, with a total of about 1000 citizens.

487

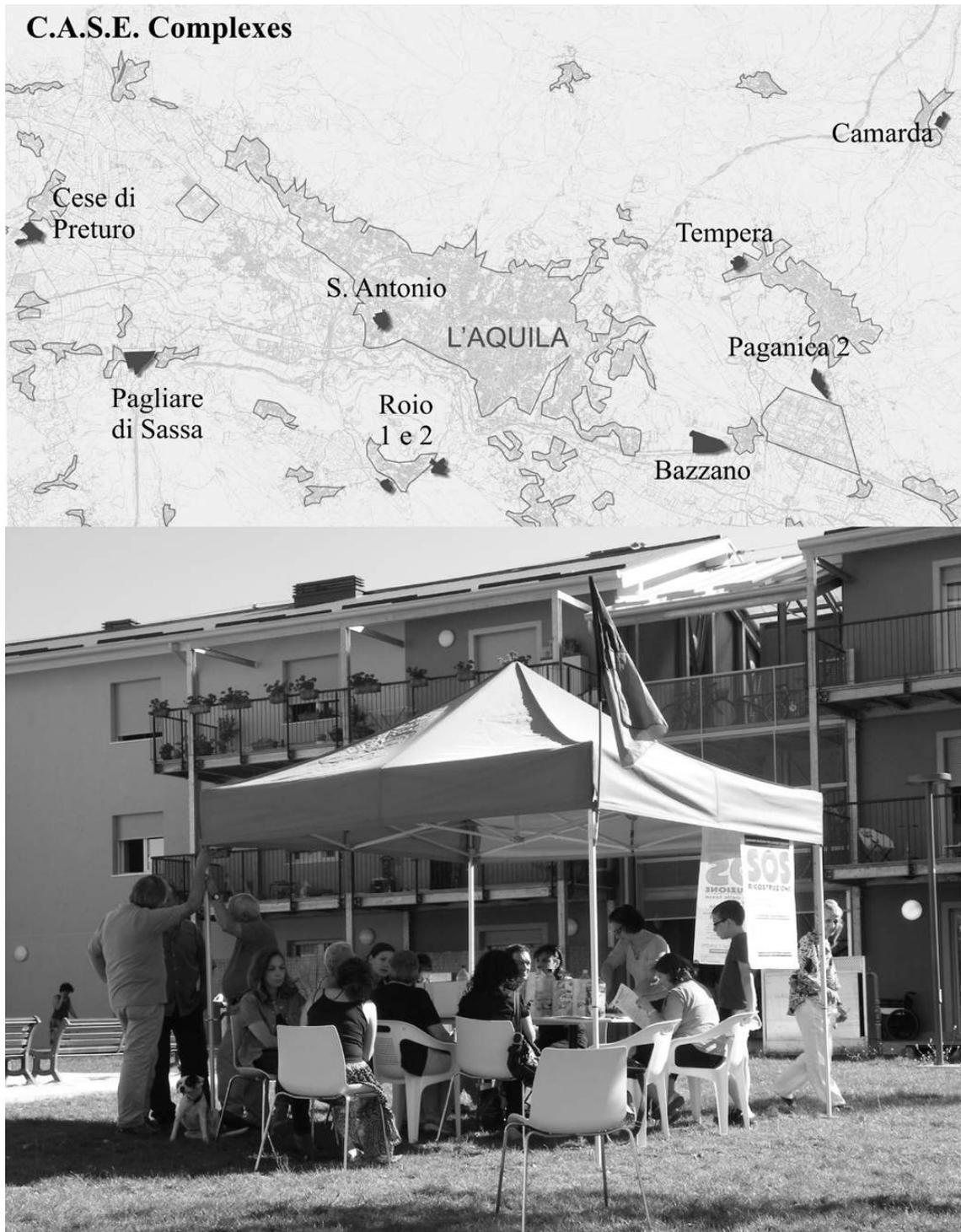
The result consisted of a broad investigation of the social and territorial unease after the earthquake, as an aftermath of the new territorialisation of L'Aquila. The most important result, however, was the "geographical narrative" of the earthquake elaborated in such a way as to illustrate ongoing social phenomena, relating them to the daily actions of each person (Boudon, Bourricaud, 1982). Combining multiple instruments (questionnaires, interviews, territorial and thematic meetings, etc.) and approaches (horizontal, vertical, integrated), and integrating qualitative and quantitative methods, the PPRA allowed to draw the "new social geography of L'Aquila after the earthquake", starting from the places of everyday life (Pain, 2004).

