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# The City of L'Aquila after the 2009 Earthquake: Review of Connections between Depopulation, Identity and Continuity

*Stefano Gizzi*

## Abstract

The chapter wants to take into consideration the progressive loss of identity and authenticity of the city of L'Aquila, located in the Abruzzi region of central Italy about a hundred kilometers east of Rome, after the earthquake of 2009. Described as “a small Florence of the Italian Renaissance”, L'Aquila is nestled in a basin surrounded by mountains, with what was a fully recognizable identity until the devastating earthquake which took place on April 6, 2009, the night after Palm Sunday. After those violent seismic shocks, repeated in 2016 and 2017, there was a progressive demographic depopulation, since the historic center of the capital and that of the hamlets have been closed and declared a “red zone”. The population, especially the younger ones, no longer recognizes themselves in their place of origin, and many people have preferred to leave. Authenticity, both material and formal (of the urban form) is also increasingly diminishing. Today the image of the city, which had been handed down over centuries, is lost. Immediately after the 2009 earthquake the city was closed and barred, preventing residents from remaining in their homes, even in the less damaged ones. The historic center was isolated and emptied, occupied by the military forces and the Fire Brigade. Contrary to any common sense, instead of immediately carrying out consolidation and restoration work (especially with regards to the more characteristic minor structures), it was decided to begin with long and expensive shoring and scaffolding installations. A forest of props and tie rods that secure the walls and draw imaginative and imposing patterns, thus postponing sine die urgent works. With the forced expulsion of the inhabitants which has now lasted for nearly seven years, the younger generation particularly, is showing (perhaps unconsciously) more and more indifference and detachment from their roots in the historic center. As time passes social and economic interest (as well as those of identity) in returning to their past houses fade. They prefer to pass time elsewhere, either in the suburbs where anonymous shopping centers have mushroomed, or in other cities (in some aspects this has been favored by the possibility of obtaining funds for the purchase of houses outside the municipality). This is why one can speak of a double loss of identity and continuity. The topic should, therefore, be approached from a twofold point of view: identity and continuity. Identity meaning that which transmits the original model and characteristic of place and the inhabitants; and continuity meaning that which allows you to remain permanently in the same place with a stable dwelling. We also find a dual meaning in

lasting continuity; the people (inhabitants), and the space and form of architecture. Identity and continuity are also reflected in lifestyle, as well as in details, materials, colors and common feelings. A 'sentimental heritage' as well as a material one, which is now lost. There is, therefore, a twin theme: that of the continuation of archetypes, and that of housing models in which the population recognizes itself. Today in L'Aquila, identity has disappeared. The inhabitants no longer appear as protagonists, but are reduced to extras, to mute actors against the backdrop of an incomprehensible scene. Even if the search for a lost identity and continuity may now seem an unreal or utopian goal, it should have been the opposite; they should have been the priority and gone hand in hand with the reconstruction. At the end, the various restoration and reconstruction criteria for the survival of what remains of the city will also be examined.

**Keywords:** Identity, Continuity, Demographic Depopulation, Earthquake, Restoration, Image of The City

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Abstract

The article takes into consideration the relationships between loss of identity, depopulation and discontinuity in the city of L'Aquila, in central Italy, after the devastating earthquake of 2009, also examining the various aspects related to the theme of reconstruction and restoration, material and immaterial, and the possibility of a hopeful permanence of the inhabitants in the historic center and in the relevant territory. The causes of the progressive depopulation and the change in the urban and territorial image of the city are examined. The errors made after the earthquake with the forced closure of the historic center to the inhabitants and the slowness of the reconstruction and restoration processes are also evaluated.

### 1.2 Background of the study

L'Aquila, located in the Abruzzi region of central Italy about a hundred kilometers east of Rome, is a city emblematic of a lost identity (both material and symbolic), and a discontinuity of the population and their local traditions. Described as "a small Florence of the Italian Renaissance", L'Aquila is nestled in a basin surrounded by mountains, with what was a fully recognizable identity until the devastating earthquake which took place on April 6, 2009, the night after Palm Sunday.

According to tradition, the city was founded by Frederick II of Swabia [1–4] - *vir inquisitor et sapientiae ama* - as he describes himself in his treatise on hunting,<sup>1</sup> (even if the constitutive Act is now considered apocryphal). It was planned, at least intentionally, between 1241 and 1245 in order to strengthen the border territories as a bulwark against the power of the papacy. Construction was completed by his son Corrado IV [5], and consolidated after the victory of Charles I of Anjou over the Swabians at the Battle of Benevento in 1266.

L'Aquila, therefore, has a double ancestry (Swabian and Angioinian), which was still clearly visible at the time of the earthquake. On a plaque, set in the walls of Montefalco in Umbria, is an engraved emblem of the imperial eagle of Frederick, geometrically marked with two opposing triangles. This symbol, according to some

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<sup>1</sup> FEDERICO II, *De arte venandi cum avibus*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms. cod. Pal. Lat. 1071 (orig. Written before 1248), P. I. 5: "Auctor est. vir inquisitor sapientiae et amator Divus Augustus Fr(i)dericus secundus Romanorum imperator, Jerusalem et Sicilie rex".

architectural historians, may have inspired the first configuration [6] - which was part of Frederick's program - "extreme organizational innovation and geometric precision, plus clarity of institutions and structures." [7]

Under Manfredi, the Emperor's natural son, L'Aquila was elevated to a bishopric [8] with a bull issued by Pope Alexander IV in 1256 (1257 according to other sources), passing from the role of *pagus* to that of *civitas*.

During the Swabian period natural and planned development was encouraged: based on the construction of artisan type housing along the winding uphill roads, starting from a small pre-existing village rich in water sources (Acculae or Aquili) at the monastery of Santa Maria ad Fontes. While the Angioinians employed a standard cardo-decumanus plan, using a system of city blocks as a whole and no longer the single sectors as before (see **Figures 1** and **2**).

L'Aquila was a compact city whose identity was linked to the origins of the population from the neighboring hamlets, and the possibility of replicating these settlements within the city, thus avoiding any conflicts of recognition, (also by means of a shrewd fiscal policy initiated by the Swabia's, and continued by the Angioinians). Each nucleus differentiated itself from the each other politically and religiously (according to the saint they worshipped), as well by the origins of the inhabitants [9]. Under Charles of Anjou each family was permitted to build a single house, "lunga otto canne e larga quattro" ["eight rods long and four wide"] by paying "dodici boni carlini per uno fiorino contato"<sup>2</sup> ["twelve boni carlini for one counted florin"]. Enlarging the city to 1200 "fuochi" [fires (families)] (see **Figures 3-5**).



**Figure 1.**  
*Remains pre-existing the presumed foundation of L'Aquila under Frederick of Swabia (drawing by S. Gizzi, 1976).*

<sup>2</sup> V. DI BARTOLOMAEIS (Ed.), *Cronaca Aquilana rimata di Buccio di Ranallo di Popplito di Aquila*, Bottega d'Erasmus, Torino 1970, p. 16: "Et uno casolino a foco si vadano assenando, / Lo casolino degia essere quattro canne per lato / E sette canne et meza per longo mesurato, E de omne casolino allo re sia dato / Dodici bon carlini per uno fiorino contado". See also G. BUDELLI - C. CAMPONESCHI - F. FIORENTINO - M.C. MAROLDA, *L'Aquila. Nota del rapporto tra "castelli" e "locali" nella fondazione di una capitale territoriale*, in E. GUIDONI (Ed.), *Città contado e feudi nell'urbanistica medievale*, Multigrafica, Roma 1974, pp. 182-195.





**Figure 2.**  
*L'Aquila. Convents, military area, accesses from the valley floor as poles of attraction for the first urban organization in the Swabian period (drawing S. Gizzi, 1976).*

Identity recognition was also reinforced by the revival, in every 'locale' (under the Swabians) and in every 'quarto' (under the Angioinian), of the 'mother-church' and the most important stately home of the county (see **Figures 6 and 7**).

A strong connection was established between the 'locali' and the territory of origin, facilitated by a law which established that those who built at the new site did not lose the right of citizenship of their place of origin ('castello'), and remained owners in the countryside. As a result each settlement in the city, while still remaining a unitary body, seemed to be split into two ('locale' in the city and 'castllo' in the countryside) (see **Figure 8**).

The subsequent subdivision into 'quarti' was an even more noteworthy event. It marked a process of centralization of political and administrative power, and a greater distributive and figurative clarity to othe city, overcoming the fragmentation of the 'locali. This facilitated not only a one to one relationship between the 'locali' and 'castello' of origin, but a broader link between the urban settlement and the countryside as a whole, including the scattered farms.

It was a bond that would be strengthened in the following two centuries thanks to the flourishing of trade (especially of the Wool Merchants Guild) [10], with the road from Rome to Florence (with a branch from the 'Via del Sale' - the Salaria) on one side, and the route between L'Aquila and Puglia on the other.

Today this image, which had been handed down over centuries, is lost. Immediately after the 2009 earthquake the city was closed and barred, preventing residents from remaining in their homes, even in the less damaged ones. The historic center was isolated and emptied, occupied by the military forces and the Fire Brigade.

