

NOTE: CATASTROPHIC EVENT VALENCIA

What has hit Valencia in recent days is an event of exceptional rainfall caused by a DANA that has continued to affect Spain for several days. This time the rainfall has exceeded 500 mm in some locations in the basin of the Turia and Jucar rivers, but it is not the first, in fact over the centuries, always in the same period of the year, copious floods have occurred, the last of which on October 13, 1957 "la gran riada" which caused 81 deaths and the flooding of a good part of the city. Following this event, it was decided to intervene through the "Plan Sur" diverting the final course of the Turia out of the city up to its mouth with the creation of a new riverbed "La Rambla del Poyo". This artificial route is 11.8 km long, and runs along the central area of the city to the south, a work that involved the construction of large infrastructure works, not only hydraulic, but over 15 motorway, road and railway bridges as well as subway underpasses, water networks, services and more; the works lasted over 10 years, starting in 1959 and ending in 1973, the year in which the waters were entirely diverted. The work, strongly desired by the Franco government, considered colossal for the time, cost around 6,000 million pesetas and was largely burdened by local taxes. The nominal capacity was estimated at 5,000 m³/s, but the actual capacity was estimated by some to be half, and in any case with indicators based on historical series dating back 70 years and without the impacts of climate change in recent years. While the areas upstream and north of the new route remained unscathed (on the adjacent north side is the famous "City of Sciences" complex), those to the south are now the center of the disaster. These are not isolated centers, they are peripheral neighborhoods of Valencia, administratively autonomous municipalities, but an integral part of the urban agglomeration.

Paiporta, la Torre, Alfalfar, Torrent, Cararroja, the most affected, have developed since the 70s with exponential growth, mostly residential with multi-story buildings, with very high density typologies, in addition to vast industrial areas, all on alluvial lands that previously hosted the "Huertas de Valencia", valuable agricultural areas.

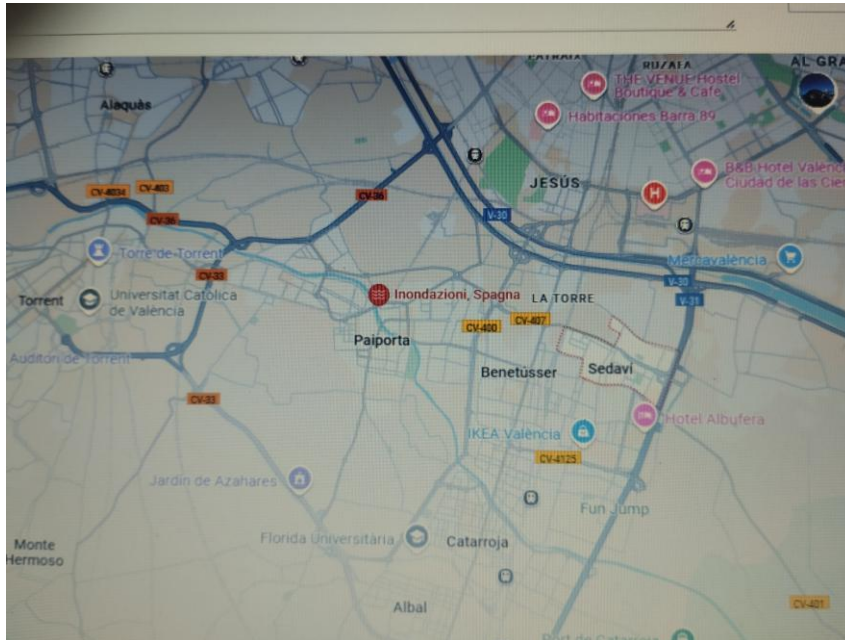
Therefore, the catastrophic dimension of the event is due not only to natural elements, but also to the human impact on a territory that is fragile in itself through massive infrastructural interventions, such as embankments for roads and railways, which prevent the normal flow of water, excessive urbanization with the concreting of vast areas, the construction of embankments aimed mainly at protecting the urban side. All this in the final stretch of the Turia, where not only the waters flowed, but enormous quantities of mud and debris from a large hydrographic basin, where the hill towns and villages have progressively depopulated, with a decrease in traditional agricultural and forestry activities, causing the progressive degradation of the territory and less maintenance of the waterways. This event, similar to those recorded in our country, recently in Emilia-Romagna and many others in previous years. Cinque Terre, Ischia, Sarno, etc. are an alarm bell considering that they will be repeated in the future, due to the impacts caused by an increase in sea temperature, periods of intense heat, water bombs and an undeniable climate change throughout the Mediterranean basin.

Hence the renewed invitation to review the overall territorial settlement model in a vision of indispensable respect and protection of the environment and reducing the risks produced by an urbanization guided only by profit and real estate market.

It is therefore necessary to restore the widespread human presence in the original territories, now marginalized, with the review of large infrastructure works in a different perspective and with the revaluation of smaller centers and agglomerations, certainly less vulnerable to environmental risks and more resilient from a social and economic point of view. But we must act quickly!!

Arch. Paolo Motta

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Valencia Map



Flooded areas