The results were presented on 10th September 2011, during a public meeting. This event, a *world café*, was attended by associations, academics, administrators, politicians, teachers, students and private citizens³. The results of the PPRA were presented in the form of a "visual story" through an exhibition including 40 posters divided into different sections⁴. The main goal of visual communication was to 'stage' people's lives before and after the earthquake. And it could not have been any different since the PPRA was conceived, organised and carried out by the same stakeholders that were involved in the decision-making processes (van Asselt Marjolein, Rijkens-Klomp 2002). The research-

³In parallel with the *world café*, taking place in a tent set up in the park nearby the Spanish Fort, in the old town centre of L'Aquila, a team of students and professors from the DHS pedagogical area set up a gazebo and organised a number of workshops involving children and teens (*LC Junior*). Results were presented at the end of the *world café*.

⁴The itinerary included the following thematic sections: 1) The boundaries of pain - Housing solutions; 2) Citizens want to hear; 3) A desire to participate; 4) Daily life after the earthquake; 5) Future perspectives; 6) Words and thoughts (Calandra, 2012).

Figure 2. The C.As.A. Initiative: C.A.S.E. complexes covered by the survey.



488

ers involved were themselves stakeholders, or better *terremotati* (earthquake survivors), living in the territories covered by the survey: they were not external experts totally unrelated to the research topic and relevant political choices (Elias, 2006). For this reason, the research was not only participatory, but also participating, in a broader sense.

This visual story, where cartographic representation plays an important role, represents the core element of the proposed communication and participation model that was

presented during the meeting: the *Laboratorio città* model (LC). It is a flexible, open, inclusive and always in progress “laboratory of democracy” that aims to identify and create a number of occasions to publicly discuss topics and issues starting from spatial analysis and territorial studies (Habermas, 1996; Reason, Bradbury, 2001). In the research, the visual processing of the results and the geographical narrative has a central role. It is designed so as to trigger social and political dynamics (Cahill, 2007; Elwood, 2006) to drive the empowerment of the local community, as well as the democratisation of knowledge and of the decision-making processes.

In other words, LC aimed to provide a methodology, both scientific and political, following the assumption of A. Giddens that the most effective forms of connection between social research and policy-making are those carried out through an extensive process of communication between researchers, decision-makers and those involved into any of the investigated matters (Giddens, 1987). Consequently, even the idea of participation at the base of his model is twofold.

Firstly, participation is understood as a methodology of inquiry used, prior to the cognitive process, by the experts (those who have the methodological, theoretical and technical knowledge) to obtain the systematic involvement of those who daily live in the territory, not as “study objects”, but rather as “subjects of knowledge” (Lather, 1986); a methodology to elaborate a legitimate framework for the interpretation of reality incorporating “the vocabulary of those who live the territory” (Martinez Alier, 2009). The purpose is to democratise knowledge and power through the research process (Fuller, Kitchin, 2004).

Secondly, participation is understood as a praxeological device, namely a communication platform and a space for ethical reflection where the intellectual and existential dimensions closely interact (Matthey, 2005). The idea is that participation acts as a catalyst for political dynamics and social actions towards an actual change; and, in the framework of a shared knowledge, as an “arena” to draw a number of moral, ethical and political considerations (Cutchin, 2002).

