



# Sinergie a confine StoneLab in *Aurisina*.



DIPLOMARBEIT

**Synergien an der Grenze.**  
**Steinlab in Aurisina**  
*Sinergie a confine.*  
*Stone Lab in Aurisina*

ausgeführt zum Zwecke der Erlangung des akademischen Grades  
eines Diplom-Ingenieurs / Diplom-Ingenieurin  
unter der Leitung

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E253-04 | HB1  
Hochbau und Entwerfen

eingereicht an der Technischen Universität Wien  
Fakultät für Architektur und Raumplanung von

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Wien am

18. Dezember 2023

Unterschrift

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# Abstract

This diploma thesis deals with the socio-anthropological scale of a rural reality, a productive landscape in the Italian Karst, on the border between Italy and Slovenia. A Borderscape in which the political frontiers often intertwined and overlapped with other boundaries based on different criteria of classification and ordering.

“The Karst is a land of limestone and juniper. A terrible cry turned to stone”<sup>1</sup>. Stone is a local natural resource in the Karst Plateau, and everything is connected to it: its landscape, architecture, geology, history and identity of the locals. This stone, more precisely the Aurisina stone, is even related to more distant cities, particularly Vienna.

This common denominator becomes a catalyst in the project, bringing locals and non-locals to build, create and live together in this rural setting. A ruin of an old stone workshop close to an active quarry in Aurisina is restored to its original function, becoming a space for innovatively working with stone. Local typologies and spaces are considered in the design process, transforming this industrial wasteland into a place for the community, where productivity becomes a means for social interaction. The built and landscape environment interact together, connecting the user with the karstic territory and the history of the place.

The project and the research work are developed in close relationship with the local organisers of the ongoing initiative of Kamen: diffused museum of the quarries of Aurisina. The purpose is to look at possibilities in which architecture can be used to establish cultural, social and political settings of co-production in marginal and rural areas.

# Kurzfassung

Diese Diplomarbeit wird anhand einer sozio-anthropologischen Skala in einer ländlichen Realität entwickelt, genauer gesagt in einer produktiven Landschaft im italienischen Karst, an der Grenze zwischen Italien und Slowenien. Es handelt sich um eine Grenzlandschaft, in der politische Grenzen oft mit anderen Grenzen verflochten und überschneidend sind, die auf verschiedenen Klassifizierungs- und Ordnungskriterien beruhen.

“Der Karst ist ein Land aus Kalk und Wacholder. Ein schrecklicher, versteinerter Schrei.”<sup>2</sup> Der Stein ist eine lokale natürliche Ressource auf dem Karstplateau, und alles ist damit verbunden: die Landschaft, die Architektur, die Geologie, die Geschichte und die Identität der Bewohner. Dieser Stein, insbesondere der Aurisina-Stein, wird sogar mit weit entfernten Städten in Verbindung gebracht, vor allem mit Wien.

Dieser gemeinsame Nenner fungiert als Katalysator im Rahmen des Projekts, der lokale und nicht lokale Besucher verbindet, die gemeinsam in dieser Landschaft bauen, gestalten und leben. Eine Ruine einer alten Steinwerkstatt in der Nähe eines aktiven Steinbruchs in Aurisina wird in ihre ursprüngliche Funktion zurückversetzt und zu einem Raum für die innovative Steinverarbeitung umgestaltet. Lokale Typologien und Räume werden in den Entwurfsprozess integriert, um dieses Industriegebrache in einen Ort für die Gemeinschaft zu verwandeln, an dem Produktivität zu einem Mittel für soziale Interaktion wird. Die gebaute und die natürliche Umgebung interagieren miteinander und verbinden den Nutzer mit dem Karstgebiet und der Geschichte des Ortes.

Das Projekt und die Forschungen werden in enger Zusammenarbeit mit den örtlichen Organisatoren der laufenden Initiative von Kamen: diffuses Museum der Steinbrüche von Aurisina entwickelt. Das Ziel besteht darin, die Möglichkeiten zu untersuchen, wie Architektur genutzt werden kann, um kulturelle, soziale und politische Rahmenbedingungen für die gemeinsame Kulturproduktion in marginalen und ländlichen Gebieten zu schaffen.

1: Scipio Slataper, My karst and My City: And other essays, Trans. Elena Coda (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 64.

2: Scipio Slataper, My karst and My City: And other essays, my translation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 64.

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# Context



# Introduction

One of the reasons I developed my project in a border area such as the Karst is the artistic and architectural potential this place holds as a melting pot of different cultures. I recognize myself in the people and realities of this border territory as a bilingual person who grew up between two countries. Therefore, it felt natural to interact with the people of the place, which made me feel part of their community instantly.

My project focuses on Aurisina, a small town with a strong connection to Vienna, Budapest, and other important cities worldwide. The reason for this connection is the stone, which has been extracted since Roman times and reached its golden age during the Austro-Hungarian occupation. Through the construction of the Southern Railway, the rock of this small town, unbeknown to most people - even to the inhabitants of Trieste - covered the façades and interiors of some of the most representative buildings of the Habsburgs, including the Hofburg, the University of Vienna, the new Parliament in Budapest, the Opera in Graz, etc.

Walking through the small villages and in the wild areas of the Karst, one can observe that everything connects to stone, from buildings to landscape, from geology to settlements. It seems that even the people were born from it. It is part of their identity, and their ancestors, who dug and carved stones, have made possible the erection of important buildings under difficult and dangerous conditions, with strenuous working hours and low wages. The problem with productive landscapes in the countryside is often this: They are invisible. As architects, when we choose a material for our project, we are not always aware of all the temporal and spatial realities behind it, especially when it is displaced. Like in many post-industrial realities, in and around Aurisina, it is possible to find several abandoned quarries and industrial buildings.

The Casa C.A.V.E. association started in 2021 to organize cultural events in Duino and Aurisina, concerts in the disused quarries, cross-border sculpture workshops, tours in the active quarries, exhibitions, encounters, and more. The aim is to create a future diffuse museum, promoting and restoring areas with cultural, historical, and natural potential.

Rural areas in Italy suffer from unemployment, lack of infrastructure, and entertainment; this leads many young people to move to the cities. Bringing attention to these invisible places and consciously designing the world's less urbanized spaces is essential for sustainability and conscious planning. The project and the research aim to bring attention to these places and reveal their potential. Because the border between two countries and cities and rural areas is much more fluid than we imagine. It is precisely in these places that new synergies can be created and developed.

# The Karst

The name “Karst” - in Slovenian and Croatian Kras and German Karst - derives from the pre-Indo-European word “ka(r)a”, which means “stone”.

Stone is a local natural resource in the Karst Plateau; it has shaped the human environment and the landscape identity of its inhabitants. The close relationship between landscape, architecture, human settlements, productivity, and geology is evident in the area. (fig.3, 4, 5)

The Karst rocks, which developed between 137 and 50 million years ago, testify to the continents’ slow shift during the transition from the Jurassic to Eocene periods. The sea moving forward over landmasses created better conditions for marine life and, when retreating, left large areas of land behind. This movement caused geological and biological events resulting in climatic changes. Like a raft, a fragment of the continent detached from Africa and moved north-eastward. It ended its journey more than 10 million years ago, colliding with Eurasia and uplifting the Alps.<sup>1</sup> The northern edge of that small fragment of Africa corresponds to present-day Karst.

The various plant and animal species and their bioconstructive activity gave rise to formations of carbonate strata of varying thickness. The plant and animal remains - especially the Mollusc fragments - formed the fossils in the “Monrupino limestones” from the Upper Cenomanian period (95 million years ago). They foreshadow the subsequent formations, namely the Aurisina limestone and Radiolite limestone.<sup>2</sup> Until the end of the Cretaceous (66 million years ago) muds and sands were deposited, visible today in limestones rich in fossils. These are limestones that emerge clearly in the Duino-Sistiana area. In this area, abundant remains of vertebrates have been found, including dinosaurs and crocodiles. In the Villaggio del Pescatore a perfectly preserved skeleton of an adult dinosaur was discovered in 1994. It is Europe’s most complete medium- to large dinosaur skeleton since 1878.<sup>3</sup>

The plateau composed of lime rocks stretching from Italy to Croatia via Slovenia is called Classic Karst in international scientific circles. Due to the rocks’ water-soluble character, the water’s erosive action has shaped the territory over the centuries, creating the so-called



1: Rodolfo Riccamboni, *Geovagando in Friuli Venezia Giulia*, (Trieste: Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia, 2012).

2: Franco Cucchi et al., *Der Naturstein aus dem Triester Karst*, (Trieste: Camera di Commercio Industria Artigianato e Agricoltura, 1989).

3: Rodolfo Riccamboni, *Geovagando in Friuli Venezia Giulia*.

→ Karst's location

5: Scipio Slataper, My karst and My City: And other essays, Trans. Elena Coda (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 64.

↑ Fig 1: Doberdò del Lago in 1917

→ Fig 2: Doberdò del Lago Nowadays



“karst phenomena” or “karstism”. On the surface, the environment is characterized by bare limestone and Mediterranean flora with pine, ash, hornbeam, and oak trees. Cultivable areas are circumscribed by depressions (doline), which collect red earth sediments and are protected against the bora by characteristic low stone walls.

Water is absent at the surface but present in-depth, penetrating through cracked limestones, resulting in a well-developed underground water system. The water enlarges fractures and stratification planes, gradually pushing itself deeper and forming wider conduits. Pressure widens cracks in the conduit walls, resulting in cavities of various shapes, horizontal (tunnels, caves) and vertical (shafts,

“The Karst is a land of limestone and juniper. A terrible cry turned to stone. Boulders grey with rain and lichen, twisted, fractures, sharp. Dry juniper. Long hours of limestone and juniper. The grass is bristly. Bora. Sunlight. The earth is without peace, without continuity. It has no field where it can stretch itself out. Every attempt it makes is fractured and riven. Cold dark caves. Water drops, bearing all the soil it has stolen, steadily, mysteriously, for a hundred thousand years, and another hundred thousand still.”<sup>5</sup>





4: "Il Carsismo," G.M.P.E. Gruppo Mineralogico Paleontologico Euganeo, May 25, 2023, <https://www.gmpe.it/geomorfologia/carsismo>.

6: Marco Facchini, „Architettura in pietra nell’altipiano carsico.“ (phD thesis, Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna, 2012), [http://amsdottorato.unibo.it/4527/1/Facchini\\_Marco\\_tesi.pdf](http://amsdottorato.unibo.it/4527/1/Facchini_Marco_tesi.pdf).

7: Mitja Kaligarič, Danijel Ivačič, „Vanishing landscape of the “classic” Karst” Landscape and Urban Planning Volume 132 (December 2014): 148-158.

8: Marco Facchini, „Architettura in pietra nell’altipiano carsico“.

→ Fig.3: Hilke path - Duino

chasms). In this network of conduits, underground circulation is created, sometimes resulting in subterranean lakes and rivers. For instance, the Reka River originates in Croatia, flows until a sinkhole near St. Kanzian in Slovenia, and after a 37km long underground journey, rises 2 km from the sea near San Giovanni of Duino under the name Timavo.<sup>4</sup>

Humans, with their activities, have greatly influenced the transformation of the Karst environment, not only through the exploitation of Stone but also through wood exploitation, agriculture, and zootechny. It is assumed that in prehistoric times, the land had been covered by oak and turkey oak forests, later cut down for wood exploitation and burned down to gain new land for agriculture and pasture.<sup>6</sup> The most common and ancient economic activity was zootechny, which led to the over-exploitation of pastures, turning the Karst into a land of stones. Indeed, in the popular imagination and the “landscape identity”<sup>7</sup> of its inhabitants, the Karst is an arid, stony land, cribbed with dolines and ravines over which the bora blows vehemently. That is why, according to ancient folk legends, the Karst was born as a garden of Eden: a green area with fresh water and fertile soil. Out of spite, it was the devil who spilled a whole bag of stones over it, covering everything.

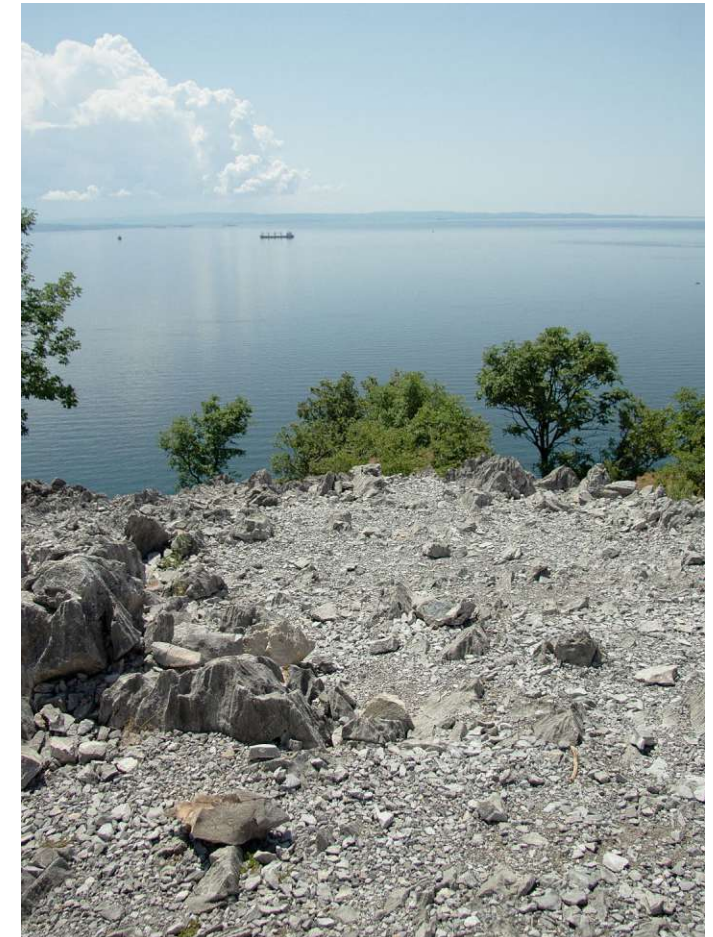
Over the past two millennia, the area suffered severe deforestation, erosion, and almost desertification. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, deforestation peaked. Josef Ressel took an interest in the issue, and by 1822, he had already investigated the possibility of reforestation of the Karst with the black pine. The Habsburgs welcomed his proposal, and 20 years later, the first plantations were made; black pine planting began in the municipality of Komen around 1895.<sup>8</sup> The reforestation initiated by the Habsburgs and the gradual abandonment of the countryside marked the second half of the twentieth century have changed its physiognomy significantly: Now well-preserved stone houses and villages and growing agglomerations are countered by karstic moorland, wild areas and extensive forest. Traces of the former landscape can be found only in some sections devastated by World War I.

