

A mixed quantitative approach to evaluate rockfall risk and the maximum allowable traffic on road infrastructure

*Original*

A mixed quantitative approach to evaluate rockfall risk and the maximum allowable traffic on road infrastructure / Marchelli, M., De Biagi, V., Bertolo, D., Paganone, M., Peila, D.. - In: GEORISK. - ISSN 1749-9518. - STAMPA. - 16:3(2022), pp. 584-594. [10.1080/17499518.2021.2010097]

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2942454 since: 2022-09-14T16:35:33Z

*Publisher:*

Taylor & Francis

*Published*

DOI:10.1080/17499518.2021.2010097

*Terms of use:*

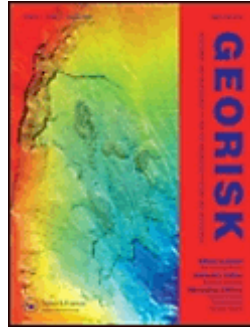
This article is made available under terms and conditions as specified in the corresponding bibliographic description in the repository

*Publisher copyright*

Taylor and Francis preprint/submitted version

This is an Author's Original Manuscript of an article published by Taylor and Francis in GEORISK on 2022, available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/17499518.2021.2010097>

(Article begins on next page)



**A mixed quantitative approach to evaluate rockfall risk and the maximum allowable traffic on road infrastructure**

Journal:	<i>Georisk</i>
Manuscript ID	NGRK-2020-0087.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Date Submitted by the Author:	06-Sep-2021
Complete List of Authors:	Marchelli, Maddalena; Politecnico di Torino, DIATI De Biagi, Valerio; Politecnico di Torino, DISEG Bertolo, Davide; Regione Autonoma Valle d'Aosta, Servizio geologico Paganone, Marco; Regione Autonoma Valle d'Aosta, Servizio geologico PEILA, DANIELE; Politecnico di Torino, DIATI
Keywords:	Rockfall hazard, quantitative risk assessment, mitigation measures, event tree analysis
<p>Note: The following files were submitted by the author for peer review, but cannot be converted to PDF. You must view these files (e.g. movies) online.</p>	
<p>Main.tex QRA_ETA.bib</p>	

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

## RESEARCH PAPER

**A mixed quantitative approach to evaluate rockfall risk and the maximum allowable traffic on road infrastructure**M. Marchelli<sup>a</sup>, V. De Biagi<sup>b</sup>, D. Bertolo<sup>c</sup>, M. Paganone<sup>c</sup> and D. Peila<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Environment, Land and Infrastructure Engineering, Politecnico di Torino, Torino, Italy; <sup>b</sup> Department of Structural, Geotechnical and Building Engineering, Politecnico di Torino, Torino, Italy; <sup>c</sup> Geological Service, Valle d'Aosta Autonomous Region, Aosta, Italy

**ARTICLE HISTORY**

Compiled September 6, 2021

**ABSTRACT**

Rockfall events constitute one of the most dangerous phenomena in mountainous areas, which can affect transportation routes. In a risk mitigation perspective, the quantification of the risk for pedestrians and vehicles represents a crucial aspect for Authorities. A method tailored to these elements at risk is herein presented. The proposed method is based on a mixed formulation of the Quantitative Risk Assessment and the Event Tree Analysis approaches. According to these procedures, an accurate evaluation of the annual probability of adverse outcomes can be computed considering all the scenarios which can lead to a fatality or to an injury. Vice versa, the method lets to evaluate the allowable traffic condition, given an acceptable threshold for the risk. Furthermore, it serves to quantify the risk reduction in case of installed passive mitigation measures and, thus, to plan the priority of intervention works. An application on a study case in the Italian Alps illustrates the potentialities of the methodology.

**KEYWORDS**

Rockfall hazard; quantitative risk assessment; mitigation measures; event tree analysis

**1. Introduction**

Rockfall is generally ascribed among the most threatening natural hazards, due to its unpredictability and abruptness (Fell et al. 2005). This phenomenon can involve several elements at risk, e.g. people, infrastructure, villages, and environment (Castelli et al. 2004). In this sense, the consequent damages can be physical, social, economical, and environmental (Castelli et al. 2002). Referring, in particular, to road infrastructure, a complete evaluation of the consequences should involve damages to the road, power and communication networks, and vehicles, the eventual traffic interruption, the consequences on the surrounding economic activities and on the alternative routes, or, in absence of these lasts, the loss of connection to villages, and, above all, the possible fatalities (Bonnard, Forlati, and Scavia 2004; Li et al. 2009).

In this sense a quantification of the risk as number of fatalities per year is often required by Authorities, in order to manage the risk and to predispose effective

---

Corresponding author: M. Marchelli. Email: maddalena.marchelli@polito.it

mitigation plans (Domènech, Alvioli, and Corominas 2020). This means that (i) an appropriate hazard analysis (Crosta, Frattini, and Fusi 2007) combined with (ii) a consequences analysis have to be performed. As for the other landslide phenomena, an accurate hazard analysis starts from the identification and characterization of the danger, aimed at defining one or more realistic scenarios, from which propagation analyses have to be performed. This means that data collection and field observation processes are fundamental steps, whose accuracy has a great impact on the result (Agliardi, Crosta, and Frattini 2009; Moos et al. 2018). In the rockfall framework, the estimation of the possible released volumes as well of their return period constitute a challenging aspect, also for the difficulties in collecting data from past events. Due to the abruptness and the site-specific nature of the phenomenon, the propensity to the detachment and its temporal probability are difficult to evaluate (Saroglou et al. 2012). The consequences analysis, comprising the estimation of vulnerability and value of the elements at risk, includes the evaluation of the intensity of the phenomenon, i.e. the volume and the energy of the possible impacting blocks, to which a reaching probability has to be defined (Corominas et al. 2014). Moreover, increasing the scale of analysis, i.e. the extension of the studied area, the costs for complete surveys increase exponentially.

For a medium-large scale of analysis, e.g. a rock face from about 1 to 10 kilometers wide (Van Westen, Castellanos, and Kuriakose 2008), the knowledge of all the variables involved, a realistic modelling of the phenomenon, and an accurate evaluation of the consequences are difficult to achieve (Straub and Schubert 2008; Wang et al. 2014; Ferrero, Segalini, and Umili 2015; Scavia et al. 2020; De Biagi, Marchelli, and Peila 2020). Consequently, often qualitative or semi-quantitative risk assessment are only performed (Budetta 2004; Guzzetti, Reichenbach, and Ghigi 2004; Andrianopoulos, Saroglou, and Tsiambaos 2013; Budetta and Nappi 2013; Pappalardo, Mineo, and Rapisarda 2014; Mineo 2020). Nevertheless, in the perspective of risk management, a quantitative evaluation of both hazard and risk is necessary, for its reproducibility and comparability.

Among the quantitative methods, Quantitative Risk Assessment (QRA) and Event Tree Analysis (ETA) are generally adopted.

Considering that the exposed area consists of  $q$  elements at risk and  $p$  rock blocks that can detach, with different volumes, QRA computes the risk  $R$  through the following formula:

$$R = \sum_{l=1}^p \sum_{m=1}^q \left( P_{(T:B)}^l P_{(S:B)}^{l,m} E^m V^{l,m} W^m \right), \quad (1)$$

where  $P_{(T:B)}^l$  is the temporal probability, i.e. the probability of occurrence, of the detachment of the  $l$ -th block and  $P_{(S:B)}^{l,m}$  is the spatial probability that this block reaches the  $m$ -th element at risk, and  $E^m$ ,  $V^{l,m}$ ,  $W^m$  are the exposure, i.e. the probability that a given element is at the impact location where the rock block detaches, the vulnerability, and the value, respectively.

