

Zeitschrift: IABSE publications = Mémoires AIPC = IVBH Abhandlungen

Band: 30 (1970)

Artikel: Brief review of modern earthquake engineering

Autor: Ferry Borges, J. / Despeyroux, J. / Maeda, Y.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-23588>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 02.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Brief Review of Modern Earthquake Engineering

Bref exposé du génie sismique moderne

Kurze Darstellung des heutigen Erdbebeningenieurwesens

“Working Group on Information on Earthquake Engineering”

J. FERRY BORGES

J. DESPEYROUX

Y. MAEDA

P. MAZILU

J. R. ROBINSON

1. Introduction

This review is a brief survey of the present status of Earthquake Engineering. It contains information on earthquake hazards, main Earthquake Engineering problems, safety of structures under the action of earthquakes, Earthquake Engineering research and education, and international collaboration.

The review is prepared in accordance with a decision by the International Association for Bridge and Structural Engineering to set up a working group for dealing with “Information on Earthquake Engineering”. The decision to create this working group was supported by the “Comité de Liaison”, which coordinates the activity of several international associations dealing with Structural Engineering, such as the International Association for Bridge and Structural Engineering, the European Committee for Concrete, the International Federation for Prestressing, the International Council for Building Research Studies and Documentation, the European Convention of the Association for Steel Construction, and the International Association for Shell Structures.

2. Earthquake Hazards

Earthquake hazards are among the most serious dangers that mankind has to face. In fact, referring only to the second quarter of this century,

between 1926 and 1950, over 350 000 people were killed and the damage to buildings and public works is estimated in nearly 10 000 million U.S. dollars [1].

The number of casualties due to a large earthquake may be tremendous. It has ranged, for the most severe ones, from 100 000 to 200 000. In the future, if no special precautions were taken, an earthquake hitting a large town could kill millions. On the other hand owing to the increasing density of construction, a single earthquake could result in a tremendous loss of property. Avoiding such catastrophes is the task of Earthquake Engineering.

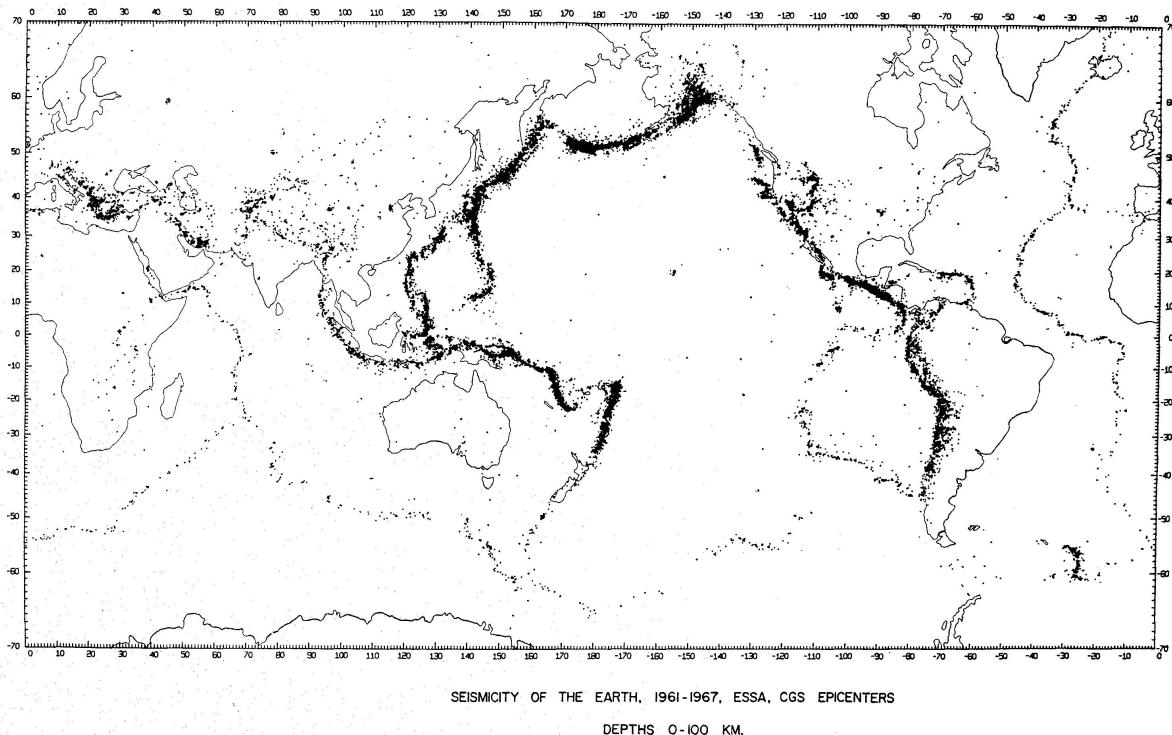


Fig. 1. Seismicity of the earth compiled by the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey [2].

