
Advancing Culture of Living with Landslides

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Advancing Culture of Living with Landslides

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Hiroshima landslide disasters in August 2014, Hiroshima, Japan (PASCO Corporation—Kokusai Kogyo Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved)

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Foreword By Irina Bokova

Every year, disasters induced by natural hazards affect millions of people across the world. The loss of life is tragic, impacting on communities for the long term.

The costs are also economic, as disasters are responsible for estimated annual economic losses of around USD 300 billion. With the rising pressures of climate change, overpopulation, and urbanization, we can expect costs to increase ever more.

We cannot prevent disasters but we can prepare for them better. This is the importance of the *International Consortium on Landslides*, supported actively by UNESCO, to advance research and build capacities for mitigating the risks of landslides. Led by Prof. Kyoji Sassa, the Consortium has become a success story of international scientific cooperation at a time when this has never been so vital.

This is especially important as the world implements the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, as well as the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030*—adopted in Sendai, Japan, to assess global progress on disaster risk reduction and set the priority actions.

The International Strategy for *Disaster Risk Reduction—International Consortium on Landslides Sendai Partnerships 2015–2025* is the key outcome relating to landslides from the 3rd World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, held in Sendai. On this basis, every member of the *International Consortium of Landslides* is redoubling efforts to understand, foresee, and reduce landslide disaster risk across the world.

Led by the Consortium, the Landslide Forum is a triennial milestone event that brings together scientists, engineers, practitioners, and policy makers from across the world—all working in the area of landslide technology, landslide disaster investigation, and landslide remediation. Meeting in Slovenia, the 4th Landslide Forum will explore the theme, “Landslide Research and Risk Reduction for Advancing Culture of Living with Natural Hazards”, focusing on the multidisciplinary implementation of the Sendai Framework to build a global culture of resilient communities.

Against this backdrop, this report includes state-of-the-art research on landslides, integrating knowledge on multiple aspects of such hazards and highlighting good practices and recommendations on reducing risks. Today, more than ever, we need sharper research and stronger scientific cooperation. In this spirit, I thank all of the contributors to this publication and I pledge UNESCO’s continuing support to deepening partnerships for innovation and resilience in societies across the world.



January 2017

Irina Bokova
Director General of UNESCO

Foreword By Robert Glasser

Landslides are a serious geological hazard. Among the host of natural triggers are intense rainfall, flooding, earthquakes or volcanic eruption, and coastal erosion caused by storms that are all too often tied to the El Niño phenomenon. Human triggers including deforestation, irrigation or pipe leakage, and mining spoil piles, or stream and ocean current alteration can also spark landslides.

Landslides occur worldwide but certain regions are particularly susceptible. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization underlines that steep terrain, vulnerable soils, heavy rainfall, and earthquake activity make large parts of Asia highly susceptible to landslides. Other hotspots include Central, South, and Northwestern America.

Landslides have devastating impact. They can generate tsunamis, for example. They can bring high economic costs, although estimating losses is difficult, particularly so when it comes to indirect losses. The latter are often confused with losses due to earthquakes or flooding.

Globally, landslides cause hundreds of billions of dollars in damages and hundreds of thousands of deaths and injuries each year. In the US alone, it has been estimated that landslides cause in excess of US\$1 billion in damages on average per year, though that is considered a conservative figure and the real level could be at least double.

Given this, it is important to understand the science of landslides: why they occur, what factors trigger them, the geology associated with them, and where they are likely to happen.

Geological investigations, good engineering practices, and effective enforcement of land use management regulations can reduce landslide hazards. Early warning systems can also be very effective, with the integration between ground-based and satellite data in landslide mapping essential to identify landslide-prone areas.

Given that human activities can be a contributing factor in causing landslides, there are a host of measures that can help to reduce risks, and losses if they do occur. Methods to avoid or mitigate landslides range from better building codes and standards in engineering of new construction and infrastructure, to better land use and proper planned alteration of drainage patterns, as well as tackling lingering risks on old landslide sites.

