

Rebuilt from the ashes: shifting value of the 1908 disaster in Messina

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

LITERATURE REVIEW

Disaster Storytelling “a means for transmitting lessons, sharing emotions, and developing empathy for others that arises from the experience of a disaster through narratives in oral or written form, as well as other forms of expression like drawing, painting, singing, drama, or photography” [1]

Study assumptions

1. Disasters are highly dependent on the cultural context and vary significantly across cultures
2. Disasters are value-laden processes that develop and shape in time
3. Disaster risk perception is influenced by memories of past disasters

MULTI-CULTURAL CASE-STUDY (ITALY-JAPAN)

Research question: How does history and culture influence perceptions of risks in high-risk countries?

Objective: promote inclusive and culturally-sensitive disaster preparedness measures in cross-cultural context



Earthquake and Tsunami of Messina and Reggio 1908



Tohoku earthquake 2011



Japan

Interdisciplinary approach:



Human Geography



Sociology



Disaster studies

METHODS

Community engagement



Participant observation



Discourse analysis



MESSINA (ITALY) CASE STUDY

History: The centre of Messina was completely destroyed by a 7.1 magnitude earthquake and tsunami on Dec. 28th, 1908. After 114 years, Messinese people keep the memory alive through family stories and commemorations.

Impact:

- Biggest disaster in Europe in terms of strength and damage [2]
- Shaped international relations prior to the outbreak of WWI [3]
- Shaped Italian identity [4]
- Blueprint of national and international crisis management [5]
- Shaped crisis communication

Current situation in Messina:

- **Infrastructure:** Abusive housing and “baracche” (shacks) issue
- **Collective memory:** monuments, images of Messina-prior disaster, anniversary events
- **Disaster preparedness:** DP is taught in school once a year by the *Protezione Civile* (Civil Protection Services) and volunteer services by the Fire Department, but recorded low engagement vis-à-vis increasing natural hazards

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Stages of disaster storytelling

1. National brotherhood sentiment in the wake of the catastrophe
2. Media and public opinion (p.o.) against the government’s inaction, in defence of disaster victims [6]
3. The media and p.o. against the Messinese people described as lazy and apathic (rumors of returned orphans?) [4]
4. National focus starts to fade and return to old division between North and South (Mezzogiorno issue) [4]
5. Local memory survives in risk perception [7]: local knowledge, abandonment by the central authorities (Gen. Mazza), construction abuses (*Piano Regolatore Borzi*) and the shacks issue.

Current discussions on 1908

- Fluid processes: water symbolises both source of external and internal risk (past experience of tsunami and landslides in Gianpileri 2009, sand hills, underground rivers and sea exposure) and core element of local identity
- Climate change, lack of trust in the authorities, and social uncertainties (job market and economic instability) affects the local mindset, leading to feelings of inability despite high risk awareness
- 1908 memories do not exist in vacuum: political mistrust, sustainability issues, and local city management are strongly interrelated topics for the p.o. 1908 memories then support the modern narrative of uncertainty in daily life [8].

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[3] di Paola, M.T. and Savasta, S. (eds) (2005) *Fra le righe: Il terremoto del 1908 attraverso i documenti inglesi e la presenza britannica nell’area dello stretto di Messina*. Messina: Istituto di Studi Storici ‘Gaetano Salvemini’.

[4] Dickie, J. (2008) ‘Una catastrofe patriottica: 1908, il terremoto di Messina.’ 1. ed. Roma: GLF editori Laterza (Storia e società).

[5] Noto, A.G. (2008) *Messina 1908: i disastri e la percezione del terrore nell’evento terremoto*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.

[6] Longo, G. (1978) *Un duplice flagello: terremoto di Messina del 28 Dicembre 1908 ed il governo Italiano*. Messina: Edas.

[7] Cerase, A. and Cugliari, L. (2023) ‘Something Still Remains: Factors Affecting Tsunami Risk Perception on the Coasts Hit by the Reggio Calabria-Messina 1908 Event (Italy)’, *Sustainability*, 15(3), p. 2787.

[8] Jay, M. (2010) ‘Liquidity Crisis: Zygmunt Bauman and the Incredible Lightness of Modernity’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 27(6), pp. 95–106.

RESEARCHER’S PROFILE

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Fields of interests: Social anthropology, Sustainable development, Gender issues in disaster preparedness, Japanese and Italian studies

Academic Background: 2019-2022: PhD in Global Environmental Studies at GSGES, Kyoto University (Japan); 2016– 2018: MPhil in Development Studies, International Development Dept, Oxford University (UK); 2012-2015: BA in Politics, Philosophy and Economics, Political Science Dept, LUISS University (Rome, Italy).

Relevant publications:

- Petraroli I., Baars R. 2022. “To be a woman in Japan: Disaster vulnerabilities and gendered discourses in disaster preparedness in Japan” *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, Vol. 70 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2021.102767>
- Petraroli I., Baars R. 2021 “Disaster Preparedness Communication and Perception of Foreign nationals in Kansai, Japan: A Socio-cultural Study”. Australian & New Zealand Disaster & Emergency Management Conference, Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia, 21-23 September 2022. DOI 10.47389/37.2.81
- Petraroli I., and Singer J. 2020. “Gender in Japan: The Unseen Aspect of Natural Disaster Risks.” 3rd International Conference on Gender Research, University of Reading, April 2-3. DOI: 10.34190/IGR.20.058