Fig. 1 shows a map of world seismicity compiled by the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey [2]. This map refers to the period 1961–1967 and includes earthquakes having depths between 0 and 100 km. Owing to the modern seismographic networks and to the modern data processing techniques the definition of hypocenter data is now much more accurate than it was years ago. This accuracy will increase in the near future, so that very reliable data will be available for studying the mechanisms of earthquake generation and defining regional seismicity.

Recently the direct forecast of earthquakes has aroused much interest among researchers [3]. It must be noted however that such a forecast may help to reduce casualties but not substantially to reduce the amount of damage.

Anyhow the information provided by such studies is of foremost interest for a better understanding of earthquake generation, even allowing us to dream of avoiding strong earthquakes by a man-controlled release of energy along

fault zones. In fact, by slowly releasing the stresses that produce the rupture of the crust, the cause of some types of earthquakes might be eliminated. This however is a very remote possibility only potentially applicable in a small number of cases.

The real challenge within our present possibilities is to design and to build earthquake-resistant constructions. This has to be done in economic terms, which implies an accurate estimate of the seismic risk.

3. Earthquake Engineering Problems

There is a large variety of problems to be studied in Earthquake Engineering. Some of the most important ones are:

- Frequency of earthquake occurrences on the whole earth and at localized sites.
- Measurement of strong earthquakes including engineering definition of earthquake ground motion.
- Dynamic soil mechanics; study of earthquake disasters due to soil conditions.
- Application of the stochastic method in Earthquake Engineering, including the simultaneous consideration of physical, economic, and social phenomena in engineering.
- Experimental studies and theoretical analysis of safety of members and structures.
- Survey of earthquake damages, particularly in relation with soils and foundations.
- Prevention of earthquake disasters including installations, plannings, shelters, relief, temporary repairs, rehabilitation.
- Prevention of disasters due to tidal waves.

These problems are being studied all over the world as indicated below. The present review particularly emphasizes structural safety problems.

4. Safety of Structures

Structural safety under earthquake loads has to be dealt with according to the general safety principles used for other types of loads [4]. According to simple economical criteria, one engineering objective is to minimize the total long-term cost of providing earthquake resistance and repairing damage, both resistance and damage being considered in a very broad sense. Achieving this goal and expressing it in statistical terms involves a statistical estimate of seismic loads and a statistical estimate of the behaviour of the different types of structures when subjected to seismic vibrations [5]. The modern principles

of structural safety cannot be applied without accurate information of these two types.

The statistical estimate of seismic loads requires a quantitative definition of the seismicity of the regions. For this purpose, information on the historical occurrence of earthquakes has to be combined with the information gathered in studies on geophysics, geology, rock mechanics and soil mechanics.

