



Werner Herzog, film still from: The Fire Within: A Requiem for Katia and Maurice Krafft, 2022

UNDER THE VOLCANO

SICILY: THREAT, DESTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION

The island of Sicily, as the largest island in the Mediterranean, lies at the outermost edge of Europe and has a highly turbulent history. The various cultures that have ruled over the island have left their mark on its rituals, many of which are still visible today. Over the centuries, numerous peoples conquered the island and merged with the local customs that overlapped there. Morphologically, the island's history is equally turbulent. A geological peculiarity is the collision of two continental plates, which still causes earthquakes to occur regularly. Furthermore, to the east of the island lies Mount Etna, Europe's highest active volcano, which has repeatedly destroyed settlements over the centuries and remains an omnipresent threat.

Sicily's extreme morphological characteristics not only led to devastating destruction through recurring earthquakes and volcanic eruptions but also contributed to the idealised visions of urban planning and radical design offered by the need to rebuild. In 1693, the Val di Noto earthquake destroyed several settlements in the south-east of Sicily. The large-scale urban renewal that followed gave rise to opulent Sicilian Baroque architecture. Again, in the twentieth century, severe earthquakes struck the island and provoked reconstruction initiatives, such as the rebuilding of Messina after the earthquake in 1908. Messina marked a turning point in urban planning, as it was one of the first cases in which a city was rebuilt after a disaster using modern urban planning concepts rather than tracing the pre-existing historic urban fabric. Sixty years later, in 1968, after the Belice earthquake, different reconstruction strategies were developed: the urban renewal of Salemi carried out by Álvaro Siza, and in Gibellina, where Alberto Burri created his famous monumental artwork over the remains of the town.

Nature and its forces have always influenced human life, and in recent decades this influence has become more evident than ever. As designers and planners, we will explore Sicily with a forward-looking perspective, discovering ways to address the consequences of unexpected natural events and reflecting on their implementation. After visiting Palermo, we invite you to begin our journey in the west of the island, to see the Belice Valley with Siza's urban renewal and Burri's artwork. Continuing eastward on the island, we will visit the impressive Baroque towns of Noto and Catania, and approach Mount Etna. In Sicily, the trip will end with a visit to Messina before continuing to our final stop in Naples, a town similarly shaped by the threat of a volcano and its eruptions.

To understand Sicily's remoteness, we will travel there by ferry. After arriving in Genoa by train from Zurich, we will embark on our ferry journey to the Mezzogiorno, all the way to southern Italy. We are excited to explore Sicily's peculiarities by bus, train, and on foot. Together with experts from different fields, we will actively follow the traces left by natural forces and visit outstanding historical and contemporary urban examples dealing with threats, destruction and reconstruction.

LINK

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TEAM

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SEMINAR WEEK

18.10. – 25.10.2025
Expense category
D (751 – 1000 CHF)
12 – 21 participants
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