

The Role And The Future Of Small Towns In The Central Italy Earthquake Crater 2016 And "The Reconstruction Of The Possible", Participatory Workshop For A Post-Earthquake Development Plan In Bologna

Ruben Baiocco¹, Cristina Catalanotti², Giulio Ernesti³, Massimiliano Barbiero⁴

¹*IUAV University, baiocco@iuav.it*

²*Polytechnic University of Milan, cristina.catalanotti@polimi.it*

³*IUAV University, giulio.ernesti@gmail.com*

⁴*Independent researcher, barbieromassimiliano@gmail.com*

Abstract: The earthquake that involved Central Italy in 2016, in addition to its disruptive effects on people, heritage and social capital, cracking the fragile balance of economic and demographic systems, has greatly amplified the attention paid small municipalities, on the Apennines Mountains. Summing the Small Municipalities Law and the National Strategy for Internal Areas, a sole large-scale project affecting the so-called "earthquake crater" of Central Italy can be outlined and presented as a widespread reconstruction work, in the name of safety and technical, technological, administrative and planning innovation. Despite the magnitude of the objectives, the dislocation of damages, the distribution and over-provision of historical, public and private assets, the particularity of the places involved, characterized by extreme specificity and inhabited by local micro-communities with a strong local identity, are likely to enhance little programmatic tools. Assuming the necessity of a context-based and collaborative approach to producing effective change at the local and regional scale, the question is: how to make possible and support a local pro-active and cooperative environment? By focusing on the collaboration developed in 2017 between the Municipality of Bologna and the IUAV University, the paper explores the possibility of co-designing an action plan for post-earthquake development.

Keywords: Governance tools, Participatory process, Institutional innovation, Territorial regeneration, Risk planning

Central Italy Small Municipalities. A resourceful context, between criticalities and new strategies.

In 2016 the Central Italy Earthquake involved a large part of the small municipalities attested on the Apennines, between Marche, Umbria, Lazio and Abruzzo. In addition to its disruptive effects on people, heritage and social capital, the earthquake cracked the fragile balance of economic and demographic systems. Those territories showed, since the fifties, a process of disarticulation of the social and economic fabric and abandonment of the land, with the population moving toward less marginal areas of the country, *i.e.* big or medium cities and largely industrialized valleys. Within this already critical situation, the earthquake emerged as an opportunity not only

to describe and discuss the intrinsic values and potentialities of those territories but also to fund a reconstruction process that would have worked as a complex and transversal system of improvements and reforms to flip the marginalization process of the Apennines. Two major national programmes would have allowed the regeneration process of these territories: the so-called Small Municipalities law and the SNAI (National Strategy for Internal Areas). Interestingly the surface areas of the two programmes largely overlap (ANCI 2017).

The driving idea to reimagine the Apennines is a form of *intrinsic sustainability* that these territories show (Fondazione Symbola 2018). They emerge as laboratories where industrial production is organized within local districts based on local communities (Becattini 2002; Sforzi 2008), and the agricultural production is investing in the creation of local supply chains and organic products (Fondazione Symbola 2018); also they were able to save high levels of biodiversity and memories of an ancient past (Calvaresi 2015b). At some degree, those tendencies are an implicit and innate form of sustainability that the inner part of the country displays. They were only possible because of the marginality of those territories from the industrialization and modernization processes that caused, on one side, the previously mentioned abandonment processes but also, on the other side, produced high levels of pollution and bureaucratization in big cities and intensively exploited lands in the rest of the country. In this sense, these territories constitute a resource to be taken into account for public policies.

The relevance and the strategic role that Italian inner areas and small towns play were already shaping the mentioned national programmes. The so-called Small Municipalities Law -officially "*Misure per il sostegno e la valorizzazione dei piccoli comuni nonché disposizioni per la riqualificazione e il recupero dei centri storici dei medesimi comuni*", law 158/2017- is the output of a long and careful observation of local systems, and its approval was only speeded up by the earthquake. The law included a series of measures to support and develop small Italian municipalities with less than five thousand inhabitants and also contained actions addressing the renewal of their historical centres. This law affected 5.567 towns, approximately covering the 54% of the whole national territory with a population of about eleven thousand inhabitants, and allocated about 100 mil., to be distributed between the 2017 and 2023 (ANCI 2017). The SNAI, on the other side, was already at work since 2013. According to this programme, marginalities, calculated through a series of indicators of the distance from 'centralities' and services, should be at the centre of national policies. The policy design process should use a place-based approach that, working through prototypes and fostering strong local governance by public administration, would have overcome the illusions of purely bottom-up local projects and pretence of state-driven projects (Calvaresi 2015a). In this sense, what should emerge is that both the instruments, the 158/2017 law and the SNAI, even though with lightly different interpretative models, and different implementation protocols, are aimed at making this portion of Italian Territory less marginal, more cohesive and, so, more competitive. The programmes allocated consistent funds in the selected areas to achieve this enormous goal.