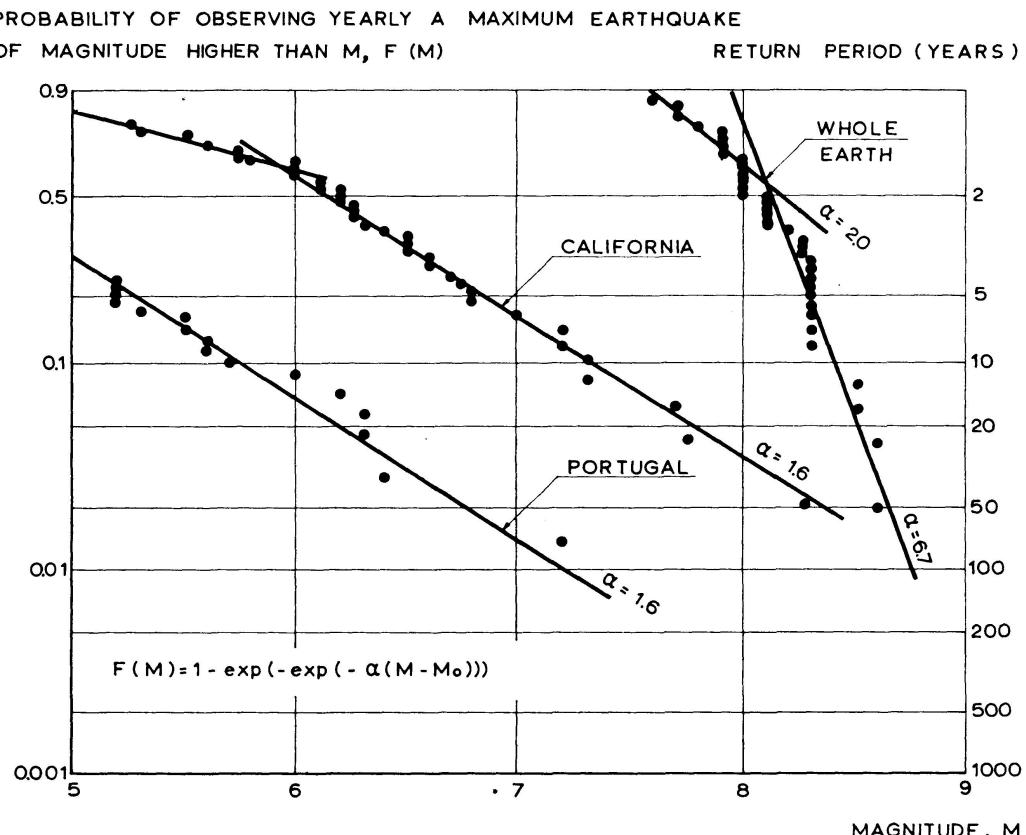


Fig. 2. Relations between probability and magnitude.

Fig. 2 shows the probability of yearly observing an earthquake with a magnitude higher than M in the whole earth, in California, and in Portugal. Within the range of interest the observed data fit double exponential extreme distributions, which are represented by straight lines in the diagrams.

On the other hand, for quantifying earthquake loads, seismic vibrations have to be duly idealized and defined by a convenient number of parameters. The theory of stochastic processes provides the most powerful means for obtaining this idealization.

The statistical distribution of the intensity of the earthquakes in a given region being thus defined, it has to be combined with the statistical distribution of the response of the structures to allow the definition of the statistical distribution of seismic loads. This last distribution is the one to be used in the design.

In general, the statistical distribution of the response of the structure depends on several parameters. For the simple case of linear one degree-of-freedom oscillators these parameters are the natural frequency and the damping factor.

This very brief survey of the tasks necessary for a satisfactory definition of seismic loads could lead to the erroneous conclusion that these are simple problems. In fact much work has already been done along these lines and much is still required to obtain the desired results. However, the general policy being established, sufficiently accurate practical results are at present obtainable from the existing data.

On the other hand, final results on structural safety can only be reached if the ultimate strength is also statistically expressed. This strength may be defined in terms of ultimate forces or of ultimate displacements. The correspondence between these two concepts can be established using the notion of ductility factor.

The information at present available on structural behaviour allows a more accurate definition of ultimate forces than of ultimate displacements. On the other hand, seismic loads are naturally expressed in terms of maximum displacements. Thus an important research task is the statistical definition of the ultimate displacements in the different types of structures when acted by seismic loads. As indicated, the results of these studies can be expressed either directly in terms of displacements or indirectly in terms of ductility factors.

It is amazing how little information of the above type can be obtained from the very large volume of structural research performed till now. It is expected that this situation will improve in a near future, allowing the safety of structures in seismic regions to be completely defined on a quantitative statistical basis.

5. Earthquake Engineering Research and Education

It is not easy to present a survey of Earthquake Engineering research owing to the lack of centralized information and also to the inter-relation of Earthquake Engineering with many other scientific and technical fields. A very important contribution to this survey is due to the "International Association for Earthquake Engineering, IAEE", that publishes world directories of universities, institutions and personnel engaged in Earthquake Engineering research. The last directory (6), revised in 1968, contains 136 institutes and 539 researchers. Although covering an important part of this activity in the world, this directory refers to 14 countries only. The number of countries where regulations dealing with earthquake loads are at present in force is considerably larger. The world list of earthquake resistant regulations published by IAEE [7] refers to 26 countries.

The majority of research results in this field is published in the proceedings of the world conferences: U.S.A. (1956) [8], Japan (1960) [9], New Zealand (1964) [10] and Chile (1969) [11], which include altogether about 500 papers. Although more than 400 papers were submitted to the last conference only 160 could be accepted.

In addition to the world conferences referred to several regional and national conferences [12 to 15] were recently organized and others have already been announced [16 to 18]. Furthermore several journals specialized in Earthquake Engineering and many others publish papers on this subject. A recent report published by the American Committee on Earthquake Engineering Research [19] gives a broad up-to-date view of the main problems in this field.

