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# Conflicts Between Recovery Objectives: The Case of Housing Reconstruction after the 2003 Earthquake in Bam, Iran

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Abstract:

Disaster management studies have demonstrated that housing reconstruction programs often contain conflicting objectives. Yet, insufficient knowledge still exists about *how* conflicts between objectives appear and escalate during the reconstruction process. The purpose of this article is to explain the causes and consequences of these conflicts and to reveal how recovery programs can prevent them. After developing the analytical framework of *underlying and intensifying factors of conflicting objectives*, this qualitative inquiry examines the housing reconstruction program conducted after the 2003 earthquake in Bam. Empirical results show three sets of conflicts between economic, social, cultural, and built environment objectives, and reveal how they led to repeating simple modular housing units, which partially destroyed a rich and historic architectural landscape, ignoring households' needs, identities, culture, and traditions and damaging irreversibly Bam's unique urban fabric. Results reveal unsolved controversies in the post-disaster reconstruction field and the lack of participatory decision-making before disasters as the underlying factors of such conflicting objectives. On the other hand, conflicts between stakeholders as well as challenges in participation processes during the reconstruction process intensified conflicts between recovery objectives. Findings recommend preventing the rapid establishment of new organizations in the post-disaster stage and finding a balance between professionals' and lay community's knowledge to fulfill short and long-term recovery objectives.

*Keywords:* Housing reconstruction, Recovery, Conflicting objectives, Public participation, Bam, Iran

## 1. Introduction

Disaster recovery and reconstruction programs are highly complex processes. According to Rubin (1985), recovery is a complex process with an ill-defined endpoint and no agreed upon measure of success. Reconstruction and recovery managers and decision-makers often make some trade-offs between the economic, environmental, social, and cultural variables. For instance, overemphasizing economic imperatives at the expense of socio-cultural issues

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