Contrary to any common sense, instead of immediately carrying out consolidation and restoration work (especially with regards to the more characteristic minor structures), it was decided to begin with long and expensive shoring and scaffolding

installations [11]. “A forest of props and tie rods that secure the walls and draw imaginative and imposing patterns” [12], thus postponing *sine die* urgent works (see Figures 9–18).

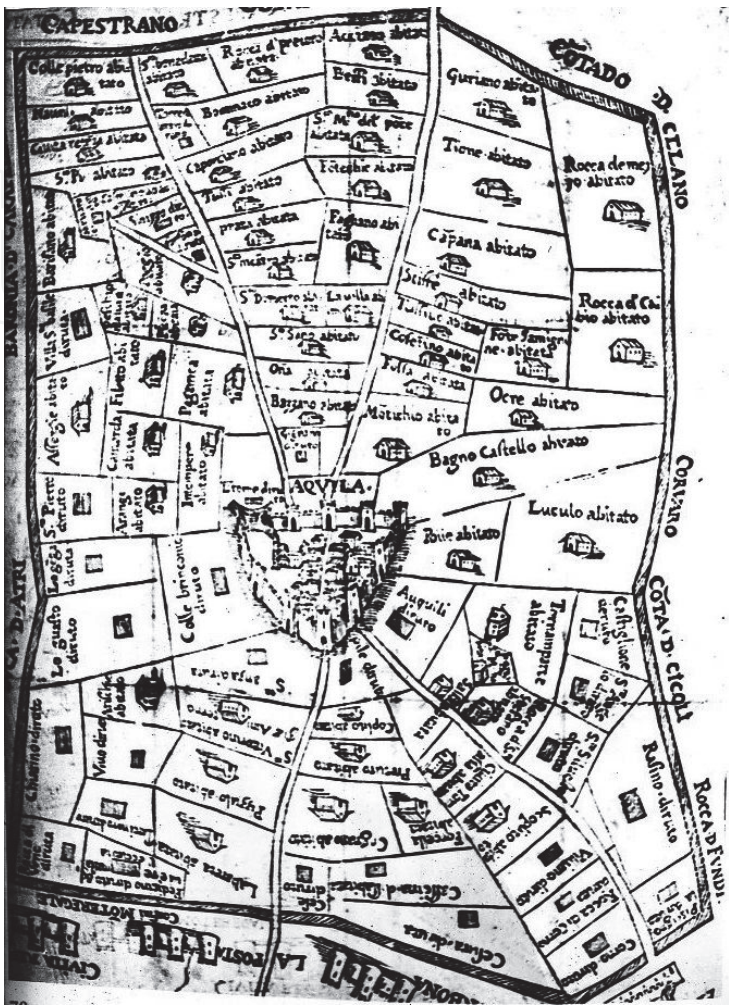


Figure 3.  
L'Aquila and the countryside (L'Aquila, Salvatore Tommasi Provincial Library).



Figure 4.  
L'Aquila and countryside in an image from 1620 (L'Aquila, Salvatore Tommasi Provincial Library).





**Figure 5.**  
*Aggregative development of the city after the privilege of Charles of Anjou (drawing S. Gizzi, 1977).*



**Figure 6.**  
*New urban and fiscal division of L'Aquila into "quarti" (quarters) (drawing by S. Gizzi, 1976).*

With the forced expulsion of the inhabitants which has now lasted for nearly seven years, the younger generation particularly, is showing (perhaps unconsciously) more and more indifference and detachment from their roots in the historic center. As time passes social and economic interest (as well as those of identity) in returning to their past houses fade. They prefer to pass time elsewhere, either in the suburbs where anonymous shopping centers have mushroomed, or in



**Figure 7.**  
*Further expansion of the religious nuclei and new directions with respect to the already structured city (drawing by S. Gizzi, 1976).*



**Figure 8.**  
*“Aquila Urbs Occasum Respiciens” (drawing Salvatore Massonio, XVI Century).*





**Figure 9.**  
*Dense scaffoldings near the basilica of San Bernardino (photo S. Gizzi, 2011).*



**Figure 10.**  
*Props of different types along via di San Bernardino (photo S. Gizzi, 2011).*

other cities (in some aspects this has been favored by the possibility of obtaining funds for the purchase of houses outside the municipality). This is why one can speak of a double loss of identity and continuity.

Indeed it is feared that many owners, tired of waiting, could sell their damaged properties to groups of speculators, ready to demolish and rebuild them with considerable financial gain. In fact, due to the extension of the stop on reconstruction work, companies have begun to acquire real estate to resell, thus increasing the expulsion of the residents [13].

The topic should, therefore, be approached from a twofold point of view: identity and continuity. Identity meaning that which transmits the original model and



**Figure 11.**  
*Shoring of the church of the Convent of Santa Chiara (photo S. Gizzi, 2011).*

characteristic of place and the inhabitants; and continuity meaning that which allows you to remain permanently in the same place with a stable dwelling. We also find a dual meaning in lasting continuity; the people (inhabitants), and the space and form of architecture. Identity and continuity are also reflected in lifestyle, as well as in details, materials, colors and common feelings. A 'sentimental heritage' as well as a material one, which is now lost.

There is, therefore, a twin theme: that of the continuation of archetypes, and that of housing models in which the population recognizes itself.

Today in L'Aquila, identity has disappeared. The inhabitants no longer appear as protagonists, but are reduced to extras, to mute actors against the backdrop of an incomprehensible scene. Even if the search for a lost identity and continuity may now seem an unreal or utopian goal, it should have been the opposite; they should have been the priority and gone hand in hand with the reconstruction.

The degree of consultation with the inhabitant concerning measures and solutions to be taken was also markedly different to previous earthquakes in Italy, where the residents were kept informed of the decision-making processes. In the case of L'Aquila a feeling of resignation immediately seemed to prevail [14]. The bitter words of Walter Siti, winner of the 2013 Premio Strega, summarize the mood well; "L'Aquila does not want to rise again, the city has committed suicide. Looking at it closely in the evening, it seems like Los Angeles; the artificial suburbs have greatly expanded it, the lights are lights and they make no difference" [15].

If it is true that the reoccurring earthquakes, that have taken place in every age, have often contributed to the changing the face of the city, it is equally true that the city still remained recognizable after the various reconstruction and restoration. This is because the restoration works carried out followed the stratifications and confirmed the existing structures.

Already in the middle Ages there were statutory regulations established in the city; such as those of Charles of Anjou in 1315, which declared that churches





**Figure 12.**

*“Works in wood provisional in a small church outside the city walls” (photo S. Gizzi, 2011).*

destroyed by earthquakes or other disasters (natural, war, human made) should be restored!<sup>3</sup>

Another unresolved problem that has contributed to the de-population of the city is the fragmentation and overlapping of responsibilities. From those of the Dipartimento della Protezione Civile (Civil Protection Department) to those of the Commissario Straordinario, of the “Direzione Regionale per i Beni e le Attività Culturali”, of the “Soprintendenze architettonica storico-artistica ed archeologica” (Extraordinary Commissioner, the Regional Directorate for Cultural Heritage and Activities, the Historical-Artistic and Archaeological Architectural

<sup>3</sup> A. CLEMENTI, *Statuti del 1315*, in G. SPAGNESI – P. PROPERZI, *L'Aquila. Problemi di forma e di storia della città, cit.*, p. 129, Statuto del 1315 n. 6: “We have established that the men or congregations of any local of the said city of Aquila and its district shall build or have built, taking care of the repair of those in ruins, a church in the city of Aquila within the circle of the city walls and start it within one year from the publication of this notice”. Cf. also M. PIACENTINO, *La vita in Abruzzo nel Trecento desunta dagli Statuti della Città dell'Aquila concessi da Roberto d'Angiò nell'anno 1315*, A. Polla, Cerchio 1993.



**Figure 13.**  
*“Provisional works in one of the alleys in the quarter of San Pietro di Coppito in L'Aquila” (photo S. Gizzi, 2011).*



**Figure 14.**  
*Emergency provisional works in wood in the church of Paganica (photo S. Gizzi, 2011).*





**Figure 15.**  
*Provisional works in San Martino d'Ocre (Photo S. Gizzi, 2011).*



**Figure 16.**  
*Provisional wooden work and props in the Medici center of Santo Stefano di Sessanio, near L'Aquila (Photo S. Gizzi, 2011).*





**Figure 17.**  
*Shoring of the church of Onna (photo S. Gizzi, 2011).*



**Figure 18.**  
*Props, temporary coverings and temporary works of various kinds in the square of San Pietro di Coppito in L'Aquila (photo S. Gizzi, 2010).*



Superintendence), the Region, the Municipality and the Diocese. All these institutional-bodies often had conflicting ideas and a reluctance to engage in dialogue.

The Diocese, in particular, has the role of overseeing the restoration of the buildings of worship it owns. The Metropolitan Archbishop of L'Aquila, Monsignor Giuseppe Molinari, used very touching words on the occasion of the first post-earthquake Christmas. "Dear Baby Jesus [...] we, the survivors of the great tragedy, will bring you this year our tears, fears and hopes. [...] For those who judge everything with a human yardstick, we are poor earthquake victims with neither present nor future certainties [...] we no longer have our beautiful city, its monuments, its churches, its workshops, its poetry and its culture. But one day you also said: 'Seek the kingdom of God and all the rest will be given to you'. We believe this promise of yours" [16].

