
Reflection P4

Draft Reflection Graduation Project Explorelab #24: Cultural Heritage Counts for Parrano

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Cultural Heritage Counts for Parrano

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Introduction

This reflection report contains four aspects concerning the graduation project. It starts with the relation between the research and design in which preliminary results from both studies are explained. The second aspect deals with the relation between the theme and the chosen case study. At the beginning of the project was chosen for a methodological approach, described in the P2 Graduation Plan, which will be reviewed as the third aspect of this reflection report. At the end, this project will be set in the wider social context to reflect on the relation between both contexts.

1. Aspect I: Research & Design

Research has taken an important position during the whole project resulting in a thoroughly studied design. Three steps can be distinguished following the path from research towards design. The research started in a more general subject concerning the definition and valuation of cultural heritage that lead towards the research of the agricultural heritage of the *mezzadria* and the decision where and how to place this type of heritage in the existing discourse. Insights from this research were the founding considerations for the redevelopment of a plot of agricultural heritage, in this case the Principality of Parrano in the central Italian region of Umbria. This created the opportunity to place the project in a wider context of heritage studies and the current debate on how to consider and value non-monumental heritage assets.

Research only, however, was nevertheless insufficient as basis for new design plans and was thus embedded in the global – particularly European – issues of dealing with areas of agricultural vacancy. This was both good and bad at the same time, because it showed the wide contextual relevance but lacked concrete tools for the redevelopment of the estate in Parrano. Therefore it needed analysis of the specific case which followed the research in volume II. By analyzing the content of the Principality of Parrano, more information was gathered about a specific case of vacant agricultural heritage. Volume II describes all relevant aspects of the past and present situation of this principality and the farm that was chosen to be redeveloped in this graduation project. Conclusions from this case study formed the basis for the redesign together with the considerations from the contextual research.

This linear approach from contextual research through case study towards redesign, as visualized in figure 1, strengthened the relation between the research and the final design because both became more connected and integrated. Step 1 (Cultural Heritage – *mezzadria*) places the project in the field of scientific research and steps 2 (Principality of Parrano) and 3 (Podere Bovorosso) place the project in the practical field of heritage redevelopment. All steps integrated in the graduation process gave this project a strong relation between research and design.

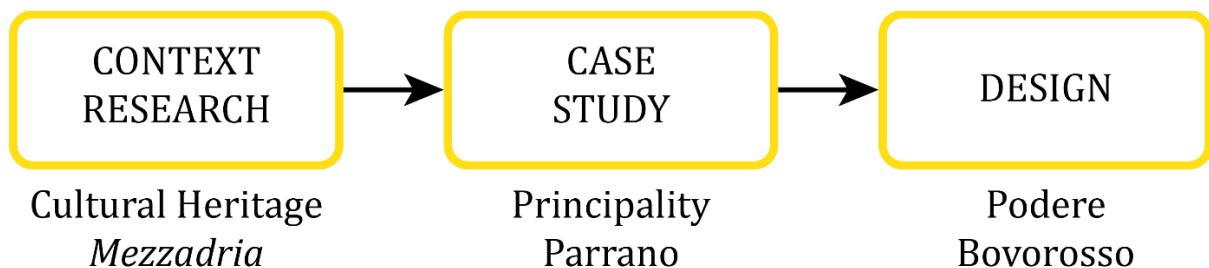


Figure 1. Van Deursen (2018), *relation research & design*

2. Aspect II: Theme & Case study

Explorelab is a multidisciplinary graduation studio with a wide range variety of topics that students choose to investigate. Most important are the personal fascination that triggers the student to study a specific problem or case and the students' initiative to explore it in depth. As stated by the coordinators of Explorelab: "*Students do not consume Explorelab; they create it*". Six principles define the theme and structure of Explorelab. Firstly, the graduation studio pursuits fundamental research and design. Secondly it functions as "*a Faculty wide laboratory*" that provides all necessary tools and knowledge to explore in depth this wide variety of subjects students come up with. Creativity is encouraged by giving the freedom to investigate personal fascinations as well as in reaching the research and design goals. It requires personal responsibility from the students as well as initiative. Though the topics are various and the work is often individual, Explorelab pays much attention to teamwork. Workshops and mutual critique helps students to collaborate with others and learn from each other. At last, Explorelab intends to develop a professional attitude amongst its students particularly to increase their awareness for their responsibilities towards society.

