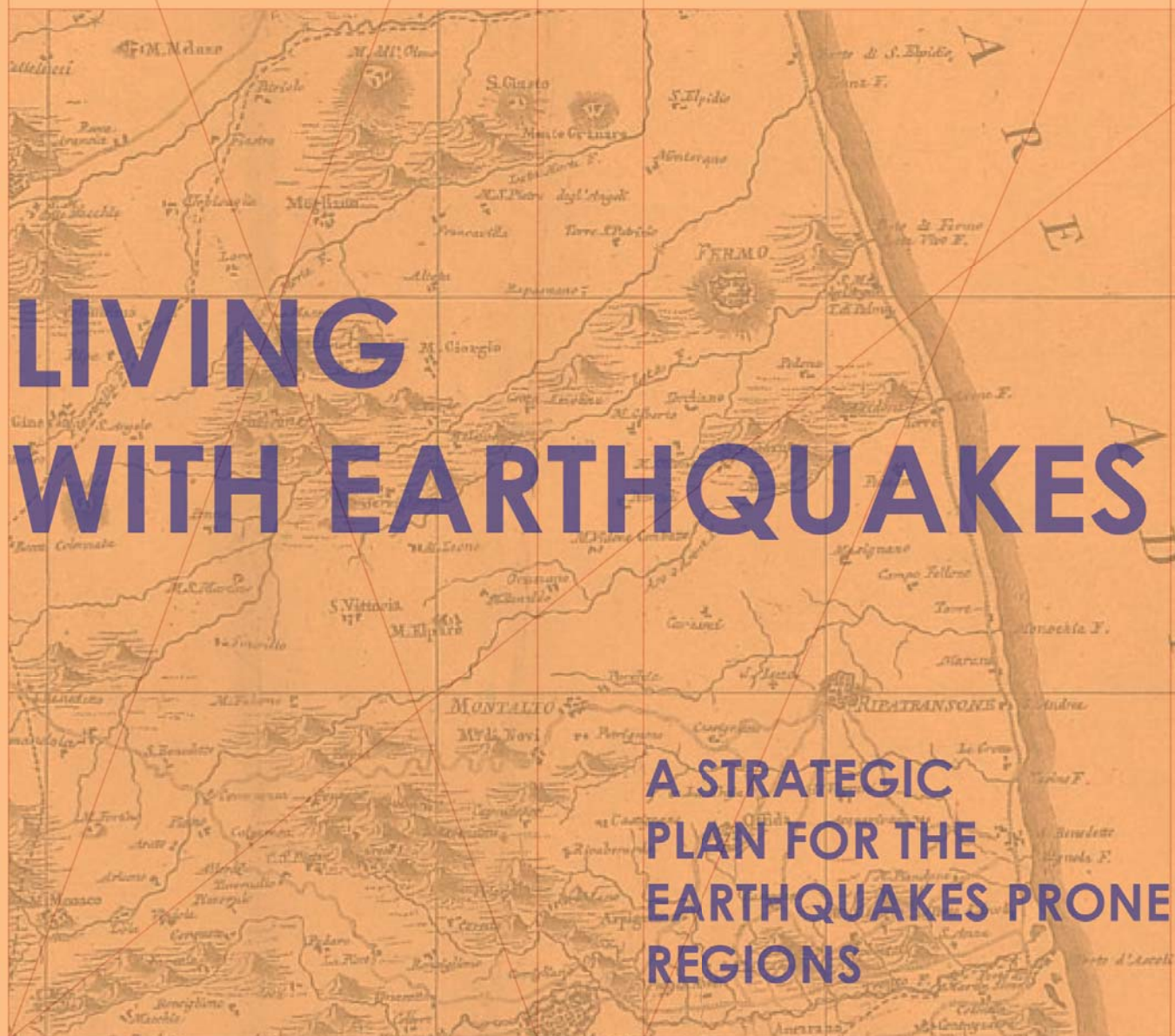


ELZÉARD 08

Antonello Alici  
(edited by)



# LIVING WITH EARTHQUAKES

A STRATEGIC  
PLAN FOR THE  
EARTHQUAKES PRONE  
REGIONS

# ELZÉARD

08

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A Strategic Plan for the earthquakes prone region  
A. Alici (edited by)

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# UNDER THE LAVA

Taking part, at the invitation of Antonello Alici, in the conference “Living with Earthquakes” in 2019 gave us a wonderful opportunity discuss life in volcanic regions, in which the shaking of the earth and the destruction are compounded by eruptions and lava.