Understanding the interrelationships between earth surface processes, ecological systems, and human activities is the key to reducing landslides disaster risks.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, a 15-year international agreement adopted in March 2015, calls for more dedicated action on tackling underlying disaster risk drivers. It points to factors such as the consequences of poverty and inequality, climate change and variability, unplanned and rapid urbanization, poor land management, and compounding factors such as demographic change, weak institutional arrangements, and non-risk-informed policies. It also flags a lack of regulation and incentives for private disaster risk reduction investment, complex supply chains, limited availability of technology, and unsustainable uses of natural resources, declining ecosystems, pandemics and epidemics.

The Sendai Framework also calls for better risk-informed sectoral laws and regulations, including those addressing land use and urban planning, building codes, environmental and

resource management and health and safety standards, and underlines that they should be updated, where needed, to ensure an adequate focus on disaster risk management.

The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) has an important role in reinforcing a culture of prevention and preparedness in relevant stakeholders. This is done by supporting the development of standards by experts and technical organizations, advocacy initiatives, and the dissemination of disaster risk information, policies, and practices. UNISDR also provides education and training on disaster risk reduction through affiliated organizations, and supports countries, including through national platforms for disaster risk reduction or their equivalent, in the development of national plans and monitoring trends and patterns in disaster risk, loss, and impacts.

The International Consortium on Landslides (ICL) hosts the Sendai Partnerships 2015–2025 for the global promotion of understanding and reducing landslide disaster risk. This is part of 2015–2025, a voluntary commitment made at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, held in 2015 in Sendai, Japan, where the international community adopted the Sendai Framework.

The Sendai Partnerships will help to provide practical solutions and tools, education and capacity building, and communication and public outreach to reduce landslides risks. As such, they will contribute to the implementation of the goals and targets of the Sendai Framework, particularly on understanding disaster risks including vulnerability and exposure to integrated landslide-tsunami risk.

The work done by the Sendai Partnerships can be of value to many stakeholders including civil protection, planning, development and transportation authorities, utility managers, agricultural and forest agencies, and the scientific community.

UNISDR fully support the work of the Sendai Partnerships and the community of practice on landslides risks, and welcomes the 4th World Landslide Forum to be held in 2017 in Slovenia, which aims to strengthen intergovernmental networks and the international programme on landslides.



Robert Glasser
Special Representative of the Secretary-General
for Disaster Risk Reduction and head of UNISDR

Preface

The term “landslide” describes a wide variety of processes that result in the downward and outward movement of slope-forming materials including rock, debris, soil, artificial fill, or a combination of these.

This includes a wide variety of phenomena, from simple fall of rock blocks from vertical faces, through topples, to landslides that are dominated by sliding motion and those dominated by flows of soil and/or rock. Landslides are strongly correlated with other types of natural hazards, such as floods, droughts, wildfires, earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanoes, and are often involved in cascading events of multi-hazard disasters.

Climate change, increased susceptibility of surface soil to instability, anthropogenic activities, growing urbanisation, uncontrolled land-use and increased vulnerability of population and infrastructure, contribute to the growing landslide risk. In the Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection (COM232/2006), landslides are considered one of the main threats to European soils. The societal and economic impact of landslide risk is difficult to be assessed and it is underestimated since a relevant part of related damage is attributed to other natural hazards, in multi-hazard chains (i.e. seismically induced failures, rainfall induced debris flows, lahars and rock avalanches associated to volcanism).

The various types of landslides can be differentiated by the kinds of material involved and the mode of movement. Five main different types of movements have been discerned (Cruden and Varnes 1996, Hungr et al. 2014), which are: falls, topples, slides, spreads, or flows.

Landslides are classified also according to the type of material involved. According to Cruden and Varnes (1996) material can be rock or soil; the latter is described as earth if mainly composed of sand-sized or finer particles and debris if composed of coarser fragments. Hungr et al., (2014) proposed a new classification of material in order to provide compatibility with accepted geotechnical and geological terminology of rocks and soils.

The proposed list of material types is: “rock,” “clay,” “mud,” “silt,” “sand,” “gravel,” “boulders,” “debris,” “peat,” and “ice”.

