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Regenerating Places, Rethinking Industry

Zahra Mani

One of the curatorial exercises we undertook as a team in the context of RESCUE was to collate a list of existing and “best-practice” models of once abandoned industrial sites that have been re-established in an artistic, cultural or community context. Across Europe, there are many such locations, primarily in towns and cities, primarily injected with long-term private and public funds to ensure their feasibility over time.

In the course of RESCUE, we often discussed that we found peripheral, smaller-scale sites more interesting to the extent that rural or suburban spaces that have been neglected over time might offer communities the opportunity to consider more grass-roots approaches to living, participative use of empty spaces, in the sense that the process of reclaiming a given site would already be a step towards collaborative creativity and social cohesion.

It is also inherent to “having” or sharing a concept – in the case of RESCUE, the focus on industrial sites – that one is obliged to think beyond its boundaries and consider further implications of abandonment, regeneration, industry and location.

In this spirit, we invited Vida Rucli and Janja Susnjar, two architects from Italy and Slovenia who live in the border village of Topolò / Topolove to look at RESCUE and to contribute a further dimension to the project and the current volume by analysing their own personal and professional, theoretical and practical approach to the regeneration of a paradigmatic “site”. Their highly sensitive considerations of space and place, living, dwelling, industry and labour, communities and futures is highly enriching to RESCUE and proffers a roadmap for future interdisciplinary cultural initiatives.

Place-making through art and dwelling

Stazione di Topolò/Postaja Topolove and a possible response to empty Italian villages

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Introduction

Whatever space and time mean, place and occasion mean more. For space in the image of man is place, and time in the image of man is occasion.

Aldo van Eyck

The revitalization of empty villages, especially in hilly and remote areas, is one of Europe's most pressing issues and challenges. As a result of industrialization and urbanization, deliberate emigration of people away from border and underdeveloped areas and, last but not least, the desire for a "more comfortable" way of life in the city, closer to jobs and services, the emergence of empty villages, smaller towns and some areas is a challenge for planners... Despite their cultural value, the future of these areas is uncertain and they are considered "problematic" from the point of view of development. Most of them are hilly areas that once represented a geo-strategic position. However today their main characteristics are: weak economy, low population density, low value of real estate; consequently, these are economically and infrastructurally disadvantaged areas.

Topolò/Topolove, the village whose history, present and possible future we'll introduce in this text, lives for sure the same problems and challenges of the above-mentioned areas. Topolò / Topolove is a small village with 22 inhabitants and more than a hundred (mostly empty) buildings, placed on the border between Italy and Slovenia, at the end of a road in the forest, in the ethnic area of a minority mistreated by history.

How to imagine a future for places like this? How could *art* operations and a new, conscious, *dwelling* save this place from its decay and total abandonment? How could the idea of and reflections around *place-making* be useful for the preservation, regeneration and imagination of a new future?

In this text we will try to answer to these questions through theoretical reflections on how to observe and experience places, in order to get to know and understand them but also reflecting on the long-term effects that art operations had in the village of Topolò / Topolove and concretely proposing a new way of living the place.

Both architects, we have a very deep relation to this place. Vida's family is originally from Topolò / Topolove and now she is living in her grand-mother's house there; Janja on the other side is from Slovenia and got to know the village later, she established her relations to the place in the years of university, and after dedicating its master's thesis to the village she only strengthened it.

This text collects some shared reflections on the village itself, on how architecture - as a discipline - relates to such places but also some ideas for a new way of dwelling again in Topolò / Topolove as in similar empty villages.

As long as people will give meaning to the places, they (places) will survive.

Key words: place-making, dwelling, place, experience, art, communities, empty villages

1_The method: how to observe, experience and know a place

Space, Place and Experience

I like to think of landscape not as a fixed place but as a path that is unwinding before my eyes, under my feet. To see and know a place is a contemplative act. It means emptying our minds and letting what is there, in all its multiplicity and endless variety, come in.

