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Development of a coastal vulnerability index using analytical hierarchy process and application to Ravenna province (Italy)

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Keywords

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Floods directive
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ABSTRACT

The assessment of coastal vulnerability to natural hazards is a major concern in coastal areas worldwide, particularly in the context of climate change and increased coastal development. In this work an index of physical vulnerability to sea level rise and marine floods was designed and applied over the coast of the Ravenna Province (Italy), a low-lying coastal area historically known as being susceptible to coastal flooding and erosion. The index is intended to be at the same time scientifically sound and easy to apply, so it is composed of five relevant variables (elevation, dunes, artificial protection structures, shoreline change rates, and land cover) that were weighted by using a multi-criteria decision making approach, namely the analytical hierarchy process. The weightings were assigned by experts familiar with coastal processes in the area, and all with background in environmental science. This enabled a transparent approach on integrating established expert knowledge to assign the relative importance of the variables in defining vulnerability scores. The final vulnerability score for each segment along the investigated coast was calculated by applying the weighted sum of all variables. For verification purposes, the obtained vulnerability ranking was compared to existing coastal flood hazard maps developed by regional authorities in the framework of the EU Floods Directive (2007/60/EC), and to real inundation events generated by historical storms. The integration of this framework into geographical information systems resulted in informative maps, useful to a variety of end-users such as coastal managers and decision makers.

1. Introduction

The damage from natural disasters in coastal zones has increased worldwide over the last decades, mainly due to the growth of capital accumulated in flood-prone areas (Filatova et al., 2011). Two major phenomena could contribute to exacerbate such trend in the future. The first one is the expected further sea level rise (SLR) and the increasing extreme sea levels related to global climate change (Church et al., 2013). According to the IPCC SR15 report, "increasing warming amplifies the exposure of small islands, low-lying coastal areas and deltas to the risks associated with sea level rise for many human and ecological systems, including increased saltwater intrusion, flooding and damage to infrastructure" (Hoegh-Guldberg et al., 2018). The second phenomenon is increasing human susceptibility to coastal flooding and erosion, especially in low-lying floodplains, due to higher migration, industrialization and urbanization trends in coastal areas (McGranahan et al., 2007; Wong et al., 2014; Neumann et al., 2015). In 2011 more than 40% of global population lived in areas within 100 km of the coastline (IOC/UNESCO, IMO, FAO and UNDP, 2011), while in the European Union (EU) approximately half of the population lived within just 50 km of the coastline (Ramieri et al., 2011). In the Mediterranean Sea region, about 55% of the total population resides in coastal hydrological basins (Martin et al., 2015). As in many other coastal areas worldwide, environmental pressures related to population growth on the Mediterranean coast are further amplified by the

30 development of tourism, which between 1995 and 2014 grew by almost 75% (European Environment
31 Agency, 2014).

32 Coastal zones are considered as one of the main climate change hotspots, with major expected
33 impacts such as damage of built environments due to extreme events (e.g. storm surges), permanent
34 inundation of low-lying areas and land loss due to higher erosion rates (Wong et al., 2014). Apart
35 from these direct impacts, wider consequences are expected, such as groundwater salinization and
36 impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity, tourism, agriculture, industry, energy production, port
37 activities, health, cultural heritage, among others (Lequeux and Ciavola, 2011; Ramieri et al., 2011;
38 Giambastiani et al., 2017; Reimann et al., 2018).

39 Vulnerability to sea level rise and marine floods is a complex issue influenced by interrelated
40 phenomena of highly dynamic and uncertain nature. High-impact events such as hurricane Katrina in
41 2005 and hurricane Sandy in 2012 in US, or storm Xynthia in France in 2010, raised and renewed the
42 awareness of the population on the vulnerability of coastal areas and dangers of inhabiting coastal
43 zones prone to flooding.

44 Studies on vulnerability to floods in coastal zones seem to be expanding recently (Roy and
45 Blaschke, 2015; Perini et al., 2016; Seenath et al., 2016; Di Risio et al., 2017; Christie et al., 2018;
46 Zhang et al., 2019, among others). Yet, there is no single standardized way to measure vulnerability
47 (Balica et al., 2012). Satta (2014) distinguished four different categories of methods for assessing
48 coastal vulnerability: (i) index/indicators-based methods; (ii) methods based on dynamic computer
49 models; (iii) GIS-based decision support tools; and (iv) visualization tools. For this research, it has
50 been chosen to utilize an index-based approach, after considering the strengths and weaknesses of the
51 above methods. Index-based methods express coastal vulnerability by a one-dimensional, generally
52 unitless, vulnerability index. One of the major strengths of index-based methods is that they offer
53 clear comparability of vulnerability between different areas (Balica et al., 2012). In this respect,
54 "vulnerability index" is defined by the IPCC glossary (IPCC, 2014) as a metric characterizing the
55 vulnerability of a system. The general aim is to simplify a number of complex and interacting
56 parameters, represented by diverse data types, to a form that is more easily understood and more
57 useful as a management tool (Nguyen et al., 2016). In this way, these indexes are based on the
58 quantitative or semi-quantitative evaluation and combination of several variables (Abuodha and
59 Woodroffe, 2010; Ramieri et al., 2011).

60 One of the initial attempts to derive a coastal vulnerability index for assessing sensitivity to SLR
61 was the one by Gornitz (1991), where seven variables related to flooding and erosion hazards (relief,
62 rock type, landform, relative sea level change, shoreline change, tidal range and mean wave height)
63 were combined at a regional scale. Thieler and Hammar-Klose (2000) applied a similar index to study
64 coastal vulnerability of the US Atlantic coast to SLR. Following these studies, many different,
65 modified versions of the Coastal Vulnerability Index (CVI) have been applied to assess coastal
66 vulnerability on different scales (e.g. Pendleton et al., 2005; Abdouha and Woodroffe, 2006;
67 Szlafsztein and Sterr, 2007; Özyurt and Ergin, 2009; McLaughlin and Cooper, 2010; Alexandrakis
68 and Poulos, 2014; Di Risio et al., 2017; and many others). More comprehensive review on different
69 applications of CVI can be found in Abuodha and Woodroffe (2010), Ramieri et al. (2011), Balica et
70 al. (2012), Satta (2014) and Nguyen et al. (2016).

71 The main aim of this study is to propose a method for assessing coastal vulnerability with focus
72 on marine floods that will be at the same time scientifically sound and easy to use. The idea is to
73 derive a replicable framework that could help future planning and decision making in many different
74 fields, such as where to invest in order to improve the level of coastal protection. In this study, a
75 modified version of the CVI is proposed to evaluate vulnerability of different coastal segments to
76 SLR and marine floods. In order to make it widely applicable, the CVI is composed of five essential
77 physical variables: elevation, dunes, artificial protection, shoreline change and land cover.



Fig. 1. Location of the study area within the coastal area of Ravenna province, Italy (NW Adriatic Sea).

78
79
80

81 Prior to estimating a final vulnerability level, the variables were weighted among each other through
82 expert judgement, based on the analytical hierarchy process (AHP) method. In this way, each of the
83 components (variables) was assigned with certain levels of importance in deriving the final
84 vulnerability levels. Therefore, simplistic assumption that all variables equally contribute to the

85 overall vulnerability was discarded. Finally, index verification was performed by comparing the
86 obtained results with the outcomes of flood hazard maps from another study, something for which
87 there are very few examples in similar studies to date (e.g. Del Río and Gracia, 2009).