The event tree analysis is a logical based procedure in which both success and failure are evaluated, starting from a single initiating event and defining all the possible alternative pathway options which can develop. The latter are mapped as branches and the nodes serve as transition from one position to another along the event tree, defining binary (Yes/No) mutually exhaustive possibilities, realizing different scenarios. The

1  
2  
3  
4 end points identify a unique outcome, whose probability is given by the product of the  
5 conditional probabilities along their own pathway. The probability of more outcomes  
6 is given by the sum of the probabilities of each outcome. The value of each occurrence  
7 probability depends on different parameters, to which a certain degree of uncertainty  
8 is inevitably associated (Macciotta et al. 2017).

9 Considering element at risks whose exposure is different from one, i.e. moving vehi-  
10 cles on roads (Peila and Guardini 2008; Mignelli, Lo Russo, and Peila 2012; Budetta,  
11 De Luca, and Nappi 2016; Mineo et al. 2017), or trains on railways lines (Macciotta,  
12 Martin, and Cruden 2015; Macciotta et al. 2017), ETA are generally adopted. Never-  
13 theless, this method starts from the occurrence of an initiating event, i.e. the impact  
14 of a block, on the considered element. On the contrary, QRA allows to precisely define  
15 the probability that a given release volume reaches a specific area in a specific time. In  
16 some cases QRA is adopted for all the risk assessment procedure, for vehicles (Bunce,  
17 Cruden, and Morgenstern 1997; Michoud et al. 2012; Mavrouli and Corominas 2018),  
18 and for pedestrians (Ansari, Ahmad, and Singh 2014), but disregarding a complete  
19 evaluation of all the scenarios leading to a fatal accident and accounting for the impact  
20 between the block and the element at risk, only. Furthermore, the assessment of the  
21 risk for vehicles or pedestrians has to be performed along a road, i.e. a linear system  
22 characterized by portions over which different possible source zones insist, differing  
23 for release volume and detachment temporal probability. The reaching probability can  
24 also vary for each point of the road. Consequently, an accurate analysis requires the  
25 knowledge of several parameters and variables, sometimes difficult to achieve.

26  
27 A mixed quantitative approach, allowing to overcome the limitations of both meth-  
28 ods and accounting for the difficulties in obtaining all the required inputs, is here  
29 introduced. This method provides the risk in terms of annual probability of having at  
30 least one fatality, approximated to the number of fatalities per year. Alternatively, for  
31 a given value of risk defined as acceptable, the correspondent allowable traffic condi-  
32 tions can be determined. This represents a key-point for risk management in mountain  
33 areas (Marchelli 2020). A study case in the North Western Italian Alps is provided and  
34 the results are discussed. Finally conclusions and further developments are presented.

## 35 36 37 38 **2. A mixed quantitative approach: QRA & ETA methodologies**

39  
40 In this section, the proposed methodology to quantify the risk is outlined, subdividing  
41 the QRA and ETA procedures and describing the mixed formulation. A deep overview  
42 of all the steps constituting the risk analysis is introduced and discussed.

### 43 44 45 **2.1. QRA procedure**

46  
47 In rockfall risk assessment for road infrastructures, the knowledge of the position and  
48 the number of blocks which can potentially reach the track constitutes a crucial point.  
49 The process starts from the identification of the rockfall-prone areas, i.e. the possible  
50 source zones. In the framework of a medium-large scale of analysis, the propensity to  
51 the detachment is difficult to estimate, and, for this reason, it is implicitly considered in  
52 the temporal detachment probabilities of the identified prone to fall area. The second  
53 step is represented by the choice of one or more rockfall realistic scenarios, in terms of  
54 initial volume and return period, according to which the hazard analysis is performed.  
55 In this sense, a single value of the block volume is generally not able to take into  
56 account the natural variability of the geometrical characteristics of the discontinuity

sets (Stavropoulou 2014; Mavrouli, Corominas, and Jaboyedoff 2015; Mavrouli and Corominas 2017; Umili et al. 2020), although the possible fragmentation along the path is neglected (Ruiz-Carulla, Corominas, and Mavrouli 2015, 2017; Marchelli, De Biagi, and Peila 2019; Marchelli and De Biagi 2019; Marchelli et al. 2019).

A road can be subdivided into  $n$  portions. Each  $k$ -th portion is homogeneous since a unique temporal  $P_{(T:B)_i}$  and a spatial  $P_{(S:B)_i}$  probabilities can be assigned. Eqn.(2) can be rewritten as:

$$R = \sum_{k=1}^n \sum_{l=1}^p \sum_{m=1}^q \left( P_{(T:B)}^{l,k} P_{(S:B)}^{l,m,k} E^{m,k} V^{l,m,k} W^{m,k} \right). \quad (2)$$

In the framework of road risk analysis, considering vehicles and people as elements at risk, a reasonable solution could be to assume that even small blocks produce consequences. Hence, the evaluation of a correlation between release volume and return period (De Biagi et al. 2017; De Biagi 2017) can be neglected and the return period of an event can be estimated, independently from the  $l$ -th magnitude or volume class, through an inventory of past events (Dussauge-Peisser et al. 2002). Consequently, Eqn. (2) simplifies, neglecting the summation over the  $p$  total block volumes. Moreover, the terms  $P_{(T:B)}^k$  and  $P_{(S:B)}^k$  are evaluated with reference to the system on which the elements at risk are moving, i.e. the road, rather than the elements themselves, i.e. vehicles (or pedestrians). The resulting Eqn. (2) becomes:

$$R = \sum_{k=1}^n \left[ \underbrace{P_{(T:B)}^k P_{(S:B)}^k}_{\text{QRA}} \underbrace{\sum_{m=1}^q \left( E^{m,k} V^{m,k} W^{m,k} \right)}_{\text{ETA}} \right]^{PIM^k}. \quad (3)$$

The under-breaks highlight the mixed nature of the risk analysis. The first addends relate to the QRA, while the summation over the  $q$  elements at risk reflects the ETA. In the following section (Sec.2.2), the procedure to obtain the term  $PIM^k$  is explained.

## 2.2. ETA procedure

As already mentioned, the ETA approach starts from the occurrence of an initiating event, starting from which all the possible developments and outcomes are considered. In the case herein considered, the starting event is the block reaching the road. Following the procedure suggested in Peila and Guardini (2008) and Mignelli, Lo Russo, and Peila (2012), starting from this, two scenarios can develop: the blocks can hit the element at risk or not, and in the last case, blocks not hitting the road can rebound on the track, even damaging its surface or stopping on the path. The outcomes depend on the considered element at risk and, thus, the authors here enhance the method for both people in vehicles and pedestrians. In this sense, a different vulnerability, i.e. degree of loss, is applied: the proposed method assumes that any block of any size or velocity hitting a pedestrian causes a fatality, i.e. a unitary vulnerability, while, in case of people on a vehicle, it can cause fatality or injury, according to the speed and the size of the vehicle, the number of people inside, the ratio between decision and stopping sight distances, and the traffic conditions. In the ETA framework, it should

be addressed that the evaluation of the exposure, the vulnerability, and the value of the element at risk are implicit in the branches probabilities.

