

SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL IMPACT OF THE 1980 EARTHQUAKE IN SOUTHERN ITALY:

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF CIVIL PROTECTION

Ada Cavazzani

The earthquake's characteristics

The earthquake of the 23rd of November 1980 (magnitude 6.7 Richter, duration 90") devastated a highly populated area of 28,000 square kilometers, affecting 679 communities in two southern regions of Italy, Campania and Basilicata (Figure 1). The epicenter area includes 36 communities of the internal provinces of Avellino, known as Irpinia, a traditional seismic zone, Salerno and Potenza. The same area was devastated by a similar earthquake in 1694 when the same villages were destroyed.

The 1980 earthquake resulted in 3,500 deaths (official record), 10,000 wounded and 350,000 homeless. According to official estimates 20,000 dwellings were destroyed, 50,000 seriously damaged, and 30,000 lightly damaged. The estimated damage amounts to 20 billion dollars, that corresponds to 40% of the total expenditure of the special agency for the South, the "Cassa per il Mezzogiorno", over the last 30 years.

This earthquake has been recognized as the greatest national disaster in Italy since World War II, and the social disruption it has caused is much greater than it appears from the general estimates of the damage.

This paper will focus mainly on the social and institutional implications both at the local and national level.

Structural features of the area

As several studies have already confirmed, the damage from an earthquake depends more on the social organization of the area affected than on the natural characteristics of the disaster. Many of those effects that can appear in the emergency phase as direct consequences of the earthquake or of the lack of organization are on the contrary the result of the structural features of the society.