489

The institutional, political and social implications of the research

In line with the commitments made at the end of the *world café* meeting, a closer collaboration with the municipal authorities was established. In the first stage (October 2011 – June 2012), it took place in an informal and voluntary way and was implemented through public itineraries that were structured in three cycles of territorial meetings:

- 1) six meetings for a collaborative consulting to elaborate the Municipality “Participatory regulation”;
- 2) five meetings for the presentation of the “Plan for the reconstruction of the old town of L’Aquila and its villages” for the opening of a public inquiry;
- 3) four meetings for the collaborative writing of the “Mandate Program 2012-2017” of the Mayor Massimo Cialente, starting out on the election program (also prepared in a participatory way during the election campaign)⁵.

As a result, this partnership was formalized and, in October 2012, the DHS and the Municipality of L’Aquila undersigned a Memorandum of Understanding. Researchers and students from the Cartolab laboratory, as well as private citizens, volunteered offering their support for coordinating the Municipal Office for Participation, as well as for the preparation, organisation and implementation of new pathways to participation. In this new framework, three PPRA different stages were again proposed within the territory, consistently with the LC model.

The first stage was related to the *Preliminary survey for the participatory budgeting (PB)_2013* of the Municipality. The survey aimed to define a general framework summarising the main requests made by the citizens – sorted by geographical area – to be included into the municipal budget, in accordance with the various regulatory and financial constraints⁶.

⁵The Participatory Regulation and the Mandate Program are available on the web site of the Municipality of L’Aquila (<http://www.comune.laquila.gov.it>).

⁶The survey revealed a majority of requests concerned with interventions in the field of public works. Therefore the Municipal Council allocated just under 3 million Euros for the *Participatory*

The research was carried out through a public *Question time* (December 2012 - February 2013), a cycle of ten meetings held all over the municipal territory, with the mayor and the councillors. In short, the collection of data and information took place during the meetings, more precisely during the *proposal time*, which was dedicated to the discussion, in working groups, and the completion of a questionnaire. Data were also collected in some of the local high schools, within the European project "Youth Participatory Budgeting", with the Municipality as leading partner.

Overall, this stage of the PPRA involved nearly 850 people, of which 436 completed the questionnaire. The latter included a set of questions for the assessment of their territorial context and living conditions, as well as the formulation of proposals and practical requests⁷.

As in LC, the results were presented in the form of a posters exhibition, which were organised in order to provide a comparative perspective on the different stories of adults and youngsters. The presentation of the geographical narrative resulting from the research took place during ten deliberative meetings dedicated to the Participatory budgeting (March-April 2013).

The second stage of the PPRA, aimed to evaluate the sense of insecurity perceived by citizens, was held during a cycle of meetings, known as *Percorso sicurezza* (May-June 2013). During the meetings, the participants were asked to complete a questionnaire, which was delivered over the following months, also through face-to-face interviews. Overall, 324 questionnaires were collected⁸.

Finally, the third stage of the PPRA consisted of the work of fourteen young members (aged between 16 and 30) of the unofficial *Move your city* group, which joined the European project "Youth participatory budgeting". The research about mobility in the area of L'Aquila was conducted between November 2013 and February 2014. The team included 1,240 students from high schools and universities, and set out to prepare a report on urban mobility in relation to the habits of students, in terms of leisure and places of socialisation (Castellani, 2014). Once again, the results were returned in a visual form: eight posters presented to high school students through participatory meetings (May 2014).

As can be seen, the participatory paths are essentially conceived as a set of occasions to make permanent the cognitive process of interpretation and representation of reality. The purpose is to provide a foundational shared knowledge to support informed decision-making.

Research results: geographical narratives of the territorial dispersion and social fragmentation

The geographical narrative, drawn from the outcomes of the PPRA, articulates around the many places of people's everyday life. As mentioned, it focuses on the visual channel, using graphic and cartographic materials that will not be reported in this paper due to length restrictions⁹. However, we will try to account, in a discourse form, for specific moments of this geographical narrative of L'Aquila after the earthquake.