Gretel Ehrlich, *Landscape in Legacy of Light*, 1987

Intellectuals from many different fields of study talk about and dedicate various discussions and theories to the concepts of *place* and *space*. In socio-geographical circles, space is usually interpreted as an abstract entity, which – although having a certain locality – doesn't represent a key social connection with a person. *Place* on the other hand is a bearer of identity, meaning, and is therefore marked with one's experience of a certain space. Some understand a place as a thing, others as a way of seeing, some think of it as a social construct, for others its existence is as essential as the existence of mankind. Place can be understood as a physical entity with certain dimensions – width, depth and height – but it can also be determined as a frame of reference in which the subject and things are mapped by distance. It can be determined as a scene of our perceptual experience, where material/objective factors and human presence intertwine.

Phenomenology is a method of research, which developed into a branch of philosophy, but its wide influence very soon overstepped the limits of philosophy. Phenomenological approach is based on everyday human experience, and is therefore an appropriate way of addressing questions which deal with the analysis of space and place. Through phenomenology we come to reflections about the meaning of space or specific places and about human relations to space, i.e., sacred spaces, spaces of memory, landscape, cities, homes or ruins. The father of phenomenology is considered to be Edmund Husserl, who – through his axiom of going 'back to the things themselves' – focused on everyday experience, and was later followed by other phenomenologist, such as M. Heidegger, H. Arendt, M. Merleau-Ponty, E. Levinas, G. Bachelard – each of them left lasting contributions to the understanding of the connection between experience and space.

In our dealings with an explicit space – place, village Topolò/Topolove, the phenomenological approach enabled gradual understanding of layers stacked in this place throughout its long and intriguing history. Our own personal experience and experience of others, with whom we collaborated, were the starting points for thinking through new possibilities and ideas for this place.

Through a careful observation of our experience, we can understand that it is our presence (our perception, the synesthetic experience and the awareness) that creates place from the spaces in which we are located. The experience is the synthesis of observations of the phenomenon through senses, memories, and the hypothesis that perceptions intertwine with the memories of past lives and those of the future. Places we experienced deeply in us we also carry in us. The memories are always with us, so they can in any moment intervene in the present. We internalise our experiences, we harvest them, and in return they evoke different emotions and actions in us. "To experience a place, a certain space or a house is a dialogue" Juhani Pallasmaa wrote in his work *The Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery in Architecture*. In dialogue memories – building blocks of our imagination – come to life. The intertwining and play of harmonious correspondences create a new architecture of experience, which is the origin, precondition and at the same time the purpose of architect's creation: to offer people a space for experience, a place to dwell.

Place of dwelling

Man's relation to locations, and through locations to spaces, inheres in his dwelling. The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, strictly thought and spoken.

When we think, in the manner just attempted, about the relation between location and space, but also about the relation of man and space, a light falls on the nature of the things that are locations and that we call buildings.

Martin Heidegger, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, 1954

In each (wo)man there is the congenital need to create and define places. Through this need relations to a specific space are established (and therefore places are established). These relations define what we call dwelling. By researching what dwelling means, we discover reasons behind building, marking space and creating a physical relation with the environment.