88

89 **2. Study area**

90

91 The demonstration site for this study was the 34 km long coastal area within the Ravenna province
92 (Italy), a low-lying coastal sector located along the NW Adriatic Sea (Fig. 1). This area is historically
93 known as being susceptible to coastal flooding and erosion (Perini et al., 2017). The southern part of
94 the alluvial plain of Po River, where the study area is located, is characterized by extensive shoreward
95 urbanization. This was driven mainly by the tourism boom that started after World War II, being
96 particularly intense during the 1960s. Beach-related tourism resulted in coastal land occupation by
97 second homes and beach establishments known as "bagni" (Cencini, 1998). Such high degree of
98 coastal urban development also caused the flattening of dunes for construction purposes (Sytnik and
99 Stecchi, 2015). Apart from beach-related tourism, land cover change was also driven by the
100 development of oil and chemical industries, located particularly in the vicinity of the Ravenna
101 harbour. A great share of land cover corresponds to cropland but there are also natural areas with
102 conservation designation (Sites of Community Importance and Special Protection Areas).

103 The area is characterized by dissipative beaches composed of fine-to-medium sands and with low
104 elevation above mean sea level (MSL) (Perini et al., 2016). It is a microtidal area, with mean neap
105 tidal range of 30-40 cm and mean spring tidal range of 80-90 cm (Armaroli et al., 2012). Along with
106 reduced river sediment supply, mainly due to the land use changes in the river basins, dam
107 construction, flood control works and extensive bed material mining (Preciso et al., 2012), the major
108 causes of coastal erosion are dune destruction, disruption of longshore sediment transport by harbours
109 and piers, land subsidence (Teatini et al., 2005; Taramelli et al., 2015; Perini et al., 2017; Antonellini
110 et al., 2019) and marine storms. Land subsidence along the Ravenna coastline is one of the most
111 significant along the regional coastal area (up to 20mm/yr, Perini et al., 2017). Intense storms mainly
112 originate from Bora (NE) and Scirocco (SE) winds (Ciavola et al., 2007; Perini et al., 2011; Armaroli
113 and Duo, 2018). Storm surge levels are significant: even low return period surges (e.g. a 1-in-10 year
114 event) can reach elevations close to 1 m above MSL (Masina and Ciavola, 2011). Most storms have
115 duration of less than 24h and a maximum significant wave height of about 2.5 m. The wave height is
116 generally low with 91% of occurrences below 1.25 m (Armaroli et al., 2012). The sea level rise
117 component according to IPCC AR5 (Church et al., 2013) in the northern Adriatic area is expected to
118 be between 0.30 0.07 m and 0.45 ± 0.12 (Table 2 of Perini et al., 2017). Because of the high
119 susceptibility to coastal erosion, a great number of artificial protection structures were built along the
120 shoreline starting from the late 1970s, such as emerged breakwaters, groynes and revetments
121 (Armaroli et al., 2009; Perini et al., 2017). These structures are able to protect the coast but can also
122 lead to a high environmental and landscape impact; in the study area, they have also been reported to
123 produce worsening of the water quality and increased sedimentation of silts and clays (Preti et al.,
124 2010).

125

126 **3. Methodology**

127

128 The workflow of this study includes: (i) preparation of input data and assignation of vulnerability
129 scores to coastal segments in relation to input variables; (ii) determination of the weights based on
130 expert judgment for each input variable; and (iii) deriving the overall score of coastal vulnerability
131 index for each segment considering both vulnerability score related to input variables and associated
132 weights.

133

134

135 *3.1. Input data and assigning of vulnerability scores*

136 Based on literature review and non-structured discussions with experts, mainly local hydrologists,
137 geologists, and geomorphologists familiar with the area, five variables were chosen as being relevant
138 in reflecting physical vulnerability to SLR and marine floods: elevation, presence/absence of dunes,
139 presence/absence of artificial protection structures, shoreline change rates, and land cover. The choice
140 for five variables was based on the objective of creating a simple, yet relevant, index. Such index
141 could be replicated and exported to different locations within similar environments, i.e. sandy
142 microtidal coastal areas. Values of each variable were assigned with vulnerability scores from 1 to 5,
143 with 1 being the lowest contribution to vulnerability and 5 being the highest (based on Gornitz, 1990)
144 (Table 1). The extraction of values for each variable was performed in ArcGIS 10.1.

145 According to Nguyen et al. (2016), segmentation aimed at ranking different sections of the
146 coastline based on vulnerability (i.e. variables that determine vulnerability) is useful to determine
147 high priority areas for vulnerability reduction. In this respect, the study area has been divided into 36
148 segments ("sectors") for the coastal vulnerability assessment (Fig. 1). These segments have an
149 approximate length of 1 km (or less, if they are disrupted by river mouths), while the landward
150 boundary for each segment was chosen to be 1 km from shoreline. We believe that this size of
151 segments is not too large to overshadow the local specificity and variability of receptors, and yet not
152 too small to overlook the true spatial extent of flooding impacts.

153 Elevation values were extracted from the 2012 Digital Terrain Model (DTM) of 1 m horizontal
154 resolution and 20 cm vertical precision, derived from LIDAR surveys and provided by ENI ("Ente
155 Nazionale Idrocarburi"), an Italian multinational oil and gas company. Since the elevation in the study
156 area (i.e. 1 km inland from the coastline) ranges to approximately 7 m above MSL, this range was
157 split into five equal intervals to which vulnerability scores were assigned, with addition that all
158 elevation values below MSL were automatically considered as having highest vulnerability. For each
159 sector, mean elevation was calculated to assign the vulnerability score. Low elevations were
160 associated with high vulnerability scores; high elevations were given low vulnerability scores (Table
161 1).

162 The layer showing the position and extent of coastal dunes was manually digitized based on 2011
163 WorldView-2 multispectral image of 1.84 m horizontal resolution, while the layer showing artificial
164 protection structures was manually digitized using the high-resolution World Imagery Basemap
165 feature (ArcGIS 10.1), based on high resolution satellite images provided by DigitalGlobe®.
166 Vulnerability scores for both variables were assigned based on percentage of shoreline in each
167 segment covered by dunes/artificial protection structures (Table 1). In the latter case both shore-
168 normal structures (e.g. groynes, by calculating alongshore length of their base) and shore-parallel
169 ones (e.g. breakwaters) were considered.

170 Historical rates of shoreline change were determined by analyzing shoreline position in 1954 and
171 2011, using the Digital Shoreline Analysis System (DSAS) extension for ArcGIS provided by the
172 United States Geological Survey (USGS) (Thieler et al., 2000).

173 The longest period available between reliable sources for shoreline position was used in order to
174 offset short-term variability due to the dynamic nature of the area. The 1954 shoreline was manually
175 digitized from aerial photos for the study of Sytnik et al. (2018) and kindly provided by the authors.
176 The 2011 shoreline was derived by processing high-resolution multispectral WorldView-2 satellite
177 imagery of 1.84 m resolution, the same that was used for extraction of the position and extent of
178 coastal dunes. The rate of shoreline change was calculated by using the end point rate (EPR) statistical
179 measure. The overall output values of shoreline changes in the area, according to EPR, were divided
180 into five equal segments in order to assign the 1 to 5 vulnerability values.