Landslides are thus described using two terms that refer respectively to material and movement.

Landslides vary greatly in size. At the largest scale, a single landslide can involve up to some cubic kilometer of rock and soils. At the other end of the scale, a small boulder has the potential to cause loss of life if it strikes an individual, or to cause mass fatalities if it, for example, induces a train to derail. In general, the potential to cause loss scales with size of the landslide, largely because of the scaling of the kinetic energy and the affected area.

Landslide can be distinguished also on the basis of the rate of movement and according to Cruden and Varnes (1996) seven classes of velocity can be identified, from extremely slow to extremely rapid. Velocity is an important parameter, strongly related to the degree of damage to the elements at risks.

Landslide occurrence varies according to different causes such as topographic profile, geology, tectonic history, weathering and erosional history, and land use.

However, landslides are usually considered to have only one trigger (Varnes 1978). A trigger is an external stimulus such as an intense rainfall event, an earthquake, a volcanic

eruption, a storm wave, or rapid stream erosion that causes a near-immediate response in the form of a landslide by rapidly increasing the stresses or strains and reducing the strength of the slope-forming materials (Wieczorek 1996). Rainfall is one of the most important triggering factor of landslides. The type of landslide produced in this case depends largely upon the frequency and magnitude, in terms of intensity and/or duration, of the rainfall events (Fukuoka 1980, Wieczorek 1987). Both shallow and deep-seated landslides can be triggered by rainfall, with different frequencies, both in time and space, and under the effects of different types of storms.

Earthquakes can trigger different types of landslides in different geological, topographic and climatic conditions and the dimension of landslides can vary from small rock falls to giant landslides. Earthquakes in steep landslide-prone areas largely increase the likelihood that landslides will occur, due to the ground shaking alone, liquefaction of susceptible sediments, or shaking-caused dilation of soil materials, which allows rapid infiltration of water. Ground shaking can also cause rock falls or rock topples due to loosening of rocks.

Landslides and other types of natural hazards such as floods, droughts, wildfires, tsunamis, and volcanoes can be strongly correlated to the so-called cascade effects. For example, landslides can cause flooding by forming landslide dams that block valleys and stream channels, allowing large amounts of water to back up. On the contrary, droughts and fires can produce bare soils (or lands with reduced vegetal protection) exposed to the direct consequences of rainfalls and weathering phenomena.

This volume of WLF4 includes recent research achievements related to different landslide types in terms of typology, material and triggering factors. This volume will include also research outcomes made on the relationship between landslides and other natural hazards.

In particular, this volume has been organized in five chapters that correspond to the following sessions:

Session 4.1 – Earthquake-induced landslides;

Session 4.2 – Rainfall-induced landslides;

Session 4.3 – Rapid landslides: debris flows, mudflows, rapid debris-slides;

Session 4.4 – Landslides in rocks and complex landslides: rock topples, rock falls, rock slides, complex landslides;

Session 4.5 – Landslides and other natural hazards: floods, droughts, wildfires, tsunamis, and volcanoes.