The red pane of Figure 1 displays the proposed tree structures for both vehicles and pedestrians, where the red node represents the starting event. Considering people in a vehicle, three end points refers to a fatal accident as outcome, and, thus, for each  $k$ -th portion of road, the probability to have a fatal accident  $PIM^k$  is:

$$PIM^k = PIM_i^k + PIM_s^k + PIM_d^k, \quad (4)$$

where the subscripts  $i$ ,  $s$ , and  $d$  refer to the case that ( $i$ ) a moving vehicle is hit by the falling block, ( $s$ ) a moving vehicle impacts on the block stopped on the road, or ( $d$ ) a moving vehicle skids for damages on the road caused by the rebounding of the block on it. For simplicity of notation the following equations do not account for each  $k$ -th portion of road.

The probability of stopping  $P_f$  or rebounding  $(1 - P_f)$  can be computed through trajectory analyses, while the probabilities of damages on the road  $P_t$  or of fatal accident are computed on the bases of annual national statistics. Explaining in detail the branches inside the three scenarios, the occurrence of the first case, i.e. “the block hits the vehicle”, requires the contemporaneity in time and in space of the falling block and the moving vehicle which is expressed by the temporal-spatial probability  $P_{(S:T)_i}$ :

$$P_{(S:T)_i} = P_{(T:P)_i} P_{(S:P)_i}, \quad (5)$$

where  $P_{(T:P)_i}$  and  $P_{(S:P)_i}$  are the temporal and spatial probabilities, respectively. These probabilities can be computed as the probability in time and space that one (subscript 1) vehicle is hit throughout the year, multiplied by the hourly traffic  $n_{v/h}$  and the annual number of hours  $n_h$  for which this traffic condition is valid, i.e.:

$$P_{(S:T)_i} = P_{(T:P)_{i,1}} P_{(S:P)_{i,1}} n_{v/h} n_h. \quad (6)$$

In detail:

$$P_{(T:P)_{i,1}} = \frac{t_t}{8760}, \quad (7)$$

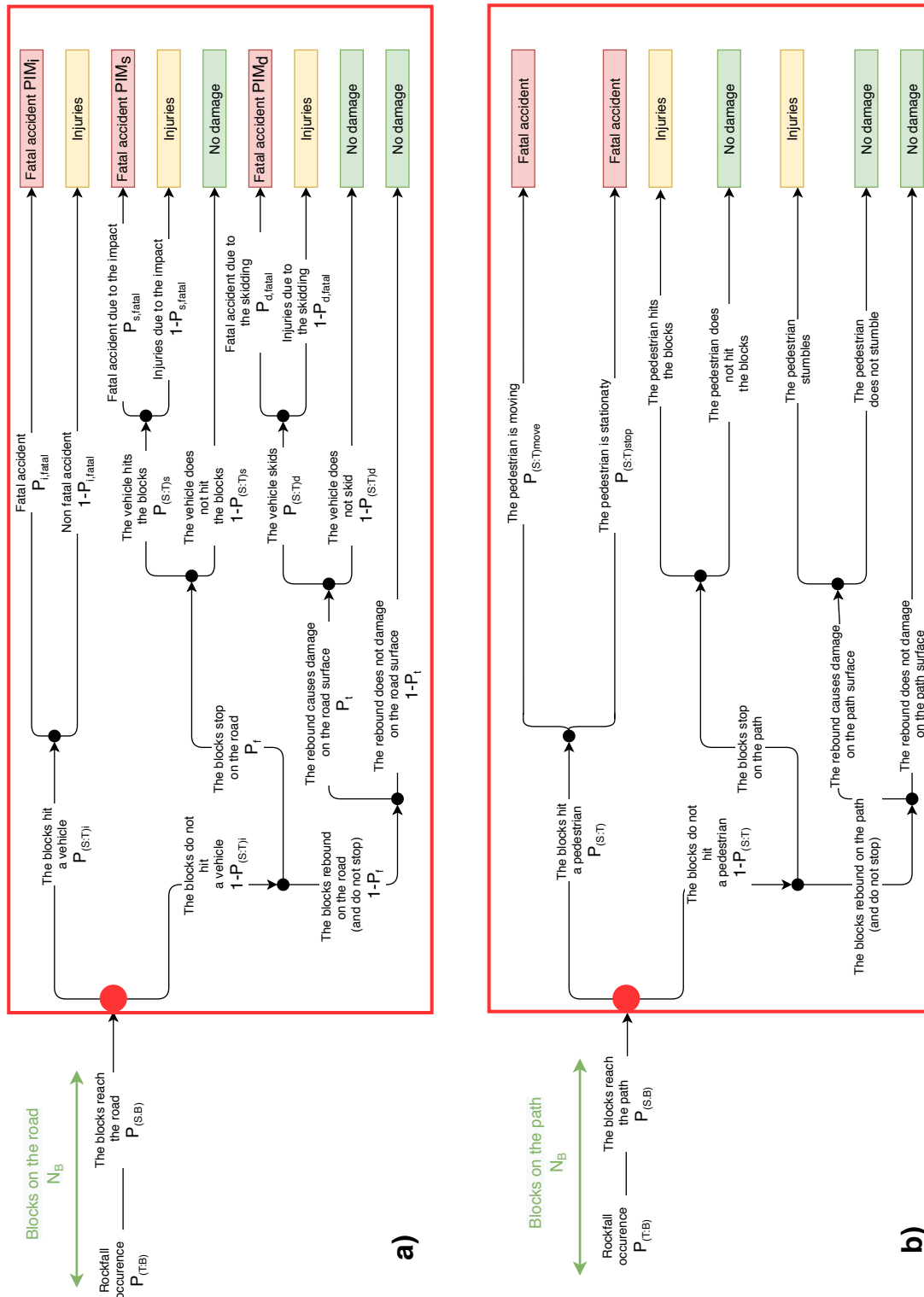
where  $t_t$  is the transit time of a vehicle in hours. The spatial probability is given by:

$$P_{(S:P)_{i,1}} = \frac{L_v}{l_k}, \quad (8)$$

where  $L_v$  is the length of the vehicle and  $l_k$  the length of the road portion in meters.

The probability that the impact is fatal  $P_{i,fatal}$  can be computed as the product between the coefficient of usage of the vehicle  $C_p$ , representative of the number of people inside, and the probability of one fatality, assumed equal to 0.2 as suggested by Bunce, Cruden, and Morgenstern (1997). Following the principles of the ETA, the probability of a fatality is:

$$PIM_i = P_{(S:T)_i} P_{i,fatal}. \quad (9)$$



**Figure 1.** Proposed mixed QRA and ETA method for persons in a vehicle on a road (a) and pedestrians on a path (b). The red panes highlight the tree structures of the ETA from the occurrence of the initiating event, i.e. the block reaching the road or the path, represented by the red bullets.

In general, different traffic conditions, in terms of  $n_v/h$  or maximum allowable velocity of the vehicle  $V_v$ , can be achieved during the year, especially in case of mountainous road, often closed or with traffic limitations during winter. To consider all the  $j$ -th traffic conditions during the year, for the mathematical properties of the ETA, all the  $PIM_i^j$  are summed. The same procedure is adopted for the other two scenarios with possible fatalities. Considering the notation reported in Figure 1, the temporal spatial probability that a vehicle impacts against a stopped block can be obtained by:

$$P_{(S:T)_s} = P_{(T:P)_{s,1}} P_{(S:P)_{s,1}} n_v/h n_h, \quad (10)$$

where:

$$P_{(S:P)_{s,1}} = \frac{\min(L_{va}, L_v, l_k)}{l_k}, \quad (11)$$

with

$$L_v = \frac{V_v}{n_v/h} 1000, \quad (12)$$

where  $L_{va}$  is the decision sight distance in meters, and  $V_v$ , the vehicle speed in kilometers per hour.  $P_{(T:P)_{s,1}}$  can be computed with the same equation as  $P_{(T:P)_{i,1}}$ , Eqn.(7).