181 Land cover types were obtained from 2012 CORINE land cover maps (100 m positional accuracy)
182 by the European Environment Agency (EEA), Copernicus Land Monitoring Services, in order to use
183 a general, easily available source of information. CORINE land cover classes were reclassified to
184 seven land cover groups: beaches and dunes, forests, marsh, agriculture, barren soil, built-up areas,

185 and water bodies. Since the focus here is on protection of the landscape from marine floods, the
 186 different land cover types were evaluated on the basis of their relative role in attenuating water flow,
 187 based on their infiltration properties. This way, vulnerability scores were assigned for each land cover
 188 class (Table 1) based on its infiltration properties, i.e. runoff potential (based to some extent on
 189 Hatzopoulos et al., 2010 and Silva et al., 2010). If a certain sector consisted of several land cover
 190 types, the vulnerability score was assigned according to the predominant type.

191
 192 **Table 1:** Designation of vulnerability scores based on range of values for each input variable used to derive the Coastal
 193 Vulnerability Index.

Variables	Range of values	Vulnerability score
Elevation	Up to 1.4 m	5
	1.4–2.8 m	4
	2.8–4.2 m	3
	4.2–5.6 m	2
	5.6–7.0 m	1
Dune coverage	0–20%	5
	20–40%	4
	40–60%	3
	60–80%	2
	80–100%	1
Shoreline covered by artificial protection structures	0–20%	5
	20–40%	4
	40–60%	3
	60–80%	2
	80–100%	1
Recent shoreline change (m/yr)	–5 and below	5
	–5 to –2.5	4
	–2.5 to 0	3
	0 to +2.5	2
	+2.5 and above	1
Land cover	Built-up areas, water bodies	5
	Barren soil	4
	Agriculture	3
	Marsh	2
	Beaches and dunes, forests	1

194
 195

196 3.2. Analytic hierarchy process (AHP)

197 The weighting of the variables that contribute to coastal vulnerability is being increasingly
 198 implemented in recent vulnerability assessments. The variables are weighted in order to reflect the
 199 significance of each variable in contributing to overall coastal vulnerability. One of the most common
 200 weighting methods is the analytical hierarchy process (AHP), which, although developed in the 1970s
 201 (Saaty, 1977, 1980), is lately becoming more frequently used in coastal vulnerability studies (e.g. Yin
 202 et al., 2012; Le Cozzanet et al., 2013; Mani Murali et al., 2013; Bagdanaviciute et al., 2015). This
 203 weighting method is a multi-criteria decision making approach that employs a pair-wise comparison
 204 procedure to arrive at a scaled set of preferences among a set of alternatives. The scores are usually
 205 assigned by experts and a comparison matrix is produced, reflecting the importance of each variable
 206 relative to all other variables. Having a comparison matrix, a priority vector, which is basically the
 207 normalized eigenvector of the matrix, is computed. This is done by dividing each of the columns in
 208 the matrix by the corresponding sum. As the last step, the average values of each row are computed
 209 and these are used as weights (Mani Murali et al., 2013).

210 In this study the weightings were done by six experts, all having background in environmental
 211 science (hydrology, geology, geomorphology) and all familiar with coastal processes in the area. The
 212 scores, reflecting to which extent one variable is more (or less) important than another in contributing
 213 to coastal vulnerability in the area, were assigned using the standard AHP scale (Table 2).

214 The AHP also provides a mathematical measure to determine the consistency of judgments. The
 215 coherence of the pair-wise comparisons is calculated through a consistency ratio (CR) which is
 216 utilized to indicate the likelihood that the matrix judgments were assigned randomly:

217

218 $CR = CI/RI$

219

220 Where the RI (random index) stands for the average of resulting consistency index that depends
221 on the order of the matrix by Saaty (1977), and the CI (consistency index) is expressed as:

222

223 $CI = (\lambda_{max} - 1)/(n-1)$

224

225 Where λ_{max} is the largest or principal eigenvalue of the matrix, and n is the order of the matrix. A
226 CR of the order of 0.1 or less is considered to be a reasonable level of consistency (Saaty, 1980).

227

228 **Table 2:** Pair-wise comparison matrix that reflects preferences among a set of options, commonly used in analytical
229 hierarchy process.

Intensity of importance	Definition
1/9	Extremely less important
1/7	Very strongly less important
1/5	Strongly less important
1/3	Moderately less important
1	Equally important
3	Moderately more important
5	Strongly more important
7	Very strongly more important
9	Extremely more important

230

231

232 *3.3. Calculation of final vulnerability scores*

233 The final vulnerability score for each segment was calculated by applying the simple weighted
234 sum of all variables (Eastman et al., 1995), according to the adapted formula:

235

236 $V = \Sigma (W_i X_i)$

237

238 Where V stands for vulnerability level, w for weight of variable i and x for the score of variable i
239 (1-5).

240 Vulnerability scores were then normalized to a scale from 1 to 5 following the formula:

241

242 $N (v_i) = ((V_i - V_{min}) / (V_{max} - V_{min})) * 5$

243

244 Where the N (v_i) is the normalized vulnerability value v_i for variable V, V_{min} is the minimum
245 value for variable V, and the V_{max} is the maximum value for variable V.

246

247 **4. Results**

248

249 *4.1. Vulnerability scores based on variables*

250 The vulnerability scores for each variable were assigned to each of the 36 coastline sectors, based
251 on the vulnerability classification in Table 1.

252 The whole study area belongs to a wide alluvial plain and is therefore characterized by very low
253 relief. Elevation in the study zone does not exceed 7.7 m above MSL, but even these heights
254 correspond to isolated points and most of the area shows elevations lower than 3.5 m above MSL. By
255 defining vulnerability classes as being separated by increments of 1.4 m, almost all of the study area