In writings on architecture the concept of dwelling in the most cases leans on the interpretation of Martin Heidegger's reflections around dwelling, mainly contained in the essay *Building, dwelling and thinking* which was presented by the philosopher in 1951 at the architectural symposium *Man and space*, held in Darmstadt. The idea of dwelling appeared in many authors, but more distinctly in Christian Norberg Schulz, who is - beside Kenneth Frampton - the architect who introduced Martin Heidegger in architecture theory. In the book *The Concept of Dwelling: on the Way to Figurative Architecture* Christian Norberg Schulz dissects places of dwelling in four categories: natural dwelling, collective dwelling, public dwelling and private dwelling. Dwelling in his idea does not represent only a roof and some square metres to live on, but means also connecting with other people, exchanging products, ideas and feelings, therefore it represents the experience of life as a multitude of possibilities. Dwelling means also the ability to agree with others, therefore the acceptance of some shared values. And in the end it also means to be independent, to create for yourself your own little chosen world. Through identification and orientation (wo)man is capable of inhabiting all four Norberg-Schulz's categories. The awareness about where and how we are is necessary to the experience of each one's existence as meaningful. Dwelling is therefore made of those spaces (wo)man created to provide to him/herself all the ways of living mentioned by Schulz and to establish those places which together create the environment. All of this always in relation to what is given, to the landscape with generic or specific qualities. Dwelling is therefore a way of developing relations with natural places (Norberg-Schulz, 1984).

2_The context: Topolò/Topolove

The sheer geographical and ethno-cultural peculiarity of the village of Topolò/Topolove, and of the whole Natisone Valleys area, gives an inspiring frame for analysis. The village – with 22 inhabitants and more than 120 houses –, a (wo)man-made structure in the middle of a hilly landscape, is located on the border between Italy and Slovenia, is certainly not a common place. The heavy and exhausting history, geographical remoteness, topological specificity, the question of identity, emigration for economical and living hardships, the earthquake in 1976, the removal of the border, the beginning of a twenty-eight-year tradition of *Stazione di Topolò/Postaja Topolove...* create a complex network and layering of factors which through time establish a place and define it as a space of dwelling.

Topolò/Topolove offers in itself the experience of natural, collective, public and private dwelling. Through a deep research of the village from its first hamlet to the way of living the village today, the observation was mainly directed toward dwelling in relation to the built structure. Dwelling - considered in its entirety - changed distinctly through different periods due to different circumstances and conditions. With a gaze toward the future dwelling these places seems uncertain, however the visions and desires which generate especially from younger generations helped the study of possible new ways of living, which are not defined only by the history of the place, but through the experience of the place itself. With dwelling we don't mean tourism even if we do not negate temporary ways of living. We propose a new relation with the place, a new answer and maybe memory.

Empty houses

In Italy empty villages, mainly located in mountain areas, are considered a phenomenon. The high percentage of emptied hamlets stimulates the interest of researchers who, besides analyzing and looking for the reason for their emptying, are trying to find solutions and new possibilities for some of these interesting places. At the same time, neglected areas become attractive also for a society looking for a genuine and naturally rich living environment. It is interesting to reflect on how those elements which were the reason for the abandonment and emptying of these villages – mainly remoteness and isolation, a different culture and absence of industry and progress – are today those elements considered positive for a possible revitalization. We could look at villages, which are destined to decay and emptiness, as consequences of the modern society moved by useful and functional logic and immediate profit. This way of thinking does not see in villages a practical value and it forgets about its existence. However the empty village could be recognized as something valuable which could be reinterpreted through a perspective which does not intend it as something which is decaying and dying but is aware of the meaning of the existing qualities and identity values of the specific place. Built structures which are emptied from their initial meaning because of their abandonment should be reinterpreted through the concept of oblivion by Marc Augé, states the scholar Luca Di Figlia. Adding a new meaning to a space means to give a new function not only to the territory but also to the space itself.

The village Topolo/Topolove and the landscape surrounding it are multilayered since their existence is the result of transformations in time and space through not-designed processes defined by nature, through anthropogenic interventions and by wider social and political actions. However, the morphology of the place was defined by (wo)man's activities in relation to the given place, while content and established relations directed the growth of the hamlet. The complex fabric of the village is therefore a consequence of the needs, relations and activities which changed through time and influenced the transformations of the place.

