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Enhancing the resilience of local communities threated by natural disaster: the experience of the Project "Shkoder", (Albania)

Veronica Pazzi (1), Stefano Morelli (1), Francesco Fidolini (1), Riccardo Fanti (1), Pietro Vannocci (1), Ervis Krymbi (2), Carlo Centoducati (3), and Alessandro Ghini (4)

(1) Department of Earth Sciences, University of Firenze, Via G. La Pira 4, 50121 Firenze, Italy (veronica.pazzi@unifi.it), (2) Department of Geography, University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Skoder, Albania, (3) National Civil Protection Department, Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Via Ulpiano 11, 00139 Roma, Italy, (4) Civil Protection Group, Venerabile Arciconfraternita della Misericordia di Firenze, P.zza Duomo 19, 50122 Firenze, Italy

The vulnerability of Albanian population to natural disasters is due to poverty, inadequate infrastructures (e.g. communication network, basic public facilities and works of soil protection), an uncontrollable building boom and a range of environmental factors, both geomorphological and geological. The greatest disaster threats in Albania are those related to severe earthquakes and large-scale riverine floods. Geohazards assessment is a crucial point for Albania, which has been subject to a rapid development after the recent political changes, resulting in a general land degradation. Also the rate of migration from rural areas to the most urbanized areas currently represents a major problem for the National Civil Protection, since the urban sprawl in the suburbs are often located in high-risk areas, particularly vulnerable to natural hazards. The National Civil Protection system, in terms of subsidiary institutional and volunteer components, is relatively young in Albania. The progressive decentralization of the administrative competences triggered by the recent political changes is accompanied by the acquisition of new territorial information and the development of specific protocols for the emergency management, as well as the risk reduction. The management of natural disasters demands not only an early response to the criticalities, but also a correct mapping of the damage and the development of emergency plans for future events in order to protect lives, properties and the environment and moreover to spread the risk awareness in the population and to prepare it for such circumstances.
The main purposes of the Pilot Project "Shkoder" is to enhance the resilience of a little community, located 9 kilometers south-west of Shkodra (Northern Albania), to flooding and earthquakes and to promote the subsidiarity principle by means of:
a) demonstrating how basic information for the disaster planning (collected with a real demonstrative field survey) and the risk scenarios can be obtained using relatively simple and low-cost technologies and methods, whose easy accessibility is fundamental for government and academic institutions of poorly developed countries;
b) training of the local community (public administrations and volunteers) on the themes of natural risk, disaster prevention and emergency management;
c) creating an efficient Civil Protection volunteer system, able to cooperate with the local governmental and scientific institutions in case of natural disasters.
The evaluation of the flooding risk in the study area has been carried out by means of HEC-RAS software, while the seismic vulnerability of strategic buildings has been estimated by microtremors analysis. A two-days course has been performed to expose the main results of the field survey and to train the beneficiaries on local vulnerabilities, emergency behaviours and roles. Finally the local authorities and the volunteers, by working together under the supervision of the Italian institutions (National Civil Protection Department and University of Firenze), promoted and realized the first national civil protection relief drill in Albania.