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Abstract

**Austrian vernacular architecture: the case of Ullmanngut in
Bad Gastein. Refurbishment and enhancement**

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by

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This paper was compiled during a University International Exchange (ERASMUS program) in Austria, specifically in Salzburg, thanks to the collaboration between the Holztechnologie department of the Fachhochschule Salzburg and the DAD department of the Politecnico di Torino. Ullmanngut represents one of the oldest and still authentic examples of wooden vernacular architecture in the Salzburg region. It's a typical peasant house in the Pongau area, built according to the Blockbau system. The house was once part of a bigger rural compound which has today disappeared. Dendrochronological studies have revealed that the spruce fir wood employed in the construction of the *blockbau* was cut down between 1485 and 1490; hence the building is believed to be more than 500 years old.



The structure, surprisingly well preserved, is a unique and unrepeatable example of “material culture”, rich with both ancient techniques and traditional skills. The farm, which has now been uninhabited for more than 20 years, has recently been preserved only through occasional emergency operations. Without a prompt and accurate renovation plan we risk losing this exceptional piece of historical evidence. The Alti Tauri National Park and some other local cultural associations are interested in rescuing the building. The idea is to turn it into operational headquarters with an exhibition area, making sure it is well maintained and suitable for the public. The whole idea is fuelled by the resolve to protect and pass down the cultural heritage of traditional architecture. The core driving value is the

conservation and enhancement of historical evidences in their natural context, respecting their authenticity according to the principles of “distinguishability”, “reversibility” and “minimum intervention”. The preliminary phase is based on the territorial and historical analysis of the settlement in its context, followed by a study of the history of the construction and the morphology of the building. Accurate documents have been produced within the drafting of this paper, including photos, sketches and drawings in relation to the steadiness of the building as well as the materials, techniques and technologies employed in the construction. Particular attention has been given to the joints and architectural details.

Various Italian regulations and procedures have been used, in some instances, to map the decay of fronts, ceilings and roof framework. All this serves to evaluate the general conservation status of the building, i.e. the nature and the causes of the building pathology. Other cases of rescue operations carried out on wooden vernacular architectures have been researched and analysed before drafting the proposal for this operation, in order to compare the different approaches and procedures of renovation and enhancement used. The buildings concerned are in three different geographical areas around Europe, respectively Italy, Austria, and Finland. All operations have been carried out with procedures and results diametrically opposed. Once all of the necessary material on the architectural object had been collected, the rescue proposal was drafted with regard to the needs of the consumer, but always favouring the conservation of the object itself. The engagement of the relative authorities, in Salzburg and locally, is vital to the fulfilment of the project. Providing essential operational experience, they can ensure the project is linked to the local traditions in employing and stressing the importance of traditional materials and construction techniques. The proposal is in line with the recent endorsement given by Europa Nostra to the project Oubre Rong, carried out in Alagna Valsesia.