The places of the emergency (2009-2010)

At the beginning of the story, we can find the places of birth and some personal information about the 308 casualty of the earthquake: beside the citizens of L'Aquila, many of the victims came from other municipalities of Abruzzo, from other Italian regions and from other European, Latin American and Mediterranean countries. They are mostly young

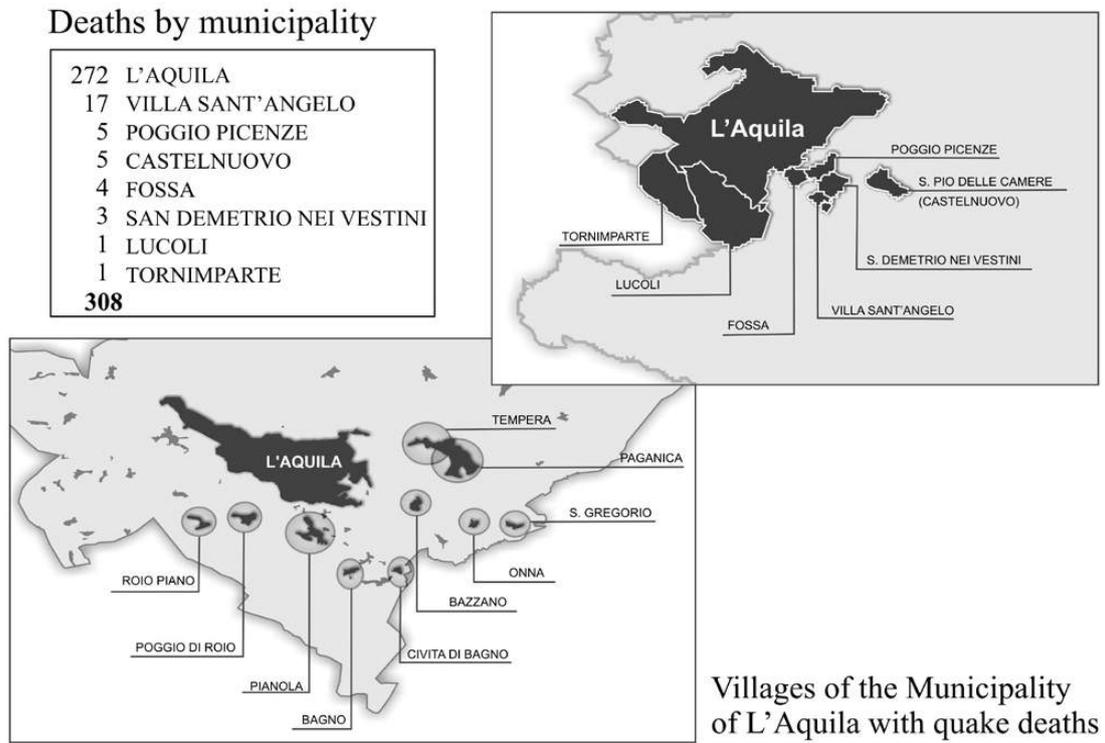
Budgeting 2013, in particular to the Multi-annual Plan of Public Works.

⁷All documentation relating to *Question time* and *Participatory Budgeting* can be downloaded from the "Participation" section of the Municipality of L'Aquila's web site.

⁸Following the replacement of the governmental police commissioner, the results were only presented after one year, during a conference, but not at local meetings with stakeholders.

⁹The graphic and cartographic materials of the research were published in Calandra (2012) and can be downloaded from the "Poster" section of the web site <http://www.laboratoriocittalaquila.it>.

Figure 3. Geographical narrative of earthquake: the places of death.