Non maintained buildings started to deteriorate, abandoned landscape slowly lost its (wo)man-made traces. Atmosphere created by ruins emotionally touches visitors and stimulates curiosity and imagination. So where does the potential lie and how can we use its recognized qualities in the case of a new inhabitation or of a totally new use? Is it enough to name new functions, to imagine transformed uses and to connect what is already there with what is new, or is a physical change necessary where, with building and transformations, we could integrate and re-shape what remained to us? Our intervention should contain the shaping of a new identity for new users, which has to relate with respect to the past and to the memories if we want to stimulate in space a sense of belonging and character - identity.

3_The present: place-making through art

Stazione di Topolò/Postaja Topolove

At the end of our lives, each of us carries with us only what he has given.

Edmond Jabes

One of the main reasons for the wider recognition of the village Topolò/Topolove and the need to preserve its existence is an art event, not-a-real-festival called *Stazione di Topolò/Postaja Topolove*, which with the desire to be aware of and experience this space blurs the boundaries between what is and what could be, strengthens human relations and thus creates a community.

In 1994, just after the Iron Curtain was lifted and the Cold War ended, the adventure of the *Stazione di Topolò / Postaja Topolove* began in Italy's most impoverished territory. *Stazione/Postaja* is a place of traffic, it is a

meeting place where people stop, where exchanges take place... in a place where in 1994 all of the above is missing. The place could not be found on the map and even the trails that once connected the village with Slovenia are marked only on accurate hiking maps. From the very beginning, it was said to the artists to respond to the village with their work, or to draw inspiration from a concrete space. Stone houses and paths shrouded in fog are not just a background, but become the protagonist of artistic interventions. These, however, were not just paintings and representations on existing buildings, but contemporary art works with a clear conceptual definition. In the first years, the projects were mostly installations and spatial layouts, which were put on display for 45 days, and the artists lived in the village and also created in this space. Over the years, *Stazione/Postaja* was shortened, but directors who have screened their just-completed films several times have also started coming to Topolò/Topolove, musicians who have only here dared to imagine sound experiments, storytellers with endless stories... The idea has remained the same to this day. Events should take place as informally as possible, haste and schedules are not desirable, as we can so on the festival programme, the events take place *at dusk, after dinner, in the dark...* Soon after the start, which held no great hope for the long future, it became clear that artists and friends of art and Topolò/Topolove return to this space because of the special affection and feeling that connects all visitors and residents in this almost no longer existing place. The network began to intertwine and spread across borders, even across the sea, the 'festival' was discussed in academies where they marvelled at a phenomenon where art is no longer just a discussion within theory but part of a simple experience. They marvelled at the project, which, despite a complete lack of funds, managed to bring together people from all over the world every year with trust and cooperation, with a desire to create art together in Topolò/Topolove.

Imaginary places of the Stazione/Postaja

Space that has been seized by the imagination cannot remain an indifferent space, it cannot be left to the surveyor to reflect upon and measure. It has been lived in. And it has been lived in not in its positivity but with all the partialities of the imagination.

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 1958

Through twenty-eight years of existence of *Stazione/Postaja*, a parallel architecture has been established in Topolò/Topolove, which over time has already built the identity of the place. The spaces, or rather the places with which incoming guests, artists and friends establish a relation, with which young people grow and ideas arise, are an important layer in the palimpsest of the village of Topolò/Topolove. Most of the spaces were born as a project, a part of a project or a consequence of it. Some have established an actual place, while others – more similar to utopias – exist only as an idea. According to Moreno Miorelli, the name *Stazione/Postaja* itself happened somewhat by chance, but soon took on the full weight of the symbolic meanings and metaphors borne by the place of departures, returns, encounters, mixing, languages and cultures.