As mentioned above, the probabilities  $P_{s,fatal}$  and  $P_{d,fatal}$  can be computed from the annual statistics of fatal accident for similar type of road and causes. It results:

$$PIM_s = (1 - P_{(S:T)_i}) P_f P_{(S:T)_d} P_{s,fatal}, \quad (13)$$

and

$$PIM_d = (1 - P_{(S:T)_i}) (1 - P_f) P_t P_{(S:T)_d} P_{d,fatal}, \quad (14)$$

where  $P_{(S:T)_d}$  can be computed as  $P_{(S:T)_s}$ . Inserting in Eqn. (4) the single contributions reported in Eqns. (9), (13) and (14), summed up for each  $j$ -th traffic condition, the annual probability of having a fatality on the  $k$ -th portion is obtained. It implicitly holds that the annual frequency of an event on the portion is one (event per year).

A similar approach can be adopted considering pedestrians. In this case the procedure can be simplified accounting for the fact that the pedestrian is able to see a stopped block or a damaged surface. A fatality occurs in case of impact, only. Both the cases of a pedestrian walking along the path with a velocity  $V_p$ , or having a rest for a while ( $t_{rest}$ ) are computed. In the last case,  $t_{rest}$  is substituted to  $t_t$  in Eqn. (7).

### 2.3. Merging QRA & ETA

As previously stated, the ETA approach starts from considering the occurrence of an initiating event, in the present case the block reaching the road. This is characterized by a certain occurrence probability in space and time, which can be assessed to evaluate

the risk. The risk can be computed through Eqn. (3) as:

$$R = \sum_{k=1}^n \left( P_{(T:B)}^k P_{(S:B)}^k PIM^k \right). \quad (15)$$

The estimation of  $P_{(T:B)}^k$ , which refers to the frequency of blocks released in the source area, is generally difficult to achieve. On the contrary, information on past events is typically related only to those phenomena which have affected sensitive structures or infrastructures, and thus, only the blocks reaching the road are recorded. From a catalogue of past events, the annual number of blocks reaching the road  $N_B$  is determined. Data of past events can be generally related to a section of road rather than to the whole track or a specific point. The authors suggest to extend the recorded data, and thus, the computed  $N_B$  to all the portions of road a block can reach from the source zone, once determined. To attain this goal and to produce a more accurate evaluation of the hazard, the authors suggest to perform trajectory analyses, aiming at evaluating not only the extension of the affected area, but also the reaching probability  $P_{(S:B)}^k$  for  $k$ -th portion of the road. In this way, a frequency  $N_B^s$ , i.e. the frequency of events on a given  $s$ -th portion, can be evaluated as:

$$N_B^s = \frac{P_{(S:B)}^s l_s}{\sum_{k=0}^n \left( P_{(S:B)}^k l_k \right)} N_B. \quad (16)$$

In other words, the frequency is distributed according to the reach probabilities on the path. Then, merging the QRA and ETA approach, the initiating events can be considered as Bernoulli trials, i.e. simple experiments with a random binary outcome (Agliardi, Crosta, and Frattini 2009), and thus, according to Hungr et al. (1998), it can be stated that the risk expressed as annual probability to have a fatal accident, for a given road is:

$$R = \sum_{k=1}^n \left[ 1 - \left( 1 - PIM^k \right)^{N_B^k} \right]. \quad (17)$$

For  $N_B^k$  less than 100, and  $PIM^k$  less than  $10^{-3}$ , performing a McLaurin series expansion, Eqn. (17) can be approximated as:

$$R = \sum_{k=1}^n \left( N_B^k PIM^k \right). \quad (18)$$

For greater values of  $N_B^k$ , or higher values of  $PIM^k$ , the percentage difference between the results obtained with Eqn. (17) and those with Eqn. (18) is greater than 4% and, thus, considerably significant.

The proposed method can serve also to stakeholders to manage the risk and (i) make decision in restricting the traffic, or (ii) predispose protective mitigation measures, predict the risk reduction and decide the priorities of intervention. In the former case, chosen an acceptable level of risk, the allowable traffic can be evaluated, in terms of number of vehicles or passages allowed during the year or in a specific period, or in

terms of minimum or maximum velocity required. In the latter case, once located and designed the passive works, new propagation analyses can be performed, evaluating a new spatial reaching probability  $P_{(S:B),new}^k$ . Considering that passive systems do not affect the released zones, the annual frequency of block reaching the portion of road  $N_{B,new}^k$  is:

$$N_{B,new}^k = \frac{P_{(S:B),new}^k}{P_{(S:B)}^k} N_B^k. \quad (19)$$

Thus, the risk can be re-evaluated through Eqn.(18) and, therefore, the effectiveness of the mitigation measures can be assessed.

### 3. Example

The presented study case deals with the assessment of the rockfall risk for life loss along two roads and a pedestrian path in a mountainous area. As protective measures cannot be adopted, the proposed method was adopted to quantify the level of risk for different traffic conditions, in order to manage the access to the pedestrian path and to control the road traffic, once defined the acceptable risk threshold. The study area is located in the North Western Italian Alps, in a mountainous area affected by rockfalls of different magnitude and intensity as reported in the local landslide inventory.

#### 3.1. Geomorphological setting

The regional geological and structural setting of the study area is characterized by rocks belonging to the Piedmontese Calcescist Zone with green stones that are covered by quartzites, marbles and mycascists, consisting of two main groups of ophiolitic units. In the area under examination, the rocks of the Zermatt-Saas eclogitic units mainly outcrop, consisting of dominant ophiolites and metasedimentary covers, with widespread eclogitic relicts and metamorphic overprint in green schist facies, from incipient to complete. Often there are extensive sequences of ophicalci, well exposed in numerous quarries, possible evidence of tectonic denudation processes of the mantle (Dal Piaz et al. 2010) From a structural point of view, the valley has an East-West direction and is set along a tectonic depression of Oligogenic Age. The fault, direct E-W, constitutes a tectonic system about 2 km wide that develops defining an asymmetrical graben. A detailed topographic survey was performed to investigate and characterize the area through photogrammetric helicopter surveys. Laser scanners were taken from the opposite side of the valley in order to detect and characterize the rock mass in the study area, limiting the shadow zones as much as possible and reducing the disturbance of the abundant vegetation along the slopes. The data were processed and elaborated in order to define the possible source areas of possible detachment (most fractured areas, past events source zones, unstable blocks). Even though the slope under study is characterised by the outcrop of different geological units, all sectors are affected by the same main systems of discontinuity, even if they may be more or less represented according to the different orientation of the outcrops. The potential mechanisms that could give rise to instability phenomena were identified by performing kinematic analyses, and an homogeneous trend was observed in all sectors, considering the similarity of the geomechanical (friction angle), structural (location of discontinuity families) and

1  
2  
3  
4 morphometric (location of slopes) context of the area under investigation. The most  
5 fractured zones, where sliding and toppling mechanisms were observed, were identified.  
6 Additionally, from the surveys, a distribution of the volumes and the of the poten-  
7 tially unstable blocks was evaluated. Figure 2.a reports the identified source zones,  
8 from which propagation analyses were performed, considering the different possible  
9 released volumes. In this particular context, with the assumption that any block of  
10 any size or velocity hitting a pedestrian or a vehicle causes a damage, the performed  
11 propagation analyses aimed at evaluating the worst scenario in terms of reach proba-  
12 bility, starting from the detachment of blocks of any possible volume defined from the  
13 surveys, neglecting the return period associated to each volume.