For over a year, a process has been underway in the Karst region to transform this area into a cross-border geopark recognized by UNESCO. The European Regional Development Fund funds the GeoKarst project under the INTERREG VI-A Italy-Slovenia Cooperation Program. This cross-border institutional cooperation aims to link the two countries in cultural heritage, economic development, and sustainable geo-tourism, enhancing cross-border governance.

Among the Interreg VI-A Italy-Slovenia Program, three strategic projects will be founded: ADRIONCYCLETOUR - A cycling

route along the Adriatic Sea coast in Friuli Venezia Giulia, Veneto, and Slovenia – POSEIDONE and KRAS-CARSO II – which would contribute to the sustainable development of the territory and cross-border functional area.<sup>9</sup>

9: “Strategic Projects,” Interreg Italia Slovenia, July 1, 2023, <https://www.ita-slo.eu/en/progetti/progetti-strategici>.





← Fig 4: Stone quarry - Aurisina  
↑ Fig 5: Slovenian house - Prepotto



-  Water
-  Settlements
-  Caves

# Duino Aurisina



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The approved original version of this thesis is available in print at TU Wien Bibliothek.



Fig 5: Duino Aurisina municipality

# The Stone of Aurisina

The municipality of Duino-Aurisina is located in the province of Trieste, in the extreme south-eastern part of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, on the border with Slovenia and the province of Gorizia. Aurisina, in Slovenian Nabrežina, is a center for extracting Aurisina marble and stone.

The origins of the Aurisina Roman Quarry date back to imperial Rome. It was widely used in the city of Aquileia to construct buildings, statues, and monuments, as well as in Targeste (today Trieste).

After the fall of the Roman empire, little evidence exists of its use in the Middle Ages. Karst stone was used regularly in Venice until the Middle Ages, later replaced by Istria stone. Its utilization began again in the 18th-century in Trieste as the city grew, encouraged by the commercial development which followed the proclamation of the free port by Emperor Charles VI of Habsburg in 1719. Trieste had an exponential demographic growth; from a town of 10.000 inhabitants in 1750, it became a cosmopolitan city of 250.000 inhabitants in 1910. Christian Hansen designed the dockyard of the Lloyd Austriaco in 1853, a project showcasing the material's quality and durability, attracting the attention of many enterprises and architects.<sup>10</sup>

During the growth of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the material went through its golden age and found wide use in every corner of the kingdom, thanks to the construction of the Southern Railway (Südbahn), which connected Vienna and Trieste. More than six thousand cubic meters of Aurisina Limestones were used to build the wing of the semicircular building of the imperial palace in Vienna and seven thousand tons of Repen for the construction of the New Parliament Hall in Budapest. Around 1890, the Karst quarry and workshop sector had over 3,000 workers. After the annexation of Trieste to Italy (1918), Aurisina marble was used to make the Redipuglia Military Memorial and the Milan Central Station (1931). During this period, Karst stone reaches overseas countries for the first time.<sup>11</sup>

In recent years, Aurisina marble has been used by internationally acclaimed architects in numerous works in Italy and abroad. Notable among these are the exterior paving of the Citylife Shopping District in Milan, designed by Zaha Hadid, and the interior flooring of



Lavazza's new headquarters, "the Cloud," designed by Cino Zucchi in Turin.

There are currently three main quarries, two still being exploited (Cava Ivere 1 and 2). Excavation over the centuries has taken them to a depth of more than 100 meters over an area of about 200,000 square meters.

In the area of Aurisina it's possible to find different types of pure, compact, and homogeneous limestone, commonly known as "Aurisina Chiara", "Aurisina Granitello", "Roman Stone" and "Aurisina Fiorita". All of them have excellent physical, mechanical, and chemical properties. They are compact, durable, and wear-resistant, suitable both for indoor and outdoor use, as well as for carving.<sup>12</sup> They have a gray or light gray color, but they differ in dimension and organic fraction.

12: Daniela Matetić Poljak, Katja Marasović, ASMOSIA XI, Interdisciplinary Studies on Ancient Stone, (Split: Arts Academy in Split, university of Split, 2018).

10: Franco Cucchi et al., Der Naturstein aus dem Triester Karst, (Trieste: Camera di Commercio Industria Artigianato e Agricoltura, 1989).

11: Franco Cucchi et al., Der Naturstein aus dem Triester Karst.

Fig 6: Quarry Ivere 2, Aurisina Cave

➤ Fig 7; ➔ Fig 8: Cava Ivere,  
Riccardo Ciriello



# Journey of Aurisina Stone

## ITALY

- *Como:*  
Honor Temple of Alessandro Volta
- *Milano:*  
Stazione Centrale, Banca Commerciale Italiana *Murano:*  
external decorations of the Church of Santa Maria e San Donato
- *Ravenna:*  
Mausoleum of Theoderic
- *Trieste:*  
Governor's Palace, Cassa di Risparmio di Trieste, former Credit Institute, Lloyd Austriaco, Old Bourse, Cathedral of San Giusto, Porta decumana, amphitheater, southern railroad Trieste-Ljubljana (railroad buildings and bridge structures)

## AUSTRIA

- *Graz:*  
Opera House
- *Linz:*  
Landesgalerie Francico Carolinum
- *Vienna:*  
New Hofburg, Parliament building, Ringstrasse buildings, New City Hall, Academy of Fine Arts, Börse, Palais Erzherzog Wilhelm

## CZECH REPUBLIC

- *Hněvčeves (Svib hill):*  
Monument to the Austrian 8th Feldjäger Battalion

## HUNGARY

- *Budapest:*  
New Parliament building, private buildings, Deak mausoleum

## OTHER COUNTRIES

*Ljubljana, Paris, Maribor, Debrecen, Arad, Temesvar, Osijek, Belgrad, Bukarest, Alexandria, Port Said, Kairo, Berlin, Prague, Salzburg, Zara, Rijeka, Zadar, Zagreb, Pola, Atlanta (USA) etc.*

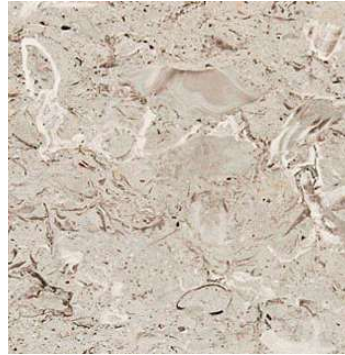













- + Ravenna: Mausoleum of Theoderic
- + Milano: Stazione Central Banca Commerciale Italiana
- + Vienna: New Hofburg
- + Budapest: New Parliament building



# Marble in Trieste Karst

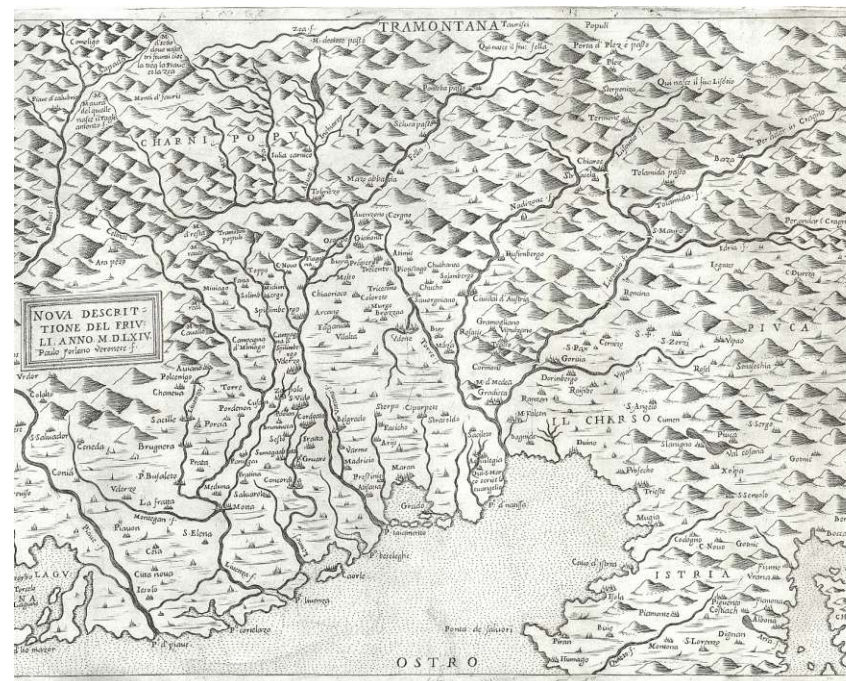


- 
Aurisina Chiara  
Place of extraction: Aurisina
- 
Aurisina Fiorita  
Place of extraction: Aurisina
- 
Aurisina Granitello  
Place of extraction: Aurisina
- 
Roman Stone  
Place of extraction: Aurisina
- 
Fior di Mare  
Place of extraction: Rupin-  
grande, Rupinpiccolo
- 
Repen Classic (bright)  
Place of extraction: Rupin-  
grande, Monrupino, San Pelagio
- 
Repen Classic (zolla type)  
Place of extraction: Monrupino
- 
Breccia Carsica  
Place of extraction: Slivia
- 
Stalattite  
Place of extraction: Bristie,  
Medeazza, San Pelagio

# History

The municipality of Duino Aurisina, the Karst, and its surroundings have been continuously inhabited since the Stone Age, mainly because of their favorable location at the junction of the Mediterranean and Alpine environments between Eastern and Southeastern Europe. The presence of prehistoric inhabitation has been proven by remains found in several caves, dating from the Neolithic and Copper and Bronze eras.<sup>13</sup> In addition to these finds, in Friuli Venezia Giulia and Istria, it is possible to find a large number of “castellieri,” villages on high grounds, surrounded by drystone walls or embankments. Among them, the oldest ones date back to the Bronze Age. However, for many castellieri in the area, it has not yet been possible to define the precise construction period nor the precise ethnic group to which these fortifications belonged. From toponym analyses, it appears that they were Indo-European but not Illyrian-speaking. The population that established the castellieri was engaged in agriculture, and during the Iron Age, they achieved significant economic and demographic growth. This civilization retreated in the late Iron Age, probably due to plague epidemics and Celtic incursions, who took over the villages.<sup>14</sup>

From as early as the third century B.C., the Roman Empire appeared in the region to consolidate its control over the Adriatic Sea. The key date of Roman penetration into the eastern subalpine regions was 181 B.C., when the colony of Aquileia was founded. With the arrival of the Romans, a new era began; Aquileia, in the 1st century B.C., became an important administrative and commercial center equipped with a fluvial port. In line with their administrative policy, the Romans built an efficient road network to connect the new provinces to their centers. Thus, the Gemina road was built, which connected Aquileia to Emona (today’s Ljubljana) and passed through San Giovanni di Duino, Aurisina, Santa Croce, and Prosecco, with a branch to Trieste.<sup>15</sup> In the 1st century B.C., the famous Roman quarries and the owners’ villas were built in Aurisina, bringing lively traffic to the area. Over the centuries, Aquileia grew in strength and wealth, contributing crucially to the establishment of Romanity to the point that after the collapse of the empire, despite the succession of invasions of Germanic and Slavic ethnic groups, the population of



the area kept its Celto-Roman characteristics, as such the Neo-Latin language that still distinguishes the Friulian identity.

One of the most outstanding examples of its use is the Mausoleum of Theodoric in Ravenna in 520 d.C. The coverage was made from a single block of stone (10.76 m in diameter, 3.09 m in height, and 300 tons in weight). The material was transported from the rocky hillside to the sea through inclined planes, where the stone was sliding toward the underlying port of landing.<sup>16</sup>

After the collapse of the Roman Empire, the Karst area was exposed to several invasions; the territory was plundered and left devastated. During the 6th and 7th centuries A.D., the Avars and Slovenes also descended to Trieste, which until then had been unharmed and plundered. The Slovenes battled with the Lombards and settled in the 8th century on the border from Monfalcone to Cormons and Cividale, where we still find the Slovenian ethnic border today.