In the beginning, the village was one big stage, the protagonist of the events, and the artists chose the spaces that they personally addressed the most for their projects. However, some permanent places have slowly begun to form – cinema, old school, renovated Juljova hiša. Soon the so-called *Embassies* started to appear. The first was founded by the Dutch artist Jan van der Ploeg in 1997, he became an ambassador himself and still helps organizers select artists from his country. This was followed by the Czech (Miroslav Janek), New Zealand (Julian Dashper) and Norway (Per Platou), and were joined by the *Embassy of the Erased*, an art project which responded to the erasure of legal residents of the Republic of Slovenia from the register of permanent residents by the state, happened after the separation from Yugoslavia. The purpose of the last is to tell stories and present projects that in any way touch vulnerable and marginalized social groups. More than ten years ago, the author of the first Koderjana, a literary project named after a nearby stream, arrived at the *Embassy of the Erased*, in Martinkina hiša, a house in the middle of Topolò/Topolove. He was followed

by nine other poets and writers who met with the village and its people during a residency in the winter and created poetry and narrative from what they received, which is collected in ten editions of Koderjana. Just as the meetings between the creators and the village have been the foundation of the *Stazione/Postaja* since 1994, the writers have also created a new bond starting from their personal experience, which has left its mark both in themselves and in the village itself.

The education was taken care of by the American artist John Hogan, who in 2000 founded the *American Academy of Architecture and Art*, followed by the *Valentino Gariup-Drjonu Library*, and in 2005 Piero Zanini founded the important *Institute for Topology*, operating in many topology-related fields. The Institute twice hosted an International Mathematical Symposium in partnership with the most important Universities and Institutes. In 2010 the Dutch artist Ulay opened the *Water Institute*, to establish a real center for projects about potable water, a meta-institute for the development and protections of springs, not only in water-rich Topolò/Topolove, but also for other places, into which the voice will be carried through *Stazione/Postaja*. In the main house of *Stazione di Topolò/Postaja Topolove – Juljova hiša*, which was renovated with European funds and is managed by the Associazione Topolò-Topolove in agreement with the municipality of Grimacco – beside the central organizational office, space for rehearsals and performances, concerts, readings, screenings and most of the events in case of rain, there is also the *Universal Pinakothek of Topolò*, curated by renowned Italian illustrator and artist Guido Scarabottolo. The pinakothek hosts a large collection of personal reproductions of world artworks, made in a small format, with simple techniques such as graphite, watercolor, collage...

In addition to official festival screenings, the *cinema* of Topolò/Topolove also hosts secret screenings, where directors and artists reveal pre-festival versions, hidden and perhaps never-before-shown films.

In the dark evenings, the view across the valley is disturbed by the lights of the Topolò/Topolove airport run by the company *Ingold Airlines* which takes care of the flights of all the cosmopolitan inhabitants of Topolò/Topolove, from distant Australia, Thailand and Mexico. In the *Waiting Room* of the station, stories are told and poetry is read. Passengers can send *Topolograms* to imaginary states from the *Post Office*, founded by the postal artist Piermario Ciani. Young and old people from the nearby area are invited to the open gardens, workshops led by artists together with whom people are invited to strengthen connections to the place, indulge in coincidences, unexpected encounters and to marvel at unusual conclusions. In addition to hospitality, working in the community is one of the main guidelines of *Stazione/Postaja*.

The spaces that make up Topolò/Topolove may, despite their intangibility, be almost as realistic in appearance as the decaying hay barn in the middle of the chestnut forest. Perhaps because of the relations established with them by visitors of *Stazione/Postaja*, their locality is so strong that it is capable of creating memories. Donatella Ruttar in the documentary film on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the *Stazione/Postaja* emphasizes the need to be aware that we humans are created to meet, live in coexistence and peace, and that *Stazione/Postaja*, despite imagination, is not only an idea in itself and about art, but with its message is part of real life.

4_ The future: place-making through dwelling

Thinking the Future

It is necessary to cross the invisible line. 'You have to fall'. The destructive loop needs to be cut. 'You have to sink'. Generosity needs to be preserved.