Florence, Italy

Nicola Casagli

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Contents

Part I Earthquake-Induced Landslides

Session Introduction Earthquake-Induced Landslide	3
Kazuo Konagai, Gabriele Scarascia Mugnozza, and Akihiko Wakai	
The Role of Simultaneous Impact of Exogenous and Endogenous Forces in Landslide Process Activation	5
Rustam Niyazov and Bakhtiar Nurtaev	
Local Terrain Relief: An Important Factor Influencing the Generation of Large Earthquake-Triggered Landslides.	15
Xiaoli Chen, Hongliu Ran, Qing Zhou, and Bengang Zhou	
Evaluation of Ground Shaking Characteristics in Residential Land Based on T/R Frequency Ratio of Microtremor	23
Yoshiya Hata, Fumihiro Minato, Takaaki Ikeda, Masayuki Yamada, Masaki Yamauchi, and Yutaro Okawa	
Critical Displacement of Earthquake-Triggered Catastrophic Landslides.	37
Che-Ming Yang, Chang-Hsuan Hsu, and Jia-Jyun Dong	
Numerical Models of Unstable Slopes in Seismic Areas—Based on 3D Geomodels	47
Hans-Balder Havenith, Anne-Sophie Mreyen, Almaz Torgoev, and Mihai Micu	
A Characteristic-Period Based Approach for Evaluating Earthquake-Induced Displacements of the Large Büyükçekmece Landslide (Turkey)	59
Salvatore Martino, Luca Lenti, and Celine Bourdeau	
Finite Element Simulation for Seismic Ground Response in Mountainous Areas in Nepal.	67
Akihiko Wakai, Daisuke Higaki, Hiroshi Yagi, Go Sato, and Masahiro Chigira	
Geophysical Investigation of the Landslide-Prone Slope Downstream from the Rogun Dam Construction Site (Tajikistan)	75
Torgoev Isakbek, Havenith Hans-Balder, Torgoev Almaz, Cerfontaine Philippe, and Ischuk Anatoly	
Spatial Relations of Earthquake Induced Landslides Triggered by 2015 Gorkha Earthquake Mw = 7.8.	85
Kaushal R. Gnyawali and Basanta R. Adhikari	
Distribution Characteristics of Geohazards Induced by the Ludian Earthquake on 3 August, 2014 and a Comparison to the Jinggu and Yingjiang Earthquakes	95
Zhiqiang Yin, Wuji Zhao, Yongqiang Xu, and Lanpeng Sa	

Seismic-Induced Landslides: Lessons Learned from Recent Earthquakes in Spain	111
José Delgado, Martín J. Rodríguez-Peces, Francisco J. García-Tortosa, Jesús Garrido, Iván Martín, and Pedro Alfaro	
Landslides Triggered by the Ms6.5 Ludian, China Earthquake of August 3, 2014	119
Kai-heng Hu, Xing-zhang Chen, Yong-gang Ge, Xing-yuan Jiang, and Yang-chun Wang	
Earthquake-Induced Rockfalls Caused by 1998 Mw5.6 Earthquake in Krn Mountains (NW Slovenia) and ESI 2007 Intensity Scale	131
Andrej Gosar	
Earthquake Induced Landslides in Russian Altai: Absolute Dating Applying Tree-Ring and Radiocarbon Analysis	141
R.K. Nepop and A.R. Agatova	
Part II Rainfall-Induced Landslides	
Analysis of the Predisposing Factors for Different Landslide Types Using the Generalized Additive Model	151
Carlotta Bartelletti, Roberto Giannechini, Giacomo D’Amato Avanzi, Yuri Galanti, Michele Barsanti, Maria Giuseppina Persichillo, Massimiliano Bordoni, Claudia Meisina, Andrea Cevasco, and Jorge Pedro Galve Arnedo	
Large-Scale Synoptic Weather Types and Precipitation Responsible for Landslides in Southern Norway	159
Graziella Devoli, Lisa Jørandli, Kolbjørn Engeland, and Lena M. Tallaksen	
Deterministic and Probabilistic Rainfall Thresholds for Landslide Forecasting	169
Pasquale Versace and Davide L. De Luca	
Definition of Rainfall Thresholds Triggering Landslides in Slovenia	177
Ascanio Rosi, Tina Peternel, Mateja Jemec-Auflič, Marko Komac, and Nicola Casagli	
Regional Rainfall Thresholds for Shallow and Deep-Seated Mass Movements Triggering in the South Eastern French Alps	183
Alexandre Remaître and Jean-Philippe Malet	
Explore on Hydro-Mechanical Threshold for Early Warning of Rainfall Induced Shallow Landslides	193
Zong-ji Yang, Jian-ping Qiao, Taro Uchimura, Lin Wang, Dong Huang, Xiao-qin Lei, and Li-li Shi	
Influences of Rainfall on Shallow Slope Failures	201
Taworn Teerametatiparat, Avirut Chinkulkijniwat, and Somjai Yubonchit	
Modelling Shallow Landslides Triggered by Rainfall in Tropical and Mountainous Basins	207
Edier Aristizábal, Hernán Martínez-Carvajal, and Edwin García-Aristizábal	
High Mobility of Large-Scale Shallow Landslide Triggered by Heavy Rainfall in Izu Oshima	213
Gonghui Wang and Yao Jiang	
Probabilistic Analysis of Shallow Landslide Susceptibility Using Physically Based Model and Fuzzy Point Estimate Method	221
Jung-Hyun Lee, Hyuck-Jin Park, and Jung-Yoon Jang	

