

CHORAL

RESEARCH PROJECT *(max. 5 pages)*

APPLICATION FORM TO REQUEST FOR FUNDING FOR JOINTLY SUPERVISED DOCTORAL THESIS

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

New life and proposals to reactivate abandoned alpine areas: perspectives and roles of cultural communities in local development processes through the reuse of architectural heritage

SUPERVISORS

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5 main KEYWORDS

Inner areas; strategies; cultural heritage, architectural heritage; community empowerment.

ABSTRACT *(250 words max.)*

The research aims to acquire specific knowledge about architecture and settlements in the mountain area, finding appropriate and effective methods to address their conservation and to valorize them.

Beyond economic reasons, recognition and obsolescence play a role in abandoned processes. Several examples can be quoted concerning those settings that have not exactly been abandoned but have been underused because people prefer homogeneous buildings, even if they are anonymous models of dwelling. Implementing a co-evolutionary approach, some other cases can be identified, which prove how built heritage could be recognized and valorized even after radical changes in cultural and ethnic context take place. The management of these potentialities could be the subject of further research in the field. Therefore, the first

step of the research consists in the analysis of the causes and of the consequences of abandonment: the processes of abandonment, the relationships with local memory, landscape's transformation and the individuation of some methodologies for investigating the problem.

As a second step, we will assess the possibility of promoting and encouraging the comeback, through strategies and prospects having the aim of relaunching historical mountain centre again, imagining a possible future. Attention will be given to normative approaches applied in UNITA countries.

The last step will concern the discovery of some practical examples where the abandoned areas were converted and the people came back. The focus is put on the role that cultural heritage can play in these processes, from the perspective of a significant paradigm shift that places the preservation and the enhancement of these assets in a circular process starting from the territory and ending in the territory.

Research aims and methodology

The research aims to identify possible strategies to reactivate interest in some minor centres which are increasingly being abandoned. The aim of this study is not only to lead to the creation of new centres of tourist attraction but also to restore the identity of places and help recognising their cultural value to present and potential new residents.

As a result, the first objective is to provide a large-scale picture of the condition of the many small, abandoned built-up areas located far from the major centres of some of the sites identified in the UNITA territories. The study will focus primarily on the pre-Alps areas, with a secondary focus on the Pyrenees, to establish comparisons in different environmental, political and cultural contexts. In the selection of case studies will be excluded examples related to external violent factors such as earthquakes, wars or floods that forced people to leave. After having identified, at a quantitative level, the consistency of these problematic realities within some preliminarily agreed upon study areas, one will have to understand the progression of these abandonment processes and whether they are still ongoing.

Then we will liaise with the local municipalities that manage these territories to know how and if the local administrative reality has implemented strategies to stop the abandonment process.

This will be achieved by consulting data provided by the local municipalities on emigration and population change (age and gender in particular, but also employment, level of schooling, etc.); organisation of personal services, etc.

Based on the data obtained, a second objective will be to identify the deeper causes of this process of loss of the link between towns and villages, to understand which values have progressively disappeared and pushed people, especially young people, to go to big cities. Many of the reasons for leaving are likely linked to much greater and higher-income job opportunities.

But they're not the only ones.

In fact, the bibliography illustrates how frequently the centralization of personal services (clinics and health care, educational institutions) has played a negative role. Added to this is

the significant ageing of housing, which negatively affects the daily lifestyle. In other words, tangible and intangible heritage is no longer the element of attraction for the local population. To meet this goal, the candidate will enter into a close relationship with the place of the study identified through the collection, not only of archival data but also by getting in touch with the inhabitants still present and any relatives (children, grandchildren, friends, tourists, other types of users, etc.), making interviews and recording direct testimonies. In this phase, collaboration with municipalities will be important as a moment of contact with people. The research aims to identify strategies to make people (not necessarily the native ones) aware of the architectural, social, natural and economic value of small mountain centres, so a third objective is to get to know the existing architectural, artistic and landscape heritage. This objective will be achieved by carrying out a punctual survey of the built environment in its various aspects, in particular historical architectural construction techniques, artistic expressions (both public and private paintings and sculptures, oral traditions, etc.), landscape and naturalistic value, etc. Also, in this case, the candidate will have to carry out an activity directly in the study area, synthesising the data into digital models (GIS-BIM).

A fourth and final goal is to provide a practical direction for preventing abandonment and activating the possibility of return. However, this objective does not take the form of merely proposing a new tourist destination of a nostalgic nature. The study must lead to find the vocation of the analysed countries by focusing on cultural heritage as a driver of attractiveness. In other words, the space for tourism is prudently included in a more general revival, but at the heart of the promoted strategy, there will be assessments related to the recovery of local production through innovative technologies, such as the reuse of historical urban fabric to cohousing and co-working, the reuse of historical and disused infrastructure to improve slow mobility, the protection and reactivation of heritage and agroforestry production, etc. Choices will not be imposed but will emerge from the context.

Relevance and added-value of the proposed research in relation to the current state of knowledge

Over the last three decades, various initiatives promoted by the European Union concerning the involvement and empowerment of communities in recognising and creating cultural values have flourished. They include, for instance, the Faro Convention, programs for ecomuseums and community mapping, and have contributed to give voice to bottom-up initiatives for enhancing not only the so-called monumental architecture but also the "ordinary" one and built and vernacular cultural heritage. In general, this approach has also contributed focusing the attention on the importance of local communities in local development processes.

The final aim of this study is to understand if and how the conservation and reuse of architectural heritage can become an impulse and stimulus for a revival that is not limited to the individual artefact but that extends, in a wider sense, to the community that makes use of it and its territory. Specifically, we do not want to limit ourselves to the proposal to build an attractive centre but the added value is to find tools that can support administrators and local realities and that can help to direct policies and programs taking account of the protection and enhancement of the architectural heritage with a view to genuine public use.

