



Natural disasters between memory and oblivion

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The last decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new millennium have been marked by a strong focus on the past and, consequently, a proliferation of studies on memory.

Perhaps this great attention to memory implies a new way of thinking and experiencing time and space, two categories that deeply changed by the phenomenon of cultural globalization (Huyssen, 2003).

If it is true that with new technologies, space and time have been dramatically compressed, it is also true that the horizons of our imagination have expanded to dimensions of space and time which are able to cross the boundaries of a locally circumscribed vision. So our past and our memory no longer have clear and delimited boundaries which were established by a tradition with local and national roots within specific geographical borders.

The revival of studies on memory has included large Italian catastrophes occurred in the last centuries. Several initiatives, researches, exhibitions and commemorations wanted to remember these great catastrophes of our country. What is the relationship between these initiatives and the reduction of risk? What relationships are there between memory, forgetting and risk?

On the issue of risk reduction the provocative phrase of Pierre Nora fits well: "We talk about memory because it no longer exists" (Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Gallimard 1997).

A direction to work on is indicated by Aleida Assmann (1999) that associates the idea of crisis of memory with the crisis of "living memory", that is linked to the disappearance of the eyewitnesses of the greatest tragedies of the twentieth century. When the generations who lived through L'Aquila earthquake on 6 April 2009 will die, the memory of the earthquake will vanish with them?

To answer these questions and to propose communication and educational strategies capable of persisting the passage of generations, this work explores an interdisciplinary point of view, which takes into account recent studies on memory as: subjectivity, emotion, context, time and evolution, the tension between memory and oblivion, information, memory as a construction process.

Today there is no single definition of memory because memory is a dynamic process: a procedural memory, which reshapes itself according to the present.

So what should we do today to develop effective risk communication strategies?

Starting from the assumption of Mieke Bal (1999, 9. VII), that cultural memory has to be seen "as an activity that takes place in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and re-described, even when it continues to shape the future", we can not forget that the problem of memory is always located in the relationship between those who "produce memory" and those who "benefit from it".

To overcome the dichotomy between individual emotional experience and collective historical experience and to counteract the effect of oblivion, those who involved in communication and risk reduction should move towards a constructive direction of memory, capable of enhancing the past, live the present and orientate the future.