Assessing Potential Effects of Climate Change on Rainfall-Induced Shallow Landslides in the Peloritani Mountains Area, Sicily	229
David J. Peres and Antonino Cancelliere	
Variations in Landslide Frequency Due to Climate Changes Through High Resolution Euro-CORDEX Ensemble	237
Guido Rianna, Alfredo Reder, Veronica Villani, and Paola Mercogliano	
Potential Effects of Climate Changes on Landslide Activity in Different Geomorphological Contexts	243
Guido Rianna, Luca Comegna, Stefano Luigi Gariano, Fausto Guzzetti, Paola Mercogliano, Luciano Picarelli, and Paolo Tommasi	
Historical Patterns of Heavy Rainfall Event and Deep-Seated Rapid Landslide Occurrence in Japan: Insight for Effects of Climate Change on Landslide Occurrence	251
Taro Uchida, Wataru Sakurai, and Atsushi Okamoto	
Geomorphologic and Structural Controls on Landslide Types in Nigeria	259
Ogbonnaya Igwe	
Geomorphology and Susceptibility to Rainfall Triggered Landslides in Gudbrandsdalen Valley, Norway	267
Håkon Heyerdahl and Øyvind A. Høydal	
Overview of Rainfall Induced Landslide Events and Importance of Geotechnical Investigations in Nilgiris District of Tamil Nadu, India	281
V. Senthilkumar, S.S. Chandrasekaran, and V.B. Maji	
Physically-Based Models for Estimating Rainfall Triggering Debris Flows in Campania (Southern Italy)	289
Pantaleone De Vita, Francesco Fusco, Elisabetta Napolitano, and Rita Tufano	
Physical Modelling of the Rainfall Infiltration Processes in Pyroclastic Soil Responsible of Landslide Trigger	299
Giovanna Capparelli, Pasquale Versace, and Gennaro Spolverino	
The Role of the Precipitation History on Landslide Triggering in Unsaturated Pyroclastic Soils	307
Luca Comegna, Melania De Falco, Fatemeh Jalayer, Luciano Picarelli, and Antonio Santo	
Role of Land Use in Landslide Initiation on Terraced Slopes: Inferences from Numerical Modelling	315
Luca Schilirò, Andrea Cevasco, Carlo Esposito, and Gabriele Scarascia Mugnozza	
Analysis of the Impact of Precipitation on Landslide Activity Within the Erosive Slopes of River Valleys of the South of Ukraine	321
Galina Pedan, Olena Dragomyretska, and Oleksandr Dragomyretsky	
Heavy Rains and Flash Floods at Rocky Coast. The Costiera Amalfitana (Southern Italy)	329
Crescenzo Violante, Eliana Esposito, Giuseppe Tranfaglia, and Giovanni Braca	
Drainage and Shear Velocity Dependent Shear Characteristics of Abandoned Imgi Mine Waste Materials in Ring Shear Tests	337
Sueng-Won Jeong, Sung-Sik Park, Hiroshi Fukuoka, Sang-Woo Ji, and Choon-Oh Lee	
Landslide Monitoring and Management Challenge in Remote Papua New Guinea	343
Norbert Baczynski and Neil Bar	