Localization of the deaths in the historic center of L'Aquila

491

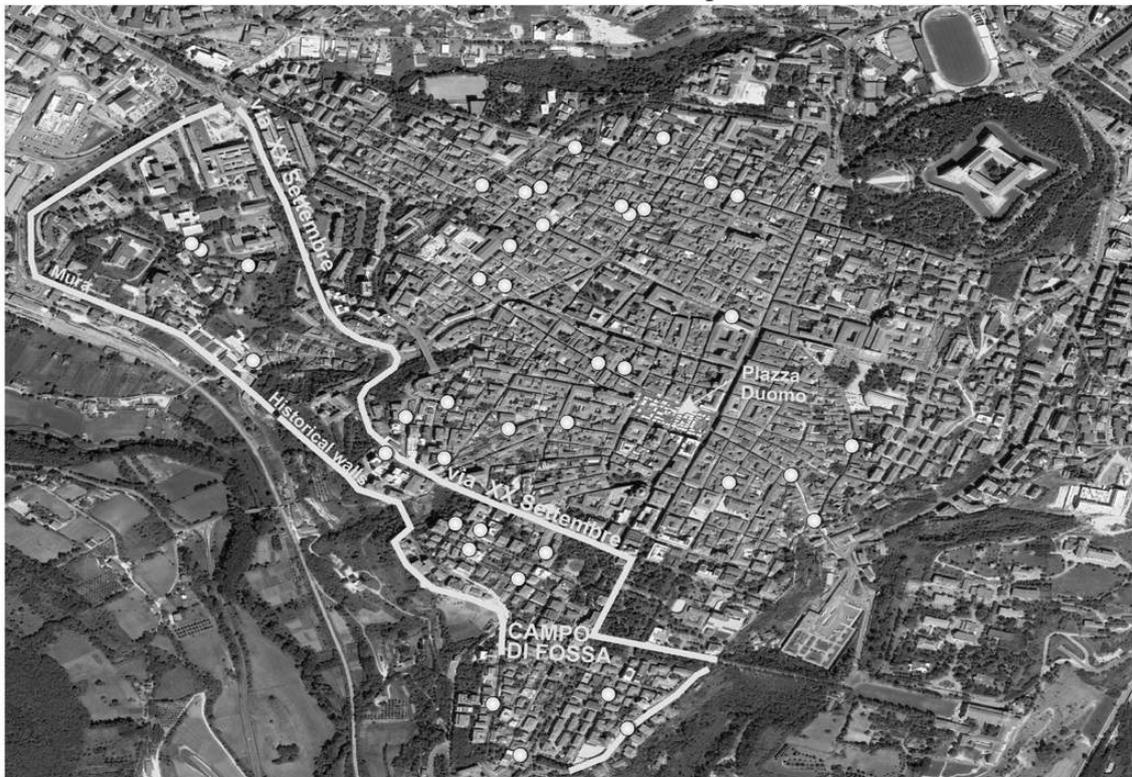
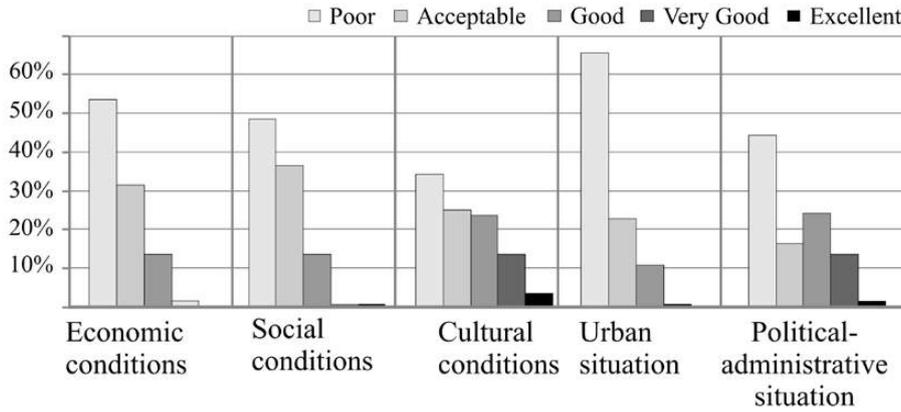


