

## FOREWORD

by

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## CELEBRATING 20 YEARS WHILE EMBRACING THE FUTURE

Twenty years for a journal provides an important milestone: we can assess how far we have come and also consider which direction we want to follow as a scientific and associative community.

In the past two decades, the Italian Journal of Engineering Geology and Environment, managed by the CERI Research Centre and published by Sapienza University Press, has been not merely a collection of scientific papers: it has been the voice of *Associazione Italiana di Geologia Applicata e Ambientale* (AIGA, Italian Association of Engineering and Environmental Geology), and a forum for critical reflection. It is through its contributions to the Journal that AIGA has been able to tell its story, share visions, relaunch topics, and stimulate debates. The Journal is a living part of our identity: it is a companion and a guide to the evolution of engineering geology in Italy and around the world.

In my capacity as President of AIGA, I also have the task of speaking about the future. To do so, I will start with a strong statement that I hope will be shared, debated, and perhaps enriched: the future of AIGA will also be shaped by **women**. This is a stance that arises from a simple observation: the role of women in our Association and in engineering geology in general has grown significantly, but it has not yet been fully recognised or valued as it could and should be. In 1999, when AIGA was founded, only two women were among the twenty-four members of its Board. Today, things have changed: there is an equal participation of men and women on the Board, and, for the first time, the Association has a female President. But these are not just numbers. It is thanks to the dedication of all the female colleagues making part of AIGA that we can now openly discuss gender equality in our discipline. The same trend is occurring at the academic level. It is hard now to imagine that, until 2004, there had been no female full professors in Italian university departments of engineering geology. Today, there are six women compared to twenty-seven male colleagues: a sign of progress, certainly, but also of a deep imbalance.

Moreover, the scientific productivity of women is comparable with and at times higher than that of men. However, a gap remains in terms of bibliometric indicators, such as the H-index. As regards leadership in research, although there are encouraging signs, the path ahead is still long. These facts challenge us as an association.

The future of AIGA does not lie solely in gender equality. It should also be founded on a strong **technical – scientific identity**,

and the capability of placing engineering geology at the core of decision-making processes. We must frankly ask ourselves: what is the current value of geological assessments in infrastructure and land-use planning? All too often, geological studies are perceived as a marginal requirement, and not as a fundamental tool for understanding land and environmental dynamics. This is why we need a new culture of planning, design, and engineering with a view to integrating geological insights not only in specific projects but also within institutional forums responsible for planning and policy-making.

Another strategic factor is technological innovation.

The future AIGA should also be intelligent, in the fullest sense of the term: capable of integrating knowledge of land and the environment with artificial intelligence, big data, remote sensing technologies, and predictive processing. It is not about replacing the geologist's experience but enhancing it, by relying on new, faster, and more dynamic tools. If we talk about the future, we cannot fail to talk about **young people**. The true renewal of engineering geology will stem from young people, from their impetus, and from their insights. Making room for and giving voice to new generations is a strategic need, if we want our community to remain alive, dynamic, and capable of understanding the changing world. Hence, one of the goals of the Association's new course will be to build stable channels of active participation, including through the creation of an under-35 group of people, representing a true genesis of new ideas and projects.

Finally, a look beyond borders. We are facing global challenges, from climate change to sustainable resource management. AIGA will have to strengthen its international profile, by participating more consistently in worldwide and European scientific networks, developing synergies with other associations, and promoting the mobility of young scholars.

In conclusion, the future of AIGA is not an abstract idea. It is a collective blueprint, which requires listening but above all dialogue. And it is with this awareness – guiding our commitment every day – that AIGA is excited to be taking part in the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Italian Journal of Engineering Geology and Environment, a vibrant space for reflection, debate, and renewal, and a permanent laboratory of our identity and commitment to making engineering geology increasingly prominent.