



Cultural adaptations of the build environment

The built environment, in particular, is one example where disaster culture can reduce risk to hazards through the “cultural adaptation” of buildings. Following a disaster, the physical infrastructure can be re-built stronger, based on tested materials and techniques. This requires assessing which structures withstood shocks or impacts and why, as well as using the traditional building skills and knowledge of local citizens. Put another way, “cultural adaptations” in the built environment refers to the capitalization of “existing traditional wisdom on construction materials and technologies, since it has been tested over generations and is best suited to the local environment and culture”. These adaptations depend on three factors, present in most natural hazards – repetition, forewarning and extensive damage. It is not unusual to see photos and videos of post-disaster scenes, where some buildings remain standing in the midst of the destruction of all other buildings. There are numerous examples of localities that suffered increased damage and fatalities due to construction that was not designed with disasters in mind. Research suggests that it is often the older, vernacular buildings that use traditional methods, which survive better than modern buildings. Destroyed buildings may then be replaced with structures using reinforced concrete, concrete block and other non-traditional materials due to fashion, population pressure, the loss of traditional materials like wood, for example, and the “economics of the cinderblock”. This directly impacts cultural heritage and increases risk so that “in some countries, the result is often a marked deterioration in the structural integrity of buildings, a decline in traditional building skills and a loss of heritage value that exposes a growing population to future disasters”.

Note: See source document for full reference.

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: [Norms/values](#), [Individual/collective memory](#), [Local knowledge](#), [Attitudes toward environmental issues](#)

Disaster Phases: [Prevention](#)

Types of Actors Concerned: [Non-active citizens](#), [Entrepreneurs](#), [National research bodies](#)

Hazards: [Natural hazards](#)

Recommendations:

- [Develop a personal “culture of preparedness”](#)

Source

[Deliverable D7.3 "Report on cultural factors and citizen empowerment" \(page 56\)](#)

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<https://culturalmap.carismand.eu/a/7-3-86-cultural-adaptations-of-the-build-environment>