He also spoke out against the excessive division of responsibilities, "Six months after the catastrophe, the Curia of L'Aquila had already prepared a plan for the possible reconstruction of the historic center. We had immediately organized a Master with three hundred architects, engineers and technicians from all over the world. Since last November we were ready, but here nothing has happened yet. The reason is the bureaucracy. Regional laws, Italian laws, European laws..." [17].

While in response to a question from a journalist, "Monsignor, won't the command deck be too crowded between commissioners, sub commissioners and deputies?" he replied, "The number is not a problem, if they all row in the same direction." And to another question, "Will the Curia's lead bother anyone?" he responded, "And why should it? The Church owns a third of the entire heritage of the historic center and behaves like any other owner. It defends its rights and does so through its Bishop, there is no need for substitutes. The Church has owned this patrimony for a millennium" [18].

The Auxiliary Bishop, Monsignor Giovanni D'Ercole, sent by the Vatican to assist Molinari in the restoration of the churches was even more outspoken. "With the wheelbarrow initiative, people expressed their desire to participate and tried to draw attention to the great expectations of the city, still on its knees from the wounds of the earthquake. The population wants to rebuild and clear the historic center of rubble as the first important step. [...] The people want their city as it was before, but it seems like a dream that is dying day after day. [...] In truth, a lot was done for the emergency, but almost nothing for the reconstruction. Indeed, it seems that everything has stopped. People have been rehoused in 21 prefabricated new towns, but no one talks about the houses to be rebuilt. Of course there are no longer any tents, but neither are there houses. The population lives uprooted in peripheral areas without services, families are divided and are far from the warmth of their original residential clusters. While 20 thousand people still live in hotels. There is so much suffering and fear that, after the emergency, everything will be completely forgotten" [19].

## **2. The Government's Decision to Propose L'Aquila as the Seat of the G8 Meeting**

Three weeks after the earthquake the Head of Government, Silvio Berlusconi, after consulting with the Consiglio dei Ministri (Council of Ministers) and U.S. President Barack Obama announced, on April 24, 2009, that the meeting of the G8 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, United Kingdom, U.S.A.) would take place in the barracks of the Guardia di Finanza in L'Aquila, instead of La Maddalena in Sardinia where it was initially planned, and where the associated works had almost been completed. "The priority is now L'Aquila, La Maddalena can wait" [20].

The presence of the major heads of state (from Obama, Merkel to Sarkozy) in the city, was seen as an opportunity to raise the awareness of the international community and encourage them to donate funds for the much needed restoration and reconstruction works.

In particular, Nicolas Sarkozy, promised funds for the restoration of the church of the Anime Sante del Purgatorio (del Suffragio) located in Piazza del Mercato (see **Figures 19–21**). While Angela Merkel committed to financing restoration work for the hamlet of Onna. This was one of the centers worst hit - almost totally razed to the ground- and where in World War I the German troops had shot seventeen people on June 11, 1944. Four years on from this promise, the article “Eine Kirche für Onna” [21] appeared in the “Süddeutsche Zeitung” of May 8, 2013, giving an account of the almost complete repair of the town.

The images of the collapsed dome of the Anime Sante (which travelled around the world), as well as those of the first provisional shoring with special steel structure being lowered from a helicopter, made the gesture of the French President particularly symbolic.

This was about saving a vaulted roof of significant importance. Designed by Giuseppe Valadier (known for the restoration of the Colosseum and the Arch of Titus in Rome), albeit with not univocal proof, given that the Roman architect was only named by the priest and scholar Angelo Signorini, according to which “the dome was designed by Giuseppe Valadier [sic] a Roman” [22] and by Teodoro dei Baroni Bonanni, who states “the dome was made by Giuseppe Valadier of Rome, and the two large marble chapels by Pietro Pedetti, and Bernardino Ferradini of Como” [23], in a more recent and sounder study.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 19.**  
*The church of the Holy Souls (Santa Maria del Suffragio) in Piazza Duomo in L'Aquila in August 2014 (photo S. Gizzi, 2014).*

<sup>4</sup> Among the latest studies, we draw attention to that of M. G. PEZONE, *Carlo Buratti. Architettura tardo barocca tra Roma e Napoli*, Alinea, Firenze 2008, p. 156, who reaffirms that the dome was “built many years later according to the project of Giuseppe Valadier.”





Figure 20. News of the move of the G8 from Sardinia to L'Aquila (from “Il Corriere della Sera”, July 9, 2009).

Both the move of the G8 summit from Sardinia to L'Aquila, and the idea of holding one of the Councils of Ministers in L'Aquila were met with much criticism. One of the most vocal opponents of the Summit was Vittorio Emiliani - President of the 'Comitato Italiano per la Bellezza' (Committee for Beauty), who in an article published in "L'Unità" declared: "The desire to restart again is blocked by the great monster, especially after the spectacle of the G8 grand parade snatched from La Maddalena, and the solemn promises of adoption of this or that monument by foreigners. A hallucinatory delirium that many people in Italy also applauded. It was a grim nightmare for those of us who had been involved, in a variety of ways, in the tragedies of Tuscany, Friuli, Umbria and the Marche, where historic centers were struck dead, churches razed or in ruins, starting with the Basilica in Assisi, symbol of St. Francis, which returned to its former self in only two years; an Italian 'cure' which was applauded around the world" [24].

In fact the G8 event risked becoming a summit show among rubble [25]. It is indicative that one of the strongest criticism of the second event was expressed by the current Minister of Cultural Heritage, Dario Franceschini (at the time Secretary of the PD), who in an interview declared that "the ministers gathered in L'Aquila will only walk the red carpet" [26].



Figure 21.  
“The first lady in tears in the rubble” (From “Il Corriere della Sera”, 10 July 2009).

3. The previous earthquakes

“L’Aquila the city that was, is not; the houses are united in piles of stones; the buildings that were not fallen were falling down.” These words, which might appear extremely current, are actually referring to another devastating earthquake that struck the capital of Abruzzo in 1703, and are found in a report prepared on April 17, 1703, by Marco Garofalo, Marquis della Rocca, for the Viceroy Marquis of Villena.<sup>5</sup> Garofalo had been appointed years before, “Preside” and “Vicario” of the

<sup>5</sup> Archivio di Stato di Napoli, Segreteria dei Viceré n. 1120, Carte diverse del Governo del Viceré di Napoli da gennaio a tutto dicembre del 1703, lettera datata Aquila li 13 aprile 1703, partially reported in R. COLAPIETRA, *Spiritualità coscienza civile e mentalità collettiva nella storia dell’Aquila*, Deputazione abruzzese di storia patria, L’Aquila 1984, p. 508, reported also in R. COLAPIETRA, *L’Aquila dell’Antinori. Strutture sociali ed urbane della città nel Sei e Settecento*, in *Antinoriana* III, vol II, Il Settecento, Deputazione Abruzzese di Storia Patria, L’Aquila 1978, p. 511. See also, *Relatione ovvero itinerario fatto dall’auditor D. Alfonso Auria de Llanos per riconoscere li danni causati dalli passati terremoti seguiti li 14 gennaio e 2 febbraio MDCCIII con il numero de’ morti e feriti nella Provincia dell’Abruzzo Citra e luoghi circonvicini per darne di essi distinta notizia al Signor Viceré di Napoli*, Roma, Gaetano Zenobi, 1703. Also noteworthy, L. A. CHRACAS, *Racconto storico di terremoti sentiti in Roma, e in parte dello Stato Ecclesiastico, e in altri luoghi la sera de’ 14 di gennajo, e la mattina de’ 2 di febbrajo dell’anno 1703: nel quale si narrano i danni fatti dal medesimo, le sacre missioni, il giubbileo, le processioni, e tutte le altre divozioni, funzioni, e opere pie ordinate, e fatte dalla Santità di Nostro Signore Papa Clemente XI e da tutto il popolo*, per Giuseppe de Martijs, nella stamperia di Gio. Francesco Chracas, Roma 1704.



Province of L'Aquila, and just fifteen days after the earthquake he gathered together the highest authorities of the city, appointing them to public office with the aim of reconstructing the city [27]. Another report was drawn up a few weeks after the event by the "auditore", Alfonso Uria de Llanos [28], on the request of the "Preside" Garofalo to carry out a thorough inspection. He described the city as "all destroyed, without any building remaining".<sup>6</sup> That L'Aquila suffered is also evident in another letter to the Marquis della Rocca, "the plague of earthquakes" [29], indeed of "a horrible earthquake" [30].

Nevertheless the tremors of 1703, even though violent, did not cause significant urban destruction [31] (except, perhaps for the 'quarto' of San Giovanni), and certainly not more damage than the traumatic construction of the Spanish castle, which demolished the ancient residences *ad reprimendam audaciam aquilanorum*,<sup>7</sup> who had rebelled against the hegemony of the Viceroy Filiberto d'Orange.