In 774, the power was taken over by the Franks, who introduced feudalism in this place. Since then, lords and clerics have occupied authoritarian positions. The most important administrative center for the western Karst was San Giovanni di Duino. In front of the port of San Giovanni, the castle of Duino, ruled by the Duino lords, was erected around the year 1000. Due to the competition with the

16: Franco Cucchi et al., *Der Naturstein aus dem Triester Karst*, (Trieste: Camera di Commercio Industria Artigianato Agricoltura, 1989).

13: Jasna Simoneta, Praprot, (Aurisina: Circolo sportivo ricreativo “Vaška skupnost Praprot,” 2018).

14: Flego Stank, Lidia Rupel, *I castellieri della Provincia di Trieste*, (Trieste: Editoriale Stampa Triestina, 1993).

15: Jasna Simoneta, Praprot.

16: Fig13: Nova descrizione del Friuli by Paolo Forlani known as the Veronese, Venice 1564

17: Jasna Simoneta, Praprotn.



↑ Fig14: Southern Railway in Aurisina, 1857

nearby Venice, in 1382, the Free Municipality of Trieste asked for help from the Habsburg Empire. It decreed the city's dedication to Duke Leopold of Austria. The city of Trieste and Duino became part of the Habsburg empire until the First World War. Numerous peasants had left their land to move to Trieste.

Turks passed through the Karst fifteen times from 1469 to 1499, leaving devastated villages, destroyed fields, and numerous dead. The population took refuge in caves and forests or the fortifications built for this purpose. In addition, in 1470, the Karst was invaded by locusts; in 1511, it was shaken by a strong earthquake, and from 1508 to 1516, there were several clashes with the Venetians<sup>17</sup>. The situation on the Karst was difficult, and the land brought little income to the lordships, who, therefore, tried to repopulate the half-abandoned villages with fugitives arriving from Bosnia, Dalmatia, and other Balkan countries afflicted by the Turks.

The Habsburgs turned Trieste into their sea outlet to the world when the city was declared a Free Port in 1719. During the growth of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, important industrial centers in Aurisina and Monfalcone were reopened to exploit stone. Aurisina stone lived its golden age and was widely used in every corner of the kingdom, thanks to the Southern Railway (Südbahn) construction, which

connected Vienna and Trieste. The quarries offered work to several thousand quarrymen from all over the region. Next to the railway station in Aurisina, a new settlement was formed for the railway employees and workers, to whom the farmers could sell their crops. Most importantly, such a close station meant a fast connection to Trieste, where the inhabitants of the surrounding area could easily go to work and sell their products, providing them with continuous and secure earnings.

The late 19th century saw the rise of a political consciousness among Slovenes, with associations committed to promoting establishing a unitary Slovenian state that would include Trieste and Gorizia. From this period, the first elementary schools and numerous cultural and sports associations were established, whose activities continued until after World War I.

The Karst was the tragic theatre of the main battles on the Italian-Austrian front in World War I.<sup>18</sup> On the night of May 24, 1915, Italy entered the war against Austria-Hungary, breaking the Triple Alliance pact that had long bound it to Austria and Germany. The Italian troops reached the Isonzo intending to overtake the Karst, blocking the way to Trieste. On the Karst plateau, Italians and Austro-Hungarians fought 12 battles between 1915 and 1917, in which thousands of men lost their lives or their freedom among the trenches dug in the bare rock or on the slopes of the Julian Pre-Alps. The final attack from the Piave River to Vittorio Veneto decreed Italian supremacy, which led to the signing of the Armistice between Italy and Austria, signed at Villa Giusti (Padua) on November 4, 1918.

Giuseppe Ungaretti, one of the leading Italian poets of the 20th century, was a volunteer in the war, and it was among the karst stones and the horrors of the conflict that he wrote some of his most important poems.

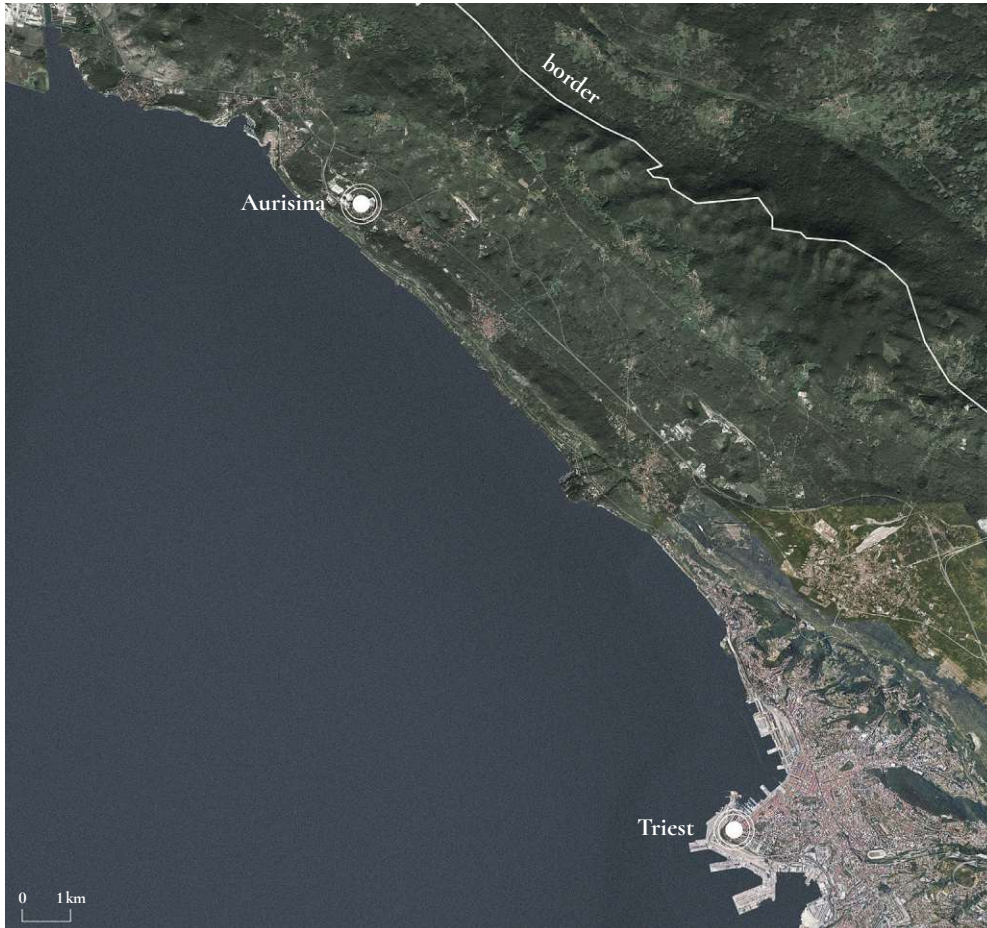
19: Giuseppe Ungaretti, "San Martino del Carso," in *Vita d'un uomo. Tutte le poesie*, (Milano: Mondadori, 2016), 51

« Di queste case / non è rimasto /  
che qualche / brandello di muro  
Di tanti / che mi corrispondevano /  
non è rimasto / neppure tanto  
Ma nel cuore / nessuna croce manca  
È il mio cuore / il paese più straziato »<sup>19</sup>

# Rural Borderscape

Italy - Slovenia, Urban - Rural

With the term “Borderscape”, Suvendrini Perera describes the border as a far more fluid, irregular, and shifting space than just a static edge between two or more countries<sup>20</sup>. A term that describes at best the issue of contact in this strip of land between Italy and Slovenia; in these territories, the political borders intertwined and overlapped - without ever coinciding - with other borders based on different



criteria of classification and ordering.<sup>21</sup> A sore border, which simultaneously divides and is a place of contact and contamination with other cultures. In and across this border, different ideas of space, territoriality and identity have been reinvented and reformulated.

For the writer Jan Morris, the Karst is a “strange place”, and “they may build roads all over it, they may suburbanize it or even industrialize it in parts, but it remains an elemental slab above the city. Even now, between the developments, it feels like Slavic peasant country”<sup>22</sup>. The villages in the province of Trieste have continuously been inhabited by Slovenian people, which accounted for 89% of the total population in 1910.<sup>23</sup> Under the rule of the Habsburg Empire, Slovenes enjoyed a respectful relationship with the state. The latter counted on their solidarity and loyalty, contrasting with the irridentist tendencies of Italian nationalist movements. In the early post-war period, upon the arrival of the Italian state, the city of Trieste and its surroundings were demographically not very Italian, having developed historically with the immigration of merchants and workers from all parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and from abroad.

On its arrival, Italy promised to respect the Slovenians but soon broke its promises. In 1923, Italian was decreed as the language of learning for schools of all grades. Slovenian language disappeared from texts and classrooms, leaving children at the mercy of teachers who did not understand them and forbade them to use their language. In 1925, the Slovenian associations were abolished. In 1928, the small municipalities of San Pelagio, Slivia, Malchina, Duino and Aurisina were merged into today’s municipality of Duino - Aurisina. At the same time, the authorities were pressing the population, through newspapers, trade unions and state employees, to Italianize surnames. Many citizens of Trieste and the more distant provinces have found themselves with another name as if they had always been Italian. With the nationalisation followed by the Fascist regime, the non-Italian population was reduced in the suburbs, while it remained stable in the countryside. Slovenes started using Italian, which became a symbol of class and ethnicity.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, after the Second

20: Suvendrini Perera, A Pacific zone (In)security, sovereignty, and stories of the Pacific borderscape’, in P. K. Rajaram and C. Grundy-Warr, eds, Borderscapes: hidden geographies and politics at territory’s edge, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

21: Marco Facchini, „Architettura in pietra nell’altipiano carsico.“ (phD thesis, Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna, 2012), [http://amsdottorato.unibo.it/4527/1/Facchini\\_Marco\\_tesi.pdf](http://amsdottorato.unibo.it/4527/1/Facchini_Marco_tesi.pdf).

22: Jan Morris, Trieste and the meaning of nowhere. (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 177

23: Pavel Stranj, La comunità sommersa - Gli Sloveni in Italia dalla A alla Ž. (Trieste:Editoriale Stampa Triestina, 1992).

24: Jan Morris, Trieste and the meaning of nowhere. (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

← Fig15: Trieste Aurisina

25: Luiza Bialasiewicz, Claudio Minca, "The 'Border Within': Inhabiting the Border in Trieste," *Environment and Planning D Society and Space* 28(6), (December 2010): 1084-1105. DOI:10.1068/d2609

26: Salsa, Annibale, "Dialogo attraverso l'arco alpino," interview by Lisa Savoia, *Dialogo attraverso l'arco alpino*, September 7, 2022, <https://medium.com/@terrealtefv/dialogo-at-traverso-larco-alpino-d574433ac77c>.

27: Giovanni Carrosio, Giorgio Osti, "Le aree marginali", in *Fondamenti di sociologia economica*, ed. Filippo Barbera, Ivana Pais, (Milano: Egea, 2017), 303-316.

28: Robert Smithson, "A Provisional Theory of Non-sites," In Robert Smithson: *The Collected Writings*, Jack Flam, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

Fig 16: A Nonsite, Robert Smithson, Franklin, New Jersey, 1968

World War, many citizens from the countryside were reassigned to their original surnames by themselves. From 1947, the area of Trieste and its surroundings stayed under the Anglo-American administration for ten years, suspended in a limbo between two different realities. Another significant border came, dividing East and West Europe: the Iron Curtain. During the Cold War, speaking Slovenian often meant being on the enemy's side, represented by Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. The frontier was a line of fear controlled by the Yugoslav military. People from the countryside – which were used prior to the war to cross through the forest – could not even approach it. After the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1990, Slovenia in 1991 reached its independence as a country. With the fall of the Iron Curtain, a new possibility of encounter emerged in Trieste and surrounding, as a bridge to the East and a multicultural laboratory for Europe.<sup>25</sup>

In Italian, the term border can be translated both as "frontiera" and "confine". The two terms – according to the anthropologist from this rural Borderscape, Annibale Salsa – have a distinction; border as "frontiera" is a word that comes from the military front, thus a defensive barrier, a dividing element. The border as "confine", on the other hand, has a more positive meaning: when the "frontiera" collapses, space is left for the "confine".<sup>26</sup> A place of opportunity and exchange, a marker of cultural identity, local economy and community. Many of the inhabitants of rural borderlands have been denied the passion for a border identity because of wars and discrimination policies. Today, however, in these lands, the border becomes a space capable of bringing different realities into dialogue. It represents the room for an exchange of relationships that enriches the social fabric, where people and their lived experiences come as priorities.

## SITE AND NONSITE

Another blurred boundary in the Italian context is the territorial inequalities between urban, provincial, and rural realities, marginal areas with socio-economic disadvantages.<sup>27</sup> Marginality in many cases developed during industrialization, whereby peripheral areas were expropriated of natural resources and workforce and put in a position of dependence on urban reality, which possessed capital, technology and business capacity. Throughout history, stones, together with other materials, have been displaced from the rural places of sourcing into the city's urban space to showcase wealth and status. Nowadays, with the increased demand for building materials, the sourcing of materials has increased significantly.

Artist Robert Smithson, with the terms "site" and "non-site", describes the territory of production – the countryside – and the territory of consumption, the city;<sup>28</sup> in the sixties, he began to explore the quarries and mines of industrial areas of New Jersey and to collect



29: Jane Hutton, *Reciprocal Landscapes: Stories of Material Movements* (1st ed.), (London: Routledge, 2019).

30: Ivan Vogrič, *Aurisina 1904-1905: storia di uno sciopero*, (Trieste: Istituto Livio Saranz, 2005).

