

Giving form to uncertainty. Adaptability and reconstruction in post-disaster territories

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In 1964, Christopher Alexander proposed that the quality of an architectural form lay in its capacity to respond coherently to the forces generated by its context: the goodness of fit as a measure of adaptation between problem and solution. This conceptual framework, grounded in the legibility of context and the stability of its forces, presupposes conditions that disaster — in its capacity to erase consolidated relations, hierarchies and spatial references — radically undermines.

In territories affected by catastrophic events, context is no longer stable or legible: the forces Alexander intended to map are dispersed, contradictory, or simply absent. In this void, uncertainty is not a temporary obstacle but a structural condition shared by affected communities, permeating both emotional and design dimensions. Responding with tools oriented toward restoring a pre-existing equilibrium means misreading the very nature of the post-disaster condition.

This contribution proposes to reread Alexander's goodness of fit through post-disaster adaptability, understood as the capacity to change while accepting that things will be different. Adaptability recognises in disaster an opportunity to build better conditions. The goodness of fit thus becomes a diachronic capacity: form is good not when it solves a defined problem, but when it remains open and oriented toward transformation over time. The reconstruction of Lisbon after the 1755 earthquake anticipates this logic. The Pombaline plan did not restore the pre-event city but radically reinterpreted it. The *gaiola pombalina* incorporated uncertainty as a constructive principle, anticipating the diachronic dimension that Alexander had not theorised.

The contribution argues that an architectural theory of post-disaster adaptability must articulate three critical nodes: uncertainty as a constitutive design condition; participation and social learning as processes through which form transforms over time; small and medium scale as the privileged operative dimension for calibrated, reversible and incremental interventions in territories marked by suspension.