Looking at those principles it became difficult to pinpoint the main theme of the Explorelab graduation studio. Explorelab #24 contains a diversity in topics from Virtual Reality to Dwellings of recycled plastic and from renewal of a monastery in the Himalaya to redeveloped farmhouses in Italy. However in the beginning of 2017, the students started looking for connecting themes in their topics. Themes emerged from personal fascinations and research topics. 'New Modes, Traditional Means' became the theme of the collaborative workshop for all students working on traditional and vernacular architecture. It was not the graduation lab that set the theme, but the individual case studies defined one of the themes for Explorelab #24.

'New Modes, Traditional Means' was the organized workshop by students with fascinations and case studies like the transformation of a former railway ring around Paris, the redevelopment of farmhouses in the Ukraine, renovation of a monastery in the Indian Himalaya and redevelopment of vacant agricultural estates in central Italy. The Italian case study relates to this theme in several aspects. In the first place it has a strong connection by means of the traditional architecture, concerning both materialization and building techniques. Secondly it focuses on the interface of past, present and future by looking to the past as learning objective for developments in the future. The framework of those two aspects can be recognized in all four case studies from the 'New Modes, Traditional Means' group.

3. Aspect III: Methodological Approach

As described in the previous chapter, Explorelab is a research and design lab with a large variety of topics that are hard to cover within one methodical approach. Every project has its own characteristics that need an individual methodical approach based on the specific goals of that project. 'From Fascination to Project' is the essence of Explorelab which results basically in a methodical line from fascination, through research, towards design.

The methodical approach of this project was firstly to create a framework of information that would embed the case in a larger context as well as to provide the important basic knowledge as start for a design. The analysis of the case first followed its direct context and then more and more towards specific and characteristic details. These two phases, research & analysis, were the basis for the design and are shaped like a funnel. In the third phase of design, research and analysis continued on several topics related to certain aspects of the design. The funnel starts to allow additional information to enter the process and can be characterized as a meandering stream that collects bits from several relevant topics (figure 2). All additional studies help converging the process towards the end. The result is a model based on the case of Parrano that set an example for similar cases.

