



In Quake-Torn Italian Town, Rubble Remains Nearly a Year On

Italy has a record of recovering slowly, and residents of Amatrice are skeptical about reconstruction

Piles of crumbled masonry and twisted metal stand taller than a grown man around the clock tower in Amatrice, Italy.

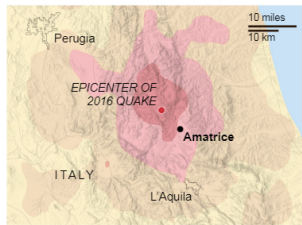
By *Pietro Lombardi* | Photographs by *Franco Pagetti/VII* for *The Wall Street Journal*

July 4, 2017 5:30 a.m. ET

SAVE SHARE TEXT

1 COMMENT

AMATRICE, Italy—The center of this tiny town is off limits. Workers cleared paths through mounds of rubble and debris after [last year's earthquake](#), but damaged buildings are still at risk of collapse in the part of Amatrice known as the Red Zone.



Shaking intensity
Moderate → Severe
Source: U.S. Geological Survey

The local school has operated since September out of a temporary structure. Some residents displaced by the quake got prefabricated replacement homes, but many others are living elsewhere while they wait for new housing.

Italy has a long record of recovering slowly from earthquakes, and people in Amatrice and surrounding towns in central Italy that were [devastated by last August's disaster](#) fear that dismal history is being repeated.

“Uncertainty hangs over our future,” said Francesco D’Alessandro, whose mother, grandmother and uncle were among [the 299 people killed by the 6.2-magnitude quake](#), 237 of them in Amatrice. His brother was trapped in the rubble for seven hours, but survived.

Eight years after [a quake hit nearby L’Aquila](#), part of that city is also still off limits. Allegations of corruption and other problems have so slowed reconstruction that officials estimate it won’t be complete before 2022.

Victims of the 1980 Irpinia quake in southern Italy spent decades in “temporary” accommodations.

“Italy has challenges with governance, corruption and enforcement of regulation,” said Daniel Aldrich, a professor at Northeastern University in Boston who has written extensively about recovering from natural disasters.

“Other countries that have faced quakes have stronger risk management frameworks,” he said. For example, he said, Italy’s governance structure is “not nearly as well-organized and efficient as that in Japan.”

INTRODUCING
MANSION GLOBAL
ONLY THE EXCEPTIONAL
DISCOVER YOUR NEXT PROPERTY

MANSION GLOBAL IS INDEPENDENT OF THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

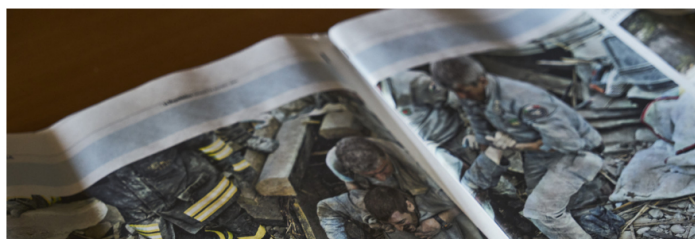


The streets of Amatrice are still lined with buildings that were damaged or destroyed in the 2016 quake, and personal belongings are still visible amid the rubble.

Politicians, mindful of past delays, have pledged to rebuild Amatrice. Banking, postal and other basic services are available in the town. Authorities set up a health center, because the town's hospital was severely damaged and the nearest one is an hour's drive.

But tremors—some of them large—have shaken the area since last August, making it more difficult to remove rubble. Piles of crumbled masonry and twisted metal stand taller than a grown man around Amatrice's clock tower, one of the few structures still standing in the Red Zone.

The government has already earmarked more than €6 billion (\$6.9 billion) to rebuild businesses, private homes and infrastructure—including 38 schools whose construction is expected to start shortly—in the regions struck by the quakes, according to the government's body overseeing reconstruction.





Francesco D'Alessandro's mother, grandmother and uncle died in last August's earthquake. He showed photos, right, of the moment his brother Marco was pulled from the rubble.