14  
15 The propagation analyses were performed with the 3D code Rockyfor3D (Dorren  
16 2015), with a digital elevation model with a grid 1x1 m, considering 5k runs per cell as a  
17 statistically representative sample of simulations. Consequently, the reach probability  
18  $P_{(S:B)}$  was defined for the entire study area.

19 The investigated elements at risk are two roads: a high traffic path (R1) and a local  
20 route (R2), and a pedestrian path (P1). The reach probability was individuated for  
21 each element, discretised in 1 m-long portions (Figure 2.b).

### 22 23 24 **3.2. Inputs of the analysis**

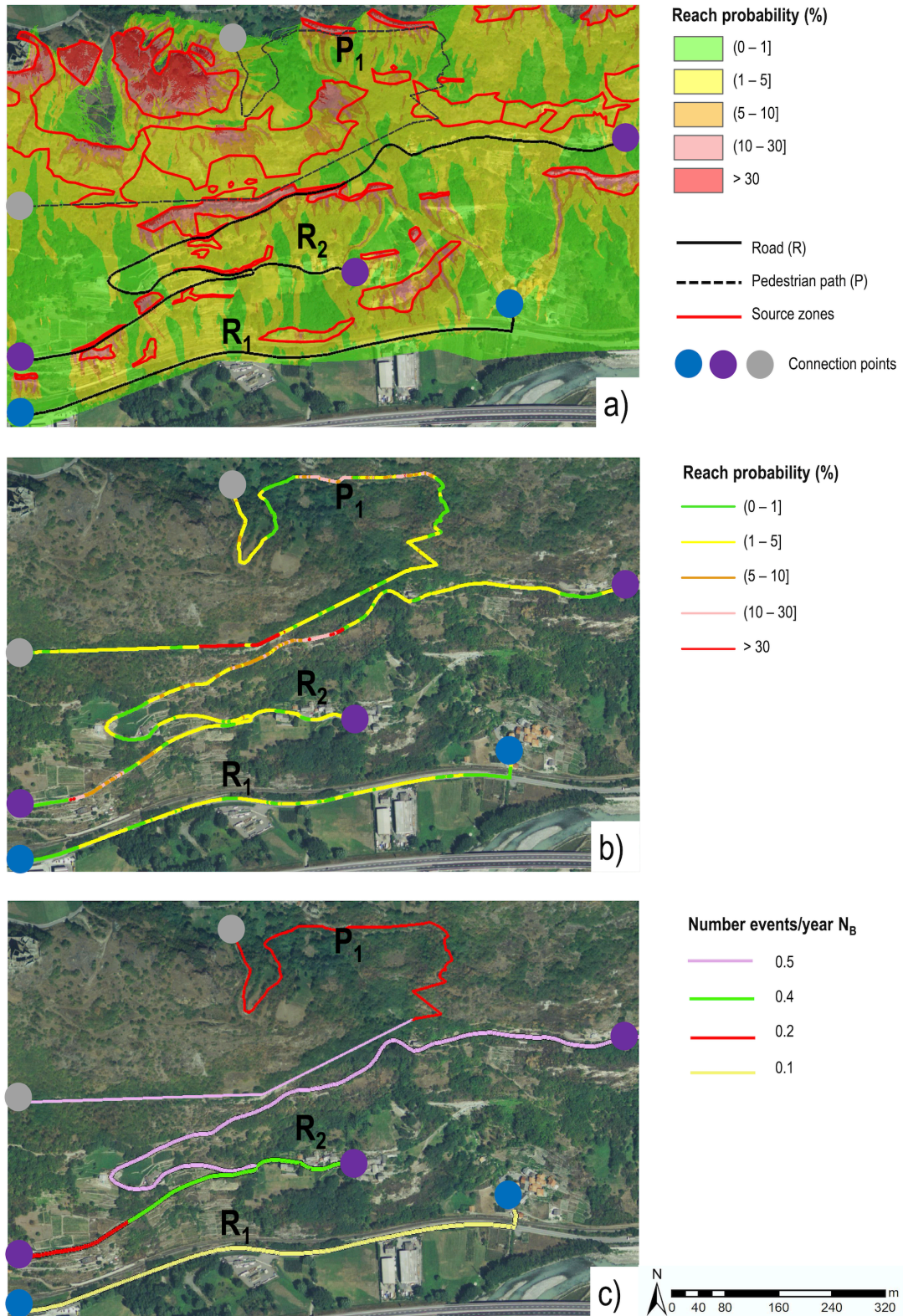
25  
26 The catalogue of past rockfall events occurred in the study area was used to determine  
27 the annual frequency of possible arrival on the road. The historical data allowed the  
28 localization of the deposit areas of past phenomena and, thus, the path was divided into  
29 sections of homogeneous temporal occurrence probabilities (Figure 2.c). Considering  
30 the South exposure of the area and its altitude, the roads are kept open all the year  
31 round, without seasonal difference in the traffic condition, i.e.  $n_h$  is equal to 8760  
32 hours, that is one year.

33  
34 Table 1 and Table 2 report the adopted input data for the analysis. The maximum  
35 allowable velocity was considered as representative of the velocity of the vehicle de-  
36 pending on the usual safety limits. The decision sight distance was evaluated according  
37 to (MIT 2001) on the basis of the type of road, the velocity, and the slope of the road.  
38 For a pedestrian the velocity was computed as function of the mean slope of the path  
39 of 20% (Márquez-Pérez, Vallejo-Villalta, and Álvarez-Francoso 2017). Precautionary,  
40 four occupants per vehicle were assumed in the calculation, resulting in a  $C_p$  equal  
41 to 1.85 (Mignelli, Lo Russo, and Peila 2012). The probability of stop or rebound on  
42 the infrastructure was computed through the performed trajectory analyses, while  $P_t$   
43 was assumed equal to 0.2 according to the annual statistics of damaged surface for  
44 impacting element following the procedure suggested by Peila and Guardini (2008).  
45 The probability of fatal accident for impact on a stopped block  $P_{s,fatal}$  or due to the  
46 damaged surface  $P_{d,fatal}$  were estimated analyzing the statistics of the last ten years  
47 for fatality occurred for impact against an obstacle, or for damaged surface or avoided  
48 obstacles, respectively (<http://dati.istat.it/>).

49 The considered statistical data refer to high traffic road for R1 and to urban road  
50 for R2.

### 51 52 53 **3.3. Results and Discussion**

54  
55 The analysis method explained in Sec. 2 was implemented to define the allowable traffic  
56 conditions, in terms of number of vehicles or pedestrians per hour, in the hypothesis  
57  
58  
59  
60



**Figure 2.** In (a): identification of the source zones for the propagation analyses and resulting reaching probabilities  $P_{(S:B)}$ . In (b): reaching probability  $P_{(S:B)}^k$  for each  $k$ -th point of the roads  $R_1$  and  $R_2$  and the pedestrian path  $P_1$ . In (c): number of blocks per year reaching a section of the roads or of the pedestrian path  $N_B$ , derived from recorded data from past events.