All this activity shows that Earthquake Engineering is an attractive field of research. It is in fact so, particularly if on one hand the potential damage of earthquakes is considered and, on the other, if it is recognized that the scientific and technical tools that can avoid such damage already exist.

Specifically as concerns education and training, several international and national institutes and schools were created during the last ten years to improve the specialization in Earthquake Engineering. Among the international institutes special reference is due to the following:

- International Institute of Seismology and Earthquake Engineering, Tokyo, Japan [20].
- International Center of Earthquake Engineering "Arturo Danusso", Milan and Bergamo, Italy.
- Institute of Seismology, Earthquake Engineering and Town Planning, Skopje, Yugoslavia.

Furthermore, special courses on Earthquake Engineering are organized at several universities and national research institutes.

Nevertheless it has to be recognized that education and training in Earthquake Engineering is not yet sufficiently spread even in countries with a high seismicity. Changing the present state of things is surely the most effective way to increase the rate of progress in this field and to put in practical use the results available.

6. International Collaboration

As indicated, the International Association for Earthquake Engineering, IAEE, is particularly effective in securing international collaboration in its field. Recognizing the importance of Earthquake Engineering other international associations have set up special committees on this problem. Thus a close relation of these associations and their committees with the IAEE seems necessary to obtain the best coordination of efforts. Unhappily exchange of information and collaboration among international associations is sometimes

difficult. Anyhow it seems that further increasing the number of committees on Earthquake Engineering is going to render this coordination even more difficult. It cannot be forgotten that in addition to the IAEE there also exist several other regional and national organizations, more or less interrelated with it.

A practical way to improve the present collaboration among international associations in Earthquake Engineering would be to include IAEE in the "Comité de Liaison" that co-ordinates the major structural engineering associations. Anyhow there is no reason to substitute IAEE in its leading position in Earthquake Engineering. Just on the contrary it seems advisable that the different international associations coordinate their activities in direct collaboration with the IAEE. On the other hand, information on the aims of IAEE should be made known more widely and possible adjustments in the activities of the IAEE so as to satisfy the needs of other associations should be considered.

The UNESCO, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, plays a very prominent rôle in the field of international collaboration and its activities in Earthquake Engineering have been very important. In fact, in addition to its wide activity in Geophysics and particularly in Seismology, special reference is due to the following actions in Earthquake Engineering: survey missions to the principal seismic zones of the world, field studies of earthquakes, technical assistance missions, working groups on special subjects such as seismic maps, principles of earthquake resistant design and measurement of strong motions, organization of intergovernmental meetings and support of international institutes and of special researches. The activity of the "Joint Committee in Seismology and Earthquake Engineering" formed under its patronage must also be mentioned.

Recently, some other international organizations – for instance NATO, North Atlantic Treaty Organization – have also decided to include in their activities the protection against natural calamities, such as earthquakes [21].

On the other hand, collaboration at associative and governmental levels between USA and Japan, both in the research field through the USA-Japan Science Council, and in the disaster prevention field through the USA-Japan Government Conference for the Natural Resources Utilization, is also yielding good results for the progress of Earthquake Engineering.

References

1. E. M. FOURNIER D'ALBE: Earthquakes – avoidable disasters, *Impact*, Vol. XVI, No. 3, 1966.
2. M. BARAZANGI and J. DORMAN: World seismicity maps compiled from ESSA, Coast and Geodetic Survey, Epicenter data, 1961–1967, *Bulletin of the Seismological Society of America*, Volume 59, No. 1, February, 1969.