Yet, at that time, the reconstruction was almost immediate. The supervisor, Matteo Castrati, and the Marquis Alessandro Quinzi, Chamberlain, in a "briefing" on May 10 of the same year [32], just a few months after the earthquake "gave orders to the citizens to build their homes as best they could, in order to resurrect this city" [33]. There was, therefore, the passion and will to restore almost resurrect the city, also in a spiritual sense! [34]

Another account published in Naples in 1703 describes the terrifying conditions, also in Ref. to the territorial and emotional aspects. "It is incredible the number of cities and lands that have been completely destroyed or badly damaged in this last movement [...]. That noble City of L'Aquila has been almost entirely razed [sic] to the ground, with the few houses and walls that remained standing being threaten with imminent collapse" [35].

As has been scrupulously stressed the interest in the earthquake is evident [36], also by the language used to describe the degree of damage: "damaged (very much)", "damaged (seriously)", "uninhabitable", "flattened (almost)", "ruined", "destroyed", "*diruta*", "completely destroyed", "*offesa*", "rubble", "overturned from foundations" ([36], p. 58).

Furthermore, the opposing views and partiality of the reports of the 1703 earthquake originating from Rome and Naples are noteworthy [37]. The former tends to exaggerate the damage done in order to pressure the Viceroy of Naples into giving more funds, while the latter appear more realistic.

At the time, some of the reconstruction took on a symbolic meaning, as it was linked to the renewal of the most important religious and civil monuments, the more "identifiable". This was the case of the Cathedral of San Massimo e Giorgio, with the aim of revitalizing "and upgrading the christianization of the traditionally popular neighborhood" [38], as it was around the Cathedral. A neighborhood "very

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<sup>6</sup> On the report of the "auditore" Alfonso Uria de Llanos, cf. R. CAMASSI – V. CASTELLI, *I terremoti del 1703 nelle fonti giornalistiche coeve*, in R. COLAPIETRA – G. MARINANGELI – P. MUZI (Ed.), *Settecento abruzzese. Eventi sismici, mutamenti economico-sociali e ricerca storiografica*, Deputazione Abruzzese di Storia Patria, Libreria Colacchi (Ed.), L'Aquila 2007, pp. 43–67, especially pp. 59–60: "In the category of printed reports [...] those of the Neapolitans must first of all mention [...] the Itinerary, by Alfonso Uria de Llanos [...] which describes the effects of the earthquake in about twenty localities in the area of L'Aquila, with [...] attention to economic considerations and observations on the geological effects".

<sup>7</sup> According to many historians *ad reprimendam audaciam aquilanorum* is the epigraph placed on the lintel of the portal of the Spanish Castle of L'Aquila that Charles V, through the viceroy Pedro de Toledo, had built on a project by Pedro Luis Escrivà, started in 1534; but today no trace of this plaque remains. cf. S. MANTINI, *L'Aquila spagnola. Percorsi di identità, conflitti, convivenze (secc. XVI–XVII)*, Aracne, Roma 2009, pp. 307–308.

desolate, whose remains had already had a troubled history in the fifteenth century” ([38], p. 512). So much so that in 1709 the residents agreed to tax themselves to raise funds to begin the restoration ([38], p. 513). Other minor churches linked to the single “locali” were also rebuilt but in reduced dimensions, such as San Marciano, originally with three apses was rebuilt with a single nave and only one apse.

More than actual “restorations,” these works were referred to as “architectural modernizations” ([38], p. 517). Many noble civil buildings were also “renovated” or “modernized”, among the most important were: Palazzo Antonelli (already “half restored” in 1712) ([38], vol. I, *Il Seicento*, p. 921), Palazzo Quinzi (which still appeared “half damaged”) ([38], vol. II, *Il Settecento*, p. 587), and Palazzo Ardinghelli in Piazza Santa Maria Paganica, (“renovated” from 1732 to 1742 in baroque style [39]).

When comparing the earthquake of 1703 to the most recent one two main points stand out: the immediacy of the reconstruction, and the fact that no Aquilan left their city. There were however, some buildings that had not completely collapsed and were deliberately destroyed, with the aim of restructuring some churches [40].

The reconstruction after the 1703 earthquake certainly gave new shape to the city [41] (see **Figure 22**). It was rebuilt “on a plan consolidated during the Spanish Viceroyalty” ([41], p. 496). According to a new “*barocchizzazione*”, and the resulting architectural works were carried out “to recover from natural disasters, in the logic of the political alternations of the eighteenth century” ([41], p. 498). A period where the baroque style [42] prevailed, particularly among the Roman architects (such as Sebastiano Cipriani,<sup>8</sup> who “restored” both the Cathedral and some of the city gates).

But now what shape should the city, still needing a clear plan of action, take?

It is well noted that “after the earthquake of 1703 in L’Aquila there was a race between Neapolitan and Roman workers to rebuild the city, retrieving from the



**Figure 22.**  
*Buying and real estate purchases after the 1703 earthquake (drawing S. Gizzi, 1976).*

<sup>8</sup> On Cipriani and other Roman architects in L’Aquila after the 1703 earthquake, see above all the updated volume of M. G. PEZONE, *Carlo Buratti. Architettura tardo barocca tra Roma e Napoli*, cit.



foundations some particularly complex buildings in order to rebuild them *ex-novo* maintaining their outline in the ground, and as we have also observed the conservation of some of the lower floors well built in the Middle-Ages, and the addition of some floors, as well as consolidating them with ingenious devices such as wooden chains” [43]. Yet, as it was written with a hint of regret, “after the earthquake, L’Aquila was rebuilt but no longer possessed its ancient beauty” [44].

Even more immediate (and symbolic), compared to the eighteenth-century reconstructions, was the restoration of the city walls immediately after the first major earthquake in 1315. The defensive wall were refortified without delay thanks to the decree of Robert of Anjou, who urged the inhabitants to rebuild them<sup>9</sup> in the same outstanding and “sumptuous” [45] way as the Cathedral of SS. Massimo e Giorgio had been rebuilt.

In regard to the “first” earthquake of 1315, in a poetic description (*Cronaca Rimata*) attributed to Buccio di Ranallo, not only is the collapse and material damage described, but also the beliefs and popular traditions to remedy it ([45], CCL – CCLIV).

## 4. City–Countryside relationship

### 4.1 Problems caused by depopulation

As in other areas hit by the earthquake, the problems associated with depopulation are particularly serious [46].

As already mentioned, the 2009 earthquake affected not only L’Aquila, the capital, but all the historic centers of the surrounding area, already affected by a progressive demographic and also economic abandonment. A highly effective social policy would therefore be needed, which should respond not only to the contingent problem, but also to address the problem of intense depopulation that is tearing apart the system of interrelationships of those villages. As in other areas of central Italy, the abandonment of those territories is unfortunately favored by the deterioration of the relationship between man and the environment in fragile contexts. Therefore, effective action should be taken that must make use of the contribution of different disciplines, not only geographical, architectural and urban planning, but also historical and economic, involving physical, social and political factors.

Regarding L’Aquila, the capital, about depopulation, a few days after the earthquake, the intervention of professor Salvatore Settis (Director of the *Scuola Superiore Normale of Pisa*) was very effective, explaining the contrast between “synecism” and “exoitism”, Words of Greek origin. At the time of its foundation, the first phenomenon (συνοικισμός) occurred, with a contemporary movement of many people who have chosen a single destination, as a place for meetings and exchanges. And L’Aquila is the only medieval city that had this origin. The opposite (exoikismós), that is, the *diaspora*, dispersion, depopulation, the emptying of the historic center of its inhabitants, is a defeat due to the ignorance of citizens and institutions [47].

Therefore, the validity of a reconstruction action must be based not only on the ability to respond to an improvement in the static and safety conditions of the monuments and houses, but also on the ability to counteract the seemingly inevitable decline of the area.

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<sup>9</sup> The walls of Aquila had been fortified in 1315. Cfr. also G. SPAGNESI – P. L. PROPERZI, *L’Aquila. Problemi di forma e storia della città*, cit.

## 4.2 Recent errors made in countering phenomena resulting from the earthquake and depopulation

One of the most evident phenomena of the current post-earthquake has been the upheaval of the relationship between the city and the countryside, which until then had remained balanced and defined. Previously, construction had never filled the space within the fourteenth-century surrounding wall, and green areas - such as gardens and vegetable gardens - still existed.

Likewise, the relationship between the farming communities and the settlements of the ancient "Comitatus" (a political-military arrangement present in the L'Aquila area) was of great importance, above all because of the mutual trust [48]. Until the 1960s, urban construction had not saturated the space within the surrounding walls. The areas towards Porta Napoli, Via XX Settembre and, in general, the southern area of the town had remained green. For centuries this had been a peculiar feature of L'Aquila: the enclosing walls included a much larger area than just the built up space.