Therefore the earthquake should be taken into account not only because of its sudden and tragic nature but also as the accelerator of already existing processes. On one side there where dynamics of progressive social-economic impoverishment and depopulation, despite any small signal of recovery showed before the earthquake (Renzi 2018); on the other side, the earthquake fuelled the approval of programmes and projects aimed at stabilizing qualitative strengths of Central Italy. The whole reconstruction project, then, seems to be the last opportunity to avoid an inevitable decline and a future in which Central Italy Internal Areas, the earthquake crater, could represent a model for sustainable development. Thus the physical (and selective) reconstruction project in the earthquake crater could be considered a part of a larger urban and territorial regeneration project that could benefit from national and European funds (Law 158/2017, SNAI, reconstruction funds plus European funds as, among others, FEASR, FSE). In this sense, this complex project, being the crater the first experimental step, would be the more significant public investment in territorial regeneration in the history of the Italian Republic (Renzi, 2018). It would represent an extensive work of reconstruction, the most extensive building site in Europe, in the name of risk resiliency and innovation in design, technological and bureaucratic protocols.

Despite that, the described instruments, being too programmatic and hardly able to catch, understand and engage the extreme local singularities and the many diverse local communities, were easily unable to reach their objectives. The over-provision of public and private goods, the social capital and the specificity of the context, where micro-communities have strong and conflicting identities would need an approach and a series of instruments able to catch and rearticulate the many different identities and actors. Demonstration of it lays in the long-lasting state of *emergency* and in the awkward start of the reconstruction in a context where local communities have traditionally shown a pro-active tendency. The relation between local, i.e. micro-communities and specific contexts, and territorial, i.e. the Apennines and any institution aimed at addressing their governance, becomes critical.

Summing up, what emerges within the post-earthquake reconstruction – pertinent but also too much pre-determined and constraining- is not the lack of norms or innovative aspects in the administrative orders, yet their substantial inability to radically transform design and planning protocols. The approach to a post-earthquake rebuilding seems unable to include all of the mentioned singularities and adversarial (business) interests that emerge if we look at small municipalities. Here again to look at local governance processes gains a critical perspective, because of the genuine possibility to implement any national policy or programme. The participatory workshop in one small municipality –Bolognola- then emerges as an experiment to develop a place-based approach, that assumes one case study, in between the exceptional and the norm (Thomas 2005), from which we could move back to a general theory and then get back to practice, proposing new territorial settings and collective and collaborative strategies.

The workshop “La ricostruzione del possibile” in Bolognola, between collaboration and co-design.

Bolognola is the smallest municipality of the Marche Region, both in terms of area (25,88 km²) and in terms of inhabitants (137, of which only 108 permanently living in Bolognola); it is also the highest ones (1070 m. a.s.l.). Its territory is included in the National Park of the Monti Sibillini, and its economy is mainly connected with resources typical of mountain areas. Particularly relevant, in local economies, are woods-connected activities and pastoralism, with sheep and bovines, and tourism-related activities. The first group also survive thanks to the enduring of quite extended common lands in the area. The last group has experienced fluctuating success, but, recently, gained relevance thanks to the growing attention toward the naturalistic, historical and cultural value of the mentioned National Park and the revamp of outdoor sports and free-time activities such as trekking, mountain biking, and many others. The 2016 earthquake adds on an already fragile milieu with the disruption of productive infrastructures such as barns and sheds –putting the livestock in danger during the freezing winters- and hotels, housing and lodges for tourists, made not fit to use. The earthquake also meant a reduction in tourism flows, since people were scared by the risk of other tremors.

For what regards the housing stock, in Bolognola only the 30% of it was permanently inhabited by residents, mainly in the main village constituted by the three original medieval villages from which the municipality was born; 70% of the residential buildings were empty for most of the time. The earthquake did not provoke the collapse of any building, but it made non-habitable, more than the 50% of the all housing stock, and, among those, the 80% of the houses inhabited by all-year residents. Right after the earthquake, then, most of the residents moved to the coastal area of the Region, and only about 79 persons stayed in Bolognola. The risk is that those who left during the emergency will never come back: this was the leitmotiv of many public meetings, not only in Bolognola but in all the earthquake-crater. In the case of Bolognola, due to the already low number of inhabitants, it would have meant the disappearance of the local community and the possibility that the municipality would be incorporated to the close ones (already discussed as a possible option before the earthquake and also already happened in other close municipalities).