Part III Rapid Landslides: Debris Flows, Mudflows, Rapid Debris Slides

Session Introduction—Rapid Landslides: Debris Flows, Mudflows, Rapid Debris Slides	357
Giovanni Crosta	
Characterization and Modeling of a Debris Flow in a Dolomitic Basin: Results and Issues	359
Chiara Boccali, Romano Lapasin, Luca Zini, Chiara Calligaris, and Franco Cucchi	
Debris Flow Hazard Assessment (Cave del Predil—NE Italy)	369
Chiara Calligaris, Glenda Nicola, Giacomo Casagrande, Luca Zini, and Franco Cucchi	
Stony Debris Flow Debouching in a River Reach: Energy Dissipative Mechanisms and Deposit Morphology	377
Antonio Fichera, Laura Maria Stancanelli, Stefano Lanzoni, and Enrico Foti	
Velocity Attenuation of Granular Debris Flows During Impact on Rigid Barriers	385
C.H. Raymond Koo, S.H. Julian Kwan, Carlos Lam, Wai-Keung Pun, W.W. Charles Ng, and E. Clarence Choi	
Impact Forces of a Supercritical Flow of a Shear Thinning Slurry Against an Obstacle	391
Michele Iervolino, Claudia Carotenuto, Corrado Gisonni, Mario Minale, and Andrea Vacca	
Observation and Numerical Simulation of Debris Flow Induced by Deep-Seated Rapid Landslide	399
Taro Uchida, Yuki Nishiguchi, Naoki Matsumoto, and Wataru Sakurai	
Analysis on Debris Flow Non-rectilinear Motion—From Case Study to Hazard Zone Delimitation Discussion	407
Tingyeh Wu and Su-Chin Chen	
Frequency Difference of Debris Flows in Moxi Basin, Southwestern China	415
Yongbo Tie, Jintao Jiang, Zhi Song, Alena V. Kadetova, and Artem A. Rybchenko	
Debris Flow Activity in Permafrost Regions in Austria During the 20th Century	421
Roland Kaitna and Thomas Huber	
Statistical Methods for the Assessment of Rainfall Thresholds for Triggering Shallow Landslides: A Case Study	429
Yuri Galanti, Michele Barsanti, Roberto Giannecchini, Giacomo D'Amato Avanzi, and Gianni Benvenuto	
Using Weather Radar Data (Rainfall and Lightning Flashes) for the Analysis of Debris Flows Occurrence in Emilia-Romagna Apennines (Italy)	437
Giuseppe Ciccacese, Alessandro Corsini, Pier Paolo Alberoni, Miria Celano, and Anna Fornasiero	
Monitoring of Debris Flows with an Improved System Setup at the Lattenbach Catchment, Austria	449
Johannes Hübl, Andreas Schimmel, and Richard Koschuch	
Natural Hazard Analysis for a Small Alpine Catchment in the Nepalese Himalayas	459
Klaus Schraml, Christian Uhlir, and Johannes Hübl	

Small-Scale Factors Controlling Onset of the Debris Avalanche of 4 March 2005 at Nocera Inferiore (Southern Italy)	467
Pantaleone De Vita, Durante Aquino, and Pietro Bruno Celico	
Experimental Study of Fluidized Landslide	477
Hu Wei, Hicher Pierre-Yves, Qiang Xu, van Asch Theo, and Wang Gonghui	
Part IV Landslides in Rocks and Complex Landslides	
A New Calculation Method to Flexural Toppling Failure of Anti-dipped Rock Slope	483
Su Lijun, Qu Xin, and Zhang Chonglei	
Rock Slope Stability Assessment Using Stereographic Projection Method and Limit Equilibrium Analysis	489
P.H.E. Dulanjalee and Jagath Gunathilake	
Insights into Deep-Seated Rockslides in Metamorphic Rock Masses: Lessons Learned from Field Surveys, In Situ Investigations and Numerical Modelling	499
Christian Zangerl, Thomas Strauhal, Christine Fey, Michael Holzmann, and Sebastian Perzlsmaier	
Structural and Climatic Control of Mass Movements Along the Karakoram Highway	509
Sajid Ali, Sascha Schneiderwind, and Klaus Reicherter	
The Influence of the Geological Model in the Stress-Strain Analysis of the 1963 Vajont Landslide	517
Paolo Paronuzzi and Alberto Bolla	
True 3D Kinematic Analysis for Slope Instability Assessment in the Siq of Petra (Jordan), from High Resolution TLS	527
Claudio Margottini, Daniele Spizzichino, Giovanni Gigli, Heinz Ruther, and Nicola Casagli	
Susceptibility to Sea Cliff Failures at Cala Rossa Bay in Favignana Island (Italy)	537
Roberto Iannucci, Salvatore Martino, Fabio Martorelli, Luca Falconi, and Vladimiro Verrubbi	
Complex Rainfall-Driven Kinematics of the Slow-Moving Pisciotta Rock-Slide (Cilento, Southern Italy)	547
Pantaleone De Vita, Delia Cusano, and Giovanni La Barbera	
Numerical Simulation on Gentle Dip Slope Deformation Caused by River Erosion	557
Tien-Chien Chen, Feng-Long Chou, and Cheng Meng Hsieh	
Mass Movement Processes of Quaternary Deposits in the Vipava Valley, SW Slovenia	571
Tomislav Popit, Jernej Jež, and Timotej Verbovšek	
Characteristics, Causes and Hazards of Large-Scale Debris Flows on June 23 at Haitong Watershed, Tibet, China	581
Ge Yonggang, Zou Qiang, Zhang Jianqiang, and Guo Xiaojun	