For this reason it was a serious mistake to have planned and, partly created, a belt of temporary housing (some unfortunately definitive) of a completely extraneous construction types, such as wooden houses or buildings which have nothing in common with the characteristics of the area [49]. Even though these were constructed on an innovative anti-seismic and movable bases, such as those designed by the former Dean of Engineering of the Naples University, Edoardo Cosenza, (who argued that "the use of seismic isolation, possibly accompanied by dissipation devices was essential"),<sup>10</sup> they ran a real risk of threatening the city country relationship, which up to the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries (but also until after the World War II) was balanced, defined and legible.

Today it appears important to maintain this separateness, this suggestion of the countryside that envelops and separates, almost protecting the city from the rest, and revealing it rich in "the most beautiful vegetables and foliage in Italy" [50].

For all this, it seems essential that the boundaries between the built-up city and countryside remain separate and well defined. Since the foundation of L'Aquila the countryside has never ceased to keep up a new physiognomy, despite having merged together "in new urban settlements dozens and dozens of small rural centers [...] passing through a difficult process of planning and programming of modes and phases of settlement" [51]. Today it is precisely those distinctive features that, by the creation of satellite centers and the new temporary wooden buildings settlements, are in danger of disappearing.

It is, therefore, unthinkable that L'Aquila could be part of an undifferentiated union with the belt of new-towns (a term and form that refers to the English model of Sir Ebenezer Howard [52], and which is completely out of context in the Abruzzo region), on which there has been much said [53]. Or, for that matter, joined with the hamlets (Tempera, Pettino, Poggio di Roio, Bagno, etc.), each with their own very specific identity and local history! (see **Figures 23 and 24**) [54].

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<sup>10</sup> Cfr. *Interview of Edoardo Cosenza. Cosenza: ricostruire con innovative concezioni strutturali. Particolare attenzione alla progettazione antisismica e grande rigore nella realizzazione degli edifici*, in "L'Ingegnere italiano", n. 348, giugno 2009, p. 6: "Q. Would the new techniques so much talked about, have reduced the damage if introduced earlier? R. Without a doubt. For example, the use of seismic isolation to protect strategic structures, which must remain operational immediately after an earthquake, would have been decisive. [...] There is no best type [...] The important thing is careful planning and implementation. [...] If then you want to eliminate the possibility of non-structural damage and equipment, then the use of seismic isolation, perhaps accompanied by dissipation equipment, is necessary."





**Figure 23.**  
*Temporary residences built around L'Aquila under the government of Silvio Berlusconi (photo S. Gizzi, 2013).*



**Figure 24.**  
*Temporary residences built around L'Aquila under the government of Silvio Berlusconi. Note the ground insulators (photo S. Gizzi, 2013).*

This precarious situation<sup>11</sup> means that the new houses, campers and shacks represent a sort of “new nomadic configuration of modernity, of officialdom” [55]. The government’s choice of an easy and out of context model for the new towns was

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<sup>11</sup> In the same way as new-towns and other prefabricated buildings, it is necessary to avoid what Riccardo Dalisi defined, thirty years ago, as the “preconstruction syndrome”, that is, the use of prefabricated buildings and temporary housing of various kinds. R. DALISI, *Intervento*, in AA.VV., *Proposte per la ricostruzione*, cit., p. 216: “Everyone talks about prefabricated buildings; and they are invoked from all sides; that is, a kind of ‘preconstruction syndrome’ that occurs”.

essentially a political one, not supported by urban planners, restorers and even less by the citizens.

In the country, the government launched a very short-sighted project called 'C. A.S.E. Piano' - Comparti Antisismici Sostenibili Ecocompatibili (Ecocompatibili Sustainable Anti-seismic Complexes) a building model without any coherent thought of urban distribution or typological characteristics, but based on standardized canons indifferently applied in Abruzzo, Switzerland or Central Europe, in the same way as M.A.P. - Moduli Abitativi Provvisori (Temporary Housing Modules) and M.E.P. - Moduli Ecclesiastici Provvisori (Provisional Ecclesiastical Modules). Interesting typologies if considered per se, (placed on slabs isolated from the ground by last generation anti-seismic insulators), but as a whole they constitute an out of scale and out of context building model. Meanwhile small and random buildings, made possible by a municipal resolution, have sprung up in areas which until recently were green.

But, returning to what was mentioned earlier. A reconstruction that has not yet taken place seven years after the earthquake means that, particularly the younger generations, will no longer find reasons, roots or interest to return to live or work in the historical center.

Thus the new settlements, rather than being temporary (as in the case of Friuli and Umbria), have become permanent, leading to the creation of a new contemporary and 'impromptu' city<sup>12</sup> and totally bypassing the restoration of the existing one [56].

What is more serious however is that the identity appears to be lost, even in new architecture. Until a few years ago the buildings just outside the historic center blended in, while today one feels a sense of bewilderment. Also the recent construction (especially in the areas around the Celestine Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio, and along the axis of the valley floor of Via Strinella), is out of context, post-modern and decidedly kitsch.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, it was hoped to avoid the dispersion and relocation of the essential services, even if it was obvious that reconstruction in the historic center would have taken longer than that of the suburbs [57]. The most serious damage however was inflicted by the imposition of the so-called 'red zone': a completely isolated area where only the authorities and technicians could enter, while the resident population was expelled (see **Figure 25**).

Despite everything, the strength and dignity of the population is evident (accustomed as they are to suffering and, to an extent, isolation) and it has been demonstrated on many occasions. Typical is the night of the "wheelbarrow people" [58], that is, those who after waiting in vain for the historic center and the surrounding streets to be cleared of rubble took the initiative and - using hundreds of wheelbarrows - did it themselves and deposited the waste in front of the headquarters of the Regional Council in protest.

The main thoroughfare, Corso Federico II, has also become a type of notice board where the residents can express their dissent. Everyone hangs protest notes, the keys to their apartments yet to be restored, and declarations of love for L'Aquila [59] along the nets that prohibit access to the arcades (see **Figures 26–29**).

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<sup>12</sup> R. DE MARCO, *La ricostruzione post-terremoto. Alcuni punti di attenzione sul tema*, Ufficio Speciale per la Ricostruzione del Centro Storico dell'Aquila, Struttura Speciale di Alta Consulenza, documento 9.3, febbraio 2011: "At the occurrence of a situation such as the one described, which seems to be characterized by extemporaneousness and poor transparency, at least three categories can be identified as being particularly penalized: the citizen who should have guaranteed rights rather than being subject to extemporaneous concessions, the administration and local authorities of direct reference".





**Figure 25.**  
*L'Aquila, the “red zone” of via Costa Masciarelli, in the historic center (photo S. Gizzi, 2011).*



**Figure 26.**  
*“We have a dream: L'Aquila”, written along Corso Vittorio Emanuele II (photo S. Gizzi, 2010).*



**Figure 27.**  
*L'Aquila, the keys to the houses declared uninhabitable hung by the inhabitants, as a sign of protest, along Corso Vittorio Emanuele II (photo S. Gizzi, 2010).*



**Figure 28.**  
*L'Aquila, the keys to the houses declared uninhabitable hung by the inhabitants along Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, together with the words “We have a dream: L’Aquila” (photo S. Gizzi, 2010).*



**Figure 29.**  
*“The protest of the thousand keys”: “removing the rubble from L’Aquila”, from “Il Corriere della Sera”, Monday 22 February 2010.*

This testifies to the existence of a particular form of emergency psychology [60], which also manifests itself as a communion of punishment among the entire population.

### 5. Possible Prospects for L’Aquila

Immediately after the earthquake several initiatives were organized by Italian architects, restorers and planners. These included numerous conferences, seminars and some operational ‘laboratories’, organized by the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica e dell’Associazione Nazionale dei Centri Storici (National Institute of Urban Planning and the National Association of Historic Centers). A series of nine workshops on the theme of the recovery of L’Aquila were also organized by the architects, Pierluigi Properzi, professor at the local Faculty of Engineering, and,



Carlo Gasparrini from the Federico II University of Naples, and a member of the group which drew up of the Regulatory Plan of Rome.

Many points of interest emerged from the first meetings and, since they are still very topical, it seems appropriate to recall them briefly.

At the meetings it became clear that a cultural project, aimed at the reconstruction of the city, did not yet exist. The inaugural workshop was introduced by Pierluigi Properzi and Marco Romano. Piero Properzi, emphasized both the need for a plan of reconstruction and the importance of avoiding any strong differences of opinion; confirming a categorical no to the opposition *historic center-periphery*. Marco Romano, former member of the Consiglio Nazionale per i Beni Culturali (National Council for Cultural Heritage), emphasized the opportunity of developing an aesthetic vision, or 'aestheticizing' the city by establishing, as a priority, the restoration of the major thoroughfares - the Corso, with its arcades and adjacent squares.

Raffaele Colapietra - professor of modern history at the University of Salerno, author of numerous texts on the history of L'Aquila, and interviewed in the internationally successful film, *Draquila*, by Sabina Guzzanti - strongly disagreed with Romano. He was the only resident of L'Aquila who has not left his home in the center [61], despite the ordinances, and he stressed the importance of the urban and social history of the city. Pointing out how the appearance of the present city was a result of the rebuilding after the 1703 earthquake, and that the principle colonnaded axis (the colonnades are from the early twentieth century) were not at any time of primary importance. Likewise, Piazza del Mercato, which was strictly commercial in nature and had never been home to any monuments of importance.