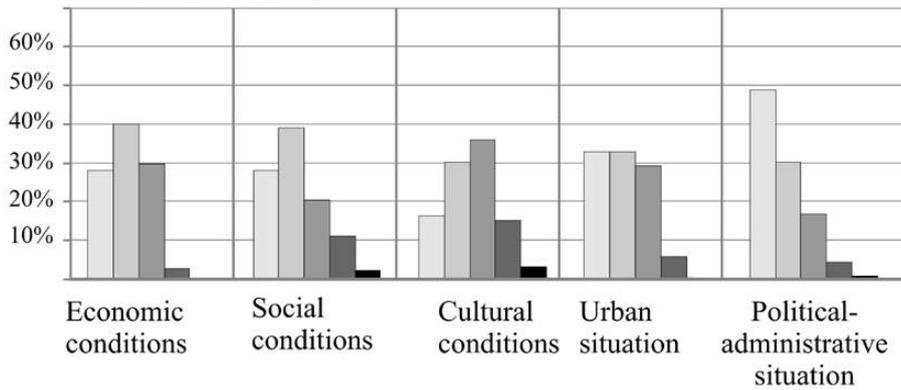
Figure 4. Territorial quality in the present and for the future as perceived by adults and young people.

The perception of territorial quality in the present

- according to adults

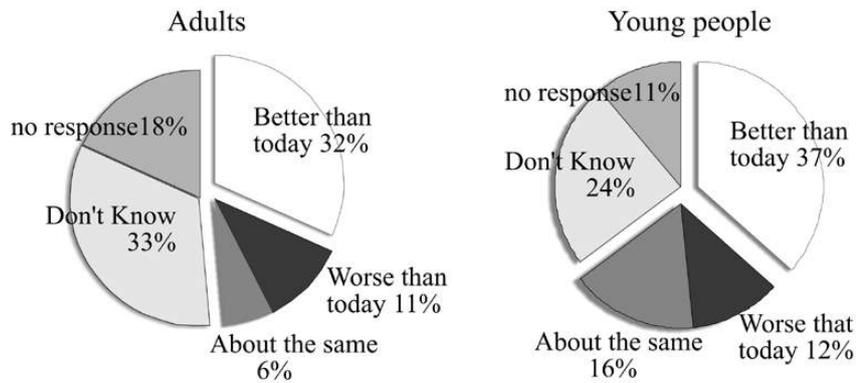


- according to young people



492

The perception of territorial quality for the future (in twenty years)



people (students) aged between 18 and 29 (about 23%), and elderly people aged over 65 (about 19%); women account for 58% of the total number. Even though the recollection of life antedating death leaves us speechless, the display of death places somehow prevents fatalism from creeping into people's mind and soul. It clearly appears that most of the victims lived in the Municipality of L'Aquila (272) and 50% of these concentrated in the southwest part of the old town (figure 3). Such a concentration of deaths in one single area is not a mere chance: it is the result of repeated acts of negligence towards the territory, from the early 1900s onwards, especially after another earthquake that struck Avezzano in 1915 (Stockel, 1981).

In the same way, the visualisation of the areas affected by material destruction reveals how some of them suffered more than others from the ongoing attitude of carelessness, shallowness and speculation towards the territory. Beyond the severe damages that affected the historic buildings of the city centre and the surrounding villages, it is striking to see the extent of damage that affected strategic public buildings, such as the regional hospital, the courthouse, the police headquarters, the land registry and newly urbanised districts (from the 1980s onwards) such as Pettino, the largest and most populated neighbourhood of L'Aquila with approximately 15,000 inhabitants. In Pettino, 38% of the buildings were affected by major structural damage (Calandra, 2012).

