Cities are progressive systems, and therefore when a shock – whatever its nature and strength – hits a city it hits a system that is evolving, and which is moving along a specific development trajectories. A shock – like an earthquake in the case of L’Aquila – has a disruptive effect on the social and economic structure as well. Yet part of the social and economic structure may remain untouched by it. At the same time, however, it sets in motion evolutionary changes engendered by public policies and private adjustment plans agents implement as a reaction to the shock – for instance, in the case of an earthquake, the reconstruction of the city’s fabric. These evolutionary changes interact with the evolutionary changes that were already unfolding before the shock arrived, and which were not interrupted by the shock itself. A key question to address, in order to understand what economy (and society) may emerge in L’Aquila after the earthquake, is the relationship between the ‘forces’ that were shaping the city’s development trajectory before the ‘disaster’ and the ‘forces’ that have been triggered by public and private reaction to the earthquake. As a consequence of the intersection between pre-disaster and post-disaster dynamics, the ‘reconstruction policy’ is an issue much more complex than usually envisaged.

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