The urgent need to recover the identity of the urban fabric (as opposed to the belt of new towns that were already appearing) was evident from the first meeting. Attention was also drawn to the delicate task of entrusting the reconstruction work to competent companies, experts in restoration (and consequently tenders), as well as the (few) advantages and (many) disadvantages of the European tenders, which risked - with the possibility of numerous appeals - to lengthen the time of "reconstruction."

The Mayor of L'Aquila, Massimo Cialente, was in agreement with this, and also with the need to immediately identify the first five most important areas within the walls to begin the works, starting with those on the edge of the oldest sectors, so as to experiment with the first 'reconstruction' sites.

There was criticism for the lack of reference in relation to technical and administrative aspects, compared to other experiences, where the results could already be assessed; such as the 1976 earthquake in Friuli (particularly at Venzone, where restoration and anastylosis of the main monuments and the historical fabric of the city was prompt) and also those of the Marche in 1979 and 1997, and Umbria in 1997.

The necessity for precise mapping of the damage, the need to immediately repair the underground infrastructure and the necessity to 'evaluate' the strategies were highlighted by the urban planners, Bruno Gabrielli, Pierluigi Properzi and Elio Piroddi (former professor in L'Aquila and now Professor of Urban Planning in Rome).

To these considerations, further indispensable issues needed to be added and addressed; such as the choice to prioritize and strengthen the continuity of identity through the enhancement of the various overlapping historical fabrics, partly still recognizable. Starting from those of the Swabian (a faint trace remains in the *Borgo di Rivera*), the Angioinian, and up to the Spanish city and that of Margaret of Austria, natural daughter of Charles V and governor of L'Aquila between 1572 and 1586 [62-64], (for whose entry into the city, the "Porta della Barete was restored,

where she had to enter, raising the walls and the two side towers, and decorated with fresco paintings by Giovampaolo Cardone”) [65].

While not forgetting the importance of the more recent periods, found particularly in the urban areas with a concentration of liberty architecture (Villa and Santa Maria di Farfa) and rationalists (already highlighted by the Italian section of the Do. Co.Mo.Mo.) [66]. Any substitution, even minimal, of these buildings would be serious and could become grim and compromising. Think also of particular road axes, with double curvature and stately and patrician buildings (Via S. Marciano, Via del Cembalo dei Colantuoni), where inappropriate building replacement could have a profound effect, like a foreign body in a fabric that has reached a centuries-old balance.

Of course, the question is always linked to the quality of the planning, and what is going to be rebuilt or integrated /replaced. But, it is necessary above all to avoid a ‘façade’ approach, that is, to preserve only the exterior at the expense of emptying the interior. It is essential to preserve the typologies as a whole, and particularly the minor fabric which characterizes the entire center. There is no doubt that it is easier to deal with the restoration or reintegration of ‘monuments’, and that it is much more difficult, but necessary, to preserve the identity of minor buildings, even the private ones (over which the Superintendence and the Ministry have, in fact, no competence or control).

Concerning the principle area of restoration, Marco Dezzi Bardeschi, in agreement with Mario Manieri Elia, Giovanni Dispoto and the author, reiterated the need to maintain the palimpsest of the stratifications (to which the recent one should be added, also as architectural language). This wiped clear any misunderstanding of “demolition – reconstruction”. The priority must be that of conservation, both material and not, and at most consolidation (to be implemented with traditional non-invasive techniques, avoiding the cementing of historic masonry) [67].

Giovanni Dispoto, Director of the Dipartimento di Urbanistica (Department of Urban Planning) of the City of Naples, was asked to review (improve) the technical-administrative process with which the earthquake problem was tackled in Naples after November 1980. Among the mistakes to avoid, was that of preventing getting locked into ‘rigid’ and ‘invasive’ structural consolidation solutions (in Naples there was the voluntary help of the two Faculties of Engineering and Architecture).

On the regulatory front, it was hoped there would be a special law for L'Aquila. Recalling that the Italia Nostra association asked the Ministero per i Beni Culturali (Ministry for Cultural Heritage) to extend a restriction to the entire historic center, creating perplexity since it was not possible to declare the interest of pulverized or destroyed buildings. The former Superintendent Renzo Mancini had attempted the same thing in the eighties, but the Tribunale Amministrativo Regionale (Regional Administrative Court) ruled against him for lack of motivation.

It would have been possible to make a request to the Organo Centrale del Ministero (Central Body of the Ministry) to obtain a waiver or a variation to the *Codice dei Beni Culturali* (Cultural Heritage Code), or to provide some form of targeted protection, especially for private minor construction. In this regard, Bruno Gabrielli, was of the opinion that the Piano Regolatore (Master Plan) or the Piani Attuativi (Implementation Plans) should already contain guarantees (if conceived well) for an adequate degree of protection.

Gasparrini too, believed that it was not possible to define or decree by law the “beauty” of an historical center, even if it is particular, like that of L'Aquila (“a little Florence”). The matter needed to be presented on the basis of *civitas* rather than *urbs*, that is, to prioritize more the union of citizens than the formal organization of the city. In particular, as he wrote in a brief note to those present, “defining a national and/or regional legislative text that indicates and regulates the



reconstruction of the historic center and the use of public and private resources, but using different methods from the past.”

Among the various proposals made after the earthquake, that of the Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, appeared singular (even if it embodies the ideas of “non-experts”), regarding the kind of reconstruction or restoration for L’Aquila. In a television interview five months after the earthquake he said, “In front of each building the question will be: can we reconstruct it by repairing the damage? Is there any certainty that it can withstand other tremors with these works or will we have to demolish and rebuild it with modern anti-seismic techniques?”<sup>13</sup>

In this case, what we have suggested - but it’s also the logical solution - is that the frontals, sculptures, and all things of artistic or historical interest are removed and stored. The building is rebuilt according to the anti-seismic reinforced concrete technology, and then the same frontals, windows, sculptures and bas-reliefs are reinstalled. It is a very long work. For all of L’Aquila, and I don’t want to demoralize anyone, it will take from five to ten years.

But today, above all, it is necessary to bring back the small productive ‘stimuli’ or attractors to the characteristic points of the historical city of L’Aquila, without compromising the stages of an urban restoration that still appears long and difficult.

## **6. Possible models for reconstruction**

### **6.1 Criteria for possible models of reconstruction**

Currently, for a number of reasons, seven years after the earthquake of April 6, 2009, there is still a lot of confusion and uncertainty about the most appropriate criteria to be adopted.

It is necessary to consider that, as in other cases, it is not useless to recall some background perspectives relating to the multiple components of the quality of living, including safety, in living environments of historical and architectural value. As has rightly been written, the rediscovery of historical and cultural heritage makes sense precisely as it is the rediscovery of the factors of community cohesion and identity that attest to its roots, even as an alternative to the consolidation of global networks [68].

However, as regards L’Aquila, since no overall plan has yet been drawn up, work has proceeded “by feel”. There have also been numerous controversies about the slowness and delay of the current rebuilding, including journalistic ones [69], warning above all that “with single decrees [from the Municipality] instead of an overall plan, many buildings would remain rubble” [70].

Likewise was the plea - dating back to the earthquake in Irpinia, but still very current- by Palma Bucarelli (a famous critic and art historian) to avoid the rash and unconsidered use of self-propelled machines and earth loading shovels. “The intervention of the bulldozers is unjustified for the unsafe monuments, where in many cases it was possible to shore them up, and think of a rapid restoration” [71].

A call to which, Marcello Vittorini, a town planner from L’Aquila seconded. Recalling a forgotten earthquake in Abruzzo in the middle of the last century “In the earthquake of 1950, [...] less serious than the latter, [...] only the commonplace existed, there were no civil protection laws. [...] At that time the uncivilized

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<sup>13</sup> Speech by Silvio Berlusconi on the program “Porta a Porta”, Rai 1 TV, hosted by Bruno Vespa, dedicated to “L’Aquila e tutto il resto”, 15 settembre 2009.

bulldozer was not thought of at all, even the stones, the cornerstones were preserved" [72].

Now the city is abandoned it is transforming itself into a small Pompeii,<sup>14</sup> into a large, "emptied mausoleum" [73]. As the former President of the Fondo Ambiente Italiano (National Trust of Italy) said "It is obvious that the danger to L'Aquila and the surrounding towns affected by the earthquake, is that it will give rise to a type of modern suburban chain," which "could lead to the abandonment of those historic centers, that need to be restored and filled with the life that was there before".<sup>15</sup>

Ada Negri in the poem, "Nel paese di mia madre", describes the memory of the smell of a living city, of a historical nucleus, albeit melancholic. "Power of death, power of life, in the smell of the ashlar: the earth enjoys it from the deep humus, under the August blaze that stands motionless" [74]. In reality, the authoritative voices of urban planners warn instead of "a ransom", a total estrangement and detachment [75].

Instead it may be useful to reflect, even if it is lengthy, on the methods and criteria of restoration/reconstruction, given that the historical center is of a fair size. The two extreme alternatives, renovation à l'identique (borrowed from many similar examples) and replacement/insertion of contemporary architecture, appear conceptually both possible and probably, yet it is still too early to make a decisive and final choice.