"Reconstruction is already underway," said the earthquake reconstruction commissioner's press office, "and everything has been done by the book, with the country's anticorruption authorities fully involved in everything we do."

Pointing at the extraordinary circumstances in which emergency response and reconstruction have taken place, it added that "the four strong quakes between August and January enormously expanded the affected areas and forced us to restart almost from scratch every time."

Amatrice's mayor, Sergio Pirozzi, gives regular updates on a local radio station and talks up progress in [reviving the town](#), including a two-year tax exemption aimed at supporting struggling businesses.

"The earthquake could become a moment of renaissance" for Amatrice, he said.



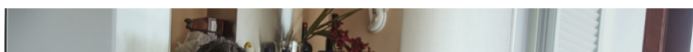
A firefighter accompanies a woman and her daughter to visit their house in Amatrice, which was damaged in the earthquake.

Locals are skeptical about the reconstruction, but [loath to give up on their hometown](#), which had about 2,600 residents before the disaster.

Mr. D'Alessandro, a 34-year-old audio technician, has been bunking for months with a brother in Rome and drives two hours to Amatrice each Saturday to work in a makeshift cinema erected in the town's sports hall. He hopes the work will expand into a full-time job.

Construction on a new school, once expected to start in June, will now probably begin in the second half of July, officials say. "At first, my friends and I talked about the quake," says Stefano Rosati, a 17-year-old student at the school. "Now we try not to."

Roughly half of the prefab homes that authorities promised to provide have been delivered, at most, though figures provided by the regional government and by Amatrice differ. Emidio Bernardi, 70, lives with his sister in one of them, which he said is an improvement over the tent they stayed in right after the quake but "doesn't feel like home."



NOT PARTISAN
Reasoned, reported commentary from WSJ
[LEARN MORE](#)



Daniele Mosca and his partner moved away from Amatrice with their son after the quake. Mr. Mosca lost his gelato shop in Amatrice, shown here before the disaster.

“People here live in a sort of limbo, a state of suspension and uncertainty,” said Sonia Santarelli, a lawyer who helps manage her family’s farm on the outskirts of Amatrice. She saw the home where she was born crumble to the ground in the quake.

Dozens of stores were also wiped out in the quake. Daniele Mosca lost his gelato shop in the Red Zone, forcing him and his partner to put off their plans to get married. They moved with their 1-year-old son to Perugia, roughly 100 miles away.

New marketplaces are under construction in Amatrice, and Mr. Mosca has been assigned a spot in one of them when it opens. He hopes instead to sell his wares out of a truck, including something he calls “Flavor of Amatrice” that features ricotta cheese from the area mixed with chestnut honey and nuts.

Mr. Mosca said he is hesitant about returning to the town, doubtful that his family would have much of a future there. “We don’t know what we are going to do,” he said. “Our time horizon doesn’t go beyond several days. We are afraid to make plans for the future.”





A view of Amatrice.

Appeared in the July 5, 2017, print edition as 'A Long Way Home for Quake Town.'

SHOW COMMENTS (1)

What to Read Next...



REAL ESTATE

The Search for New England Quint



JOURNAL REPORTS: COLLEGE RANKINGS

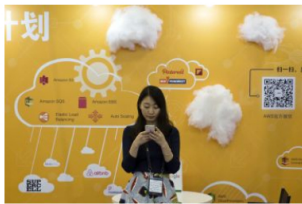
Compare Any Two Colleges From the WSJ/THE College Rankings



Mario Draghi

POLITICAL ECONOMICS

Opinion | Italy's 'Doom Loops,' Imagined and Real



WORLD

China Floats Cloud Concession to Foreign Tech Firms in U.S. Trade Talks



MARKETS

Peer Pressure Can Improve Your Financial Life, Study Finds



THE FUTURE OF EVERYTHING

Deus Ex Machina: Religions Use Robots to Connect With the Public



POLITICS

Democrats Push for Fast Release of Mueller Report

POWERED BY DOW JONES

Customer Center | Subscriber Agreement | Privacy Policy | Cookie Policy

© 2019 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.