Nataša Kramberger

The proposed approach to the revitalization of the village Topolò/Topolove by including a new user, new use (new forms of living) and consequently a new meaning deals with the current housing issue, especially

felt by young people working in research and creative practices, with regard to environmental issues and sustainable strategies for renewal and development of hilly areas. Nevertheless, the proposal is building on the foundations already present in the space. It spatially seeks to engage in the continuity of interventions and by responding to the place itself, to time and to the user creates modern forms of living, which through the given space realize their potential. With the proposal, we are trying to find a possibility to repopulate the area with a user who would establish a relationship with the space and would dwell in it.

New form of dwelling: the village is a house

Have you ever lived in a village as if it were your house?

Have you ever dreamed in the woods as if they were your garden?

If in the twentieth century architects sought to come closer to ideal living comfort and the greatest masters of modern architecture in their works realized the values of providing sufficient light, size of living spaces, connection to nature and material quality, with the acceleration of the same century to this day, hope and faith in these ideals have almost been lost in the crowded cities.. In the existing built fabric of the village of Topolò/Topolove, which still testifies to the modesty of the peasant population, in the case of preserving the spatial language it may be contradictory to talk about these same ideals that would attract new, younger users, accustomed to monotonous notions of comfort and instant reach.

What happens when the ideal of a modernist villa (which may never have been built, as in the case of Mies's Brick house) is reinterpreted in the qualities of its living environment and individual buildings would represent the rooms of one large 'house'? To what extent are our needs for private and intimate spaces defined by following the same patterns, and could we re-examine them and share some spaces with a wider community, thus creating more intense social relationships? We propose a new understanding of the village as a wider definition of the home of the local community, which can extend its generous stay to living in common areas such as the entrance, which provides a new infrastructure, the living room with the shared library, the kitchen, which transformed to a restaurant can host new activities, the pool by the river, the bathroom with laundry, the cabinet with printers, scanners, photographic equipment ..., a workshop that becomes a laboratory and offers employment, a gazebo for storage and arrangement of agricultural land around the village. Meanwhile, individual dwelling houses - rooms - still offer sufficient privacy, but due to limited space, they cannot provide all the needs of luxury that today's man is accustomed to. Through such an approach, abandoned spaces are given new uses, a strong sense of community is established, and people are provided with a new, better form of living.

New inhabitant: city quitter

The modern world is occupied by cities. More than half of humanity is now urban, which is probably the main reason that a lot of attention is focused on what is happening in cities, what their needs, development, flows, ideas and threats are. The lack of architectural manifestos that would focus their attention on the countryside also testifies to the priorities that have guided the research within the profession in the last century. We look at cities as drivers of economies, emancipation, and also the ultimate lifestyle. We may however, forget ninety-eight percent of the earth's surface, without which the city would not function. The global trend of urbanization cannot be stopped, but alternatives have already begun to emerge in many places.

Karen Rosenkranz uses the term "city quitters" in the book of the same title for those representatives of the younger generation who make a decision in search of living qualities and replace life in big cities with a new

form of modern living in the countryside. This allows them to have closer contacts with nature, freer creative practice, intensive involvement in the local community and, last but not least, a calmer and healthier everyday life.

Thanks to the influence of social networks and thus rapidly spreading trends, leisure activities and hobbies have emerged, stemming from the connection with nature, rural and tradition, such as pottery, plant growing, wood products, food preservation and fermentation, mountaineering, holidays in remote places, natural cosmetics and herbalism... All these seem quite normal to us, but permanent settlement in the countryside and urban resignation evoke a romanticized and aestheticized show that most of us can't really think about. Does the reality of rural life satisfy our notions of the better, the easier and the creative? In any case, life in the countryside requires a certain amount of challenge, renunciation and readiness, which we would not need to think about in an urban environment. All these challenges testify to the greater exposure to nature, its cycles, the attitude towards the earth, water and air, which we perceive as self-evident goods in the urban environment. The phenomenon of moving from a city that is perceived by observers on all continents as an alternative response to the vortex in which most young people are trapped and see no way out of it. The ambitious goals we pursue lead to constant fatigue, busyness with tasks that influence our neglect of relationships, our own physical and spiritual condition, the pressure to always be more and more late, not meet expectations and chase the timetable prescribed by our society. Meanwhile, the stories of representatives who have also focused their creativity on changing their lifestyle testify to a possible different choice, which, in return for a certain effort, enables a more peaceful, stable and, for the most part, richer dwelling.