Concerning these two positions and limiting ourselves to what has been published in recent years, we note some significant writings.

The publisher-architect Mario Ferrari notes the correctness of the reference to "as it was and where it was," but with different human, modernized nuances; "In the haste to ensure that the developments in reconstruction legislation - in the sacrosanct unity of the "Aquiliani" "on the principle that everything must be redone as it was and where it was - an unusual hope grows within me. That is, even within the framework of a faithful reconstruction of the city, this piece of history [the void caused by the earthquake] will not be erased. I hope that [...] in the future urban layout there is planned a presence of small *mementi mortis*, opportunities for reflection on the transience of human destiny, on those 25 eternal seconds that have dissolved the city" [76].

Numerous authors have expressed themselves in favor of the second hypothesis, most recently Federica Di Vincenzo in "Mu6". "Restoring the formal integrity of some buildings may make no sense [...]. It is also necessary to make a distinction between buildings of cultural interest [but here we don't take into account the minor buildings!] and those of simple civil construction [...].

We need to think carefully about the advisability of re-proposing, unconditionally, the same city to which we were accustomed and for that reason is familiar and comforting. One should not be afraid to open oneself up, the right amount, to the

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<sup>14</sup> B. BOLOGNA, *Crolli a Pompei e L'Aquila sospira "che ne sarà di noi"*, in "Abruzzo 24 Ore", 8 novembre 2010: "And to say that many have often thought 'don't let L'Aquila become another Pompeii', but what they would want to add is: 'uninhabited and deserted like Pompeii after the eruption [...]?' L'Aquila like Pompeii screams: we need funds, protection, effective politics and not special effects. [...] We need to think about what tools are necessary to revitalize the entire national archaeological heritage".

<sup>15</sup> G. M. MOZZONI CRESPI, *Ibid.* But cf. also C. FIUMI, *Il volo difficile de L'Aquila. Tra bilanci e ricordi, fotografia collettiva di un popolo che non dimentica*, in "Sette", 25 marzo 2010. Even the current Undersecretary for Cultural Heritage, Ilaria Borletti Buitoni, reiterated the same concept in an interview: "I believe that in five years, if the rubble remains rubble, the spirit and soul of the historic center of L'Aquila will remain those of Pompeii"; cf. I. BORLETTI BUITONI, "L'Aquila è morta, sembra Pompei", in "Corriere della Sera", domenica 10 dicembre 2010, cronache, p. 23.



possibility of contemporary architectural works, sometimes aimed at remembering - why not - what has happened in the history of one's city" [77].

The problem is that in none of the Italian cases, in which building replacements or renovations were carried (either due to seismic events or war damage), was the result satisfactory. It was almost always a question of architecture "put in place", of poor quality. This is evident in the examples of Genoa, Treviso, Ravenna, Pistoia, Viterbo and the Florentine Arno River itself, in which the replacement works appear lacking in originality, banal and unsatisfactory.

Even in the most recent opinions in favor of complete restoration there are nuances, gradations and subtleties worthy of attention. Those who have often been supporters of the need for renovation/reconstruction according to the original lexicon of lost parts, ask themselves the following question. "In L'Aquila, before rushing into a reconstruction exactly the same as the pre-existing one, we should - in the name of a truly correct philology - ascertain whether the bourgeois buildings [...] have remained themselves, or have they not been too modified in height and not only, have variants been introduced either to make the buildings more habitable to the various families over time, or by the promotion from bourgeois to patrician".<sup>16</sup>

Basically, therefore, one asks to which historical phase of the building to refer to, so that "it would be advisable to return to heights from the ground of no more than two or three floors".<sup>17</sup> According to this practice, much emphasis was placed on the advisability of a *philological reconstruction* (a study day was organized on this subject in Rome, "Il terremoto in Abruzzo. Per una ricostruzione filologica. Precedenti e prospettive"<sup>18</sup>), with a perspective different to that of restoration tout-court.

Among the authoritative voices in favor of a reconstruction 'as it was and where it was', that of Paolo Portoghesi stood out in affirming the rightness "of reconstructing the ancient buildings as they were," considering that "in the case of a vast and generalized destruction [...], the upheaval of places goes hand in hand with that of habits, feelings and inveterate customs, especially in people of a certain age, causing tremendous suffering. To the tragedy of destruction is added that of adaptation to a totally new reality" [78].

He did not, however, exclude the possibility offered by contemporary building, provided that it was outside the historical center. "The idea of constructing totally new buildings, perhaps in different areas could be correct, as long as one thinks of urbanized areas provided with all the services, arising as a replacement of the peripheral areas [78].

Along the same lines, but with different nuances, Franco Purini and Italo Insolera expressed themselves. Franco Purini in support of the need for a "philological method" for works in the historic center<sup>19</sup>; and Italo Insolera in support for

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<sup>16</sup> Cfr. P. MARCONI, *Cosa fare nelle città distrutte dalla guerra, dai terremoti o dall'uomo?*, in "Ricerche di storia dell'arte", 99, 2009, dedicated to "Com'era dov'era. Dopo il terremoto, o la guerra", pp. 77-101, specially p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>18</sup> As part of the *Master* in "Conservazione e Recupero dell'Edilizia Storica dell'Università degli Studi di Roma Tre", il 18 settembre 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. The interview of F. ERBANI, *Terremoto e ricostruzione. Il dramma de L'Aquila e dei paesi abruzzesi interroga architetti e urbanisti*, in "La Repubblica", 9 aprile 2009, a Franco Purini e ad Italo Insolera. Purini argued that "the recovery of a destroyed historic center must be carried out with a philological method, but new neighborhoods [not new cities] are indispensable [...]. It is precisely the ancient that asks us this because the building heritage of the past may not suit the needs of sustainability and safety. New neighborhoods, that however create public spaces, and facilitate the formation of communities".

the theory that “cities cannot be thrown away and rebuilt, they are points where many activities converge [...] which can’t be invented”).<sup>20</sup>

## 6.2 Policies for the best reconstruction models

Of course now it no longer serves to regret the failure to implement a proper prevention plan, as it was opportunely pointed out by the Ministry; noting how “the approach should have been different”, without “waiting for the event (the seismic one or any other) to occur”, preventing “the catastrophic aspects [...] without considering in any way the possibility of exchanging restoration with prevention” [79].

Precisely on the basis of this experience, the same Ministry recently drafted the *Linee Guida per la valutazione e riduzione del rischio sismico del patrimonio culturale* (Guidelines for the assessment and reduction of the seismic risk of cultural heritage) [80, 81], in alignment with the new technical standards for buildings, in which there are many examples of applications relating to the Abruzzo capital.

In this regard, we recall the admonition of Roberto Pane as early as 1980. “The earthquake is a violent and merciless tester; it shakes every masonry structure, causing the crumbling parts to collapse; and for modern factories, the discovery of the unforgiving failure and fraud in the use of reinforced concrete” [82].

The subject, especially for civil construction, is complicated by the fact that many buildings have “imploded”; the risk now being that they will be completely emptied and their typology changed (see **Figures 30–36**).

Undeniably there is the possibility of recomposing by anastylosis, the stone blocks lying on the ground of the various ‘workshops’ (along the lines of the



**Figure 30.**  
*Porta Napoli, at the end of Corso Federico II, immediately after the partial collapse (photo S. Gizzi, 2009).*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*. According to Insolera “a perfect solution does not exist. The best results came by examining everything with a fine toothed comb. Cities cannot be thrown away and redone; they are the point where many functions converge - homes, work, offices - which are not invented. More than the English new towns, I would look at the Ina-Casa neighborhoods, built in Italy from 1949 to 1963”.





**Figure 31.**  
*L'Aquila, collapses and props along the axis of Via Roma (photo S. Gizzi, 2010).*

reintegration of the Cathedral of Sant'Andrea Apostolo in Venzone after the earthquake of 1976 [83–86], and which has recently been discussed regarding L'Aquila<sup>21</sup>). Proceeding first with the “presentation on the

ground” of the recovered ashlar, after identification and graphic restitution of the same<sup>22</sup>; as in the case of the many numbered pieces belonging to the Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio, arranged in the field behind and ready for a welcome reassembly.

In this regard, one of the most urgent anastyloses should, in our opinion, concern one of the most singular artifacts of architecture. Namely the evocative perspective canvas (painted dome) by Venanzio Mascitelli [87], dated 1827, in the Cathedral of SS. Massimo and Giorgio (created on the example of Andrea Pozzo's false dome of Sant'Ignazio in Roma –1685–), and now totally shattered: a work that always aroused the admiration of visitors and faithful.

The collapse was obviously favored by incorrect previous restorations. Now the restoration has begun, thanks to the help of the Fire Brigade, with the support of the Istituto Superiore per il Restauro e la Conservazione (High Institute for Conservation and Restoration), which has recovered the canvas cut in nine pieces [88].

