



## **Prediction, Communication and Urban policies. Is there enough space for three faces on a single medal?**

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There are two possible answers to the question that this session poses (why predict?):

Firstly, because scientists like to play God and envisage a future where the chaotic unfolding of atmospheric physics will be reviled by numerical weather prediction models.

Secondly, because policy makers realised, in the last years, that the development of our unsustainable society made it impossible to tackle the “risk reduction problem” by solving its dilemma at the root and de-constructing in favour of a cutback of risk exposure.

In synthesis the desire of omnipotence of science and the excessively costly future prospected by politicians made us believe that predicting natural hazards is an indispensable tile of a much more complex jigsaw. Civil Protection (CP) measures, those for which most of the predictions are needed, are however entangled within complex societal schemes. A perfect CP system, with perfect soi-disent predictions, is useless if not applied and disseminated through a long term policy of civic education. The entire population needs to become part of this educational stream aiming to a shared and participated empowerment of society.

If on the one hand we have society and science on the other hand we have economy and urban policies. The economy deriving from the construction sector is in some countries seen as an indispensable asset for national financial stability. Furthermore the current economical crisis is slowing the adoption of vital risk-reduction interventions: to the same extent as in the aftermath of the Second World War, employment and very short termed economical strategies are overtaking strict urban planning and environmental rules. Thus the availability of funds intended towards the protection of the population has greatly decreased whilst, on the other hand, more buildings are being constructed in areas of great risk. Not only our landscapes are being radically changed but, in the long term, we are exponentially augmenting the exposure of the population to extreme events.

This work wants to convey on these themes bringing forward the example of the recent flash flood which took place in Genoa (Liguria Region, Italy, November 2011). It will show how CP plans were present and how they precisely identified the vulnerable areas where unfortunately six women died. Forecasts were consistent to the unfolding of events and CP alerts were diffusely issued two days before the event, however the population was unaware of what was going to happen. To this aspect also the aforementioned faulty urban planning perpetrated in more than fifty years must be taken into account.

Going back to the initial question, why do we predict? A realistic answer could be: because we cannot do anything else. It is time for policy makers to rethink completely the scheme of priorities of our society. Are we willing to annihilate the safety of our cities in the near future just to live one more year on the verge of bankruptcy? If things will not change in the near future we are afraid that these questions will be retrospectively answered by our sons and daughters.