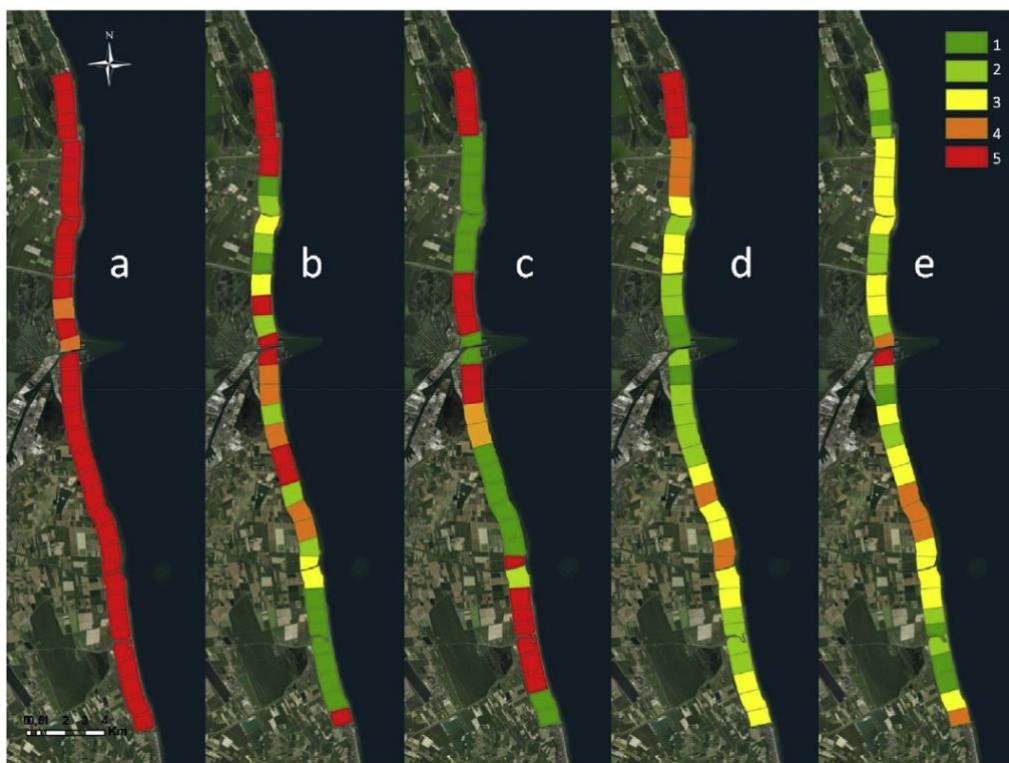
256 (Fig. 1) is assigned with the highest possible vulnerability score of 5 since the mean elevation exceeds
257 1.4 m only at sectors 13 and 15. Vulnerability values for elevation in the area are shown in Fig. 2a.

258 As for the dunes (Fig. 2b), sectors 1-6 show the highest possible vulnerability score of 5 since
259 there are no dunes present in the area. On the other hand, sectors 30-35, at the southern part of the
260 study zone, were assigned with the lowest vulnerability score of 1 since all of them have over 88%
261 of the coastline protected by dunes. This area, belonging to Lido di Dante pinewood, is known as one
262 of the last remaining coastal stretches with natural dunes in Emilia-Romagna region. Aerial photos of
263 the study area show strong contrasts between urbanized stretches of coast vs. those covered with
264 natural dunes (Fig. 3).

265 Regarding artificial protection structures, almost two thirds of sectors are not protected with
266 extensive structures such as groynes, breakwaters and attached rubble mound slopes. These sectors
267 were assigned with vulnerability score of 5. Some other sectors are fully protected by either groynes,
268 breakwaters or rubble mound slopes and are assigned the lowest possible vulnerability score of 1.
269 This particularly relates to urbanized stretches such as sectors 15-16 (artificial protection structures
270 in front of Porto Corsini/Marina di Ravenna settlement), sectors 21-26 (in front of Punta Marina and
271 Lido Adriano settlements) or sectors 34-36 (in front of Lido di Classe settlement). Fig. 2c shows the
272 vulnerability values considering presence/absence of artificial protection structures in the area.

273 When considering shoreline change, sectors 1, 2, 3 and 4 (north of Reno River mouth) were
274 assigned with the highest level of vulnerability (value = 5), since majority of transects show average
275 erosion rates of over-7 m/yr. The sectors that showed highest accretion trends on average were sectors
276 14, 15 and 17. These areas, located around the jetties of Porto Corsini/Marina di Ravenna were
277 assigned with the lowest vulnerability score (value=1). The vulnerability classes according to
278 average shoreline change rates by sectors are shown in Fig. 2d.

279



280
281 **Fig. 2.** Map showing vulnerability values for elevation (2a), dunes (2b), artificial protection structures (2c), shoreline
282 change (2d) and land cover (2e) for each sector in the study area.

283

284 It is important to mention the areas located in the northern part (sectors 5 to 7, between the Reno
285 river mouth and Casalborgsetti - north of the Marina Romea pinewood). These areas are protected by

286 attached rubble mound slopes that were built in the 1990s due to the severe erosion, and therefore
287 shoreline retreat should be considered here as an indication of a critical stretch of coast, although
288 since the 1990s the shoreline is in a fixed position. This is reflected in considerably high vulnerability
289 values assigned to these sectors (value 4) regarding shoreline retreat. Furthermore, the
290 aforementioned port of Porto Corsini (sectors 15 and 16) reached its present configuration in 1970s.
291 Both areas are now represented by hard and fixed coastlines that are no longer affected by erosion.
292 However, sector 15 also includes the beaches adjacent to the port jetties.

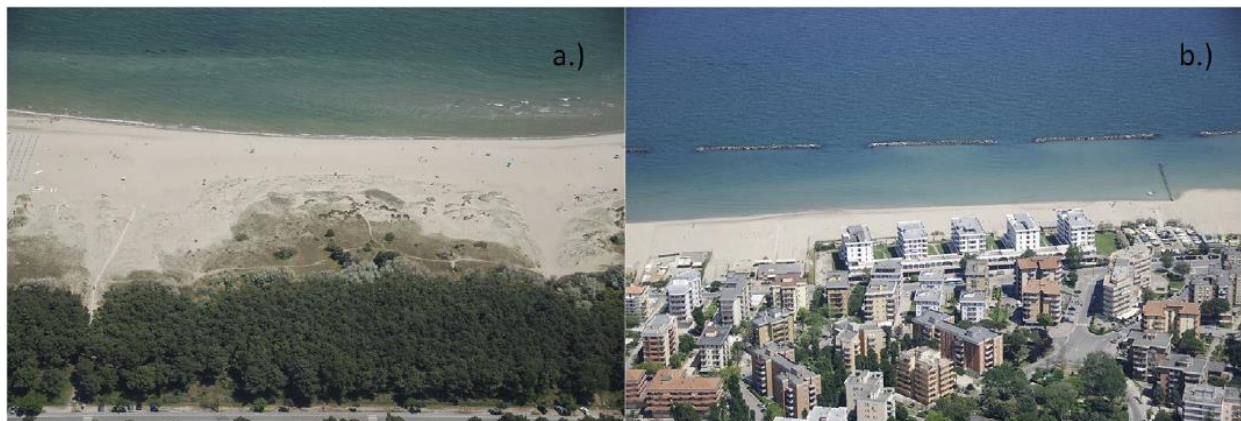
293 As for the land cover (Fig. 2e), the only sector attributed with the highest vulnerability score of 5
294 was sector 16, but also other sectors (e.g. sectors 23-25) had relatively high vulnerability scores (value
295 = 4) due to a predominantly urban land cover. The southern part of the study area (sectors 30-34) had
296 low vulnerability regarding land cover, since these sectors are predominantly covered with forest.

297

298 4.2. Analytic hierarchy process

299 Out of the six weightings by the experts (mainly hydrologists and geologists with experience in
300 different kinds of coastal monitoring), two of them were not considered in deriving final weights
301 since the consistency ratio was exceeding the 0.1 threshold (namely 0.12 and 0.15), meaning that the
302 weighting in these two cases was more random than it should be for considering it as consistent. The
303 remaining four weightings showed satisfactory consistency ratios (0.04, 0.06, 0.07 and 0.08) and were
304 used to derive average weights. The highest resulting weight was for elevation (0.391), followed by
305 dunes (0.245), shoreline change rates (0.215) and artificial protection (0.167), while the lowest was
306 for land cover (0.135).

