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FURTHER RESEARCH - WHERE NOW?

For a number of years now the study of the vernacular architecture of historic centres in earthquake zones has been not only an important research and study topic for the experts of the European Centre for Cultural Heritage in Ravello but also one of the main lines of its programme as devised by the Scientific Coordinating Committee.

The case studies of Calitri (May 1988), San Lorenzello (December 1988) and Paestum (May 1989) provided a first opportunity of putting our scientific knowledge to the test and were a first field trial of the methodological aspects of disseminating information.

The recommendations generated by the seminar on the San Lorenzello case study, which I myself announced to the policy-makers at the closing session, stressed the fact that the material obtained needed to be completed by specific studies of the local seismic risk and the whole collected together in a single volume. It is thus particularly gratifying to see, six months later, that most of these recommendations have been implemented with the publication of this volume in Italian. The English version will now ensure that it reaches a wider audience.

This "search for protective anomalies" has not ended with the publication of these results.

One of the final recommendations was that "the methodological lessons learned should be applied not only by the experts but also by the communes and regions concerned."

The San Lorenzello authorities have thus begun a revision of their town planning instruments on the basis of our research findings, with a view to promoting a campaign of local revival which will look at people's understanding of their architecture and the behaviour of the community.

As regards the dissemination of knowledge, we recommended training courses for instructors who use the knowledge accumulated over the three years of the CUEBC's work. This was specifically requested recently by the Prefecture of Benevento and the Province of Naples.

It is not out of any kind of smugness that I would point to the (rare) speed with which the local political leaders received and applied the experts' conclusions. It is one more proof of the scientific validity of the line of research we are pursuing: combining

physical analysis of the seismic phenomenon with technical analysis of the architecture and methodological consideration of the behaviour of the community. This is a line of research which promises to expand further both "vertically", to define the best form of interaction between central and local levels, and "horizontally", to compare the different experiments amongst each other.

Effective protection of old buildings requires rules (technical, town planning rules) which are adapted to specific local realities. But rigorous scrutiny is needed to prevent these from being invoked to justify arbitrary actions. To reconcile these two needs, research should be done centrally or regionally to devise standard procedures and instruments (grids for analysing buildings and the behaviour of the system, catalogue of traditional methods, etc.), to be used locally in order to establish, jointly with the local community (inhabitants, technical experts, administrators), the sequence of action most appropriate to the system.

"Horizontally", research could continue by broadening the scope of the experiments and testing the methodology adopted on other cultural environments in Europe.

The research method which follows the sequence of theoretical seminars - field tests - discussion of the results - wide dissemination of the results has proved particularly fruitful. For this reason it would be a good idea if the other European countries exposed to the risk of earthquakes - France, Greece, Spain and Portugal - were to conduct case studies of this kind.