Finally, there are the places of the 67,000 evacuees: the *tendopoli* (tent cities) that accommodated approximately 20,000 people immediately after the earthquake, and the touristic facilities (hotels), especially along the Adriatic coast of Abruzzo. Most of the other affected people found their own alternative accommodations.

The places and practices of fragmentation and dispersion (2010-2011)

After the initial phase of emergency, the story shifts to the places of fragmentation and dispersion, highlighting the changes that affected the behaviour and the habits of the citizens of L'Aquila.

Many places were affected by sudden changes in terms of nature and functions. First of all, the old town centres of L'Aquila and the surrounding villages were declared 'red zone', off-limits and militarised. Similarly, whole neighbourhoods and areas of the city outside the walls emptied out, because the buildings were unusable. For months, the houses 'with the lights on' were only a few dozen. Only after the 'light' reconstruction (end of 2012 – early 2013), that is the reconstruction of 6,400 homes with fewer and no structural damages, here and there in the city could again be seen lights at the windows and flowers on the balconies. Meanwhile, in order to respond to the housing emergency of the displaced people, the Italian Government built a number of accommodations known as C.A.S.E. (figure 1): 14,000 people were accommodated in nineteen different sites, mainly located on national roads, especially in remote rural and suburban areas far off from the, prior to the earthquake, roughly continuous urban fabric. They are mostly sites deprived of any emotional and symbolic reference points, as well as material and organisational, where services are absent or inefficient. Depending on the site, from 200 to 2,000 people were accommodated in these houses. As a result the city stretches out 'like a chewing gum', from east to west, for about 35 km (Palma, 2012). At the same time, many services and activities were relocated without adequate coordination. As for instance:

- The municipal offices were scattered in more than a dozen different locations;
- Several university faculties were relocated in disused industrial buildings in the areas of Pile and Bazzano – these sites are only 10 km apart, yet, during certain hours, it may take up to 40 minutes to travel from one place to the other;
- In October 2009, only a few schools resumed their activities in their previous headquarters, whereas the majority of them were relocated in temporary units known as M.U.S.P., mainly situated within the old urban setting (where, at the time, hardly anybody used to reside anymore) (figure 1). Until now no school has been rebuilt.
- Several ambulant vendors that used to operate in the daily market of Piazza Duomo randomly relocated on streets, squares, parking lots, and so on.

As a consequence, post offices, shops, professional offices, etc. shut down or relocated, resulting in the disruption of relationships and proximity-oriented practices. For

instance, before the earthquake, 60% of the population used to reach for the nearest post office or medical facility, whilst, after the earthquake, 25% were forced to look for a different family physician or did not even know where their previous one relocated to.

As a result, thousands of people started perceiving as a problem simple activities that were previously quite natural and taken for granted: grocery shopping, pension's withdrawal, mail delivery, medical appointments, commuting to work, taking children to school and so on. People's habits in terms of shopping behaviour and shopping places were deeply affected: before the earthquake, people used to go shopping in local supermarkets (44%) and at the daily market of Piazza Duomo (21%), whereas, after the earthquake, 25% of citizens go shopping "wherever they can", 13% buy from "street stalls" and the percentage of those who go to shopping centres increased by eleven points (from 14% to 25%). In this regard, it should be noted that, within eighteen months after the earthquake, the number of shopping centres in the Municipality of L'Aquila had more than doubled. Similarly, even with respect to leisure time, there were important changes in terms of behaviour: the percentage of people going to the old town significantly decreased (before the earthquake, 35% of people used to go to the city centre for shopping, too), as well as cinema and theatre attendance. It is striking, on the other hand, the significant increase of people that tend to spend their time "at home", which reveals the tendency of individuals to take refuge in themselves and their own families. It took a few years (2013-2014) for the old town centre to regain its popularity, especially among teens every Saturday evening and young people (not just university students) every Thursday and Friday night.