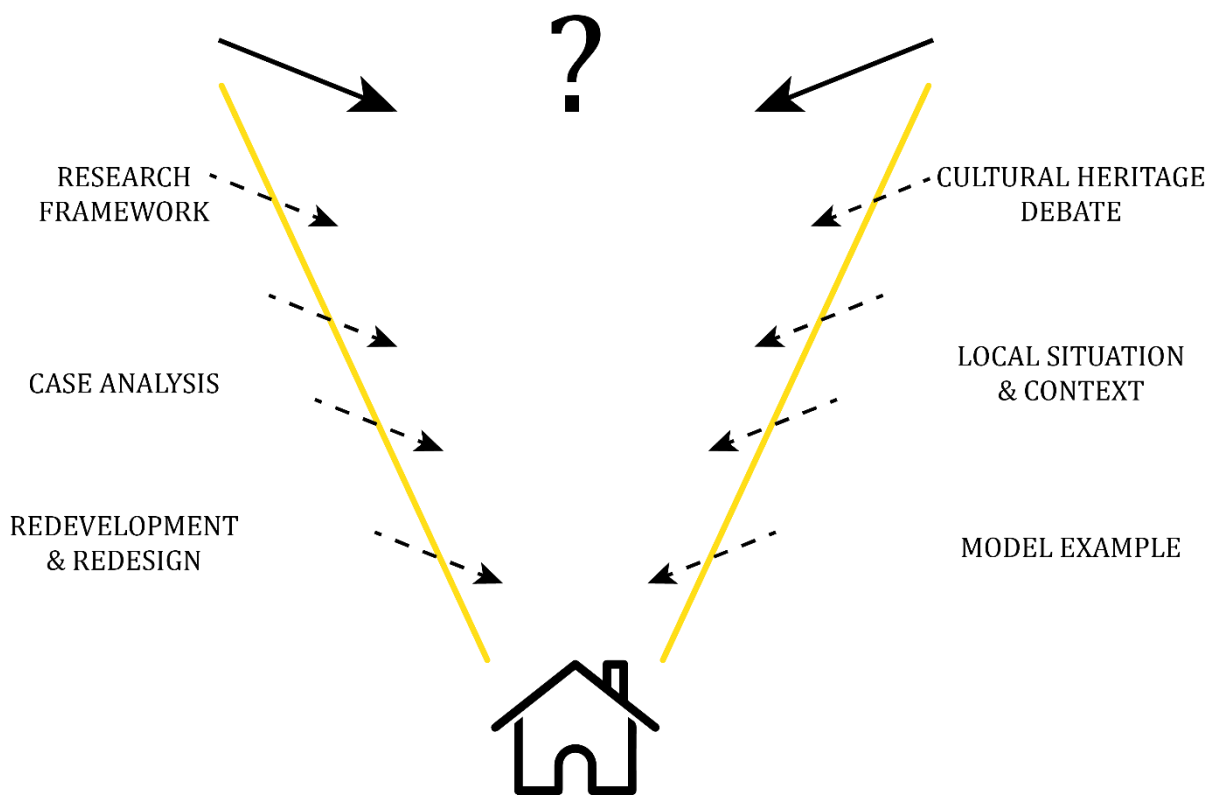


Figure 2, Van Deursen (2018), *the funnel method*.

4. Aspect IV: Project & Social Context

Shrinkage of agricultural areas is a problem that does not only exist in the Principality of Parrano but is a dramatic feature all over the world. Farms all over Europe lost their function in the past decades and this decline of agricultural properties still continues. Consequences not only strike the farmer and his family but influence the whole community as well. Projects like this one concerning the agricultural estate of the Principality of Parrano deal with many contexts of which the social aspect is one of the important keys to success.

Since the agricultural practice in Parrano declined after the ceasing of the *mezzadria* sharecropping practice in the 1960's, which has affected the social context of the community dramatically. The population declined because many citizens moved towards the cities to find other work and those who remained had to find new ways of living and working. The new development plan, as described and explained in the Graduation Thesis (volume III), aims to re-establish the economic, environmental, cultural and social situation of the principality as case project including the whole community of Parrano. Because the actual situation is comparable with many other locations in central Italy, caused by the same events, the context of this project grows wider. Moreover, the development approach can be seen as an example for all vacant agricultural areas in Italy which are a lot. Because in basis we are dealing here with the problem of shrinkage in an agricultural area, the relevance becomes even wider when we start considering agricultural vacancy across the (inter)national borders. The developed approach in this project is applicable in other cases dealing with the same problems in agricultural vacancy.

The wide context of this project is evident. Let us focus on the aspect of 'social context' to discover the relation between this specific project in a relatively small village in central Italy and its wider social context. Since the vacancy of agricultural heritage has led to a social problem for its direct context its opposite direction it is evident that by re-establishing the heritage assets, the social context will be positively affected. Because we are dealing with a worldwide problem of shrinking agricultural areas, one successful example of redevelopment can be seen as an concept for other places. The social aspect of the redevelopment in Parrano was very important because of its crucial status in the past and present. It can be seen as crucial element for a successful redevelopment. That is why it has been integrated in several layers of the project. The positive social effect of this redevelopment together with the wide contextual relevance of the problem make the social effect of this case reach beyond the municipal borders of Parrano considering it as a concept for all other cases concerning agricultural shrinking areas.

Conclusion

The linear process from research towards design, including a thorough case study, made the project strongly connected with the field of scientific research as well as the field of practical redevelopment. Information from the three steps integrate all relevant information for a successful project.

'New Modes, Traditional Means' was the theme of several graduation projects within Explorelab #24. This specific project of redeveloping vacant agricultural heritage in Italy relates to this theme by concerning the traditional architecture as well as the focus of bringing the past and present together to create new purposes for the future. Materialization and (vernacular) building techniques were the main aspects from the traditional architecture. The interface of past, present and future created the opportunity to use the past as learning objective for future developments. New modes were created by using traditional means.

The 'funnel method' that was used started with a very broad subject for the research. By focusing on the goal – a redevelopment plan for the Principality of Parrano and redesign of the Bovorosso farm – and by letting additional studies and valuable information enter the funnel, the converge lead to the organizational plan for the principality and a remodeled farm.

It is necessary to distinguish several aspects when defining the social context of the project. Concerning the global wide problem of vacancy in agricultural areas, caused by shrinking practice of agriculture, the case project sets an example that can influence positively all other areas if they would use the same redevelopment strategy.

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