31: Igo Gruden, "I Cavatori di Aurisina." in *SOGNANDO LA LIBERTÀ Le poesie di Igo Gruden dal campo di Visco - 1943* (Gorizia: Editrice Goriška Mohorjeva, 2023), 63

32: Giovanni Carrosio, Giorgio Osti, "Le aree marginali", in *Fondamenti di sociologia economica*, ed. Filippo Barbera, Ivana Pais, (Milano: Egea, 2017), 303-316.

Fig 17: Cave workers in Aurisina, 1890

materials – stone, gravel etc. – from these sites. He then exhibited the assembled materials in shaped metal containers (non-sites), photographs, and maps of the original location (site), establishing a link between the source space and the representation. He introduces the transit between the two locations, emphasizing time and duration.

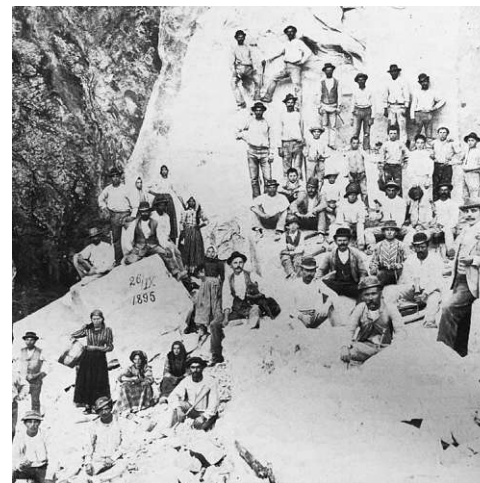
Similarly, Jane Hutton, in her book "Reciprocal landscapes", explores how materials sourced from hidden rural landscapes – such as stone, steel, wood, fertilizers and trees – relate to visible urban landscapes in New York City, where they are integrated. It focuses on the intricate consequences and contradictions spanning physical and temporal scales as it explores the narratives and stories resulting from these materials' journeys.<sup>29</sup> The ipe wood, a durable timber used to construct sustainable buildings, whose harvest causes deforestation led by globalized neoliberalism; the trees imported from Rikers Island, harvested by unpaid inmates serving time on the island, serve as an instrument for urban health and quality urban living in Harlem.

When taking a look at the Hofburg Palace - or other buildings and monuments in the city centre of Vienna - we rarely think about the journey that the stone made for its erection, all the efforts needed for the extraction of the material in the quarry, the cutting and polishing in the workshop and the transportation. In the mid-nineteenth century, Aurisina turned from a sleepy village of fishermen and farmers into a hub of marble mining, with a significant capital flow for the owners of the mines. The conditions for quarry workers were far from being fair, with working hours of 12 to 13 hours a day and no social assistance.<sup>30</sup> This led to numerous labour fights and strikes as early as 1890. In his socially themed sonnets, the Slovenian poet Igo Gruden, who was born during the years of the exportation in Aurisina, narrates the harshness of the quarrymen's work, denouncing the exploitation of the workers.

Modern technology uses chain saws and diamond wires to cut the blocks to be quarried with mechanical shovels, bulldozers and tractors for transport. In workshops near the quarries, multi-blade block-cutting frames are utilized, together with computerized systems for polishing marble.

## RULAR EXODUS

The marginalization of these rural areas is visible nowadays in the demographic decline, low population density and high percentage of the elderly population, difficulty in providing services because they are costly in relation to the few users, low ability to attract population from outside, lower per capita incomes, and weak business sector.<sup>32</sup>



« O quarrymen of Aurisina,  
in the native land grow firm  
the roots of your strength,  
Dig deeper and deeper into your thought:  
when ye shall rise strong from this earth,  
robust and vigorous,  
at home and outside –  
never servant of foreign peoples,  
but brother Each of you imprints his imprint  
on the bold progress of history,  
or quarrymen of Aurisina. »<sup>31</sup>

33: Rem Koolhaas, *Countryside, A Report*, (Köln, TASCHEN, 2020).

34: "TERRITORIO," data visualisation by Istat, accessed September 02, 2023, <https://www.istat.it/it/files//2020/12/C01.pdf>

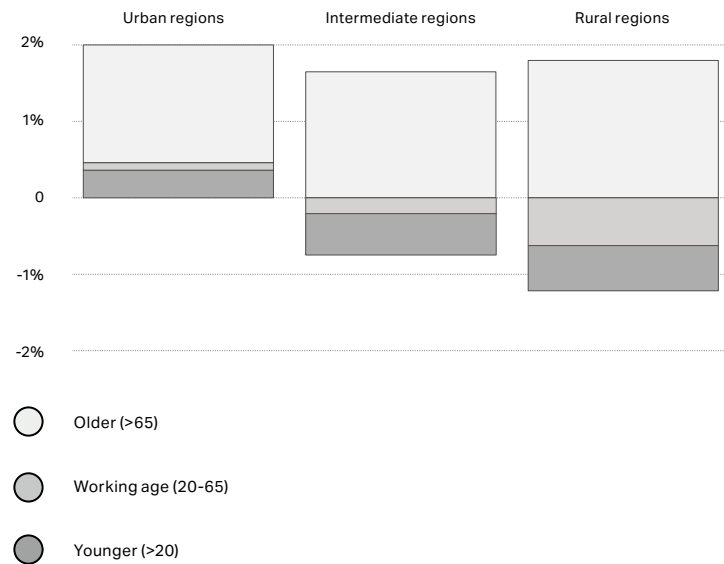
→ Employment rate of rural areas in 2019. Source: Eurostat

↘ Average annual change in population by age and urban-rural typology (2015-2020). Source: Eurostat

Worldwide, 50% of humankind lives on 98% of the surface of earth, the countryside. Rural areas are experiencing population decline, expected to decrease even more by 2050, with urban dwellers increasing up to 68%. This number drew the attention of Rem Koolhaas, who, in his exhibition "Countryside: the Future", attempts to shift the attention towards the broader space of the non-urban areas worldwide, advocating critical thinking beyond the city.<sup>33</sup>

Behind an idyllic picture, the Italian countryside hides many of these criticalities: according to Istat,<sup>34</sup> Italy has an employment rate in rural areas of 58%, the lowest rate in Europe, followed by Croatia and Greece. Unemployment, scarce service access (infrastructure, education, healthcare), an ageing population, and close-mindedness lead many young people to leave these spaces behind. Which often became forgotten territories. The regions forgotten by politics and markets.

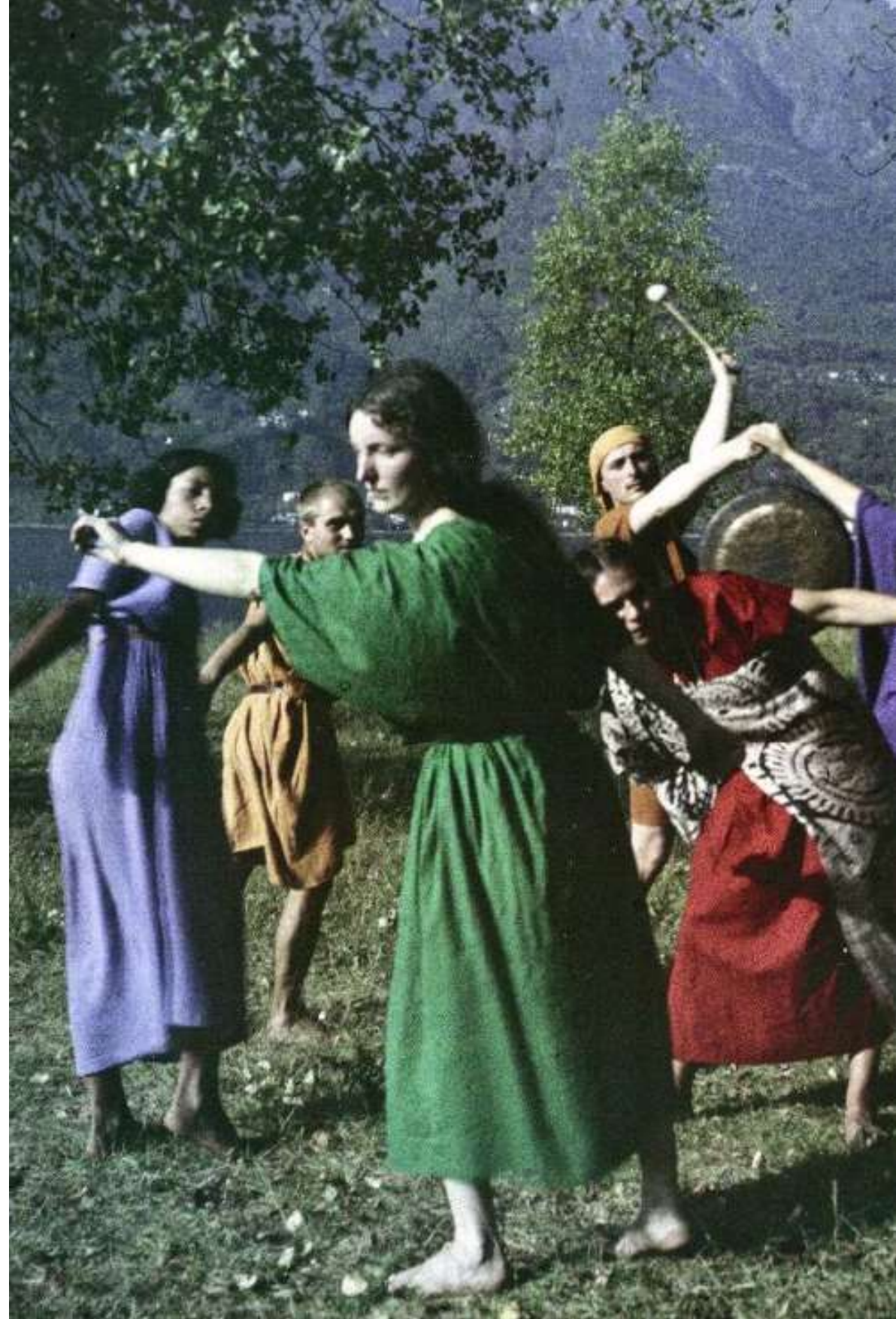
In Friuli Venezia Giulia, some small borders and marginal realities have begun a cultural journey, loading these places, which are politically and culturally rich, with new meanings. Based on the inherent nature of the shared and available spaces in the rural areas of the karst, they seek, first and foremost, to reconstruct a community to live it rather than just repopulate it.



# Countryside

as

a Laboratory





# Culture as a Regenerator

"The sources of art in human experience will be learned by him who sees how the tense grace of the ball player infects the onlooking crowd; who notes the delight of the housewife in tending her plants, and the intent interest of the goodman in tending the patch of green in front of the house; the zest of the spectator in poking the wood burning on the hearth and in watching the darting flames and crumbling coals."<sup>35</sup>

In the city-country dichotomy, the rural is always considered in opposition to the urban. This also implies two distinct levels of human development, where the rural is often associated with a non-civilized, outdated, conservative realm.<sup>36</sup> According to the economic geographer Chris Gibson, it is essential to get over the idea of the rural-urban divide in the context of creative production, as the flows of people and networks are equally important for urban and rural locations.<sup>37</sup>

Often, the remoteness of Artists and organizations that work in marginal areas without an established art infrastructure allows only a small audience. This opens the opportunity—rather than be driven by art audience development and capacity—to overcome the hierarchical binaries of rural-urban, spectatorship and use, low and high culture, in favor of a symbiosis between art and everyday life. John Dewey – one of the leading figures of the school of American Pragmatists – in his works *Art as Experience* and *Experience and Nature*, emphasizes the connection between human beings and natural processes that shape their experiences. According to him, the highest form of this interaction is through aesthetic experience, which includes both everyday activities and ordinary modes of experience.<sup>38</sup>

The ethereal view of art as something disconnected from everyday life occurred with the development of capitalism and nationalism when art was declared an autonomous field. According to Dewey, art should not be confined within the white walls of a museum, which sets art "upon a remote pedestal"<sup>39</sup> and separates it from its origin and modes of experience. Art should instead be a continuity of life.

35: John Dewey, *Art as experience*, (New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), 5.

36: Wojciech Mazan, *Trouble in Paradise*, (Warsaw: Zache-ta, 2020).

37: Chris Gibson, *Creative economy in regional areas: possibilities, pitfalls and ongoing Issues*, (New South Wales, University of New South Wales, 2013).

38: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. "Dewey's Aesthetics," accessed 28 May, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dewey-aesthetics/>.

39: John Dewey, *Art as experience*, 5

← Fig 19: MAD Architects, "Flow" at the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, Japan



40: Kathrin Böhm, Wapke Feenstra, Antje Schiffrers, eds. *The Rural*, (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2019).

41: Agnès Sarale et. al., *ART FESTIVALS AND RURAL REVITALIZATION: ORGANIZING THE OKU-NOTO TRIENNALE IN JAPAN*, *Journal of Asian Rural Studies* 4(1), (February 2020), 23-36

42: Manon Mollard, "Rural restoration: Xu Tiantian, DnA, China," *The Architectural Review*, March 1, 2019, <https://www.architectural-review.com/buildings/rural-restoration-xu-tiantian-dna-china>.

