

Repairing interventions inside “Ecomuseo delle Terre d’Acqua”. San Giovanni complex in Fontanetto Po

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In our degree thesis, we worked on the recovery of a stratified molinary complex (*San Giovanni complex*) located among the Fontanetto Po rice-fields, in the Southern area of Vercelli. Among the buildings which compose it, a mill of the seventeenth century (*Molino da Po* or *San Giovanni*), the rests of an ancient mill for inert materials and a rice mill still in function, that nowadays is used as a rice-working museum, is notable.

Some years ago, the *San Giovanni complex* became part of the net of the exposition points tracked by the *Ecomuseo delle Terre d’Acqua* - engaged in promoting and narrating the rice-fields people’s culture and history - that had recognised it as an important evidence of the local material culture.

Our work, according to the *Ecomuseo* principles, aimed to realise a project able to regain the historical memory of the complex and, at the same time, to meet the new requirements of the territory.

After having made a survey of the present condition and having accurately filed the whole architectural manufacture (Scheda A dell’ICCD – Progetto Guarini), it was possible to track the guide-lines of the project, that can be summarized in three essential points:

1. The first point sees, beyond the restoration of the historical buildings, new interventions aimed on the one hand to exalt parts of the building hidden by delapidated structures, on the other hand to adapt the spaces to the new purposes. In this first point is included the recovery of the *San Giovanni* rice-mill, that confirms and increases its present museum destination, and the seventeenth-century ancient mill, that becomes a typical inn where you can rediscover the tastes of local cuisine and the initiatives of Vercelli *Slow Food* can be entertained. In both cases, thanks to historical research and reading of the architectural manufactures, we tried to get back the original appearance of the buildings, also through the sometimes symbolic reproposal of lost features.



2. The second point is focused on the ex-novo projecting of a youth hostel that reminds the ancient rice-pickers' dormitories thanks to the internal organisation in large rooms, and of a space for different uses covered by a roof composed by three pitches, that widens as a fan according to the natural disposition of the lot. During the project of new buildings we have reflected very much about the relationship with the pre-existing. In fact the new buildings are realised using a simple language, that doesn't prevail the one of the historical structures, and employing construction systems and materials different from the traditional ones. Furthermore the relationship with the landscape, that is evident in some formal choices adopted for the hostel. The building is thought to widen towards the surrounding countryside and the *Monferrato* hills: in order to do this we reduced to the least the brickwork using glass, lifting up the only pitch of the covering moved forward, towards the landscape, with a long balcony which represents a perfect place for the shade, the sunshine and the contemplation of the rice-fields.



3. The third point, finally, is based on the organisation of the open spaces and of two pedestrians routes, that have the purpose of linking each other the different parts of the complex, at the moment disjoined by the Roggia Camera. In order to do this, the existing alignments, the orientation of the buildings, the tracks of the fields and canals were taken as references.

In fact, the two links projected links recall some marks readable from the planimetry of the present situation: the first, that runs in parallel to the new hostel, follows the course of an irrigation canal, while the second, inside the lot, recalls and underlines the perspective of the courtyard and, as a telescope, addresses the sight over the Roggia Camera.

Thanks to this two paths it is given the possibility to the visitors of going across the Roggia Camera and observing one of the most suggestive sights of the complex: the narrow passage where the water operated the San Giovanni mill wheel and then the mill hydraulic turbine.



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