

New place names in Italy after disasters or human changes

Giovanni De Santis^a, Cosimo Palagiano^{b,*}

^a Università degli Studi di Perugia, Giovanni De Santis - giovanni.desantis@unipg.it

^b Sapienza Università di Roma, Cosimo Palagiano - cosimo.palagiano@uniroma1.it

* Corresponding author

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to highlight how the simultaneous presence in the same area of a disastrous earthquake and the drying up of a lake have changed the landscape and toponymy. While the place names were changed or moved after the earthquake, the drying up of the lake resulted in a change in the landscape with the creation of new place names. Furthermore, a new economy was developed. From a methodological point of view, the transformations of the landscape have a few international comparisons. We can only consider the changes in the landscape of the exhausted lignite mines between Cologne and Aachen. Today an artificial lake has changed the landscape in a comfortable Erohlungszone, “recovery area”. Italy is often shaken by natural disasters, and affected by the need to reclaim wet areas subject to hydrogeological and sanitary fragility.

In this study we will focus on an area of central Italy, modified by the drying up of a lake basin and subsequently destroyed by a catastrophic earthquake. The events described occurred between the 19th and the 20th century. An adequate comparison with the current situation has been able to regain possession of a vast territory even under the toponymic aspect. We are considering the region called Marsica. Its population, settled in the villages around the lake, was, until 1870, very segregated and with a predominantly pastoral economy, although integrated by the supply of fish products. The disappearance of the lake made it possible to have about 165 square kilometers - the third largest Italian lake - of excellent agricultural land, mainly used for the cultivation of wheat, potatoes and beets. This reclamation intervention also allowed to implement the demographic load.

The demographic increase was due to the immigration of settlers from other regions, which favored a notable development of some cities, such as Avezzano and Pescina, and the creation of completely new settlements such as San Benedetto dei Marsi. This situation changed by the earthquake of 13 January 1915, which had its epicenter here. The effects were disastrous. Avezzano with 11,208 inhabitants in 1911 had about 96 percent of the dead, Collarmele, S. Benedetto, Paterno, Gioia dei Marsi, Lecce in the Marsi, S. Pelino and other villages were almost razed to the ground. Almost all the others more or less affected.

The intense reconstruction work hindered not only from bureaucratic delays, but also from the serious damage caused by the Anglo-American air bombardments and the violent Nazi-fascist reprisals, was resumed with force only at the end of the Second World War, so much so that Avezzano now has (2022) 40,808 inhab. and many other towns, rebuilt from scratch further downstream such as Lecce (1541 inhabitants.), Gioia (1710), Collarmele (818 inhabitants), etc., benefit from the Fucino basin, which has become a thriving agricultural and industrial center, with various also reflected on the toponymy of the area, hitherto submerged by the waters and therefore completely devoid of any indication of the places. Unfortunately, only with the agrarian reform of 1952 was aimed at the hydraulic-agrarian arrangement and urban planning in addition to the post-earthquake reconstruction.

The project, which began in 1952, involved the transformation of the land in Carruscino and the construction of the Laborer Village near Avezzano. From 1954 to 1956 the population of the plain increased by building other settlements. We should quote as an example the residential village near Trasacco, the completion of Borgo Ottomila and Borgo Strada 14 in the municipality of Celano, Borgo Incile, Borgo Via Nuova and Borgo Strada 10 and 40 del Fucino in the municipality of Avezzano, the rural village of Luco dei Marsi. At the beginning of the 60s a Borgo is added, now integrated in Ortucchio, where 27 families are housed that still lived in the shacks built after the earthquake of 1915. In this area the Telespazio Space Center which is fundamental for telecommunications worldwide has been located.

The model of the new settlements is of the centralized type, in contrast to the law then in force which provided for scattered settlement types. They appeared in a compact form, suitable for community life and consisting of a central nucleus in a mix of homes and public buildings of a social, commercial, administrative and cultural nature. Different solutions can be found in the same territory affected by a reclamation and an earthquake.

In seismic areas, the settlements normally tend to keep the original place name.

In the reclamation or drainage areas, the new place simply reports the name strada "road", followed by a number, or canale "channel", fossato "moat", paese "village". The part of the valley due to the earthquake is named bacino "basin". It extends by the "Ottomila water pumping station" almost as far as Ortucchio and is used as a reservoir withholding of the two channels Allaccianti which flow into the Canale Collettore coming from the Incile.