43: Xu Tian Tian in "Rural restoration: Xu Tiantian, DnA, China," *The Architectural Review*, March 1, 2019, <https://www.architectural-review.com/buildings/rural-restoration-xu-tiantian-dna-china>

→ Fig 20: Tadao Ando, "Benesse House Museum", Naoshima

→ Fig 21: DnA design and architecture, "quarry #8", Jinyun

In rural settings, the symbiosis between art and everyday life encourages the establishment of cultural, social, and political settings of the co-production of art.<sup>40</sup> A country that has seen a prolific growth of cultural co-production is Japan, where some of the country's most important contemporary art events take place in rural areas, such as the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, the Setouchi Triennale, the Reborn Art Festival, and many others. The significant art events are not disconnected from the rural contexts; they interact with the local communities and incorporate creative arts practice into regional discourses, making these territories centers of contemporary art encourages visitors to explore marginal areas.<sup>41</sup>

In the Seto Inland Sea, three islands - Naoshima, Teshima, and Inujima - have been turned into an art utopia full of museums, galleries, and outdoor sculptures and interventions. The chairman of the Benesse Corporation in Okayama, Soichiro Fukutake, decided in the 1980s to turn the island of Naoshima - which at the time was primarily an industrial site - into an art hub. The first building erected on Naoshima was the Benesse House by Tadao Ando in 1992. The project, functioning as a museum and a hotel, is based on the concept of the symbiosis of nature, architecture, and art. After that, Naoshima started to attract many national and internationally active Japanese architects - Kazuhiro Ishii, Tadao Ando, SANAA, Hiroshi Sambuichi, and Sou Fujimoto - who have created 20 buildings for the island, all well integrated with its landscape.

China is another country in the Asian continent that has seen cultural development in rural, remote areas, thanks to the good practices of architect Xu Tiantian. The nation, known for its fast-growing cities, in the process of rapid urbanization over the last 40 years, has left its countryside depopulated. Sengyang county, one of the many rural areas suffering depopulation in China, saw the realization of 13 projects brought forth by the Beijing architect and her practice, DnA Design and Architecture, in five years. The projects include the renovation and conversion of existing structures - abandoned houses, connecting bridges, etc. - and the construction of new structures using natural and local materials - Hakka village museum, Damushan tea house, Brown sugar and Tofu factory, Bamboo Pavillion, etc. - providing the locals with communal spaces and new sources of income. Xu Tiantian understood the tourist potential of the area, but she went beyond its touristic appeal, unveiling the heritage and local history of the area to the villagers themselves<sup>42</sup>. The approach of the architect involves using architecture as a holistic strategy, addressing social, economic, and traditional aspects of rural areas. She does it using an acupuncture strategy: Sustainable and minimal intervention applied to specific points in the area, creating the conditions of an organic and long-term process of evolution. This strategy was also used more recently in the conversion of nine abandoned quarries in Jinyun County, which were used for cultural and social events.

„Architecture here is about translating what is existing, drawing from and extending, extracting and elevating“<sup>43</sup>





The European rural context also offers many cultural opportunities; many examples of rural communities and remote areas positively affected by cultural projects and good architectural practices can be found.

The Sicilian countryside, often subject to devastation, backwardness, unauthorized real-estate development, and Mafia speculation, has been found in art and culture tools for territorial improvement and expansion. Indeed, this southern Italian region has seen the establishment of several open-air museums - Gibellina, Fiumara, etc. - and internationally known art festivals.

Among the various initiatives, Gibellina Nuova - a hyper-contemporary city built in 1970 - stands out as the most ambitious and utopic project. The small town was built in the aftermath of the 1968 earthquake that destroyed old Gibellina and is located 20 kilometers north-west of the ruins of the city, covered today by a large monumental artwork out of concrete - the Grande Cretto - realized between 1984 and 1989 by Alberto Burri. The 40,000 square meters of concrete were laid along the lines of the old streets and buildings, a labyrinth that preserves the memory of the destroyed city, the earthquake, and its victims.

↑ Fig 22: DnA\_design and architecture, "Brown Sugar Factory", Sengyong Songyang

→ Fig 24: Alberto Burri, "Il grande Cretto", Gibellina

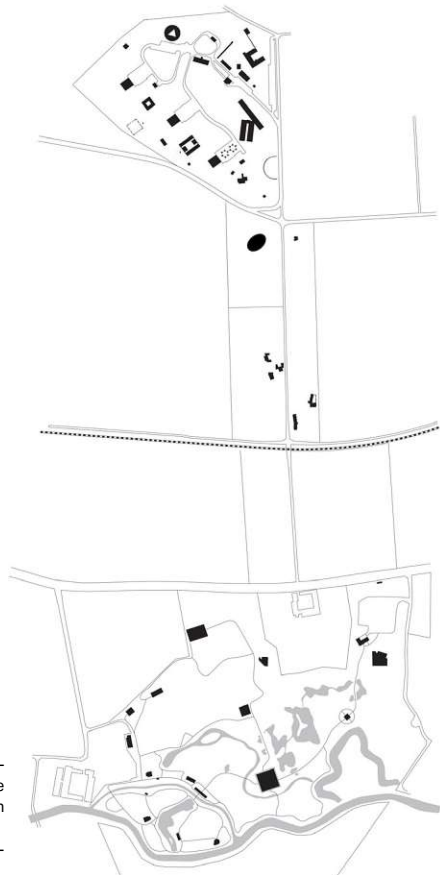
The new town was built according to the functional and rational design of architect Franco Purini, with the intention of permeating the most representative places of collective life - churches, squares, and entrances to the town - with artworks by world-famous artists and architects.<sup>44</sup> The intention was to transform the new Gibellina into Italy's largest open-air museum. The mayor, Ludovico Corrao, got the funds - denied by the Italian state - through demonstrations, parliamentary battles, and artists' and residents' help.

44: Luoghi del contemporaneo, "Gibellina Nuova," 21 January 2020, <https://luoghidelcontemporaneo.beniculturali.it/home>.



45: Insel Hombroich, "Introduction", <https://www.insel-hombroich.de/en/stiftung/foundation>

In Germany, another rural venue in the suburbs of Neuss has brought together art, architecture, and landscape. Insel Hombroich follows Chezanne's motto of art in parallel to nature, as the space works ideally both in museum and landscape terms.<sup>45</sup> Museum Insel Hombroich was made available for public viewing in 1987. The museum encompasses 21 hectares of guarded natural scenery. Ten sculptures can be entered on foot; some are used as exhibition structures. On the museum's grounds, a long-abandoned part of the early 19th century was brought back to life and renovated by landscape architect Bernhard Korte, who respected its history and local topography, following the vision of art parallel to nature. Since 1994, the former NATO missile base has been used as a place for developing art and architecture, complementary to the Insel Hombroich Museum, and used as a habitat and workplace for artists from the world of art, literature, and music. Artists and architects Raimund Abraham, Tadao Ando, Dietmar Hofmann, Erwin Heerich, Oliver Kruse, Katsuhito Nishikawa, Claudio Silvestrin, and Álvaro Siza participated in the project to redesign and reconstruct the base.



→ Fig 25, → Fig 26: Erwin Heerich, Turm 1987-1989 and Hohe Galerie 1984, Insel Hombroich

→ Fig 27: Map of Insel Hombroich



46: Centre International d'Art et du Paysage, "Centre International d'Art et du Paysage", 2022, <https://www.ciapiledevassiviere.com/item/10>

↑ Fig 28, → Fig 29: Centre International d'Art et du Paysage, Aldo Rossi, 1989, Isle of Vassivière



Meanwhile, in France, another rural art center was being established on the Isle of Vassivière in the 80s. The initiative of building a contemporary art center and creating a permanent studio space for artists in Vassivière island arose when the association “Limousin Art Contemporain et Sculpteurs” – a group of sculptures - and SYMIVA - the management body for the island - came together. The architect Aldo Rossi and his former pupil and later partner Xavier Fabre were commissioned for the Centre International d'Art et du Paysage (CIAPV) project, which was opened in 1989. In this project, art and architecture came together, and since then, they have never ceased to interact. The two parts of the building that make up the exhibition space – a lighthouse and a gallery/aqueduct pointing towards the lake – were planned together with the group of sculptors. A challenging layout, the relationship to the landscape, the rhythms, material qualities, functionality of the areas, spatial connections, and movement flows are all features that the architects chose to use to serve artistic creation. Through its creative programming, the International Centre for Art and Landscape has maintained a close and regular relationship with radical architectural forms and experimental landscaping. Invitations are extended to artists to produce and exhibit works that closely relate to the local area while also examining broader modern issues surrounding society, politics, and the environment.<sup>46</sup>



# Robida and Topolò

permanent and temporary residents in marginal spaces are discussed.

Taking care of and inhabiting a small village as if it were a house is a way to tackle, through reflections and actions, the issue of an empty village as a complex ecology, finding new ways of using abandoned spaces, and creating a community in spaces which are marginal and excluded from maps, travels, and conferences.<sup>49</sup>

47: Vida Rucli et. al, "About", Robida, accessed August 17, 2023, <https://robidacollective.com/about>

Topolò is a small village of 22 inhabitants located in Friuli Venezia Giulia in the municipality of Grimacco, very close to the border with Slovenia. Topolò in 1921 counted 400 inhabitants. Later on, a process of depopulation started: temporary emigration turned into permanent emigration, and many inhabitants relocated to urban centers or the valley floor.

The vicinity of the border influenced the village's history and culture. The exchange of language, traditions, and cultural practices between the two countries created a unique blend of Italian and Slovenian cultural identity in the village. It also influenced the collective memory of its inhabitants due to changes in political allegiances, occasional conflicts, and restrictions on movement.<sup>48</sup> Short after the independence of Slovenia, in 1994, the village embarked on a cultural initiative known as "Stazione di Topolò Postaja Topolove." With the initiative, the depopulated village found a new purpose as a hub for cultural exchange and artistic endeavors between national and international artists, writers, and cultural enthusiasts. With the success of the cultural initiative, this marginal space revealed its potential in the context of contemporary culture; the village has received support for the renovation of its historic buildings and houses, including European grants, which have been utilized to restore the architectural heritage of Topolò. Robida started as a multicultural magazine curated by a group of young architects and artists, which grew within the Stazione di Topolò initiative. It later became a collective - driven by the need to develop more projects in Topolò - which started a journey of care and regeneration in the village. Starting from the surrounding landscape, the dry walls and the abandoned enclosed terraces were renovated and inhabited. A collective space for the village - Izba - was created under the church, a space to discuss new ideas, to welcome guests and travelers, a laboratory for projects, and a communal kitchen.

Robida organizes many symposiums to stimulate discursive and collaborative learning between the younger generation of artists, thinkers, curators, and the public. These encounters happen through the virtual space of Radio Robida, the Academy of Margins, and Care of Margins, with summer schools and residencies. New concepts of inhabiting spaces, living together, and creating community between



« Robida is a platform for creating a place of belonging.  
Robida is a space where to dig deeper into things.  
Robida is a place for observation and reflection.  
Robida is a project to connect people  
Robida is a place to experiment.  
Robida is a laboratory.  
Robida is relationships.  
Robida is a cure. »<sup>47</sup>

48: Giulio Nascimben, "Abitare a Topolò, il confine lungo il bosco," Medium, Jul 21, 2022, <https://medium.com/@terrealtefv/abitare-a-topolo-il-confine-lungo-il-bosco-bef120d3e3c6>.

49: Vida Rucli et. al, "Academy of Margins", Robida, accessed August 17, 2023, <https://robidacollective.com/projects/academy-of-margins>

→ Fig 30: Academy of Margins - Robida

# Interview with Vida Rucli

*Co-founder of Robida*



> Vida Rucli. You and other young creatives who grew up in a border reality saw the possibility of creating culture in a marginal place. Some of you studied and lived in the city. How did you find yourselves, and how did you come up with the idea of creating first a magazine and then a collective based in Topolò?

Reflecting on genealogies of things is exciting when thinking about how the project started. The connection between us as a group in Topolò didn't begin with Robida; it has long-lasting roots. We have been connected to this village all our lives. Some of us are originally from here, and as children, we grew up following the annual art festival of Stazione di Topolò. It has taken place every July since 1994 and ended last year. We are as old as this art project, which always represented our school of life, where we encountered our best teachers and the most inspiring people. The festival taught us that in a reality like Topolò it is possible to do projects that deal with art, which are radical, contemporary, research-based, and that help take care of the village itself.

One of the core values of this festival and of Robida itself was this radical hospitality and openness to the world, the search for contemporary languages, and for things that could be brought here, not only in the form of representation but things that here would become meaningful for the place itself. This openness is significant for this border reality, as a weighty history impacted it in the 20th century during the First and Second World Wars and the Cold War, negatively affecting the population.

Robida Magazine was born in 2014 during our first year at university, with the desire to be in contact as a friend group through a project that would nourish our friendship. Robida means brambles, the plant that grows on the abandoned landscapes surrounding Topolò beyond the forest. The project was perceived metaphorically as this plant growing from an abandoned project we had in high school. Today, after ten years of the magazine, we have our 9th issue. Each issue deals with a topic related in a meaningful way to Topolò. The reflections are shared with other creatives, who are invited to participate in an open call. The external opinions are also an opportunity to look from a different perspective at what we have around us and to interpret what interests us.



After the first years, we were all spread around Europe; some of us were studying in Ljubljana, others in Rome, Venice, Portugal, Belgium, Norway, and so on, constantly moving around. And then, at a certain point, some of us slowly started living here, which, rather than a decision, was perceived as a temporary solution to avoid paying rent in Ljubljana.