Paradoxically, since the current earthquake, it has been possible to collect information of some interest: among the collapsed parts pre-existing architectural elements have been recovered (and exhibited in a special exhibition). Some are from the Angioinian age - which had been reused inside the new walls after the earthquake of 1703 [89] - components of which there were no memory. “Stone elements [...] of some of the most ancient monumental complexes of L'Aquila, of which any trace and memory had been lost” [90]. These were, in any case, works carried out in

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, S. BUCCI, *I monumenti perduti tra restauro e clonazione. Esperti divisi. I casi di Venzone e di Pavia*, in “Corriere della Sera”, 9 aprile, 2009: “According to Roberto Cecchi [...] you can choose, after an earthquake, to reconstruct exactly the original, as was the case for the Cathedral of Venzone [...], or [...] as in Noto, where work was done by integrating the old and the new. Or, again, it is possible to act by mending, [...] healing the wounds”.

<sup>22</sup> G. ZANDER, *Persepoli. Una testimonianza di come si lavora insieme*, in “Antiqua”, anno II, n. 5–6, settembre-dicembre 1984, pp. 123–132, especially p. 131: “L'anastilosi deve avvenire in due tempi: ricomposizione a terra [...] e ricollocazione in opera”.



**Figure 32.**  
*L'Aquila, collapses in the historic center: Tartari house, from the 15th century (photo S. Gizzi, 2010).*

continuity with the pre-existing masonry, with the same or similar techniques and technologies (see **Figure 37**).

All this has been lost over the years, the memory. The criteria for restoration have increasingly turned towards the use of heavy, invasive and poorly thought-out technologies, aimed, above all, at the use of reinforced concrete. In this sense the incorrect restorations were not so much those, discussed at length by Superintendent Mario Moretti (in the 1970s), on the various churches in L'Aquila (*in primis* Santa Maria di Collemaggio<sup>23</sup>), but the previous ones with the insertion of reinforced concrete. For example, the intervention of Ignazio Carlo Gavini, in the wake of Gustavo

<sup>23</sup> On Mario Moretti, in addition to the well-known literature, I also reference the thesis, supervised by me, of Sara D'Aurelio "La figura di Mario Moretti, soprintendente e restauratore in Abruzzo", a.a. 2003, Facoltà di Conservazione dei Beni Culturali dell'Università degli Studi della Tuscia di Viterbo.





**Figure 33.**  
*Onna, near L'Aquila. Collapses and rubble (photo M. M. Segarra Lagunes, 2011).*



**Figure 34.**  
*Onna, near L'Aquila, detail (photo M. M. Segarra Lagunes, 2010).*





**Figure 35.**  
*Collapses in Paganica, a hamlet of L'Aquila (photo S. Gizzi, 2011).*



**Figure 36.**  
*Fire Brigade in Onna, after the collapses (photo S. Gizzi, 2010).*

Giovannoni and Gino Chierici, as well as those carried out by the Civil Engineers and then by the Provveditorato alle Opere Pubbliche (Superintendency Public Works), from post Second World War to 1962 [91]. However, it was the use of reinforced curbs which Moretti used for raising the roof of the central nave of Santa Maria di Collemaggio and San Pietro di Coppito, as well as similar interventions in Santa Maria Paganica, that were one of the causes for the current disaster.

Yet, just think, that even after the Irpinia earthquake, widespread use of cementing historic masonry and the insertion of materials incompatible with the ancient structures continued. It seems significant that, in 1982 (two years after that earthquake), the conference “Terremoto e centri storici” (Earthquake and historic





**Figure 37.**  
*L'Aquila, church of Santa Maria Paganica. Reused stone elements that came to light inside the eighteenth-century walls after the collapse (photo S. Gizzi, 2010).*

centers) was held in Pescara, the capital of Abruzzo, as if foreseeing what would happen in 2009.

“Why was this initiative held in Abruzzo? As Abruzzo is one of the regions with greatest seismic risk in Italy, and because the conditions of abandonment of almost all the historic centers put the Region in conditions very similar to those of Irpinia before 1980”, wrote the former President of the Abruzzo Regional Council of “Italia Nostra” in the introduction to the Conference [92].

At that forum in 1982, over thirty years ago, Superintendent Renzo Mancini noted that “the Abruzzo records have been enriched by the knowledge of some of the typical consequences of earthquakes” [93], it was still valued that “where possible in principle, we intervene with reinforced concrete curbs” [93], citing a series of examples such as: the churches of San Pietro ad Oratorium in Capistrano, San Filippo in L'Aquila, Santa Maria delle Grazie in Civitaretenga. Precisely those

that in the current earthquake would have suffered the most structural damage even if, “in the theory of restoration, the walls were left with their original bulge denouncing the historical phenomenon of collapse and its causes” ([93], p. 55). But Giulio Pane had already observed the risk, “These interventions, like a hat, are nothing but a greater risk! [94]”.

### 6.3 Practice. Possible procedures for reconstruction

Now, the fundamental problem is that of understanding the specific traditional techniques of L'Aquila, of the ancient masonry structures, of the mortars, on which considerable progress has been made (thanks to the research carried out by the Universities of Aquila [95] and Chieti<sup>24</sup>). Overcoming the idea - due to the history of restoration in L'Aquila - which until now was only concerned with the major buildings [96–98], such as the Palazzo and the municipal tower (already restored after the 1703 earthquake [99]). And for civil construction, the dismantling and reassembling of the “Cancelle” [100], and of a small building used as shops in the Renaissance period (overlooking the Piazza del Mercato, and moved early in the twentieth to a back alley), today seriously damaged by the earthquake.

Some consolidation techniques used after the 1703 earthquake did prevent the total collapse of the structures, but were rendered partially ineffective by subsequent



**Figure 38.**

*The words “L'Aquila is reborn” on a restoration site scaffolding (photo S. Gizzi, 2014).*

<sup>24</sup> Cfr., for example, C. VARAGNOLI, *Tecniche costruttive tradizionali e terremoto*, in “Ricerche di storia dell'arte”, 99, 2009, *cit.*, pp. 65–76; of the same A., *La costruzione tradizionale in Molise e l'esperienza del terremoto*, in A. ANTINORI (Ed.), *Città e architettura in Molise nell'Ottocento preunitario*, Gangemi, Roma 2006, pp. 81–102, e ID. (Ed.), *La costruzione tradizionale in Abruzzo. Fonti materiali e tecniche costruttive dalla fine del Medioevo all'Ottocento*, Gangemi, Roma 2008. Cf., also, S. RANELLUCCI, *Manuale del recupero della regione Abruzzo*, DEI Tipografia del Genio Civile, Roma s/data. See also L. ZORDAN, *Tecniche costruttive dell'edilizia aquilana. Tipi edilizi e apparecchiatura costruttiva*, in M. CENTOFANTI – R. COLAPIETRA – C. CONFORTI – P. PROPERZI – L. ZORDAN, *L'Aquila città di piazze. Spazi urbani e tecniche costruttive*, Carsa, Pescara 1992, pp. 80–111, e L. ZORDAN, *Gli elementi costruttivi e le maestranze*, *ibidem*, pp. 112–159.





**Figure 39.**

*L'Aquila, panels with the figures of the reconstruction sites located under the arcades of Corso Vittorio Emanuele II (photo S. Gizzi, 2014).*

restoration with extensive use of reinforced concrete. For example: the wall spurs (frequently inserted in churches) [101], and the wooden chains used by Giuseppe Valadier in the dome of the Suffragio, along the lines expressed in *Architettura Pratica* [102].

Finally we are now moving towards the union and bonding of industrial and traditional techniques, as is being experimented in Collemaggio (for the first consolidation work after the collapse [103]) as well as at Santa Maria Paganica and the church of the Suffragio. Overcoming the long-standing and sterile diatribe between the supporters of pre-modern consolidation systems and those of innovative contemporary ones, and moving forward in a balanced search for technologies compatible with the historic heritage, which also represents a hope for the future of L'Aquila (see **Figures 38 and 39**).

## 7. Conclusions

The need to revive everyday life and put a stop to depopulation should have led to widespread reconstruction, but in most cases the lack of a culture of conservation and restoration became evident. Modern solutions, alien to the context, were chosen which ignored both the problem of protection and those of the compatibility of contemporary building in historical centers.

After the emergency works government action should be indispensable and a priority; proposing also development and promotion goals for the areas affected by such a devastating earthquake.

Similar issues to these had already been addressed in a book by Salvatore Boscarino relating to other earthquakes in the 1980s, coining the term “restoration of necessity” [104].

A new culture must play an important role in affirming a different relationship between man and the environment. The tragic event in the L'Aquila area highlights a balance that must be achieved through eco-sustainable choices.

Of course, the study presented here does not claim to be exhaustive. But it can certainly be useful as a reflection and a starting point for other types of analysis to be carried out on the relationship between both natural and man-made disasters and the problems related to the permanence of the population in the areas affected by them, including how to curb the phenomenon of depopulation.


The strength of the work, however, is the new approach to restoration and conservation. That is, restoration and conservation that must be understood not only as safeguarding values and material content, but also those of memory and intangible worth. It is not, therefore, only a question of merging restoration into town and architectural planning (which remain autonomous or separate disciplines), but also of proposing possible interventions linked to the memory of places and the inhabitants which are affordable to the Municipal administration and the various communities and Institutions.

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