307



308

309 **Fig. 3.** Aerial photos showing natural dune (a) and urbanized coastal stretches (b) in the study area (Photos provided by
310 N. Greggio and B. Giambastaini, University of Bologna).

311

312 4.3. Final vulnerability score

313 Final vulnerability scores and the weight value for each variable and for each sector are shown in
314 Table 3 (and visualized in Fig. 4) for all sectors. The final vulnerability values are calculated with two
315 decimal places, since in this way the difference between sectors is more trans-
316 parent than rounding them to integer values.

317 The highest vulnerability to SLR and marine floods, with a final vulnerability score equal to 4.56,
318 appears in sectors 1, 2 and 4 at the northernmost end of the study area. This area, north of the Reno
319 River mouth, is characterized by a natural barrier beach backed by brackish marshes (Nordstrom et
320 al., 2015). It is known for its erosive trend over the last 50 years, mainly due to the reduced sediment
321 supply, land subsidence and lack of adequate protection systems (Antonellini et al., 2008; Preciso et
322 al., 2012). These sectors are featured by low elevation (0.45-0.8 m mean height), shoreline retreat
323 (around 7 m/yr), no dunes and no artificial protection structures.

324 It is interesting to note that there are no sectors assigned with very low vulnerability, i.e. with
325 vulnerability score 1. As for the final vulnerability scores of around 2, the lowest in this study, two
326 areas stand out, one of sectors 10 and 11, and another of sector 35. Sectors 10 and 11 represent an
327 area belonging to Marina Romea pinewood, where the coastline is largely protected by natural dunes
328 (71 and 85% respectively) as well as breakwaters and thus minor erosive trends occur (lower than
329 -0.5 m/yr in both cases). Furthermore, these sectors are largely covered with coastal forest (“pineta”),
330 contributing to flood attenuation by natural infiltration. As for the sector 35, this part of the coastline
331 is also covered with forests, belonging to Lido di Dante pinewood, and almost fully protected by
332 dunes.

333

334 5. Discussion

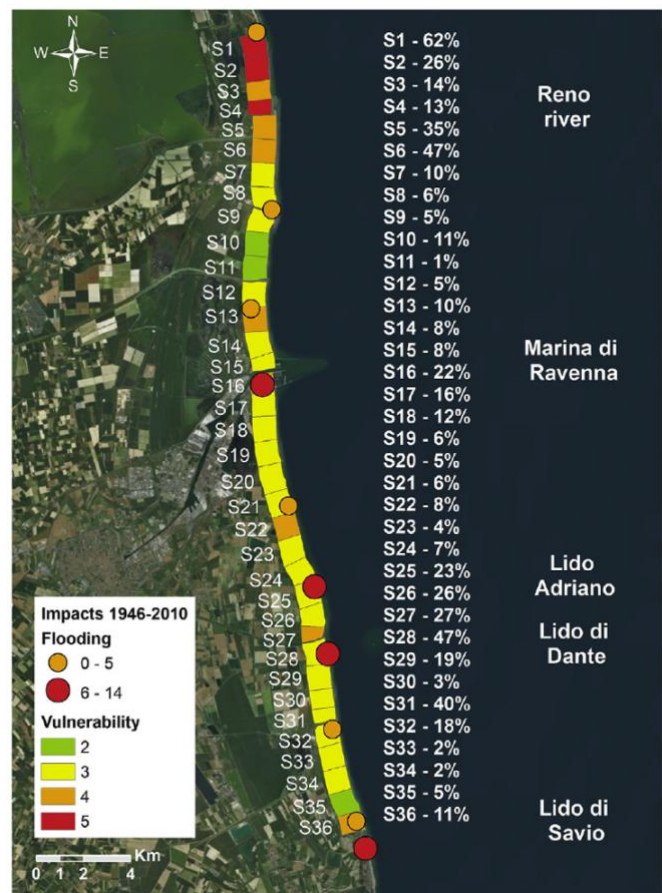
335

336 Whenever a composite index that is supposed to reflect vulnerability is designed, the choice of its
337 variables is partly subjective. In this study it was decided to use five variables that could capture the
338 vulnerability to SLR and marine floods in the study area. These variables were chosen as relevant
339 based on literature review (e.g. Gornitz, 1991; Abuodha and Woodroffe, 2010; Mahapatra et al., 2015;
340 Nguyen et al., 2016) and the engagement of different experts, so that the chosen variables were
341 significant for the local context and for the processes considered in the vulnerability assessment (i.e.
342 flooding and SLR). Balica et al. (2012) argues that an index using few variables is less reliable than
343 a more complex one, since a large variation in one variable can have a strong influence on the overall
344 index. However, since one of the aims of this study was exploring an index that could be widely
345 applicable, the intention was to remain within few relevant variables so that this kind of assessment
346 could also be performed in conditions where there are not many different types of data available. In
347 addition, choosing fewer variables can reduce redundancy (in terms of avoiding closely related
348 variables reflecting the same processes) and help to obtain a simple, feasible index (Del Río and
349 Gracia, 2009). In this case, updating values of chosen variables should be reasonably easy to obtain
350 at any given area without requiring extensive surveying (Villa and McLeod, 2002). Consequently, the
351 resulting tool is not only scientifically valid, but also replicable, practical and easy to use and to
352 communicate to coastal managers.

353 Regarding the influence of the different variables in total vulnerability, a weighted CVI method
354 provides more consistent spatial distribution of highly vulnerable sectors than the original,
355 unweighted CVI approach (Bagdanaviciute et al., 2015). This way, in areas with a significant
356 alongshore variability of some of the variables most relevant to determine vulnerability (e.g. dune
357 cover or shoreline change), a weighted index allows to assign the highest vulnerability to those sectors
358 which are actually the most vulnerable ones, while an unweighted approach would under- or
359 overestimate vulnerability.

360 In this work the highest weight resulting from the AHP was assigned to elevation. In this respect,
361 although elevation is very low in the whole study area, it was divided into five vulnerability classes
362 for the purpose of this assessment. However, the question on separation of classes arises: Is the
363 elevation of 1.5m really so less vulnerable than the elevation of 1m that they belong to different
364 vulnerability classes? This depends on the properties of forcing, i.e. the height of the water level and
365 its potential to penetrate landward. In this respect, it could occur that a certain height of water level
366 will cause as much damage on locations at 1.5m elevation above MSL (e.g. sector 13 of the study
367 area) as on those at 1m elevation (e.g. sector 14). Therefore, it would be convenient to determine,
368 wherever possible, the threshold elevation above which the potential for inland flooding will be
369 substantial. This would be particularly important in locations characterized by uniformly low
370 topography, as occurs in the study area. In locations where threshold determination is hindered by
371 lack of data, the objective procedure of dividing the range of elevations existing in the study area into
372 five equal intervals to assign vulnerability can be considered acceptable. Additionally, the mean
373 elevation is influenced by the chosen landward extension of the sectors. In any case, the sectors where

374 the mean elevation is low represent areas more prone to flooding if the water levels during storms
 375 exceed the elevation of the rear part of the beach, leading to water ingress, or if the dunes or other
 376 defences are breached and the water is able to flow landward.
 377