Janja, who is part of the collective and was my classmate at school, decided to dedicate her thesis to Topolò, as she was interested in developing a project in a space where she would create a more intimate relationship by living it every day. At a certain point, we all started to move here somehow, slowly, one by one. In 2017, we decided to open our association to develop smaller, research-based projects that went beyond the magazine, and in 2021, we became a collective.

### > What potential does this place hold in comparison to urban realities in the context of contemporaneity?

Topolò is a microcosm of topics, themes, and issues that relate to our contemporary time on many different levels. Due to its complex history, even in such a small place, it is possible to find historical, contemporary, ecological, and social issues even more strongly than in urban contexts. In contrast to the city, where time moves faster, many things in Topolò stop at a certain point, and when these topics appear again, they are more explicit. Countryside or marginal areas are often excluded from cities' speedy capitalistic development, which usually covers and hides some layers. Therefore, I think these non-urban realities have the potential for topics such as borders and the border identity, ecological and climate crisis, capitalism and modernization, history from the 20th century, etc., which are more evident here. Artists can profoundly work with them, even if they are not from here. It's a very inspiring place and fertile for creative production, as there are many topics and layers to work with.

### > From an architectural point of view, what reflections are emerging, and what are you discovering within the workshops, residencies, and symposiums?

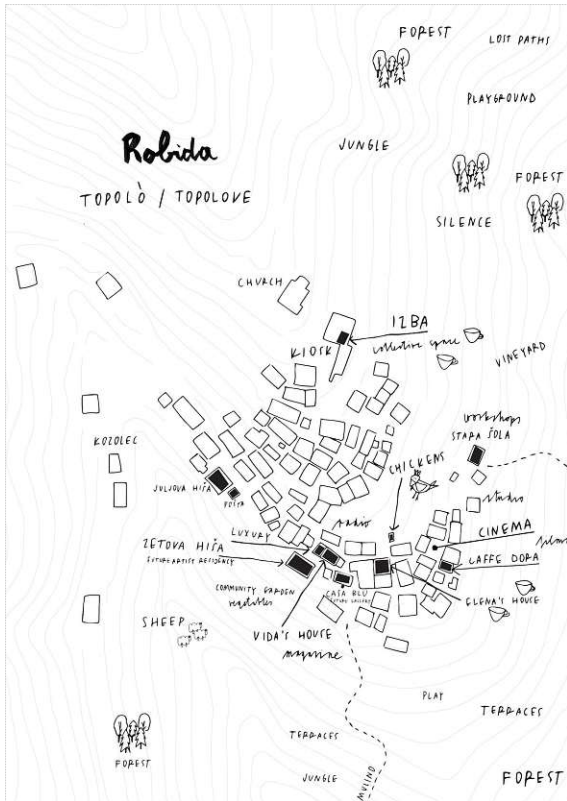
Some interesting observations emerged during Janja's stay for her master's thesis while experiencing our everyday routines based on lack of infrastructure, suitable housing, and comfort—a very uncomfortable and simple life.

Janja and I lived in my house, which had no bathroom. So we were using the bathroom of another house. Dora, another member of the collective, didn't have electricity, the bathroom, or running water at her place, so she went to the fountain or at our house when she needed water. We all didn't have internet in our houses, so we would work in a third house, which was located on another side of the village, and then have lunch at my house, breakfast at Dora's house, and so on.

So this constant movement not only from our own private houses but also from other private spaces of people who were maybe giving us the possibility of using their toilet stimulated in Janja some reflections, as it was happening during winter and not in summer when it's normal. Her idea was to renovate the village without impacting the houses' morphology to adapt them to contemporary needs. The houses in Topolò are tiny, as its population mainly dealt with agriculture and, therefore, spent most of the day outside and came home to eat and sleep. Instead of enlarging singular houses, she put public programs - such as a communal library, communal living room, kitchen, lounge room, etc. - in renovated distinct dwellings.

Her beautiful concept translated into reality. We expanded this way of living with new inhabitants joining us and falling into this rhythm of living. In 2021, we opened a collective space, IZBA, where we dine together and organize events. Another house is used to host artists in residence; recently, we hosted a group of 25 students doing activities and sleeping there.





It's interesting to observe how a speculative architectural thesis, which could never be realized, as it would need huge investments, makes us recognize the value of something we did all along.

Living in a place like this also brings interesting relations toward private property. Like taking care of buildings that are not yours, but they are close to your house. This way of dwelling creates a resistance toward the capitalistic need to own all the essential tools to live our everyday lives.

One of the most important values this project brings is an enlargement of the relation of care. Unlike living in cities, in individual flats or houses dedicated only to our own spaces, here, the village is our house. Gestures of care take up more space, such as occupying a private room that is not yours but is neglected, taking care of the public space as the municipality has no energy and money to do it and so on. We take the responsibility over, and it's like an enlargement of gestures and practices of care, a commitment to a place more extensive than a private house.

Fig 33: IZBA in Topolò Robida

Another reflection that we are adding to this is how to include in this concept other agents of spatial transformation that are not only humans but also animals.

In this line of reflection, we realize that animals are spatial producers too, especially in a place that has 25 human inhabitants; thousands of animals are shaping the space in which we live, and sometimes we do not realize it; reflections started on how to include them in our way of inhabiting a space. For example, a deer drawing a path in the forest to look for water creates a form of non-human architecture. Also, geological forces have an impact on the village. Our landscape looks picturesque and beautiful, but it's tragic as the forest is totally abandoned. After every



significant rain or even slight rain, trees fall. How does this falling impact space? And how do we start? It's just an observation of how we use space differently when everything is moving around us and when human interventions are the smallest part of a change in the space itself. Also, this is interesting when considering the project of Janja and all that followed; we didn't build anything new; we opened the IZBA, which was already an existing space, but we didn't do any architectural intervention, any archi-

tectural change, but so much in changing in Topolò and the landscape surrounding it. It's also interesting because it repositions the role of architects and spatial producers.

### > As an architect, what do you think is important to consider when working in an area like Topolò or other rural contexts?

Topolò deals with many topics and problems similar to other villages and marginal realities, such as abandonment, rural exodus, displacement, and even a loss of meaning and uncertainty for the future. But it is also an exceptional place, precisely from an architectural point of view. Compared to other villages in our municipality, it still has some beautiful traces and ruins of old architecture.

It's a village where cars do not enter, and it's only accessible by foot, meaning that it was never covered with asphalt or cement. The old paths made by stones are visible, and grass grows between them.

It has certain spatial qualities and a cohesive morphology, with a church on the top, developing in a triangular form down from the church. It didn't have many interventions; most were curated and done respectfully and harmonically by the same architect, our father. Respecting the architectural, morphological, typological, and spatial identity of the place and the conversation with the context is always essential. I would like to refer to a term, *topophilia*, that was coined by the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan; it is an elementary term, and his research was about the affection we develop for places.

In our case, the word is super interesting because the Sloven word for Topolò is Topolove, and there is this love word within Topolove, which has nothing to do with love itself in the original term.

This game of words in the name of the village can refer to the concept of *topophilia* for architects who want to intervene in rural contexts or contexts with a robust architectural identity. Also, through ruins, it is still essential and crucial.

For this reason, the interventions our father developed here in the village, even though they are not all of excellent quality, thanks to his affection towards his place, gave them a unique sense of coherence. Also, considering other agents in the work we do as architects, it's so clear when you look at ruins and when you have to build near them, the presence of agents like material, logical and also vegetal ones, that transform a space and give to it a certain quality. The question is how to include these elements conceptually in new architectural projects. This is another reflection that I would do concerning what it means to work in such a context.

Another element is the reflection on the necessity of building, which is sometimes very challenging to escape from in cities. I would rethink the idea of building in rural contexts, abandoned contexts with ruins everywhere, and empty houses. I would reconsider the idea of intervention itself.

Also, our projects show that sometimes spatial practices do not need to go hand in hand with spatial interventions; they are more connected to ways of using space or living in it, dwelling in it, taking care of it, and so on. And all of this still makes architecture.

# Cultural and Collective Initiatives in Aurisina

*Kamen: diffused museum of the quarries of Aurisina*

The non-profit cultural association for developing the territory CASA C.A.V.E. CONTEMPORARY ART VISOGLIANO-VIŽOVLJE EUROPE opened in 2014 in the Municipality of Duino Aurisina. Fabiola Faidiga - visual artist and association president - was the promoter of this initiative in collaboration with other organizations. The association aims to spread culture and contemporary art by promoting events and providing services and facilities in the Duino Aurisina area, strengthening local identity and the quality of life in the Karst region.

In 2021 Casa CAVE - in cooperation with the Municipality of Duino Aurisina, landowners of the Jus Comunella, and numerous other local associations and businesses - for the first time proposed a significant event that has been held annually ever since; "THE ENERGY OF PLACES | ART MEETS SCIENCE AND THE ENERGY OF DOING - A RETURN TO "TERRITORY-UNIVERSE." The festival offers sculpture workshops for young artists/students with meaningful cross-border collaborations, contemporary art exhibitions, land art installations, creative itineraries, performances, screenings, and cultural meetings. In parallel to the event THE ENERGY OF PLACES, a Seminar is held every year where scientists, physicists, historians, scholars, entrepreneurs, curators, artists, architects, representatives of associations, and inhabitants of the area take part.<sup>50</sup>

KAMEN is the name of the first Diffused Museum of Quarries and Stone of Aurisina, originating from the festival. The museum will be part of the network of the cross-border geological park of the Karst, and it will introduce visitors to the quarries and businesses of this sector through diffused itineraries, workshops, residencies, themed exhibitions, and immersive experiences.

The cross-border sculpture residencies and workshops include



students from the Academy of Fine Arts of Venice and the Art Schools of Sežana in Slovenia. In 2023, the call was extended to the Academy of Fine Arts of Vienna students. The students are hosted for eleven days in the Duino Aurisina area, working with stone at the Andrea Mervic - Artistic Stonemasonry and Marmi Cortese marble companies in collaboration with Zenith C, which provided Aurisina stone waste. The sculptures are exhibited after the residencies in the Sculpture Park of Portopiccolo-Sistiana, which will be included in the itineraries of the future diffuse museum. One of the latter's main goals is to connect contemporary art with territorial development and with various local productive sectors, combining it with the broader project of the Karst Geopark.<sup>51</sup>

50: Fabiola Faidiga, "Chi siamo".

↑ Fig 34: Quarry excursion

## Collective Ownership & Care Jus Comunella Gemeinde

One of the peculiarities of the Karst is the presence of the so-called “Communelle” in Slovenian “Jus” and in German “Gemeinde.” They are the earliest forms of collective ownership among the descendants of the ancient landholders. The native families from the Karst villages began to own these lands in the early Middle Ages. Lands that did not provide any profit to lords were given to the subjects.<sup>52</sup>

The communal land was utilized for agriculture, pasture, and for wood. In 1848, with the Habsburg Empire - after the abolition of slavery - the usufructuaries of the land acquired the right to become owners of the land in their possession.

In 1927, the Italian state wanted to liquidate civic uses with a decree, abolishing the previous usufruct of land by individual villagers and transferring it to the municipality. In 2018, the Court of Cassation decided that on land owned by the local communes, “there are no civic uses against them since they are collective properties pre-existing the laws enacted by the Italian state on the matter.” The ruling represents a turning point in future relations between the Jus Comunelle and the Italian state. Today, this collective land in Duino-Aurisina - including the land where the quarries are located - constitutes 13 percent of the total area of the municipality.<sup>53</sup>

According to the decree of the region’s president, the Jus Comunella of Aurisina has the task of managing its properties with activities aimed at the care, preservation, and development of the common heritage, according to customs and traditions. In addition, members also have the ability to independently promote or foster the initiatives of other organizations directed at the enhancement of environmental, historical, and cultural heritage within the municipality. The Jus Comunella started this process by presenting land reclamation projects, including renovating trails, buildings, and public spaces.

## Interview with Fabiola Faidiga

President of Casa C.A.V.E.



> **Fabiola Faidiga.** Thanks to your organization you are opening up these areas to culture. How did you first come with the idea of a festival and later a museum dedicated to Aurisina stone and the territory?

With the advent of Europe and the opening of borders, the various souls of our territory (Municipality of Duino Aurisina - Devin Nabrezina), especially the two communities, Slovenian and Italian, have found essential reasons for cultural confrontation and development. One of these reasons is related to the knowledge and promotion of karst geosites and stone ecosystem. A mutual artistic rediscovery to welcome a common heritage and its valorization, also for sustainable tourism that acts as a flywheel to the specificities of the territory, its geological peculiarities, and its sites, some of the worldwide importance and included in the more comprehensive cross-border Project of the Karst Geopark.

52: Jasna Simoneta, Praprot, (Aurisina: Circolo sportivo ricreativo “Vaška skupnost Praprot,” 2018).

53: Carlo Grgič, “Superficie dei Fondi delle proprietà collettive delle comunelle, nella provincia di Trieste” in Consulta Nazionale della proprietà collettiva, March 26, 2007, <https://www.demaniocivico.it/public/public/article/992/jus%20comunelle%20Trieste%20Srenje.pdf>

So, in this already fervent climate, the activity of our association has found fertile ground to be able to activate a precise project of cultural promotion and communication, in particular through proposals related to the most current contemporary research finding relational links with nature, history, tradition, and social sphere.