**Table 1.** Input data for the assessment of the risk for the roads R1 and R2.

Input data	R1	R2
$V_v$ (km/h)	70	30
$L_v$ (m)	5	5
$L_{va}$	100	30
$C_p$ (-)	1.85	1.85
$P_{i,fatal}$ (-)	0.2	0.2
$P_f$ (-)	0.5	0.5
$P_{s,fatal}$ (-)	0.041	0.035
$P_t$ (-)	0.2	0.2
$P_{d,fatal}$ (-)	0.026	0.018
$L_{road}$ (km)	1.841	0.984

**Table 2.** Input data for the assessment of the risk for the pedestrian path P1.

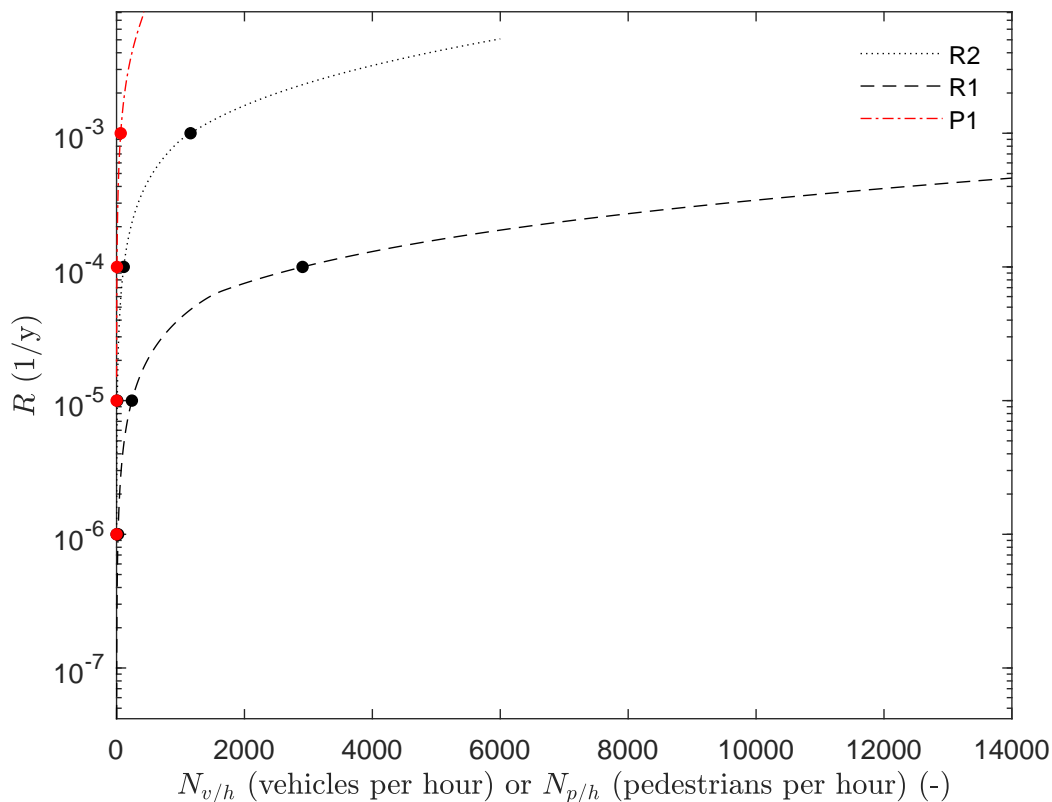
Input data	P1
$V_p$ (km/h)	4.5
$L_p$ (m)	0.6
$t_{rest}$ (h)	0.05
$L_{path}$ (km)	1.687

of an homogeneous use of the roads during the year, given a value of  $R$ . The choice of an acceptable threshold value constitutes a crucial aspect in the analysis and this aspect, unavoidable to manage the risk, is still under debate in the scientific community (Enright 2015).

With reference to landslides, Reid et al. (1989) report an interesting comparison between voluntary and involuntary risks, and Starr (1969) asserts that the average magnitude of the discrepancy between voluntary and involuntary risk is estimated in three orders of magnitude, due to the fact that voluntary risks are usually accompanied by the perception by the individual of being able to manage in such a way the risk scenario. Furthermore, it is considered that the risk associated with a landslide on a slope on which no action has been taken is more tolerable than the risk associated with a landslide on a slope onto which engineering works have been taken. The suggested value of acceptable risk is  $10^{-3}$  per year (ANCOLD 1992; Fell 1994), while when a monitoring system has been installed on a landslide slope without any stabilizing intervention, the suggested value of acceptable risk is  $10^{-5}$  per year. This reduction follows the fact that it is believed that the risk associated with a landslide on a slope on which no intervention has been done is more tolerable than the risk associated with a landslide on a slope on which engineering works have been done (Fell 1994).

Figure 3 displays the obtained results, while Table 3 reports the maximum hourly traffic for  $R$  equal to  $10^{-6}$ ,  $10^{-5}$ ,  $10^{-4}$ , and  $10^{-3}$ . It can be noticed that the maximum affordable traffic is higher in road R1 than in R2 since in the former the exposure is less as vehicles speed is higher and the number of events  $N_B$  is smaller. In this particular case, it is seen that a traffic value for which it results  $R = 10^{-3}$  cannot be considered since the capacity of road R1 is reached.

In the case of R2, the resulting  $N_{v/h}$  is very low, and, for the pedestrian path, the minimum risk is  $R = 10^{-4}$ . Nevertheless, it must be noticed that several  $k$ -th portions of both R2 and P1 display quite high annual frequency of events  $N_B$ , i.e. 2 events per



**Figure 3.** Allowable number of vehicles  $N_{v/h}$  or pedestrians  $N_{p/h}$  per hour for different value of annual probability of fatality  $R$ , for the roads R1 and R2 and for the pedestrian path P1. The circular markers refer to the values of  $R$  equal to  $10^{-6}$ ,  $10^{-5}$ ,  $10^{-4}$ , reported in Table 3.

year.

The plots of the reaching probability  $P_{S:B}$  (Figure 2.b) represent a profitable solution to understand the priority of intervention along the road or path for the decision makers.

#### 4. Conclusions

The effects of rockfall hazard on transportation corridors both for car or pedestrian traffic influence the risk management policies of the Authorities and, consequently, the possibility of transit and access to mountain settlements. A quantitative assessment of the risk, in terms of number of fatalities per year, is often required by the stakeholders in order to define a priority list of interventions for risk mitigation. Among the quantitative methods, QRA and ETA are widely employed. Nevertheless, the former is more suitable for static element, i.e. with a unitary exposure, while ETA starts from the occurrence of an event, disregarding its frequency. An integrated QRA-ETA solution, tailored for vehicles and pedestrians, has been presented and discussed. All the possible scenarios and outcomes have been outlined. A unitary vulnerability is considered, with the precautionary assumption that any block of any size or velocity hitting a pedestrian or a vehicle causes damages. As the historical data on past events generally lack

**Table 3.** Different traffic conditions in terms of number vehicles or pedestrians per hour according to different threshold of acceptability in terms of annual probability of fatal accident  $R$ , for the roads R1 and R2 and for the pedestrian path P1.