For towns and wider areas, the presence of city quitters can have a positive impact on the social composition, the revitalization of spaces that have been neglected mainly by young people and the consequent reversal of economic downturns. Perhaps one day rural areas will become a counterweight to cities, as they allow more time and space for experimentation, for one's own voice, without disturbing distractions and comparisons. The biggest impact on the depopulation of the Natisone Valleys was the long-term emigration of young people, in search of new opportunities, dreams and worlds. However, when researching Topolò/Topolove and the relations that are part of this village, it turned out that in the representatives of the generation between the ages of 25 and 35 there is a desire to repopulate this areas, in discovering qualities that could enrich everyday life and in possible practices and project that allow open space and time that runs slower here.

Living in a community

The expressed need of young people for community is in fact a precondition for re-establishing life in this place. Where does this need come from and why do young people today perceive it as one of the key ones? A market-lead society longs for the constant proof of its own, individual capabilities, which should then be proportionately repaid in the form of money, or with the position we will fight for by achieving higher and higher goals. In this longing to fulfill the created images of success, we increasingly forget the basic connections and guides of our paths - namely relationships. It is relationships that build our community in which belonging and identification needs are met. Insofar as our everyday relationships do not offer the possibility of establishing a deeper relationship with the world, the probability of belonging to a potential community based on these relationships is also more uncertain.

Grouping in communities is one of the primary patterns of living beings who, in addition to their own basic community - the family, as social beings rely on each other in search of emotional and wire support. Living in a community not only meets our basic needs, but also changes the way we interact with others, promotes our awareness of our relationship with fellow human beings, the environment and with consumption ... However, a sense of connection does not always correspond to Western ideals of success. Increasingly educated but unemployed young people, in search of new opportunities, began to think again about

community ways of working or connecting through activity / space / interest. Thus, in the last ten years, 'co-working' communities have experienced a great boom, which began to emerge in public spaces, and later in some places also took care of the revival of forgotten buildings and neighborhoods. This working model also opened up new possibilities for how we could live as part of a community in the future.

A new community

The new proposal considers the need for an intimate space and a space where interaction and relationships take place. A new user is part of a new (and existing) community. Individual spaces are thought of as house spaces. In this way, the existing structure acquires a new meaning. A new form of living is being formed, which may lie on the edge of what we have been presented with as comfortable, beyond the bounds of the accepted and the ordinary. The spaces, which are part of one larger picture, are extended to the whole village with the help of the idea of community and at the same time offer a more luxurious and connecting stay.

With the new form also comes spontaneous and accidental uses - the common space becomes a space of play, of imagination. Through interaction, trust, help and support are fostered.

Conclusion

The text proposed a way of looking at and then dealing with empty villages, in this case the small, almost abandoned village of Topolò/Topolove, where actions and future plans are driven by a careful and deep understanding of the place and where the responses to this understanding are guided by imagination – in the form of art projects or of a new way of inhabiting the place.

We think that this method which includes observation, experience, knowledge of the place and nevertheless takes in consideration also personal memories, personal relation to the place - a sense of belonging - and imagination could be useful also when considering revitalizations of other types of spaces or buildings.

"Everything done is possible, but it needs a sense, a significance, a reason, an intimate necessity. It has to be necessary for itself but it has to be necessary in some way for the village (...) it is never a narcissistic gesture, but always a relation to the place, to the village, to the people that are there."

Donatella Ruttar, ex-art director of *Stazione di Topolò/Postaja Topolove*

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