3. Premointory Phenomena Associated with Several Recent Earthquakes and Related Problems, Joint US. Japan Conference, American Geophysical Union, May, 1969.
4. J. FERRY BORGES and M. CASTANHETA: Structural Safety Course 101, Laboratório Nacional de Engenharia Civil, 2nd Edition, Lisbon, March, 1971.
5. J. FERRY BORGES and M. CASTANHETA: General Recommendations Derived from Basic Studies on Structural Safety, Symposium on Concepts of Safety of Structures and Methods of Design, International Association for Bridge and Structural Engineering, London, September, 1969.
6. International Directory of Universities, Institutions Engaged in Earthquake Engineering Research. International Association for Earthquake Engineering, Tokyo, March, 1970.
7. Earthquake Resistant Regulations. A world list, International Association for Earthquake Engineering, Tokyo, 1966.
8. I World Conference on Earthquake Engineering. Earthquake Engineering Research Institute, Berkeley, California, June, 1965.
9. II World Conference on Earthquake Engineering. Science Council of Japan, Tokyo and Kyoto, 1960.
10. III World Conference on Earthquake Engineering. International Association for Earthquake Engineering, New Zealand, January, 1965.
11. IV Conference on Earthquake Engineering. International Association for Earthquake Engineering, Chile, January, 1969.
12. NSF-UCEER Conference on Earthquake Engineering Research. University Council for Earthquake Engineering Research. University of California, Berkeley, California, March, 1969.
13. I Congreso Nacional de Sismología e Ingeniería Antisísmica, Lima, Peru, Setiembre, 1969.
14. Testing Methodology and Technique of Full-Scale and Model Structures Under Static and Dynamic Loads, Bucharest, September, 1969.
15. ECEE/AEIS Joint Symposium on Earthquake Engineering Topics. European Commission for Earthquake Engineering, Madrid, September, 1969.
16. Conference on Earthquake Analysis of Structures, Experimental Methods and Techniques for Dynamic Characteristics and Seismic Response of Structures, Iasi, Romania, September, 1970.
17. III European Symposium on Earthquake Engineering. European Commission for Earthquake Engineering, Sofia, Bulgaria, September, 1970.
18. Third Japan Earthquake Engineering Symposium. Japanese Society of Soil Mechanics and Foundation Engineering, Tokyo, November, 1970.
19. Earthquake Engineering Research. A report prepared by the Committee on Earthquake Engineering Research, National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C., 1969.
20. International Institute of Seismology and Earthquake Engineering. UNESCO/UNDP, Special Fund Component, Report Series, 19, Paris, 1969.
21. Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society. Disaster Assistance Project, NATO Unclassified Document, AC/274-D/3, March, 1970.

Summary

Earthquake resistant constructions are the great challenge of Earthquake Engineering. The scientific and technological knowledge already available

makes it possible to reach this aim safely and economically. It is to be expected that basic and applied research carried out in a well balanced condition will improve this knowledge, notably the rational bases of design, further increasing the efficiency and the economy of constructions. In particular, patterns of earthquake damages should be analysed and understood through actual investigations of the damages.

The present high rate of progress has not been accompanied by a parallel dissemination of knowledge which would enable mankind to take full advantage of the benefits that could derive from this knowledge. Consequently, education and training actions are highly profitable and are strongly recommended.

Special attention must be paid to securing the efficiency of international collaboration, as in fact this collaboration is one of the most effective ways of accelerating progress and disseminating knowledge.

Résumé

Les constructions résistant aux tremblements de terre représentent le grand défi du génie sismique. Ce défi peut être surmonté actuellement grâce aux connaissances scientifiques et techniques déjà acquises. Des recherches appliquées, bien appuyées sur des recherches de base, permettront de rationaliser davantage le projet des constructions, avec des conséquences directes sur l'efficacité et l'économie. En particulier, on doit faire des études quantitatives des dégâts dûs aux tremblements de terre.

Le rapide progrès actuel n'a pas été accompagné d'une diffusion des connaissances permettant de profiter des avantages qui en découlent. En conséquence il est vivement recommandé d'augmenter les actions d'enseignement et d'information.

Il est tout spécialement important d'assurer une collaboration internationale efficace, car cette collaboration est un des meilleurs moyens d'accélérer le progrès et de diffuser les connaissances.

Zusammenfassung

Der Entwurf und Bau von erdbebenbeständigen Bauwerken stellen die große Herausforderung an das Erdbebeningenieurwesen dar. Die bereits vorhandenen wissenschaftlichen und technischen Kenntnisse erlauben dieses Ziel auf sichere und wirtschaftliche Weise zu erreichen. Durch eine ausgewogene durchgeföhrte Grundlagen- und angewandte Forschung kann das vorhandene Wissen erweitert werden, insbesondere die Grundlagen der Bemessung, so daß ein verbesserter Nutzen und eine erhöhte Wirtschaftlichkeit zu erwarten sind. Vor allem sollten typische Erdbebenschäden untersucht und im Lichte der heutigen Schadensforschung betrachtet werden.

Der derzeitige, rasche Fortschritt wurde allerdings nicht von einer gleichzeitigen Verbreitung der Kenntnisse begleitet, welche der Menschheit erlauben würde, vollen Nutzen aus diesen Kenntnissen zu ziehen. Demzufolge ist eine sorgfältige Ausbildung und Fortbildung von großem Nutzen und besonders zu empfehlen.

Besondere Beachtung verdient die Aufrechterhaltung einer intensiven internationalen Zusammenarbeit, stellt doch eine solche eines der besten Mittel dar, um die Verbreitung der Kenntnisse und den Fortschritt zu beschleunigen.