Joint Modelling and Monitoring on Case Pennetta and Case Costa Active Landslides System Using Electrical Resistivity Tomography and Geotechnical Data	593
Andrea Quagliarini, Andrea Segalini, Alessandro Chelli, Roberto Francese, Massimo Giorgi, and Laura Spaggiari	
Large-Scale Rockslope Deformations in Sogn Og Fjordane County (Norway)	601
Ivanna M. Penna, Martina Böhme, Reginald Hermanns, Trond Eiken, and John Dehls	
Landslide Zoning Using the Principal Component Analysis on Monitoring Data: The Sauna Earth Slide—Earth Flow (Parma, Italy)	607
Marco Mulas, Francesco Bonacini, Marcello Petitta, Francesco Ronchetti, Giovanni Truffelli, Michela Diena, and Alessandro Corsini	
Part V Landslides and Other Natural Hazards	
Experimental Study on Impact Behavior of Submarine Landslides on Communication Cables	617
Zili Dai, Fawu Wang, and Yasutaka Nakahara	
RFID-Aided Sediment Transport Monitoring—Laboratory and Preliminary Field Test Results	623
Vladislav Ivov Ivanov, Davide Brambilla, Laura Longoni, Diego Arosio, and Monica Papini	
Flash Floods in the Rwenzori Mountains—Focus on the May 2013 Multi-Hazard Kilembe Event	631
Liesbet Jacobs, Jan Maes, Kewan Mertens, John Sekajugo, Wim Thiery, Nicole van Lipzig, Jean Poesen, Matthieu Kervyn, and Olivier Dewitte	
Debris Flow Generation in Burned Catchments	643
Mario Parise and Susan H. Cannon	
Residual Slope Stability in Low Order Streams of Anganguero Mining Area (Michoacán, Mexico) After the 2010 Debris Flows	651
Stefano Morelli, Veronica Pazzi, Victor Hugo Garduño Monroy, and Nicola Casagli	
Landslides Risk Assessment Along Roads: The Transportation Corridors of the “Dolomiti Lucane” (Basilicata)	661
Lucia Losasso, Stefania Pascale, and Francesco Sdao	
Monitoring Eruption-Induced Mass-Wasting at Active Volcanoes: The Stromboli Case	669
Federico Di Traglia, Teresa Nolesini, and Nicola Casagli	
Development of a Rockfall Risk Mitigation Plan in the Montserrat Massif (Central Catalonia, Spain)	677
Pere Buxó, Marc Janeras, Guillem Domènech, Judit Pons, Elisabet Prat, and Ferran López	
Assessment of Rockslide Dam Scenarios at Catchment Scale in the Context of Cascading Hazards	685
Christian Kofler, Francesco Comiti, Bernhard Gems, Benni Thiebes, Stefan Schneiderbauer, and Romy Schlögel	
Landslide Technology and Engineering in Support of Landslide Science	693
ICL Structure Table	703
Author Index	705