Earthquakes and volcanoes are among the most terrifying situations imaginable in densely populated areas, and the eruption on the island of La Palma in the Canaries has prompted us to start a modest investigation into what a phenomenon of this kind means for life and architecture.

**With a volcanic eruption, all that was known is lost. The reality of every one of the inhabitants is erased.**

Among the most important considerations in the case of an explosive eruption such as the one still taking place on La Palma is that it brings with it, among other dramatic changes, the loss of the recognised landscape, which means coming to terms with a new topography, a new soil, a new environment. Trees have vanished, what once were riverbeds are filled with lava, and all the eye can see is a photographic negative of the world as it used to look, the intensely black ash covers everything – houses, streets, forests – like a terrible tone-reverse snowfall. All the parameters that defined the maps of our insular imaginary disappear from one day to the next. The valleys are no longer valleys, having been filled with magma as it takes the most convenient route to the sea, their former concavity turned into the convexity

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of the lava flows, equally linear, but black. The result a kind of inversion of the topography, as if a new layer had abruptly overlapped and completely cut away the known reality.

In an earthquake there is devastating damage, or even total destruction, leaving nothing but the ground. With a volcano, everything is lost, even the soil. In an earthquake, many of the houses may survive, cracked and unstable, but still standing. People can still have some degree of hope of their lives returning to normal, the possibility of repairing and making good and trying to forget or move on from the catastrophe. It is a matter of restoring rather than reinventing the landscape, the house, the city and life itself.

But the loss of your known landscape means you have to reinvent yourself from scratch. Build a new reality. Come up with new rules for a new environment. Where to begin becomes the big question, the biggest uncertainty.

The house of a Danish family, which miraculously survived the first river of lava, became famous and appeared in newspapers around the world until it was engulfed by the second a day or two later. Fortunately, the rhythm of these Strombolian volcanoes is slow, greatly reducing the loss of human lives, but if it is slow it is also relentless. The Danish family's house was a symbol of resistance. Now, it is a reminder of our fragility and our subjection to the vagaries of nature.

Every reference to the past disappears; even the names have been erased. The landmarks or symbols that identified the place are lost, and it exists now only in memory and in

any surviving documents. The reality has disappeared; only its representation remains.

The streets – their names and traces – no longer exist except on maps. Everything that is not readily registered is lost, like the swirling flight of the birds and their alighting on a familiar tree, or the familiar smells, such sharp spurs to memory. Gone too is the old way of traversing the landscape: the roads have disappeared, and with them the walks that constitute a routine and a physical social network – all the things that we mistakenly call intangible values.

The volcano both devastates and generates. It changes the contour of La Palma as it creates new land along the coast. Sometimes this is consolidated as a 'low island'; in some places it is unstable terrain, constantly on the brink of dropping into the underwater abyss. New possibilities open up, alongside new risks.

Nature will take care, in time, and in accordance with its own laws, to appropriate whatever there is. It will inhabit these new stolen territories. But our time is short, we do not follow those informal and *ad hoc* laws. We rely instead on the abstract rules that order our living; rules that, despite their synthetic condition, or perhaps precisely because of it, are less flexible under the impact of these radical changes brought about by earthquake or volcano. It is difficult to answer the new questions that inevitably arise and as yet do not have any clear answers:

What is happening with this new topography? What will happen when the heavy winter rains come? What belongs to whom? What is more 'valuable'? The beauty of the field of

black lava or the right to one's own land? What will the next settlements be like? Do we regroup in the safe zones or scatter across the territory, as before? Do we take this opportunity to change the model of how we inhabit and how we live?

The bottom line: from what do we work now?