378
 379 **Fig. 4.** Vulnerability scores, number of flooding impacts along the study area between 1946 and 2010 (Perini et al., 2011)
 380 and percentage of flooded surface in each sector for the 1-in-10 years event and calculated by the Regional authorities for
 381 the EU Floods Directive (Perini et al., 2016).
 382

383 As for the dunes, the variable was chosen because it constitutes a significant natural buffer against
 384 SLR and marine floods. Inclusion of dunes as a variable should also stress out their importance as a
 385 barrier to intruding sea water, especially in areas where they are being removed/ destroyed for various
 386 purposes, such as in the case of Ravenna province (Sytnik and Stecchi, 2015). An important
 387 consideration when using dunes as a variable that reflects vulnerability is that the share of coastline
 388 occupied by dunes is just a partial factor, as the volume of the dunes, the elevation of the dune base,
 389 dune height, dune health, alongshore and cross-shore continuity of dunes, etc. are also essential in
 390 determining the role of dunes as protection from intruding water (Sallenger, 2000; Armaroli et al.,
 391 2012). In this respect, in some sectors of the study area the existing dunes are so deteriorated that are
 392 no longer able to act as an effective protection against marine ingress, as occurs south of Lido di
 393 Dante (Armaroli et al., 2013). On the other hand, and regarding the methodological aspect, some
 394 areas may have dunes present but if these are not of sufficient height/volume they can be overlooked
 395 in manual digitization, even from high-resolution imagery. However, and for the above stated reasons
 396 (wide replicability, ease of communication), this work was aimed at simplicity when building the
 397 composite index, and consequently it was decided to choose only dune presence as a variable.

398 The role of the artificial protection structures should also be taken with care. Perpendicular
 399 structures such as groynes can lead to sediment accretion at one side, increasing beach width and,
 400 hence, distance that flood waters need to cover to reach a receptor. However, sometimes these

401 structures can even aggravate the erosion at adjacent beaches due to the mentioned sediment retention
 402 (Hall and Pilkey, 1991). In addition, improper placement of breakwaters can lead to their sinking into
 403 sandy bottoms, which makes them more inefficient in protection (Gerwick, 2007). In fact, according
 404 to Sousa et al. (2013) the presence of engineering structures implies a higher vulnerability as they
 405 represent areas of instability and have frequent negative impacts on the coastline, although they may
 406 provide local short-term protection. In this respect, a special care needs to be given when assigning
 407 the highest vulnerability scores to areas without protection structures. It could be that these areas are
 408 not protected because there are no assets at risk, but it could also be because they are stable, i.e. there
 409 is no need for placing defence structures. In that case, the vulnerability of an area without protection
 410 structures does not necessarily need to be high, while on the other hand, areas with defence structures
 411 are those with a clear erosion trend (which is why the defences were constructed) so they could
 412 intrinsically be more vulnerable. This is the case for most part of the study area, where severe erosion
 413 occurring around places like Casal Borsetti, Lido Adriano or Lido di Dante led to the building of
 414 extensive protection structures (Sytnik et al., 2018). On the other hand, in case of major storms, areas
 415 without protection structures would eventually be more vulnerable than the protected ones, as wave
 416 energy would not be dissipated by any obstacle. This is the main reason why in this work the highest
 417 vulnerability was assigned to the sectors without protection structures.

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Table 3: Final vulnerability scores and the weight value for each variable for each sector of the study area.

Sector	Elevation	Weight	Dunes	Weight	Artificial protection	Weight	Shoreline Change	Weight	Land Cover	Weight	Final vuln. score
1	5	0.391	5	0.245	5	0.167	5	0.215	2	0.135	4.56
2	5	0.391	5	0.245	5	0.167	5	0.215	2	0.135	4.56
3	5	0.391	5	0.245	5	0.167	5	0.215	1	0.135	4.41
4	5	0.391	5	0.245	5	0.167	5	0.215	2	0.135	4.56
5	5	0.391	5	0.245	1	0.167	4	0.215	3	0.135	3.75
6	5	0.391	5	0.245	1	0.167	4	0.215	3	0.135	3.75
7	5	0.391	1	0.245	1	0.167	4	0.215	3	0.135	2.69
8	5	0.391	2	0.245	1	0.167	3	0.215	3	0.135	2.72
9	5	0.391	3	0.245	1	0.167	2	0.215	3	0.135	2.75
10	5	0.391	2	0.245	1	0.167	3	0.215	2	0.135	2.15
11	5	0.391	1	0.245	1	0.167	3	0.215	2	0.135	2.31
12	5	0.391	3	0.245	5	0.167	2	0.215	3	0.135	3.05
13	4	0.391	5	0.245	5	0.167	2	0.215	3	0.135	4.01
14	5	0.391	2	0.245	5	0.167	1	0.215	2	0.135	2.83
15	4	0.391	5	0.245	1	0.167	1	0.215	4	0.135	3.20
16	5	0.391	5	0.245	1	0.167	2	0.215	5	0.135	3.58
17	5	0.391	4	0.245	5	0.167	1	0.215	2	0.135	3.36
18	5	0.391	4	0.245	5	0.167	2	0.215	1	0.135	3.45
19	5	0.391	2	0.245	4	0.167	2	0.215	3	0.135	3.03
20	5	0.391	4	0.245	4	0.167	2	0.215	2	0.135	3.41
21	5	0.391	5	0.245	1	0.167	2	0.215	3	0.135	3.28
22	5	0.391	5	0.245	1	0.167	3	0.215	3	0.135	3.52
23	5	0.391	2	0.245	1	0.167	4	0.215	4	0.135	3.10
24	5	0.391	4	0.245	1	0.167	3	0.215	4	0.135	3.40
25	5	0.391	4	0.245	1	0.167	3	0.215	4	0.135	3.40
26	5	0.391	2	0.245	1	0.167	4	0.215	3	0.135	2.95
27	5	0.391	3	0.245	5	0.167	4	0.215	3	0.135	3.94
28	5	0.391	3	0.245	2	0.167	3	0.215	3	0.135	3.17
29	5	0.391	1	0.245	5	0.167	3	0.215	3	0.135	3.18
30	5	0.391	1	0.245	5	0.167	2	0.215	2	0.135	2.80
31	5	0.391	1	0.245	5	0.167	2	0.215	1	0.135	2.65
32	5	0.391	1	0.245	5	0.167	2	0.215	2	0.135	2.80
33	5	0.391	1	0.245	5	0.167	2	0.215	1	0.135	2.65
34	5	0.391	1	0.245	5	0.167	3	0.215	1	0.135	2.89
35	5	0.391	1	0.245	1	0.167	3	0.215	3	0.135	2.46
36	5	0.391	5	0.245	1	0.167	3	0.215	4	0.135	3.66

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422 Assigning the vulnerability score to certain sectors based on land cover type also raised some
 423 questions. The procedure of assigning the vulnerability scores of different land cover types in order
 424 to obtain a single value for the entire sector, based on the predominant land cover type, might
 425 overshadow the situation at-the-ground. For instance, if a certain asset will be constructed behind a
 426 forest zone, its vulnerability regarding floods could be lower than if it was constructed behind a built-
 427 up area, although the distance of this asset from the shoreline is the same in both cases. This is because
 428 the infiltration is higher for this land cover type (forest) than for paved impervious surfaces which
 429 can transfer flood waters beyond them, if no obstacles exist to dissipate water flow energy. Therefore,

430 it would be important to also consider the land cover type between the receptor and the sea, not only
431 the predominant land cover type in the sector. In addition, coarse spatial resolution of CORINE land
432 cover input data (positional accuracy 100 m) can lead to errors when representing land cover on a
433 local level; nevertheless, the use of CORINE land cover is intended to demonstrate that easily
434 available databases can be used elsewhere to make a general assessment of vulnerability in a relatively
435 simple manner.

