

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE
Degree in Architecture
Honors theses

The Modern alpine architecture in the Valle d'Aosta region

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When and why was the sentiment of identity born in Valle d'Aosta, which conditions the path of "romantic" studies carried out by the architects of the modern epoch on the rural alpine architecture?

The birth of the above-mentioned can be noticed between the nineteenth and twentieth century, there is the acknowledgement of a specific culture in the Valle d'Aosta region and the desire and policies to preserve it; in a crucial moment like the passage from the Kingdom of Sardinia to the Unification of Italy, a sentiment of Identity of the Valle d'Aosta region is formed, an acknowledgement of diversity, a research for the "Valdosta ethnicity" – the idea of a "patrie valdôtaine" – characterising the historical elements that were marked by battles in order to defend the Valdosta peculiarities , specifically the mountains and the linguistic differences in respect to the rest of Italy.



Olivetti Mountain Colony, Brusson – Arch. Conte and Arch. Fiori

The sense of belonging to an alpine culture in the true sense of the word was the exact opposite of the worlds of the plains and the city. By the romantic re-discovery of the mountain on behalf of British travellers and also, subsequently, that valuate their savage beauty, the mountain population became the expression of remarkable virtue as well as proud and simple traditions.

In Valle d'Aosta, the mythical image of the mountain started to impose itself near the end of the nineteenth century and was greatly utilised by architects which dealt with alpine building starting from the end of the Second World War.

The rural and spontaneous architecture was studied and analysed by modern day architects through works of the conventions of the Institution of Mountain Architecture, which met for the first time in Bardonecchia in 1952.



Garelli premises, Champoluc - Arch. Mollino

The conventions of the Institute were aimed at promoting and addressing the typological and structural characteristics in order to “respect” in the case of new works of construction in the alpine environment, following the trend that starting from the 30’s in the twentieth century, began to discuss traditional architecture as a topic of interest and testimony of the same value of the other sectors like demagogic and folkloristic cultures, mutating the generalised conception to retain traditional art as a more elementary and culturally “weak” manifestation in respect to art with a capital “A”, with particular interest for private and hotel buildings, trying to safeguard the “natural” landscape.

It is necessary to distinguish between typical and rural architecture: one represents architecture that is aimed at the necessities of the community, from spiritual to productive needs, and the other is that which is essentially related to ground works, rural homes, “rascards” or “stadeln”. Traditionally functional, it leaves nothing to the excess and the constructive sincerity of a mountain home, it is evident that: its internal distribution is identifiable straightaway.

From the proposals and the typological – construction conclusions that arose from the Conventions of the Institute of Mountain Architecture, not always are ideas born, at least in Valle d’Aosta, developments that found an applicable space in the building sector.

“we do not reject ...the “modern” materials and the “modern” building concepts, but we hope that the designers or even just the professionals and craftsmen draw happy moments of inspiration, especially in the area which must always, preventively, be well understood and happily interpreted. It is the forms, the volumes, the light and dark contrasts, the vibrations of the surfaces, the tonalities of the tints and the materials, the overhangs, the measures and the cuts of the rooms that contribute to a good architectural inspiration, not the sterile and not well digested copying of the new”.



Pirovano Shelter, Cervinia - Architect Albini

Concrete examples of this type of approach to building in the mountains are, in my opinion, the Pirovano Shelter of the Architect Albini, the Garelli premises by Arch. Mollino or the Olivetti Mountain Colony by Arch. Conte and Arch. Fiori, buildings that present an alliance between typical constructive elements of local architecture, as stone and wood, beside “modern” techniques and material like cement and steel.

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