Making use of the Regional Culture Calls for Proposals, the partnership, and contribution of the Municipality of Duino Aurisina - Devin Nabrezina and essential foundations such as the Pietro Pittini Foundation and the Kathleen Foreman Casali Foundation, as well as the collaboration of the Slovene Cultural Circle SKD Igo Gruden and other vital figures and associations of reference in the area, the association CASA C.A.V.E., was established by me in 2013. The latter, in line with its mission statement and the proposed events, has therefore realized, step by step, its wealth of experience and expertise in the context of as many as nine editions of the REVIEW THE ENERGY OF PLACES - FESTIVAL OF THE WIND AND THE STONE, combining in it, with precise vision and conceptual coherence, exhibitions and multimedia events, contemporary artistic expressions and scientific research, in the innovative perspective of an integrated, inclusive and sustainable territorial development also, as mentioned, from the standpoint of concerned, conscious and experiential tourism.

In this context, particular importance should be given to the project THE FABULOUS TRIP IN THE STONE OF AURISINA, residencies, and sculpture workshops dedicated to young sculptors in collaboration with the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice, the Sesana Srečko Kosovel Vocational Technical Institute stone drawing section / Šolski Center Srečka Kosovela - Sežana (Slovenia), Studio Carrer in Pietrasanta, the Slovenian Cultural Circle SKD Igo Gruden in Aurisina, the Jus Comunella Nabrezina and the Juna Farm.

The workshops/residencies co-conceived with Maddalena Giuffrida, curated by art critic Eva Comuzzi and supervised by two tutors, sculptors Edi Carrer and Alberto Fiorin, are accompanied by visits to the companies and explorations in the Roman quarries

of Aurisina. Curated by Estplora's guides and in collaboration with the area's marble companies, visitors reach the heart of the quarries. They can thus learn about their ancient history, geological and naturalistic preciousness, and enjoy a panorama of great beauty, often accompanied by artistic performances of theater and dance or, in parallel at other venues, by meetings with international artists and cultural figures from the area as essential catalysts of identity and development.

The crucial next step was the meeting and confrontation with the Municipality of Duino Aurisina institutions, which, with a careful look at the future, first established "THE TABLE OF CAVES AND STONE", inviting the territory to participate in the project itself. They subsequently accepted our proposal, conceived within the framework of the Review itself, establishing KAMEN - DIFFUSED MUSEUM OF CAVES AND STONE OF AURISINA / MUZEJ NABREŽINSKEGA KAMNA IN KAMNOLOMOV.

So, within the framework of the Municipality of Duino Aurisina and the Karst Geopark, agreed with the "Table of Stone and Quarries," in line with the agreement signed between CASA C.A.V.E. and the Municipality, the path towards the realization of the DIFFUSED MUSEUM has been activated, which has the name KAMEN, "stone" in the Slovenian language, with this symbology: K= KRAS/CARST A= ART M=MUSEUM E= ETHNOGRAPHY N= NATURE.

The diffused museum does not have walls but allows for a thematically based narrative of the territory, enhancing the distinctive aspects of our municipality, particularly Roman quarries, geosites, prehistoric sites, stone architecture, documentary memories of marble companies and the territory, plus targeted nature and historical itineraries, in the broader framework of the future Karst Geopark of which it is an essential part.

An important step related to the Diffuse Museum itself is also the creation of the SMALL SCULPTURE PARK in Portopiccolo Sistiana, where the works carved by students within the framework of

the aforementioned Laboratories/Residences are exhibited, also a destination of interest and guided tours, and the setting up, in progress, of the first itinerary THE STONE ROUTE / Itinerary No.1 of enhancement of the geosite Cave of Aurisina One of the first geo-itineraries to be mapped and made usable for the enhancement of Aurisina's geosites that will allow visitors to comfortably walk from Aurisina's Town Hall, to the area of the mining ba-

sins, passing near a quarry that has been disused for quite some time and only recently reconverted and ready for public use: a unique opportunity that will allow them to observe the differences between historical and modern, disused and operational quarries. The informative itinerary will lead visitors to the extensive barrens of the Ivere basins, which are still functional and therefore particularly suited to show live the continuity with the more remote past when marble for the construction of Aquileia was extracted from these quarries: several millennia of history to be reviewed by taking the visitor by the hand and accompanying him along the timeline. Another advantage of this highly scenic itinerary is the possibility of declining it according to different themes and of combining it with visits to other sites. It is possible to concatenate it with visits to the workshops of marble companies based nearby for a cut related to the traditions and ethnography of the stone ecosystem and to meet, if present, the sculptors of the Contemporary Sculpture in Aurisina Stone project; in alternative, it is possible to walk towards the coastline to the Tiziana Weiss lookout and the Kugy path, from where you can enjoy an excellent view of the Gulf, the morphology of the karst plateau, the limestone cliffs overlooking the sea, which can also be enjoyed with an enriching walk due to the presence of remarkable and numerous karst surface phenomena and the presence of fossiliferous rocks that allow accurate observations.

Finally, this project also aims to bring out the potential for cultural and scientific exchange between the karst reality and other similar national and European sites, encouraging the interaction of best practices the meeting between scholars and thus optimizing the management and promotional interventions to be implemented in the area.

My path as a visual and relational artist born in the context of Gruppo78 International Contemporary Art in Trieste, under the careful guidance of contemporary art critic Maria Campitelli, has allowed me to grasp in today's world the peculiarities and needs of a territory loved since childhood, to which I returned after the death of my father, accepting the

**> Before being the president of the Casa C.A.V.E. organization, you are a visual artist. From the point of view of your experience and your relationship with this land, what do you think are the potentials for artistic exchange and production that this place holds compared to other (urban) realities?**

inheritance of a small house in the hills of Visogliano. From this choice was born the idea of creating the cultural association for the development of the territory CASA C.A.V.E. - Contemporary Art Visoglianovisovlje Europe, which in its name encompasses part of my choice: my father's HOUSE, my artistic origins Contemporary Art and residence in a bilingual country like the small Visoglianovisovlje, as well as the broader vision towards Europe and the international development of a territory.

The potentials of our provincial territory are enormous, and the purpose of publicizing and popularizing the places of the Municipality of Duino Aurisina and its magnificent sites is accompanied by the desire to communicate and spread a dimension where it is possible to perceive, narrate, and transmit an interior, emotional and evocative Karst. The KAMEN project is therefore declined in an experimental and experiential way, identifying, in the roles of the geologist, historian, and nature guides, important scientific reference figures, and in the figures of the artist, sculptor, and other exponents of the culture and work of the territory, sensitive catalysts of identity and development. In addition, working with targeted synergies and through a specific communication plan, the activity of CASA C.A.V.E. I can well emphasize the links of "scientific/creative," "global/local," and "future and widespread vision" thinking

from a perspective of integrated enhancement also in an international perspective.

In addition, I am very happy to note that my relational research has allowed the transition from temporary dimensions of multimedia exhibition and collateral events into continuous territorial development projects, grafting into the artistic/relational proposal a shared, complex vision with a future perspective.

In this context, the conception of the concept “wind and stone,” subtitle of the REVIEW THE ENERGY OF PLACES, in relation to the karst territory of reference has allowed the subsequent development of a real “brand” of immediate recognizability, which is attracting different audiences to the territory, thus leaving the usual criteria (and prejudices) and activating precise cultural links between the city and the province in a metropolitan perspective; in the knowledge that the province of Trieste is the smallest in Italy, therefore dialogue and cultural interweaving can be even more easily opened and shared to its entire territory.

The CASA C.A.V.E. association with the CARSO CREA(T)TIVO Project envisions the activation of specific karst itineraries and social workshops with a creative profile for the conception and creation of design artistic souvenirs in collaboration with marble companies, sculptors, stonemasons and associations for disabled people, with a view to training, professional updating, and artistic career. In addition, the experimentally produced works will be unveiled and narrated during special EXHIBITIONS and MEETINGS with local stakeholders and the press, and finally, some of them will be offered to selected industry players to gather the necessary feedback for their evaluation before the second production trial and their positioning on the market, with a view to Creative Industries.

**> Both the festival and the museum are recent. How do you envision the development of this diffuse museum and what spaces could be provided to develop its potential?**

The precious characteristic of the Municipality of Duino Aurisina with the ancient Roman Quarries and their particular stone is at the center of a cultural and tourist territorial development plan activated mainly through our Museum Diffuse of Quarries and Stone of Aurisina. KAMEN, to date, has had hundreds of visitors interested in learning about the quarries, marble workshops, contemporary sculpture residencies, and attending artistic performances in the basins and meetings with sculptors and cultural exponents of the area.

The future vision will have to give continuity to this now-grafted cultural process through ongoing collaboration between associations and institutions, with a keen eye on Regional and European Calls for Proposals that could allow the restoration of the ancient stonemasons' workshops, the belvederes on the quarries, activate new itineraries with “stone focus” (castellieri, caves, cliffs) and organize essential collaborations with other sectors as well, such as food and wine.

Let us also not forget the development of artistic, visual, sound, and dance performances in the quarries that enable an evocative perception of the territory and will be perfected in the near future.

Finally, the Museo Diffuso, which now has no walls, should be provided with well-defined reference place rooms where the territory's ethnographic, naturalistic, and geological history and quarries can be developed. In this sense, collaboration with figures of scholars, creatives, visual art artists, sculptors, and especially architects, in close relationship with each other, will give a secure future to our growing reality.

Desire for knowledge, vital energy, perception, and responsibility, together toward a better world.

# Stone Workshop 2023 Photo Reportage

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- Day 01
- Day 02-05
- Day 02-05









- ⊕ Day 02-05
- ⊕ Day 02-05
- ⊕ Day 06-08
- ⊕ Day 06-08





Day 08   
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# Settlements



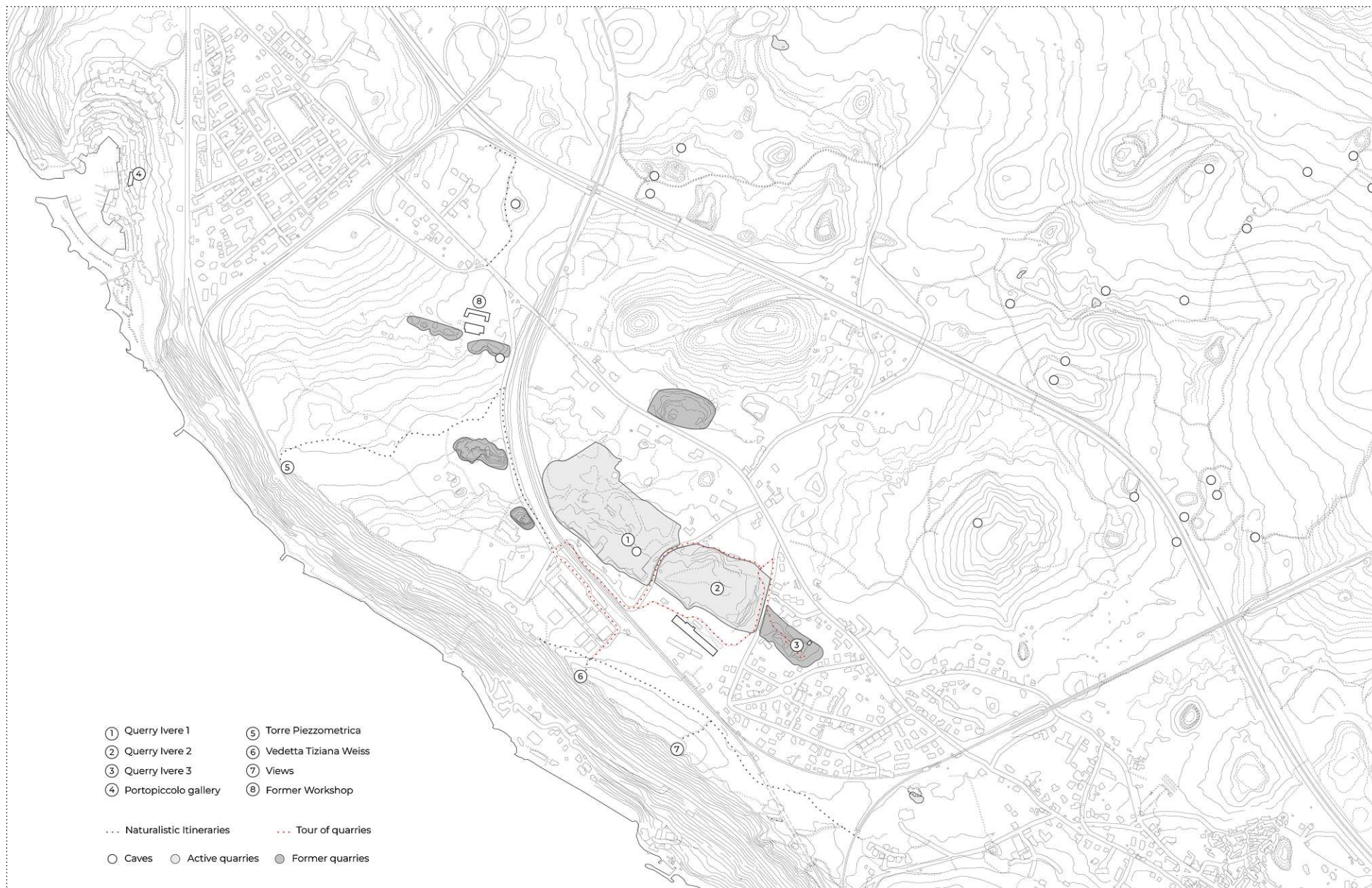
- ① Porto Piccolo
- ② Borgo San Mauro
- ③ Cave di Aurisina
- ④ Aurisina

