



Public participation in reconstruction after the earthquakes in Friuli (Italy) and the Upper Soca Valley (Slovenia) in 1976, 1998, and 2004

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Northern Friuli (in northeast Italy) and the Upper Soča Valley (in northwest Slovenia) are extremely seismically active. The earthquakes of 6 May and 15 September 1976, with an epicenter in the Venzone area, claimed 939 lives in Italy and 157,000 people were left homeless. The same two earthquakes affected northwest Slovenia, which was still part of communist Yugoslavia at the time; they did not claim any lives, but they damaged 12,000 buildings and 13,000 people were left homeless. The “Easter Earthquake” of 12 April 1998, with an epicenter in the Krn Mountains, damaged 4,000 structures in Slovenia, among which nearly 1,500 had to be completely rebuilt. Even though there was noticeably less damage than in the 1976 earthquakes, in some settlements more than 80% of the houses were damaged. The same area was hit by another earthquake on 12 July 2004, which damaged nearly 2,000 structures, including some that had already been repaired after the 1998 earthquake.

More than three decades after the 1976 earthquakes, a qualitative study was carried out on public participation in rebuilding after these earthquakes and public influence on the success of rebuilding. The research is based on studies of cases of individual settlements in Italy and Slovenia, where in-depth interviews were conducted with relevant persons that had been directly involved in the post-earthquake rebuilding efforts. This article highlights six case studies ranked on Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation. Examples from Italy include Venzone, Portis, and Resia for the 1976 earthquakes, and examples from Slovenia include Breginj for the 1976 earthquakes, Drežniške Ravne for the 1998 earthquake, and Čezsoča for the 1998 and 2004 earthquakes.

Alongside various political, legislative, and administrative circumstances, a responsible citizenry was also an important factor. In the case of Venzone, the majority of the residents and stakeholders had a positive influence on the preservation of cultural heritage because they limited individuals’ negative impact and successfully resisted the municipal authorities’ inclination to quickly rebuild after the earthquake, as was done in Breginj. Portis is a good example of the local community’s great success in agreeing on how to rebuild their settlement and also carrying this out completely autonomously. For the Municipality of Resia, as a weak local community, responsibility for rebuilding after the earthquake was too much to handle. Because of the large extent of the damage and ineffective management of reconstruction, rebuilding was only completed two decades later. In the case of the preservation of cultural heritage in Breginj, the local community was divided, and the municipality’s responsibility for rebuilding was insufficiently funded by the state, which also censored media reports on the failure to preserve cultural heritage. Drežniške Ravne is a case of successful agreement with the residents in preparing a management plan for post-earthquake reconstruction of the affected settlement. Unfortunately, due to a lack of state resources, the management plan was not completely carried out. Čezsoča is a case in which the warnings and dissatisfaction expressed by the residents about improper rebuilding after the 1998 earthquake were confirmed by the 2004 earthquake.