Because of the critical situation, the resources described in the previous paragraph represent a significant opportunity to let the local community stay, not only as small and utopian pockets of resistance. The earthquake became the opportunity to invest in a regeneration project that could transform hopes and vague ideas into

tangible improvements. To pro-actively use endogenous resources to sustain a *minimum vital flow*, and to foster any small improvement able to attract new users and (economic) activities becomes imperative.

From this urgency, the collaboration between the local administration and the IUAV University started. The driving question was: *how to proactively use endogenous resources to sustain a minimum vital flow, and to foster any small improvement able to attract new users and (economic) activities?* Moreover, the focus was not only about how to practically produce those new economies and futures, but *how to stimulate –and sustain in the long term- local pro-active subjectivities and a learning process between institutions, citizens and new economic stakeholders*, interested in investing their energies in projects in –and for- Bolognola?

The hypothesis that the mentioned workshop wanted to test is that a co-design event, open to the public, in other words with a high degree of *participation*, could represent not only a participatory design tool but a moment of empowerment of the local community, setting the scene for a collaborative approach for future development.

In this sense, collaboration is here not only used to depict a participatory environment that includes, in the planning process, the public institutions/decision makers and also everyday people. Neither collaboration only means conflict resolution through alternative dispute resolutions (ADR) techniques. Collaboration is here intended as an approach, a state of mind that, acknowledging the existence of conflict, tries to overcome the mere confrontation of two different positions fostering understanding, empathy and mutual respect. Collaboration implies a great effort in explaining technical and personal reasons and in carefully listening to other participants to the process. To foster such an approach within participatory events ideally sets the mood to participate in other meetings collaboratively.

On this premises, the workshop “The reconstruction of the possible”, whose title recalls the aim to build on the ruins produced by the earthquake in order to envision possible alternative futures for the territories hit by the catastrophic event, was held. During the design studio -“Laboratorio di Sintesi”- of the Master in City and Environment Planning and policies at IUAV University, thirty students, together with the authors of this paper, were invited for one week in Bolognola to listen to the inhabitants and to facilitate the workshop.

Clearly to be on site for one week is neither enough to set a collaborative environment successfully, or to prepare a charrette –a participatory method aimed at designing a project/plan/programme, and reflecting with the participants about how to practically configure physical spaces to achieve an objective. Also, the programme was so dense that there were only a few moments dedicated to co-design, and also there were not all the expected participants. Despite that, the students were able to pinpoint key-people and fruitfully engaged with them, also through walks and informal chats. The result was the production, by the students, of six reports. A part of them focused on the legal and technical framework in which the reconstruction process was starting (at the time of the workshop and the design studio, the emergency phase had just ended). Others concentrated their attention on local material and non-material resources; other groups carefully identified, through the conversation they had with the inhabitants of Bolognola, visions and hints for local social entrepreneurship.

Bolognola can be considered as an extreme example of criticalities experienced by many surrounding towns in Central Italy Internal Areas. At the same time, the small municipality also exemplifies all the opportunities and the strengths that a careful reconstruction project could put at stake and that were mentioned in the first paragraph of this paper. Within those premises, the guideline for further reflections could be: which kind of *material or virtual infrastructure*, or platform, could enhance collaborative forms of *interaction among the diverse stakeholders* to let local strengths and visions emerge in order to build a local agenda for development? In other words, how to let local social entrepreneurship emerge and survive in the long term? Which tools planners have? The presented workshop suggests that, despite the difficulty to set actually collaborative processes, only moving to a generative form of listening -as the most in-depth way of listening to the others that requires the listener to be out of his system and open to what surrounds him-, we can generate solution as

collective creations (Scharmer 2009, 2018). In other words, only through active forms of listening (Selavi 2009), we will be able to detect molecules of bottom-up *projectual sensitivities* and connect them with (i) institutional frameworks and founts and (ii) necessary skills and expertise. By doing so, and starting from detailed enquires of local *micro-cosmos*, an articulated and trans-scalar set of plans, programmes, projects and actions, either public or private, could be outlined toward the definition of a coherent group of policies for the regeneration of the territory.

Toward a post-earthquake development agenda.

A preliminary listing phase, formalized in a document called "the collection of ideas and projects" was necessary to reconstruct in detail needs, ideas and project emerged within the design-charrette. For Bolognola, its public administration, the private stakeholders and the citizens, the catalogue represents a shared document and is an attempt to return all the interests at stake, in the most exhaustive manner possible. The collection might both be the base on which pacts between the public administration and the citizens could be build and function as a support on which the institution sustain those pro-active groups that are already developing projects in the area. The reasoned list can also constitute support for those who, thanks to existing funding, decide to start new activities.