$R$	R1	R2	P1
(1/y)	( $N_v/h$ )	( $N_v/h$ )	( $N_p/h$ )
$10^{-6}$	23	1	0
$10^{-5}$	239	11	0
$10^{-4}$	2908	112	6
$10^{-3}$	(-)*	1156	64

\* the maximum allowable number of vehicle passing hourly has been reached and the correspondent annual probability of fatal accident is less than  $10^{-3}$ .

in accuracy, the proposed method allows to distribute the temporal occurrence probability also as function of the reaching probability defined through trajectory analyses. The method permits to quantify the annual risk for different levers of traffic of vehicles or pedestrians. For these latter, also the rest condition is considered. Vice versa, once defined the acceptable risk level, the maximum number of vehicles/pedestrians per hour (or per year) can be evaluated. Moreover, the method can be adapted considering passive protective measures to mitigate the risk. Performing new propagation analyses, through the variation in reaching probability of blocks on the road, it is possible to evaluate the risk reduction and thus, delineate the priority of intervention.

A study case in the North Western Italian Alps is introduced, and, for different annual probabilities of fatality, the maximum allowable traffic is computed. As the definition of an acceptable threshold for the risk is difficult to achieve, the maps of the reaching probability, together with the number of block reaching the road, derived from recorded past events, are fundamental to define a priorities in a list of interventions. Further development can account for the possibility of mutual interference between pedestrians and vehicles, e.g. in case of a farm road. Additionally, for each different context a precise estimation of the probabilities or other input parameters, i.e. stopping sight distance, can be performed.

### Acknowledgments

The authors thank Dott. Raffaele Rocco for his support and suggestions. This research was developed in the framework of the research project “Sviluppo di una metodologia per la valutazione del rischio su differenti tipologie di elementi esposti al pericolo di caduta massi” funded by Regione Autonoma Valle d’Aosta, Italy.

### Authors’ contribution

M. Marchelli (M.M.) and V. De Biagi (V.D.B.) developed the theory and D. Bertolo (D.B.) and M. Paganone (M.P.) provided critical feedback and supported for the study case; M.M. performed the numerical analyses and wrote the final version of the manuscript with the help of V.D.B.; D. Peila (D.P.) supervised the project.

## References

- Agliardi, F., G.B. Crosta, and P. Frattini. 2009. "Integrating rockfall risk assessment and countermeasure design by 3D modelling techniques." *Natural Hazards and Earth System Science* 9 (4): 1059–1073.
- ANCOLD. 1992. *Guidelines on dam safety management*. Technical Report. Australian National Committee on Large Dams.
- Andrianopoulos, A., H. Saroglou, and G. Tsiambaos. 2013. "Rockfall hazard and risk assessment of road slopes." *Bulletin of the Geological Society of Greece* 47 (4): 1664–1673.
- Ansari, M.K., M. Ahmad, and T.N. Singh. 2014. "Rockfall risk assessment for pilgrims along the circumambulatory pathway, Saptashrungi Gad Temple, Vani, Nashik Maharashtra, India." *Geomatics, Natural Hazards and Risk* 5 (1): 81–92.
- Bonnard, C., F. Forlati, and C. Scavia. 2004. *Identification and mitigation of large landslide risks in Europe: advances in risk assessment*. CRC Press.
- Budetta, P. 2004. "Assessment of rockfall risk along roads." *Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences* 4 (1): 71–81. <https://nhess.copernicus.org/articles/4/71/2004/>.
- Budetta, P., C. De Luca, and M. Nappi. 2016. "Quantitative rockfall risk assessment for an important road by means of the rockfall risk management (RO. MA.) method." *Bulletin of Engineering Geology and the Environment* 75 (4): 1377–1397.
- Budetta, P., and M. Nappi. 2013. "Comparison between qualitative rockfall risk rating systems for a road affected by high traffic intensity." *Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences* 13 (6): 1643.
- Bunce, C.M., D.M. Cruden, and N.R. Morgenstern. 1997. "Assessment of the hazard from rock fall on a highway." *Canadian Geotechnical Journal* 34 (3): 344–356.
- Castelli, M., G. Amatruda, C. Scavia, L. Paro, and F. Forlati. 2004. "The IMIRILAND methodology: a proposal for a multidisciplinary risk assessment procedure with respect to large landslide." In *Landslides: Evaluation and Stabilization/Glissement de Terrain: Evaluation et Stabilisation, Set of 2 Volumes: Proceedings of the Ninth International Symposium on Landslides, June 28-July 2, 2004 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*, 229. CRC Press.
- Castelli, M., C. Bonnard, J.L. Durville, F. Forlati, R. Poisel, R. Polino, P. Prat, and C. Scavia. 2002. "The IMIRILAND project-Impact of Large Landslides in the Mountain Environment: Identification and Mitigation of Risk." In *Instability: Planning and Management*, 671–678. Thomas Telford Publishing.
- Corominas, J., C. van Westen, P. Frattini, L. Cascini, J. P. Malet, S. Fotopoulou, F. Catani, et al. 2014. "Recommendations for the quantitative analysis of landslide risk." *Bulletin of Engineering Geology and the Environment* 73 (2): 209–263.
- Crosta, G.B., P. Frattini, and N. Fusi. 2007. "Fragmentation in the Val Pola rock avalanche, Italian alps." *Journal of Geophysical Research: Earth Surface* 112 (F1).
- Dal Piaz, G.V., F. Gianotti, B. Monopoli, G. Pennacchioni, P. Tartarotti, and A. Schiavo. 2010. *Carta Geologica di Italia alla scala 1:50 000. Foglio 091 Chatillon*. Technical Report. APAT, Servizio Geologico d'Italia.
- De Biagi, V. 2017. "Brief communication: Accuracy of the fallen blocks volume-frequency law." *Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences* 17 (9): 1487–1492.
- De Biagi, V., M. Marchelli, and D. Peila. 2020. "Reliability analysis and partial safety factors approach for rockfall protection structures." *Engineering Structures* 213: 110553.
- De Biagi, V., M.L. Napoli, M. Barbero, and D. Peila. 2017. "Estimation of the return period of rockfall blocks according to their size." *Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences* 17 (1): 103–113.
- Domènech, G., M. Alvioli, and J. Corominas. 2020. "Preparing first-time slope failures hazard maps: from pixel-based to slope unit-based." *Landslides* 17 (2): 249–265.
- Dorren, L. 2015. "Rockyfor3D (v5. 2) revealed—transparent description of the complete 3D rockfall model." *EcorisQ paper (www.ecorisq.org)*.
- Dussauge-Peisser, C., A. Helmstetter, J.-R. Grasso, D. Hantz, P. Desvarreux, M. Jeannin, and A. Giraud. 2002. "Probabilistic approach to rock fall hazard assessment: potential of

