

Reflection

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Explore Lab 39

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research and design - process, methodology

A personal fascination for incomplete architectures in the south of Italy and their aesthetic qualities marked the starting point for this project which is part of the explore lab graduation studio.

In an initial round trip to the south of Italy the phenomenon of unfinished architectures was observed and documented. The case studies depicted during this tour marked the scope of research, augmented with a study of available literature and related conceptional themes. These preliminary experiences set the base for a second field work after P1, aiming to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and its socio-spatial context. The methodological framework for this tour included spontaneous, informal conversations with local residents as well as formally arranged interviews. In both approaches it proved valuable to lead the discussions along a basic framework of questions and to directly capture the answers in a transcript. The duality of approaches turned out as a successful methodology to gain knowledge, not only about the specific stories behind the buildings but also, more general, about the condition as found.

Towards P2 the collected information were processed and developed into a photographic essay documenting the uncertain state of unfinished buildings, reflecting greater problems of an abandoned region in their wasteful obsolescence. In the search for program and purpose of an architectural projection design experiments played an important role. This trial and error process allowed narrowing down the actual needs and possibilities for a design in response to the problems identified during the research. By P2 these studies came together with the research conducted, proposing the transformation of unfinished buildings into villas.

An extended scope towards construction practices and housing ideals in the region marked a turning point in the project before P3. Through the detailed study of market-listed villas, available building materials and construction costs, a local state of the art could be depicted. This analysis linked research and design, positioning the project in between the finished and unfinished, deeply rooted in the possibilities of the region but exceeding these through an outsider's architectural projection (Fig.1).

The continuous reframing of the project through design studies and the analysis of references, such as Le Corbusier's Maison Dom-Ino, the case study house program, or the writings of, among others, Stanford Anderson and Pier Vittorio Aureli, allowed to sharpen the proposal into its current form: The transformation of unfinished buildings into latent villas. By imposing a clear, absolute order but maintaining the structures inherent openness as latent tolerance. This order is designed specifically to each structure, executed within a framework of the resources available in the region and adapted to the clients ideals of living.

research and design - results, communication

To prove its applicability to different existing structures and living ideals, this approach is probed in three case studies, highlighting the spatial quality of the design as well as its economic and social value.

The final product at P5 will consist of an exhibition and a presentation. The first, is based on the research and intended to situate the audience in the context of this project, drawing a contrast between the finished and unfinished.

The latter is aimed to communicate the project on three layers, to architects (as a work of art), potential clients (as a commodity) and constructors (as a tool). Drawings and models of the imposed order will convey the beauty and conceptional clarity of the design as a work of art. The feasible, low cost and easy to build construction, will be presented in a set of standard details, executive plans and material lists. A sales brochure, including a detailed offer with cost estimations, visuals and furnished plans, will impart the proposals value to a non professional audience. In the framework of the graduation year, these products will form the integral part of my project, the transformation of unfinished structures into latent villas, towards an incomplete project (Fig. 2).

relevance - architectural, urban, academic, personal

The prevalence of unfinished building in the increasingly abandoned southern regions of Italy expresses a conflict in cultural desires of home ownership, economic limits and informal self-building practices, facilitated by modern construction systems and a loosely regulated housing market. The project responds to this condition on various scales. It gives new use and meaning to the existence of unfinished buildings but also promotes the repopulation and economic investments in the south, strengthening the robustness of its urban environment.

On a more fundamental layer, the studies examine the perennial tension between order and freedom in architecture. This approach is particularly relevant as it poses questions about the role of architecture in between these extremes and allowed to personally explore my position as future architect as an articulation of openness and determination but also in between architectural practice as a tool, a work of art and a commodity.

reflection - feedback, learnings

Throughout the whole graduation year, the conversation with my three tutors played an important role. In the weekly meetings I felt constantly encouraged to challenge my own work, to build-up but also to dismiss, reflect and re-frame. Still, I felt perfectly guided in aligning to the graduation regimentations and fulfilling the expected learning objectives in the foreseen timeframe.

Besides this constant mentoring, discussions with researches at TU Delft, Politecnico di Milano, Università degli Studi di Napoli, as well as with other external parties helped questioning and consolidating my design decisions. The presentation of an actual design proposal to a potential client and the formulation of an abstract for the OASE magazine, marked the chance to confront the project with different perspectives and extend the boundaries of the project, exceeding the graduation framework.

reflection - personal development, outlook

From the beginning on the project included myself as subject of observation, allowing me to develop my personal interests and my way of working as a designer. Thereby, the constant reflection on my studies in the format of a journal, proofed a valuable method for my future work, allowing to capture ideas and site-products that don't directly add to the finished product.

By being challenged to work independently and outside the guidelines of a regular studio, I learned how to structure and schedule my tasks. In phases of ongoing analysis and synthesis I learned to underlay, justify, strengthen but also to discard my personal opinions. Allowing myself to try and to fail, I started constantly rephrasing my arguments and to generate productive, positive energy out of this iterative process.

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 challenged me to outline my personal field of interests in transition to a career as an self-dependent practicing architect. With the projects close touch to reality, I now feel able to handle the complexity of a real building project. I am confident with my work and are looking forward for my graduation, which will not mark the end of this project but the continuation of my studies in a different framework, may this be in a publication, an exhibition or the actual construction of a building.

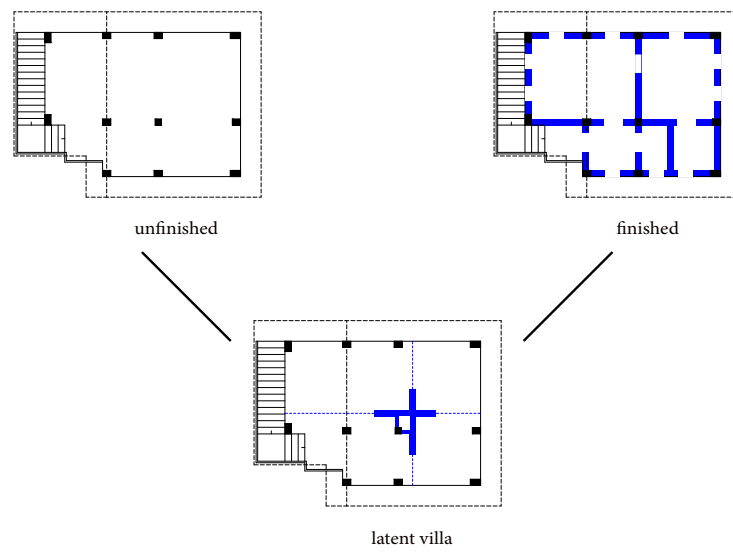


Fig. 1: The latent villa as a neither unfinished nor finished building but an articulation thereof.

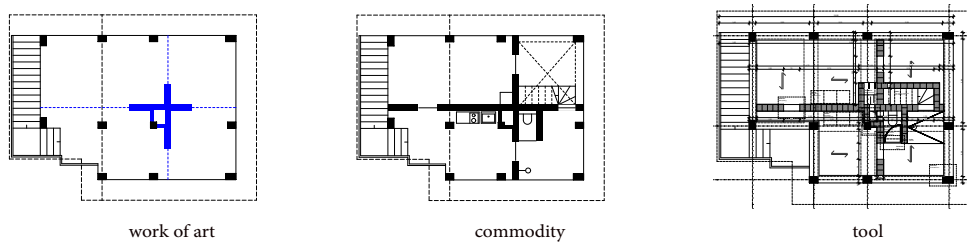


Fig. 2: Communicating the project in three ways of architectural representation, acknowledging the relevance and coexistence of all three theories.