Mobility resulted in a major issue, and still is today. There are many critical factors: on the one hand, the inefficiency of public services, which fails to adequately cover the new increased distances; on the other hand, the impact on mobility, due to the increased use of cars, the alteration of routes after the chaotic relocation of offices, services, functions, etc., and the increased flows in certain areas due to the concentration of 1,000-2,000 people in areas that were only equipped to accommodate few hundred (for instance the C.A.S.E. complex of Cese di Preturo). Moreover, from most of the C.A.S.E. sites, it is virtually impossible to reach work places, schools or supermarkets on foot, or simply to go for a walk. This results in the congestion of the major road transport arteries, which are now blocked by construction sites, leading to an increase (twice, trice or even quadruple as much) of the journey times during certain hours.

494

The places of everyday life: objectivity versus perception (2012-2013)

People's behaviour after the earthquake was not conducive to the maintenance or reconstruction of relatedness, communicability, proximity and solidarity networks. This had an impact on the way people perceive the places of everyday life, life contexts, and security.

After five years from the earthquake, from the adult population's point of view, the relationship with the territory is troublesome in its present and future projections (figure 4): overall, they provide poor quality evaluations about the present and cannot figure out some kind of vision for the future. Therefore, the fact that, in spite of this, most adults (72%) declared that they were not willing to move to another city reveals a tendency to feel like 'prisoners' of one's own territory: this implies that the sense of constraint prevails on that of belonging. Instead, from the point of view of young people, even though the spatial projection into the present appears more objective and pondered over real data (after all, "not everything sucks"), the projection into the future turns out even more pessimistic than the adults': it is not surprising, therefore, that 46% of young people want to move to another city.

This perception of the life context counterpoints the desire for care, decency and cleanliness, which translates into practical and precise needs: improvement of road conditions, enhanced usability and accessibility of public spaces, maintenance or creation of equipped green areas, pedestrian traffic control, road cleaning and maintenance, and so on.

The desire for care is connected with a strong sense of insecurity amongst the citizens of L'Aquila. Looking at the places and situations in which people feel it more, it is significant, but not surprising after all, that 52% of people declared they feel more insecure

when they “go out at night”: this figure, while higher, is more or less in line with similar data at a national level. Moreover, it relates to the direct rating of the places of everyday life – for example, some roads are dirty, in bad conditions and poorly lit – and certain places where alcohol abuse and vandalism are quite frequent. Instead, it is quite surprising that 48% of people declared that the place where they feel more insecure is “at home”. Very significantly, the percentage rises to 57% among those who live in the C.A.S.E.; whereas 55% feel “little or not protected” when they go out at night. It is also quite worrying that 12% declared that they “do not go out” at all, and to the question “How safe do you feel when you are alone at home and it is dark?”, 38% replied “little” and 17% “not at all”. This is not due to an high crime rate, but rather to the relationship that connects the territory and its inhabitants after the earthquake; a relationship that seems to evolve from a physiological to a pathological functioning (Allevi, 2013).

Conclusion

As we have seen, L'Aquila is currently experiencing a growing sense of fear for the future, mistrust and uneasiness, as well as a decreasing sense of cohesion towards a social polarisation that is typical of larger cities. The reconfiguration of the territory after the earthquake resulted in an acceleration and accentuation of the sense of fragmentation and dispersion, which, although already present before the earthquake, was not so widespread amongst inhabitants. In this context, we believe that the PPRA may represent a response to the inconsistency of urban fragmentation, as well as a practice for regenerating paths for the valorisation of relationships, social cohesion and territorial inclusiveness. Definitely, the PPRA may represent a form of resistance and resilience, but also an ethical choice focused on knowledge, awareness and responsible action (Smith, 1997; Soja, 1993). In the same way, the geographical narrative of social and spatial dynamics, drawn from the research, plays a key role as a potential medium between politics, communities and science in post-disaster contexts, also as a means to preserve the identity of places and, above all, to preserve a possibility for people to be happy and feel good in their own territory.

495

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496

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