
Learning To Fill The Gap Between Design And History

The Empty Urban Villages in Catalonia

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We will describe the work during 25 years of a design workshop in the School of Architecture in Barcelona on the renewal of hundreds of old medieval villages, some of them empty, in Catalonia. The output of this work is deposited on the National Catalan Archive.

Our communications will describe some intervention on these villages, built by professors or by students of the workshops.

Some of these examples are the arrival of the Olympic flame to Catalonia in 1992, old buildings and landscapes rehabilitated in empty or ruined urban forms or places.

The learning methodology and the design methodology is based upon the possibility of a confluence or dialogue in between design and history of the place. (Bagnato V. 2017). In this way modern design innovation and historical memory and old architectural remains, reinforce each other, and can produce an original, unique and universal work of art. (Bakhtin M. 1990)

This is true in a building and in the empty urban forms, however in the case of empty villages the economic

conditions need much more political and social forces to support the design ideas. Nevertheless the cultural, theoretical, and practical conditions are the same from an architectural viewpoint, since the place, demands similar deep intentions of dialogue between the old and the new. Methodologies in both cases have produce architects able to renew empty forms and places.

The main point is the link between the power of social transformation and the power of the renewed old forms as a support for them. Two processes, social transformations and physical transformations should reinforce each other in order to arrive at a new life in empty forms or places.

This learning and design process has been published in publications by the professors of the workshop (...). We introduce in this abstract a minimum of images in order to understand the kind of architecture we are talking about, and the historical documentation that can be found in the National Archive of Catalan Urban Forms.

In conclusion, if hundreds of Catalan villages are more and more empty today, this is not an irreversible process of economic globalization and urbanization. With good learning processes and policies able to coordinate social and physical transformations, some of them can be rehabilitated in modern times, and at the end of the digital impact we can find, perhaps the modernity of vernacular forms and historical spaces. (Rainer E. Zimmermann, 2017)

After a long and carefully done historical study of the old Greek town of Empuries, the modern design reinforce the touristic use and the renewal of the ruins.

This is a medieval ruin transform without destruction in a modern house in a very, almost empty Catalan village.

The dialogue between the old and the new is not only technic but also cultural

Each village has been analyzed not only physically but also socially. Empty villages implied a survey with the old users still alive in near villages or in Barcelona. Students with families born in the villages have been the best bridge to the real meaning of the empty forms.