The next step in the design of a development agenda would imply to transform the collection into a *constellation*, meaning, with that, the identification of supply chains in which an existing projectuality can be accounted (for its economic feasibility) and for its nexus with other projects (in and out each constellation).

The concept of the supply chain is here used to describe multiple connections and different actors involved in the transformation process of a resource into a good. It implies organizations, public and private deals, regulations and norms. Constellations of projects should be described and grouped in different supply chains, assessing their impacts on *the micro-cosmos project*, which identifies the ensemble of actions and inputs that would guarantee a minimum vital flow –services and micro-economies- in the small municipalities. The micro-cosmos project is only made possible by forms of collaboration and partnerships between the public, the private and the people.

References

- AGENZIA PER LA COESIONE TERRITORIALE. 2013. 'Strategia Nazionale per Le Aree Interne: Definizione, Obiettivi, Strumenti e Governance, Accordo Di Partenariato 2014-2020. Documento Tecnico Collegato Alla Bozza Di Accordo Di Partenariato Trasmessa Alla CE Il, 9 Dicembre 2013'.
- ANCI. 2017a. 'Agenda Controesodo. Una Politica Nazionale per Il Sistema Locale Ed Il Rilancio Dei Territori a Partire Da Quelli Più Disagiati'.
- ANCI. 2017b. 'Agenda Cotntroesodo. Nuovi Assetti e Politiche per Il Sistema Locale.' Presented at the XVII Conferenza Nazionale Anci Piccoli Comuni, June 30, San Benedetto del Tronto.
- ANCI and IFEL, Fondazione Anci. 2015. *Atlante Dei Piccoli Comuni 2015*.
- Barca, F., Casavola, P., and Lucatelli. 2014. 'Strategia Nazionale per Le Aree Interne: Definizione, Obiettivi, Strumenti e Governance'.
- Becattini, G. 2002. 'From Marshall's to the Italian "Industrial Districts". A Brief Critical Reconstruction'. Pp. 83–106 in *Complexity and Industrial Clusters, Contributions to Economics*, edited by A. Q. Curzio and M. Fortis. Physica-Verlag HD.
- Calvaresi, C. 2015a. 'Le aree interne, un problema di policy'. *TERRITORIO* (74):87–90.
- Calvaresi, C. 2015b. 'Una strategia nazionale per le aree interne: diritti di cittadinanza e sviluppo locale'. *Territorio* (74), 78–79.
- FONDAZIONE SYMBOLA. 2018. *Atlante Dell'Appennino*, Rubbettino Editore, Soveria Mannelli (CZ).



- Lucatelli, S. 2015. 'La strategia nazionale, il riconoscimento delle aree interne'. *Territorio*, (74), 80-86.
- Marana, P. Labaka, L., & Sarriegi, J. M. (2018). A framework for public-private-people partnerships in the city resilience-building process. *Safety science*, 110, 39-50.
- Renzi, F. 2018. 'Dov'era Come Sarà: Appennino e contemporaneità'. Unpublished Lecture, Presented at the "Conoscere la ricostruzione", Seminario a cura di R. Baiocco, G. Ernesti, P. Romagnoni, Winter, Università Iuav di Venezia, Venezia.
- Rolli, G.L. 2015. 'I Terremoti Salveranno i Centri Storici Minori Dall'abbandono?' *Economia Della Cultura* (1/2015).
- Scharmer, O. 2009. *Theory U: Learning from the Future as It Emerges*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Scharmer, O. 2018. *The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Sclavi, M. 2009. 'Ascolto Attivo e seconda modernità: sulla gestione creativa dei conflitti'. Pp. 133–57 in *Gestire i conflitti interculturali ed interreligiosi*. Vol. nuova serie, n. 19. Pisa: Pisa university Press.
- Sforzi, F. 2008. 'Il Distretto Industriale: Da Marshall a Becattini (The Industrial District: From Marshall to Becattini)'. *Il Pensiero Economico Italiano* 16(2):71–80.
- Thomas, Y. 2005. 'L'estreme et l'ordinaire. Remarques Sur Le Cas Medieval de La Communauté Disparue'. Pp. 45–73 in Passeron J. C., Ravel J. (eds.), *Penser par cas*. Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales.
- Valeriani, E. and Bertelli, A. 2017. *L'attività del Commissario Straordinario ed il futuro della ricostruzione del Centro Italia: una strategia sostenibile. Rapporto*.