In this sense, we want to move from direct knowledge of some cases to the relationship with the actors (public and private) who will be involved at various scales so that the strategy is explicit and shared, and why it is critical to act on the reuse of built heritage. Through an ex post analysis of concrete cases already realized, many elements that allow an initiative to be activated, to continue to develop or, on the contrary, to end with a failure will be collected and investigated.

The possibility of dealing with different European States will be an added value to analyze different types of practices, not only in terms of how to approach the problem, the quality of intervention, and the impact on the built environment, but also in terms of impact on use, management, and therefore the indirect impact on the community and territory. On the basis of the data collected through the study of bibliography, surveys, and field interviews, the census of conservation and reuse practices located in the territory of UNITA will be expanded, not with the aim of identifying all the initiatives that have been promoted but to return a picture as representative as possible of the dynamics in place. The GIS-BIM platform, accessible online, will gather a large number of already realised experiences, to which each potential promoter can look to realise its own strategy. Interpretive lines for the prevalence and orientation of heritage re-use practices in support of local development processes will be integrated and, specifically, elements aimed at the recognition of the ex-ante conditions of feasibility and effectiveness of possible re-use and local development strategies will be identified. The interpretative lines represent a "usable" product and an agile and expeditious tool, again in support of the figures who, in various capacities, deal with reuse practices. The research, in general, will (or will not) confirm the extent to which reuse is also compatible with the extension and endowment of essential services. The tools proposed here, operationally usable by potential promoters of reuse practices aimed at local development, represent a starting point for further developments and experimentation aimed at outlining methodologies to guide or assist these processes in a conscious manner, also from the point of view of the protection of the built heritage.

Interdisciplinary nature of the research together with the alignment with the CHORAL programme and complementarity expertise of the teams

The project is part of the CHORAL programme, one of the strands of which it shares, namely the study of inland areas with their relative inconveniences but also with their potential to be rediscovered. The University of Brescia has already tackled important studies on this subject, in particular, it recently participated in a project called Attivaree (www.attivareevalliresilienti.it/it/index.html), which has had numerous positive feedback in the scientific sector and is a truly active and positively successful practical example.

The co-supervisor the Professor. Christine Bouisset specializes in social geography of the environment. She is particularly interested in patrimonialization processes and interactions between local and global environmental changes and societies, which she studies mainly using qualitative methods.

The candidate can count on a heterogeneous team made up not only of the undersigned for issues related to the conservation and reading of the historical built environment but also of professors of the history of architecture for the knowledge of the symbolic architecture of the

local communities but also of the events that may have led to the loss of interest in places. The team also includes lecturers in urban planning who help in the identification of building mapping systems and GIS management of the results obtained, as well as the social dynamics that can be created in areas of distress because of the urban structure. Topography, computer science, and digitization lecturers are available for the knowledge phase of historical artefacts to assist in the creation of HBIM models, used in the enhancement part, facilitated by contributions from lecturers in tourism economics and mountain landscape economics. In Pau, the candidate will benefit from the support of a multidisciplinary team (social geography, economics, law, sociology) and from specialists in qualitative approaches (document analysis, surveys) in the field of environment and heritage. In particular, the doctoral student can refer to researchers who deal with environmental and climate changes, but also with agrarian-mountain landscapes and socio-demographic changes.

Output plan including publication and dissemination activities

The dissemination of the results will take place to communicate and ensure the dissemination of the research at different levels. The intended recipients are of various types: university researchers, but also people who may be interested in the topic, such as local and supra-local administrations, promotional bodies, investors, cultural associations, those living in the villages studied, high schools, and vocational training schools.

The communications aim to make people aware that the possibility of a reversal of the current abandonment trend is possible and that the contribution of all organizations and people involved in the research is necessary.

Dissemination will take place through several channels: publications within international scientific journals (at least 2), communications within international meetings, and communications at a local and supra-local level with the involvement of schools and protection and government bodies of the investigated territories.

Social media will be used to disseminate audio-visual products and material informing people about the initiatives and updating them with videos, photographs, and multimedia activities of the places and the status of the research. The first communications will start after the first three months after the start of the research to inform the managers of the study sites of the objectives of the research, at six months there will be a sharing of the state of the art on the topic.

Estimated schedule

The research organized over 3 years foresees in the first 6 months a survey related to the state of knowledge at the international level in UNITA and European countries. In the following three months, potential case studies will be recognized in the territories of UNITA universities for further study. Starting from the sixth month, inspections will begin in the areas identified to provide a survey of local realities, also through innovative technologies made available to the candidate (laser scanner), highlighting the typical architectural aspects, proceeding in historical and historiographical research on tangible and intangible assets that can be of help in the greater knowledge of the collection between man and territory, proceeding in the



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knowledge of the problems of management of small nuclei, gaps in services to the person, the existing economic organization, the relationship with the landscape and naturalistic context, etc. This work will last about 15 months on two or three case studies.

For at least 12 months, the candidate will also work in coordination with the closest reference universities in terms of research objectives for the places identified as case studies. In particular, there will be a stay in Pau to study a case in the Pyrenees. Over the next 15 months, the data collected will be synthesised, a mapping will be created using GIS/HBIM models, and several proposals and operational strategies will be evaluated to reactivate the attractiveness of the village studied by identifying a symbolic architecture on which to apply conservative intervention guidelines that take into account its characteristics. At the end of the work, the suggested work proposal will also be submitted to the local authorities involved.



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