436 As for shoreline change rates, it is a key variable in determining vulnerability and as such should
437 be carefully evaluated. In this work, obtained rates could have been influenced to some extent by the
438 different methods employed for digitizing the 1954 and 2011 shorelines and by having used different
439 sources of input data with diverse levels of precision. However, shoreline trends in the study zone are
440 clear and the results obtained agree with previous works (Sytnik et al., 2018). Regarding the AHP,
441 Youseff et al. (2011), Bagdanaviciute et al. (2015) and Roy and Blaschke (2015) discussed the
442 advantages of using this approach in vulnerability analyses: its structured approach of decomposing
443 the analysis problem into hierarchical units and levels; its reliance on expert opinion rather than on
444 completeness of the data; the transparency of the approach; the ability to integrate independent
445 opinions and check inconsistencies; and the possibility to involve both experts and stakeholders.
446 Nevertheless, the dependency on the judgment of the experts can also be seen as a limitation of the
447 method since it can be sensitive to changes in the decision weights associated with criteria
448 (Fernandez and Lutz, 2010). In any case, in this work AHP was found to be a transparent, well-
449 structured, and “fit-for-purpose” methodology. One issue in this respect was that two of the
450 weightings had a consistency ratio above 0.1 and, although their values were only slightly higher, it
451 was decided not to include them in the final weighting. One of the experts asked for some
452 clarifications on variables prior to weighting, as he found that the variables were in some cases
453 strongly interrelated (e.g. one of the observations was that the dunes can also be viewed as part of the
454 land cover variable). Therefore, the definitions clarifying what each variable stands for should be
455 presented with care to consulted experts in order to avoid any possible confusion. Another concern in
456 this work was the relatively low number of experts involved in the weighting. However, this was the
457 case because it was decided to focus not on stakeholders with different backgrounds, but only on
458 environmental scientists with knowledge of the study area, as the CVI is related to the physical
459 characteristics of the coastal area. Notably, there was a degree of “diversity” within this group of
460 scientists as they had different backgrounds within environmental science (geography, geology and
461 hydrology).

462 An important issue in studies on composing coastal vulnerability indexes is the possibility of
463 verifying the methodology (Del Río and Gracia, 2009). In this case, the major question would be: is
464 the area assigned with the highest vulnerability level actually the most vulnerable to marine
465 ingressions? Although vulnerability is an intrinsic characteristic and hence not suitable for absolute
466 measurement or proper validation (Roy and Blaschke, 2015), a verification via the comparison of the
467 scores with other relevant studies in the area, i.e. previously published flood hazard maps, was
468 considered in this work.

469 In this way, flood hazard maps for the coastal area of Emilia Romagna, issued at the end of 2013
470 to satisfy the requests of the EU Flood Directive (2007/60/EC), were considered here for
471 “verification” purposes. The maps used were developed by the Geological Service of the Emilia-
472 Romagna Region by applying the Cost-Distance tool of ArcGIS®, taking into account three Total
473 Water Level scenarios (10, 100 and > 100 year return periods) and high resolution Digital Terrain
474 Models (DTMs) of the coast (Perini et al., 2012, 2016). More details about the methodology can be
475 found in Perini et al. (2016). Although a comparison between a vulnerability index and hazard maps
476 may in principle seem inappropriate from the conceptual point of view, the main factor involved in
477 determining flooded areas in the hazard maps used (namely elevation) is also the most significant
478 variable in the vulnerability index. Therefore, in this work the comparison between both results was
479 performed in order to evaluate the relationship between theoretically vulnerable areas and hazard
480 areas determined by water levels. For this purpose, the 36 sectors of the study zone were overlain by

481 the flood hazard maps and the percentage of flooded area for each sector was evaluated (Fig. 4). The
482 hazard maps used here were the ones showing the lowest return period floods (1-in-10 years), since
483 these reflect the highest expected frequency.

484 There were only four sectors that had more than 40% of the area covered by flood water (Fig. 4).
485 These sectors are assigned with vulnerability scores of 2.65, 3.17, 3.75 and 4.56. It is important to
486 note that one of the sectors assigned with the highest vulnerability score is the one showing the largest
487 percentage of area covered with flood water (i.e. sector 1, with 62.2% of flooded area). Also the sector
488 with lowest percentage of area covered with flood water (sector 11, 1.5%) is assigned with one of the
489 lowest vulnerability values (2.31). On the other hand, there were 16 sectors which had less than 10%
490 of their area covered with flood water. Eight of them were assigned with vulnerability scores between
491 2 and 3, while eight of them were assigned with vulnerability scores between 3 and 4. However, there
492 are some notable cases in which areas of high vulnerability scores do not correlate with those
493 estimated as prone to flooding by flood hazard maps. For example, sector 4 is assigned with
494 vulnerability score 4.56 but “only” 13% of its area is covered with flood water according to the flood
495 hazard maps analysed. It is unrealistic to expect that the results of the vulnerability analysis will
496 strictly correlate those of flood hazard maps, since flood hazard and flood vulnerability are different
497 (although in this case, related) concepts and the two analyses used two different methodologies. The
498 percentage of each sector affected by floods in the 1-in- 10-years storm depends on total water level
499 (determined by waves, tides and storm surge) and land elevation, while the proposed CVI does not
500 consider these hydrodynamic agents but includes the presence of dunes and artificial structures,
501 shoreline changes and land use. The lack of wide correspondence between both calculations
502 highlights that these approaches are not mutually excluding but complementary, as they account for
503 different factors in characterizing flood risk.

504 As demonstrated above, the coastline within the Ravenna province is affected by marine storms
505 and by both erosion and inundation. The large impact of energetic events is also reported in the
506 catalogue of historical storms produced by the regional authorities for the period 1946–2010 (Perini
507 et al., 2011). The dataset was used by Armaroli and Duo (2018) to validate the results of the
508 application of the Coastal Storm Risk Assessment Framework - CRAF (Viavattene et al., 2018) along
509 the whole regional coastal area.

