



EURAU18 alicante  
RETROACTIVE RESEARCH  
**CONGRESS PROCEEDINGS**

ISBN: 978-84-1302-003-7  
DOI: 10.14198/EURAU18alicante

Editor: Javier Sánchez Merina  
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**Titulación de Arquitectura**

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# Villages in search of an author

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Italian ghost towns reactivation: strategies and design

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## Synopsis

The phenomenon of abandonment is widespread all over the world. All the urban realities, even the most excellent from the point of view of the administration of the territory, present the characteristics of the dismissal. Abandonment can involve an isolated building, a part of the city or an entire urban reality, a village or a network of villages. It is a complex phenomenon in constant change that depends on geographical, social and political aspects of a place. In the case of Italian territory, the phenomenon of abandon affects above all the medieval villages diffused on the entire peninsula, not far from the artistic, cultural and architectural heritage, valued and celebrated all over the world for its beauty. The topic of this work are the sleeping beauties (A. Mocchiola, 2014), small forgotten towns, small fragments of history and daily life lost in the silence of absence, distant from the institution, hidden from the network of navigators, unreachable mobile, ignored by Wi-Fi. The abandoned Italy is a tourist map read backwards.

## 1. Analysis

The argumentation is focused on this part of unknown Italy, which risks of disappear, and is accomplished through a project and a possible strategy to bring these places to life, starting with the idea that they represent a cultural heritage and strong identity, and possibly may be an economic resource to be valued. The discussion is divided mainly into two parts, in the first is studied and analyzed the phenomenon with strong attention to the Italian cases and with the intent to collect and unify the fragmented sources on the topic; in the second part it assumes a reactivation intervention applied to a case study.

The study of the phenomenon is spread through a metaphorical journey that runs through the entire Italian territory, which suggests that all around the peninsula (islands included) there are at least 175 totally abandoned villages. In addition to the mapping of villages was carried out a study on the origins of the villages, almost of medieval fortified and located in inaccessible areas for defensive reasons. From a typological and morphological analysis are reported the most recurrent developments, which include *the terranean house, the row house, the profferlo house, the arches house, the wall house and the tower house* (G. Caniggia, G. L. Maffei, 1979), to create a classification for best develop intervention strategies.

## 2. Dismission

The analysis of decline of the villages shows that the mainly reason is economic, linked to the economic boom of the 50s, and environmental, such as the occurrence of natural disasters such as landslides or earthquakes. Only a small part of the villages have been abandoned for causes related to unfavorable position or social reasons.

The research aims to understand the role of Italian architecture in the abandonment phenomenon. Italian architects, from World War II onwards, have gone along with the trend to depopulation of rural areas through the creation of new urban suburbs, with the explicit intention of recreating an organization that was referring to rural morphologies. Only in 1995 Giancarlo De Carlo create a proposal for *Colletta di Castelbianco*, a village on the Ligurian slopes. The project, visionary for the time, was aimed at the reactivation of the village through the clabing of internet (M. C. Torricelli, 1997). The result was the telematic village, the flagship of the reactivation of the Italian villages. Although in Italy there are some recovery examples of villages, the decommissioned and abandoned heritage in danger of extinction is far higher than that reactivated, and there is no central device (state or government) that it can neither quantify the abandonment nor give directives for recovery.

## 3. Strategy and design

The intervention strategy concerning the *Val Borbera*, a territory belonging to the Piedmont Apennines, with the specific intent to create a methodological system applicable to similar cases study. The valley is marked by the passage of the *Borbera River* and the occasional rural architectural heritage is

surrounded by an impressive natural landscape that preserves the ancient pre-Celtic and pre-Roman substrate (D. Bottiroli, 2003).

The project proposal focuses on four villages of the high *Val Borbera* area, which represent different types of abandonment: *Carrega Ligure* is a village partially abandoned, *Connio* represents the type of the abandoned village with foundation of new center and finally the ghost towns *Ferrazza* and *Reneuzzi*. The project provides the recovery of existing buildings in compliance with local building traditions and the characteristic materials of the area; every new construction project was thought to be recognizable and reversible. The functions provided for the reactivation include new accommodation facilities such as the spread hotel and productive activities that promote repopulation of the villages also with the participation of new ethnic groups. The economic strategy assumed develops through buying and selling goods and services, and making skillful use of the funds generated by the formation of associations of citizens and European and regional tenders.

The ultimate aim of the research is not just about the study of the phenomenon, but also understanding the reactivation mechanisms and how these can spread to bring to life a national reality and community which is likely to be forgotten.

#### 4. Future

Alessandro Baricco, in its reflection on the “new barbarism” that characterized contemporary, puts tremendous emphasis on the inevitable reason of act from whom, by virtue of their life energy, moves from place to place, creating connections and new relations of meaning and networking (N. Flora, E. Crucianelli, 2013). Create a new network of relationships and meanings for the contemporary is expressed in ordering the knowledge of a surface, new symbolic place that, in contrast to the stated depth, is deputy conceptually accumulation of values in which most of the new generations is recognized. Baricco assume this wave of huge shifting of meanings and then the because of the new structures of the concepts of the new novelty and beauty whit the image of devastating invasion for those who feel the repository of ancient truth; beneficial invasion for those who truly love all the life and accept the change whit the smile of confidence in its obscure logic (A. Baricco, 2006).

In conclusion, this must be assumed by contemporary architects to work consciously and to give life to projects that are integrated with contemporary sensibility. The purpose of this research is to find answers in the common past that can solve the fate of a common future, to rediscover the sense of places (V. Teti, 2004), in many cases lost.

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## Biography

**Martina Crapolicchio.** Born in south Italy, she lives in Turin. Graduated in architecture at the Polytechnic of Turin, she is interested in the architectural and cultural problems of abandoned buildings. Currently she carries out her professional activity collaborating with some architectural offices in Turin.