

Graduation Plan

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Explore Lab 39

Main/ Design mentor: Jorge Mejía Hernández

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Third/ Research mentor: Elise van Dooren

Argumentation of Choice of the Studio:

The possibility to study a subject of my personal interest independently convinced me of Explorelab. In the framework of this 1 year graduation studio I am motivated to explore not only an architectural problem but also my personal progress in relation to the subject of investigation. Guided by Tutors of my personal choice I want to learn about the organization of an academic research and design project.

Unfinished Villas

renegotiating the ideals of living

Location, Condition

The regions of Basilicata, Calabria and Campania in the South of Italy are scattered with a huge amount of unfinished concrete skeletons. In their obsolescence these structures mark a waste of resources and underline the limited perspectives of the regions. However their openness has an aesthetic quality breaking up the boundaries between inside and outside, between architecture and landscape.

Research question

In form of a photographic essay this research documents the phenomenon of unfinished ruins and situates it in the context of an abandoned land in a state of de-growth. For my observation, public buildings and big scale structures are left out of consideration. Instead, the focus lays on those numerous small scale skeletons in the transition to an open landscape, which will be referred to as unfinished Villas.

- How is the phenomenon of unfinished Villas in the South of Italy reflected in specific cases?
- How does the analysis of these cases and their specific (spatial and social) situation inform the bigger picture of unfinished yet obsolete buildings?

Problem - Finishing (as planned) is no option

The studies show that finishing these buildings as originally intended is unlikely to ever happen. With the suspension of building over time and a lack of external reflection most of these privately built structures became obsolete during construction and remain unfinished in a state of slow ruination.

Design Question - Alternative ways of inhabitation

This uncertain condition invites to explore the problem of uselessness through an architectural perspective, seeking for ways to inhabit these structures with the limited resources available.

- How can unfinished buildings be inhabited rather than being finished?
- What actual and potential spatial qualities do they entail?

This questions aim to outline an architectural principle which allows the (semi-permanent) inhabitation of skeletons while maintaining their inherent openness and emptiness, renegotiating ideals of living. The design is thought to be feasible, low-cost and applicable to other unfinished structures and various scenarios of inhabitation.

When deconstructing the notion of a ,finished‘ and complete house, as in the predominant local understanding, unfinished buildings become valuable resources and the starting point for an architectural exploration of the ideals of living situated in a contemporary, south Italian context. The reinterpretation of existing skeletons allows the anew negotiation of comfort and shelter with the perspective of a minimal invasive yet spatial complex Architectural intervention. The findings of this process will be translated into a structural system which will be applied in 3 to 4 exemplary skeletons transforming them into unfinished Villas.

Process/ Methods research and design:

The research focuses on the qualitative study of particular case-studies, in which the work in the field played an important role.

1. Observation and Documentation

On-site, with a road-trip through the South of Italy, augmented with the study of available literature and related themes.

2. Conversations and Case-Study Analysis

On-site, revisiting and describing selected Case-Studies from the previous tour. Analyzing the structure through drawing and photographic documentation, unveiling the specific stories of their becoming through conversations with local actors and residents to learn about multiple positions on the problem (Constructor, Neighbour, Owner, Politician, Architect).

Through studies in physical models of different scales, the design is aimed to develop a principle for how to transform unfinished buildings in a way that is feasible within the conditions as found in my research and applicable to various other structures.

1. 1:33/ 1:100 - Design principles

Exploration of design principles. Abstract experiments of form and the relation between positive and negative spaces as well as the relation of building and intervention and the association of different functions within. Suggesting different programatic scenarios for a possible inhabitation.

2. 1:10/ 1:20 - Functionality

Detailed design of the structural components, joints and utilities, with a focus to negotiate the permanence and temporality of the different elements.

3. 1:1 - Life-Size Experiments

Physical, spatial interventions in one of the buildings to probe and convey the design proposal.

Literature and general practical references:

This work is mainly informed by my personal experiences during the on-site analysis as well as the interviews and conversations with local actors as documented in the research paper.

These subjective experiences build up on a body of publications specifically about unfinished buildings in the South of Italy (incompiuto, maifinito). Further, my studies draw on associated literature about broader, theoretical concepts and themes (obsolescence, ruins, the unfinished).

Practical references about the transformation of unfinished buildings are scarce. Besides the Projects of Arno Brandhuber and Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzola, my design studies are informed by the transfer of more general spatial concepts (free plan/ free room, double envelope).

Reflection:

This thesis concludes my previous academic studies in Munich, Milan and Delft that have been shaped through a consistent diversity of themes and learning objectives, extending my understanding of the boundaries of architectural practice. The open structure of the course challenges me to outline my personal field of interests and formulates a transition to a career as an self-dependent practicing architect.

The global issue of unfinished buildings has been increasingly subject to photographic documentations and has been addressed in Architectural discourse (Biennale). However, examples of an actual transformation in practice remain rare.

This project aims to proof the feasibility of a transformation with minimal interventions and by that to contribute to a more active projection of unfinished buildings not only in a theoretical, academic framework but also in practice. Working with existing structures I aim to negotiate the question of what a house needs to be and to explore spatial associations between different functions in relation to the structural skeleton framework.

The intent of this work is to encourage a change of perception on the ubiquitous existence of unfinished buildings and to reconsider them as a valuable resource with great spatial potentials, addressing ways of how to utilize the grey energy stored in unfinished buildings all around the world.