
THE ENGADIN HOUSE, A CONTEMPORARY REINTERPRETATION. A new mixed program intervention in the village of Celerina

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The Engadin is a small region in the Swiss Alps, going from the Austrian boundary to the Italian valleys. Its houses, characterized by deep windows that Paul Schmitthener called “profound eyes”, are the subject of this thesis, divided into two different parts, autonomous but strictly linked. In the first one the Engadin House is analyzed from the historical, typological and morphological point of view, while in the second I investigated on the possibility to reinterpret its main characteristics in a contemporary project.



An example of Engadin House in Ardez. The volume, with its deep windows, is characterized by coloured Sgraffito decorations.

After a short excursus on the constructive tradition of the Engadin, in the general frame of the complex mosaic of cultures and languages that characterizes the Grisons, the Engadin House is analyzed starting from the strong link with the history and the culture of the valley. I retraced then its development, from the Middle Ages to the XVI century, when its main distributive and formal features were almost defined. The relation between the house and the urban fabric of the villages, but also the material and constructive aspects, are the main themes, faced in an ideal path through the different scales of architecture. At the end of the first part I made a short draft of XIX and XX century architecture in the Engadin, period in which architects had to face the totally new phenomenon of mass tourism in the valley, mediating between internationalization and preservation of local customs. The tight link with the constructive tradition of the Canton that characterizes the work of many of those architects, gave me the opportunity to introduce the theme of the second part of the thesis: the reinterpretation of the Engadin House.

The rejection of a project for the construction of a hotel in the center of Celerina, a little town in the High Engadin, not so far from St. Moritz, was a big opportunity to propose an alternative solution to a real situation, trying to develop a hypothesis of transformation for a crucial area of the village.

The site is located in the conjunction between Crasta and Celerina, two villages that, once separated, joined together after the big expansion that affected the valley during the last century. The result was a quite sparse and irregular fabric in which we can find some interesting buildings from the XX century.



Elevations. Behind the apparent regularity of the facades there is a great variety of openings, revealed by the different shadows on building's surfaces.

The project is conceived as a new centrality along the main road, a series of public spaces on different levels that reconnect this part of the village to the rest of the fabric. The volumes, perfectly fitting into the context, host multifunctional spaces, a hotel and some residences. They are organized around a series of thresholds that bring into the different buildings with various grades of permeability, starting from a central public space. From a formal point of view the language adopted moves between regularity and deformation, exactly as in the majority of traditional houses, whose volumetric, distributive, technological and constructive features are here reinterpreted. The project is developed at different scales, from the urban level to the technological details, making time after time the relationship with the local tradition clear.



Sections of the multipurpose building. The great void of the barn that characterized the traditional buildings is here reinterpreted with a big multifunctional space, opened towards the outside.

The thesis is therefore a chance to experiment a method that, starting from the in-depth analysis of the context, both in its physical and immaterial components, tries to bring back a constructive tradition, taking a clear stance towards the issue of the dialogue between the project and its cultural context.

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