510 The CRAF was developed in the EU Risc-kit project (www.risckit.eu; Van Dongeren et al., 2018).
511 It consists of a framework to identify hotspots of erosion and inundation along regional coastal areas
512 and to apply a storm impact evaluation in selected critical sites (for more information on CRAF
513 methodology and outcomes refer to: Armaroli and Duo, 2018; Christie et al., 2018, De Angeli et al.,
514 2018; Ferreira et al., 2018 and Viavattene et al., 2018). Armaroli and Duo (2018) identified the coastal
515 area within the Ravenna province as a hotspot of inundation and erosion. The authors also carried out
516 a validation of the results obtained with the CRAF that confirmed the reliability of the results. The
517 evaluation of the number of inundation events between 1946 and 2010 (Fig. 3 in Armaroli and Duo,
518 2018, left panel, reanalysed for the present study and presented in Fig. 4) that affected the coastal area
519 shows that the most critical sites (number \geq 6 of inundation events that caused an impact) are located
520 in sector 16 (Marina di Ravenna), 24–26 (Lido Adriano), 28 (Lido di Dante) and south of sector 36
521 (Lido di Savio). The sectors 24–26 and 28 are scored 3 in the present work (medium vulnerability,
522 Fig. 4) and are protected by defence structures. Sectors 16 and 36 show a better correspondence with
523 the historical information and are scored 4 (high vulnerability). As mentioned above, the reason for
524 the difference between the observed impacts and the CVI is related to the variables included in the
525 CVI, which do not include the hazard component, and the limitations of the method described above.
526 As an example related to these limitations, the presence of protection structures is considered to lower
527 the vulnerability while, in the case of the study area, they are located where the coast is more
528 vulnerable. Considering the inundation hazard, it was demonstrated that the coast is primarily exposed
529 to high surge levels (Armaroli et al., 2012), therefore breakwaters are less effective in wave energy
530 dissipation than they would be without high surge levels.

531 An example of the possible application of the CVI for coastal management purposes along the
532 Emilia-Romagna coastline is presented hereafter. As mentioned above, in the framework of the EU
533 Floods Directive (2007/60/EC) regional managers carried out the analysis of flooding extension for
534 different return period storms, using simplified inundation models (Perini et al., 2016). The flooding
535 extension was then combined with land use maps to produce risk maps of the coastal area (see Perini
536 et al., 2016 for details on the methodology). For the creation of risk maps, land use typologies were
537 firstly scored by coastal managers, according to their perception, based also on experience, of the
538 degree of susceptibility to be damaged of each land use typology. The scoring can thus be considered
539 a simplified evaluation of the vulnerability of different land use categories in relation to their
540 characteristics (e.g., agricultural area, built-up area, beach, dune, etc.). It is however clear that the
541 “risk” maps produced by regional managers for the Floods Directive do not include a proper
542 vulnerability evaluation of all the elements exposed (located in flood-prone areas). Therefore the CVI
543 presented in this paper could help coastal managers to better define the vulnerability, and
544 consequently define the risk level, of coastal sectors with a more complete and robust methodology.
545 Additionally, a large database of coastal physical characteristics is available for the Emilia-Romagna
546 Region (named In_Coast1). However, the information stored in the database is used separately for
547 risk evaluations. The CVI could also become a valuable tool for coastal managers because it
548 aggregates relevant (already available) variables to provide a clear indication of vulnerable sites.
549 Although regional and local managers are aware of the criticalities of the coastal area, specific and
550 simple tools to define its vulnerability are not used. The CVI developed can thus represent a first step
551 towards a more comprehensive evaluation of coastal vulnerability which can be easily carried out
552 also by non-experts of coastal dynamics.

553 For what concerns the exportability of the methodology, it is important to note that the variables
554 included in the CVI can be retrieved or produced also for data-poor coastal areas. Freely available
555 remote sensing products such as satellite imagery (which can be used to define shoreline trends,
556 identify the presence of dunes and protection structures), land use and land cover maps (already
557 available or that can be produced using satellite imagery) and global DEMs can be used to build the
558 CVI, although with different accuracies with respect to the dataset presented in this paper. The forcing
559 components, on the contrary, are more difficult to retrieve or produce. However, many coastal areas
560 worldwide are lacking this type of detailed information. For this reason, the CVI does not consider
561 the hydrodynamic forcing, because the proposed method is meant to be replicated also in coastal
562 zones for which there is a lack of long-term research data on hydrodynamic conditions and where
563 coastal managers might not be aware of waves and water levels dynamics.

564

565 **6. Conclusions**

566

567 This paper proposes an easy-to-use coastal vulnerability index (CVI) to sea level rise and marine
568 floods that is employed to examine vulnerability of the coastal area in the Ravenna Province (Italy).
569 The index is formulated with five physical variables which are relevant for the intended purpose, yet
570 not difficult to obtain: elevation, dunes, artificial protection structures, shoreline change rates, and
571 land cover. In this way, the index is easy to apply and to communicate to stakeholders, also providing
572 exportability and wide applicability. Each variable was assigned different levels of importance
573 (weights) by experts familiar with the study area, by applying analytic hierarchic process (AHP). In
574 this way quantitative and qualitative data were integrated in a transparent and structured way. This
575 coastal vulnerability index could be replicated to similar (sandy and microtidal) coastal environments,
576 by using AHP to include the local context of the study area where it will be applied. Potential
577 uncertainties in this framework were carefully considered along the different steps of the procedure,

¹ available at https://applicazioni.regione.emilia-romagna.it/cartografia_sgss/user/viewer.jsp?service=costa

578 such as assigning vulnerability scores to input variables, weighting procedure and verification of the
579 methodology.

580 The verification of the proposed index was one of the key issues in this study. The comparison of
581 the assigned vulnerability scores with flood hazard maps based on water levels yielded inconsistent
582 results, showing the complementarity of both approaches to deliver a full risk assessment.
583 Nevertheless, more detailed knowledge on observed floods and their effects in the study area would
584 be convenient to reach a more sound verification. The greatest question arises from the fact that the
585 different variables influencing coastal floods are dynamic and interconnected, so there is a high level
586 of uncertainty regarding their future behaviour. The forcing is changing, since sea level is rising. In
587 many areas, such as the Ravenna province, the coasts are subsiding and sediment input is strongly
588 reduced. If these phenomena get jointly exacerbated in the future, this could impact shoreline change
589 rates, which will in turn reduce the flood pathway towards the receptor, i.e. towards built-up areas
590 near the coastline which will probably grow even more in the future. Since future changes in forcing
591 and receptors are highly unpredictable, a wide range of uncertainty should be thoroughly considered
592 in future coastal planning.

593 In data-rich coastal areas, the proposed index can be used by coastal managers as a simple tool to
594 aggregate relevant variables in order to obtain a clear identification of sectors that are highly
595 vulnerable to sea level rise and marine floods. In these cases, the use of the CVI could be a first step
596 towards a complete risk assessment that would have to include also the evaluation of the hazard and
597 the exposure. In data-poor coastal areas, one of the main advantages of the index for coastal planning
598 and management is the possibility to obtain the relevant variables by freely available remote sensing
599 data. In this way, the index provides an easy way to evaluate vulnerability to coastal floods that can
600 be achieved even by non-experts in coastal dynamics. Furthermore, a key potential of this approach
601 lies in its visual component - the integration of the framework into geographical information systems
602 results in maps which are highly informative for coastal managers and decision makers, and can also
603 be a powerful public awareness tool.

604 Finally, it must be pointed out that, although the identification of vulnerable sectors can be a solid
605 basis for considering adaptation in the area, any adaptation action should be based on more detailed
606 bottom-up analysis.

607

608 **Authors contribution**

609 IS and LR conceived and designed the study. IS performed the analysis and wrote the manuscript
610 with contributions from LR. CA provided the Lidar data and contributed to the identification of part
611 of the reference literature. All authors revised the paper and contributed to the interpretation and
612 discussion of the results.

613

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