- historical data analysis." *Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences* 2: 15–26.
- Enright, P.A. 2015. "Is there a tolerable level of risk from natural hazards in New Zealand?" *Georisk: Assessment and Management of Risk for Engineered Systems and Geohazards* 9 (1): 1–8.
- Fell, R. 1994. "Landslide risk assessment and acceptable risk." *Canadian Geotechnical Journal* 31 (2): 261–272.
- Fell, R., K.K.S. Ho, S. Lacasse, and E. Leroi. 2005. "A framework for landslide risk assessment and management." *Landslide Risk Management* 3–25.
- Ferrero, A. M., A. Segalini, and G. Umili. 2015. "Experimental tests for the application of an analytical model for flexible debris flow barrier design." *Engineering Geology* 185 (July): 33–42.
- Guzzetti, F., P. Reichenbach, and S. Ghigi. 2004. "Rockfall hazard and risk assessment along a transportation corridor in the Nera Valley, Central Italy." *Environmental Management* 34 (2): 191–208.
- Hungr, O., R.D. Beckie, C.M. Bunce, D.M. Cruden, and N.R. Morgenstern. 1998. "Assessment of the hazard from rock fall on a highway: Discussion. Authors' reply." *Canadian geotechnical journal* 35 (2): 409–410.
- Li, Z.H., H.W. Huang, Y.D. Xue, and J. Yin. 2009. "Risk assessment of rockfall hazards on highways." *Georisk* 3 (3): 147–154.
- Macciotta, R., C.D. Martin, and D.M. Cruden. 2015. "Probabilistic estimation of rockfall height and kinetic energy based on a three-dimensional trajectory model and Monte Carlo simulation." *Landslides* 12 (4): 757–772.
- Macciotta, R., C.D. Martin, D.M. Cruden, M. Hendry, and T. Edwards. 2017. "Rock fall hazard control along a section of railway based on quantified risk." *Georisk: Assessment and Management of Risk for Engineered Systems and Geohazards* 11 (3): 272–284.
- Marchelli, M. 2020. "Event tree analysis for mountain roads under rockfall hazard." *GEAM. Geoingegneria Ambientale e Mineraria* 161: 41–46.
- Marchelli, M., and V. De Biagi. 2019. "Optimization methods for the evaluation of the parameters of a rockfall fractal fragmentation model." *Landslides* 16: 1385–1396.
- Marchelli, M., V. De Biagi, H. Grange, and D. Peila. 2019. "Applicazione del modello di frammentazione frattale ad un caso reale di caduta massi. Problematiche inerenti la scelta dei parametri di modello." *Geoingegneria Ambientale e Mineraria* 157: 22–32.
- Marchelli, M., V. De Biagi, and D. Peila. 2019. "A quick-assessment procedure to evaluate the degree of conservation of rockfall drapery meshes." *Frattura ed Integrità Strutturale* 13 (47): 437–450.
- Márquez-Pérez, J., I. Vallejo-Villalta, and J.I. Álvarez-Francoso. 2017. "Estimated travel time for walking trails in natural areas." *Geografisk Tidsskrift-Danish Journal of Geography* 117 (1): 53–62.
- Mavrouli, O., and J. Corominas. 2017. "Comparing rockfall scar volumes and kinematically detachable rock masses." *Engineering Geology* 219: 64–73.
- Mavrouli, O., and J. Corominas. 2018. "TXT-tool 4.034-1.1: Quantitative Rockfall Risk Assessment for Roadways and Railways." In *Landslide Dynamics: ISDR-ICL Landslide Interactive Teaching Tools*, 509–519. Springer.
- Mavrouli, O., J. Corominas, and M. Jaboyedoff. 2015. "Size distribution for potentially unstable rock masses and in situ rock blocks using LIDAR-generated digital elevation models." *Rock Mechanics and Rock Engineering* 48 (4): 1589–1604.
- Michoud, C., M.-H. Derron, P. Horton, M. Jaboyedoff, F.-J. Baillifard, A. Loye, P. Nicolet, A. Pedrazzini, and A. Queyrel. 2012. "Rockfall hazard and risk assessments along roads at a regional scale: example in Swiss Alps." *Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences* 12 (3): 615–629.
- Mignelli, C., S. Lo Russo, and D. Peila. 2012. "ROckfall risk MAManagement assessment: the RO. MA. approach." *Natural hazards* 62 (3): 1109–1123.
- Mineo, S. 2020. "Comparing rockfall hazard and risk assessment procedures along roads for different planning purposes." *Journal of Mountain Science* 17 (3): 653–669.

- 1  
2  
3  
4 Mineo, S., G. Pappalardo, A. D'Urso, and D Calcaterra. 2017. "Event tree analysis for rockfall  
5 risk assessment along a strategic mountainous transportation route." *Environmental Earth*  
6 *Sciences* 76 (17): 620.
- 7 MIT. 2001. "D.M. 5/11/2001, n. 6792, Norme funzionali e geometriche per la costruzione delle  
8 strade." .
- 9 Moos, C., M. Fehlmann, D. Trappmann, M. Stoffel, and L. Dorren. 2018. "Integrating the mit-  
10 igating effect of forests into quantitative rockfall risk analysis—Two case studies in Switzer-  
11 land." *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 32: 55–74.
- 12 Pappalardo, G., S. Mineo, and F. Rapisarda. 2014. "Rockfall hazard assessment along a road  
13 on the Peloritani Mountains (northeastern Sicily, Italy)." *Natural Hazards and Earth System*  
14 *Sciences* 14 (10): 2735.
- 15 Peila, D., and C. Guardini. 2008. "Use of the event tree to assess the risk reduction obtained  
16 from rockfall protection devices." *Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences* 8 (6).
- 17 Reid, S.G., Building Research Association of New Zealand, Building Industry Commission  
18 (N.Z.), University of Sydney. School of Civil, and Mining Engineering. 1989. *Risk assessment*.  
19 Technical Report. University of Sydney, School of Civil and Mining Engineering.
- 20 Ruiz-Carulla, R., J. Corominas, and O. Mavrouli. 2015. "A methodology to obtain the block  
21 size distribution of fragmental rockfall deposits." *Landslides* 12 (4): 815–825.
- 22 Ruiz-Carulla, R., J. Corominas, and O. Mavrouli. 2017. "A fractal fragmentation model for  
23 rockfalls." *Landslides* 14 (3): 875–889.
- 24 Saroglou, H., V. Marinos, P. Marinos, and G. Tsiambaos. 2012. "Rockfall hazard and risk as-  
25 sessment: an example from a high promontory at the historical site of Monemvasia, Greece."  
26 *Natural Hazards and Earth System Sciences* 12 (6): 1823.
- 27 Scavia, C., M. Barbero, M. Castelli, M. Marchelli, D. Peila, G. Torsello, and G. Vallero. 2020.  
28 "Evaluating rockfall risk: Some critical aspects." *Geosciences (Switzerland)* 10 (3): 1–29.
- 29 Starr, C. 1969. "Social benefit versus technological risk." *Science* 1232–1238.
- 30 Stavropoulou, M. 2014. "Discontinuity frequency and block volume distribution in rock  
31 masses." *International Journal of Rock Mechanics and Mining Sciences* 65: 62–74.
- 32 Straub, D., and M. Schubert. 2008. "Modeling and managing uncertainties in rock-fall haz-  
33 ards." *Georisk* 2 (1): 1–15.
- 34 Umili, G., S.M.R. Bonetto, P. Mosca, F. Vagnon, and A.M. Ferrero. 2020. "In Situ Block Size  
35 Distribution Aimed at the Choice of the Design Block for Rockfall Barriers Design: A Case  
36 Study along Gardesana Road." *Geosciences* 10 (6): 223.
- 37 Van Westen, Cees J, Enrique Castellanos, and Sekhar L Kuriakose. 2008. "Spatial data for  
38 landslide susceptibility, hazard, and vulnerability assessment: An overview." *Engineering*  
39 *geology* 102 (3-4): 112–131.
- 40 Wang, X., P. Frattini, G.B. Crosta, L. Zhang, F. Agliardi, S. Lari, and Z. Yang. 2014. "Un-  
41 certainty assessment in quantitative rockfall risk assessment." *Landslides* 11 (4): 711–722.
- 42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