# Transport



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# Spaces for Art & Contemplations



# Design

# Process

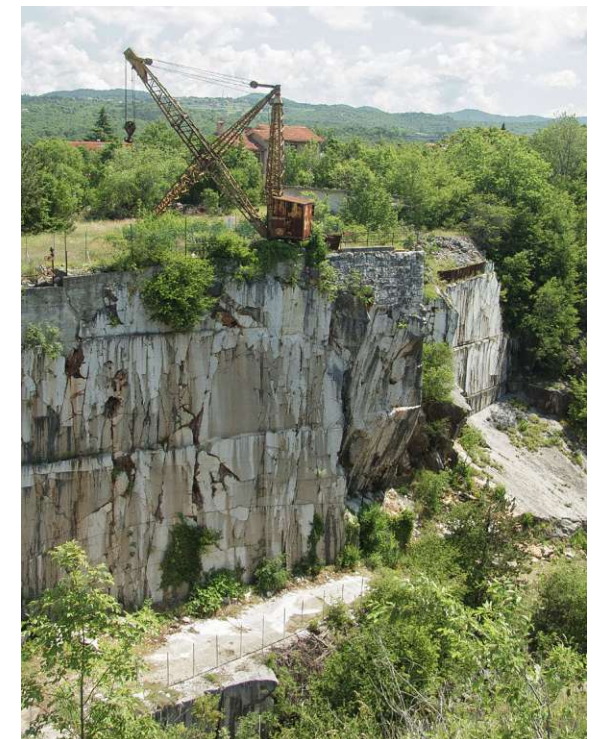


# The issue of Vacant plots and the case of Portopiccolo

According to the Regional Landscape Plan of Friuli Venezia Giulia<sup>54</sup>, many abandoned and dilapidated structures, buildings and artefacts are present in various areas in the Duino-Aurisina region. The presence of wasteland is partly due to the abandonment of industrial and agricultural spaces, which simultaneously characterize the history of the place and its inhabitants.

Between these, the former limestone quarry in Sistiana, dating back to the 2nd century AD, was redeveloped between 2011 and 2014 into the controversial Portopiccolo project. Touristic and real-estate speculation has transformed one of the most scenic stretches of the Adriatic coast - a former quarry that has become a green area dominated by nature - into a man-made concrete coast. Rizzani de Eccher S.p.A. invested two hundred forty-five million euros in a luxury Hub, but outside of this luxury bubble, there are neither the facilities nor the historical tradition to provide support for this kind of tourism. According to the locals, Portopiccolo is a grey, anonymous sprawl. Less than 50 and 60 per cent of the properties have been sold, with vacant apartments at the top and deserted stores at the bottom.<sup>55</sup>

Rather than developing investment-driven new construction through policies of tabula rasa, the derelict plots in the region offer the possibility of imagining new types of public space, which take more careful consideration the history of the region and its inhabitants.



54: Piano Paesaggistico Regionale del Friuli Venezia Giulia, Schede dei beni dichiarati di notevole interesse pubblico. Comune di Duino - Aurisina, (Trieste: Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia 2018)

55: Zeno Saracino, "De Eccher cede il 'gioiello' di Portopiccolo a un Fondo internazionale," Triestnews, September 9, 2019, <https://www.triesteallnews.it/2019/09/de-eccher-cede-il-gioiello-di-portopiccolo-a-un-fondo-internazionale/>

Fig35: Portopiccolo Sistiana

Fig36: Former Quarry Ivere 3



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# The Former Workshop

Passing the entrance to the path to the Piezo-metric tower, next to a disused quarry, another path through the woods leads to an abandoned industrial site. The imposing ruin is located at the Railway 3 quarry, a former quarry exploited by the Habsburgs during Aurisina's golden age. Most of these stone buildings were built during the Austro-Hungarian period, including a big marble workshop on the southern side and a U-shaped building on the northern side. Parts of the complex have collapsed over time, having been in a state of neglect for decades. Others preserve the facade, reminding us of the productive past of the place. The imposing ruin demands an opportunity to be occupied again, through interventions of rehabilitation and expansion. Trees and ivy have taken over the area, occupying the architectural space in the entropic process.

↓ Fig 37: Marble workshop

→ Fig 38: Part of the U-shaped building

↘ Fig 39: Green area between the buildings

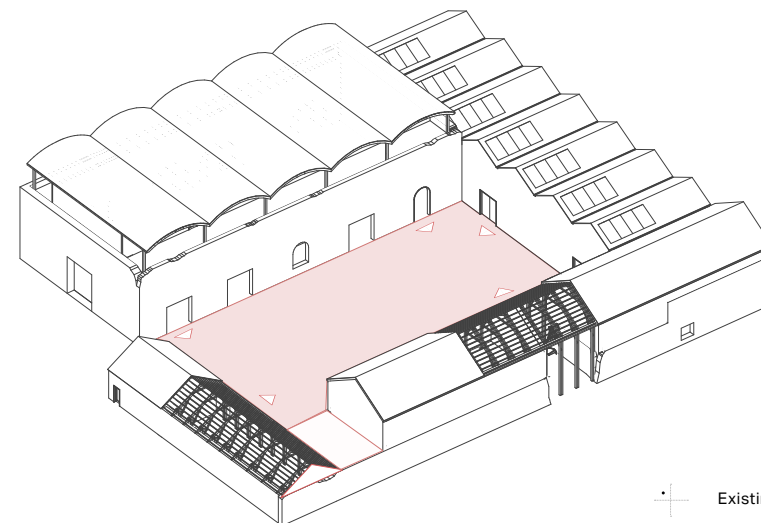
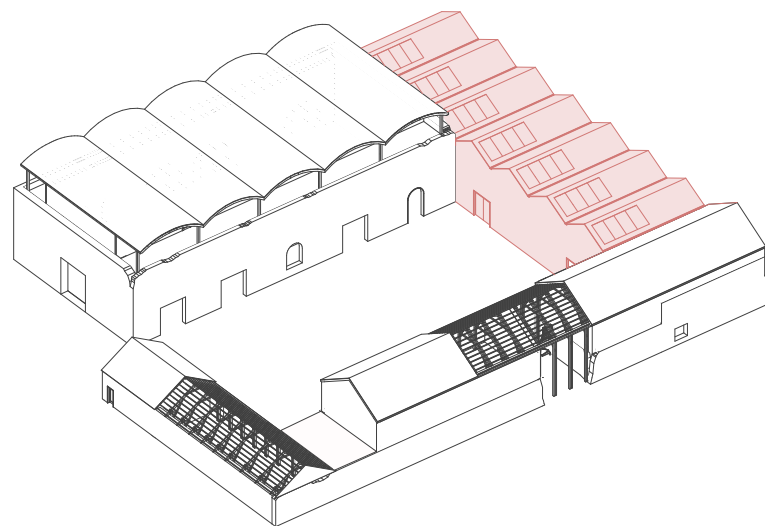
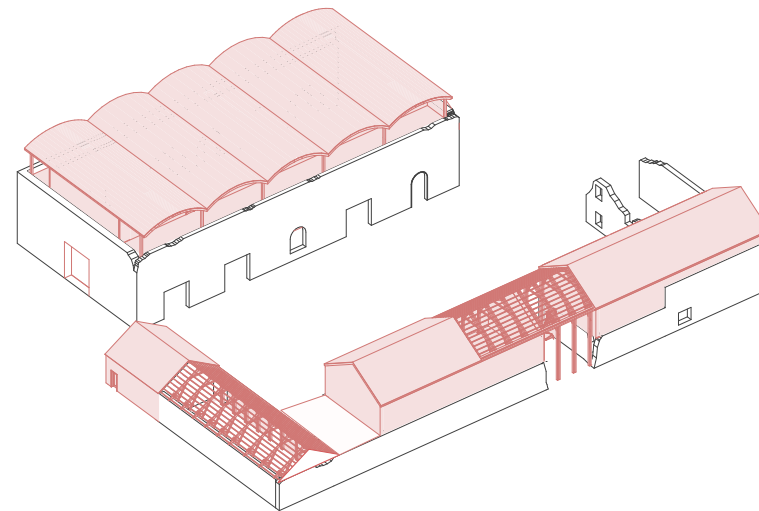
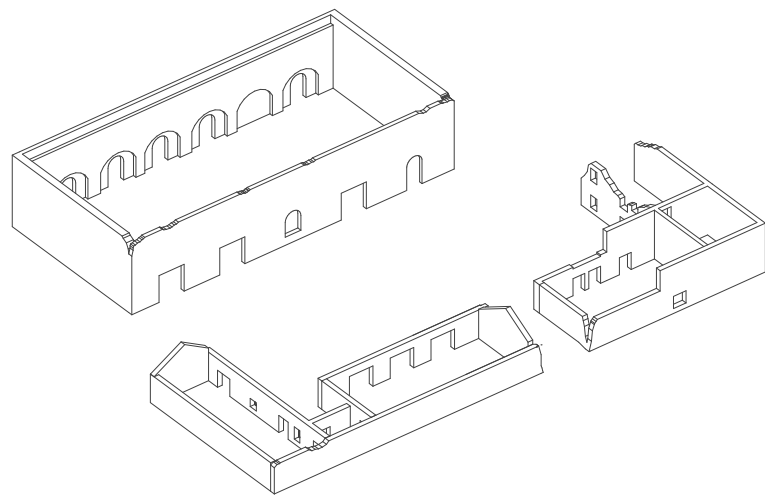






# Entropy and memory

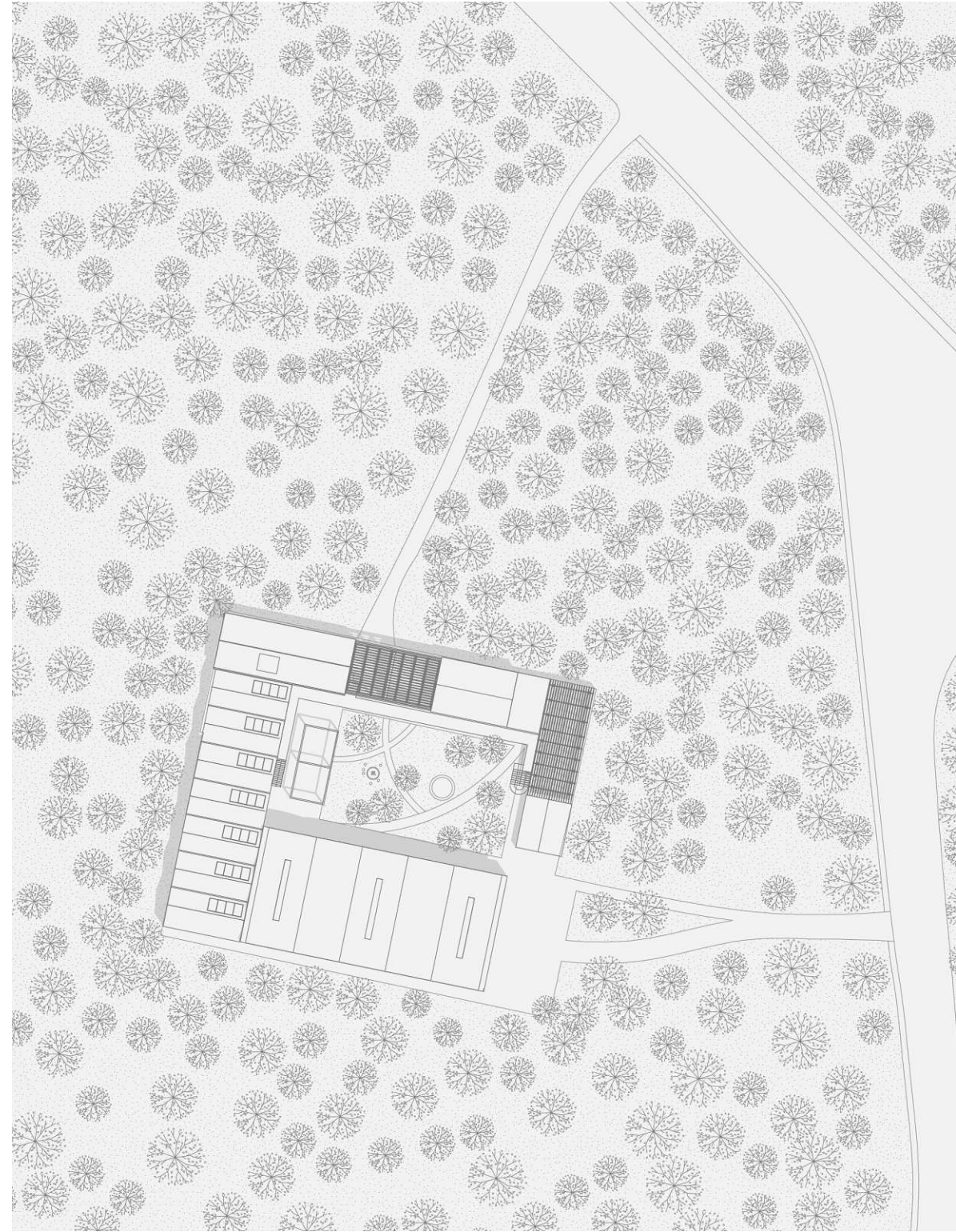


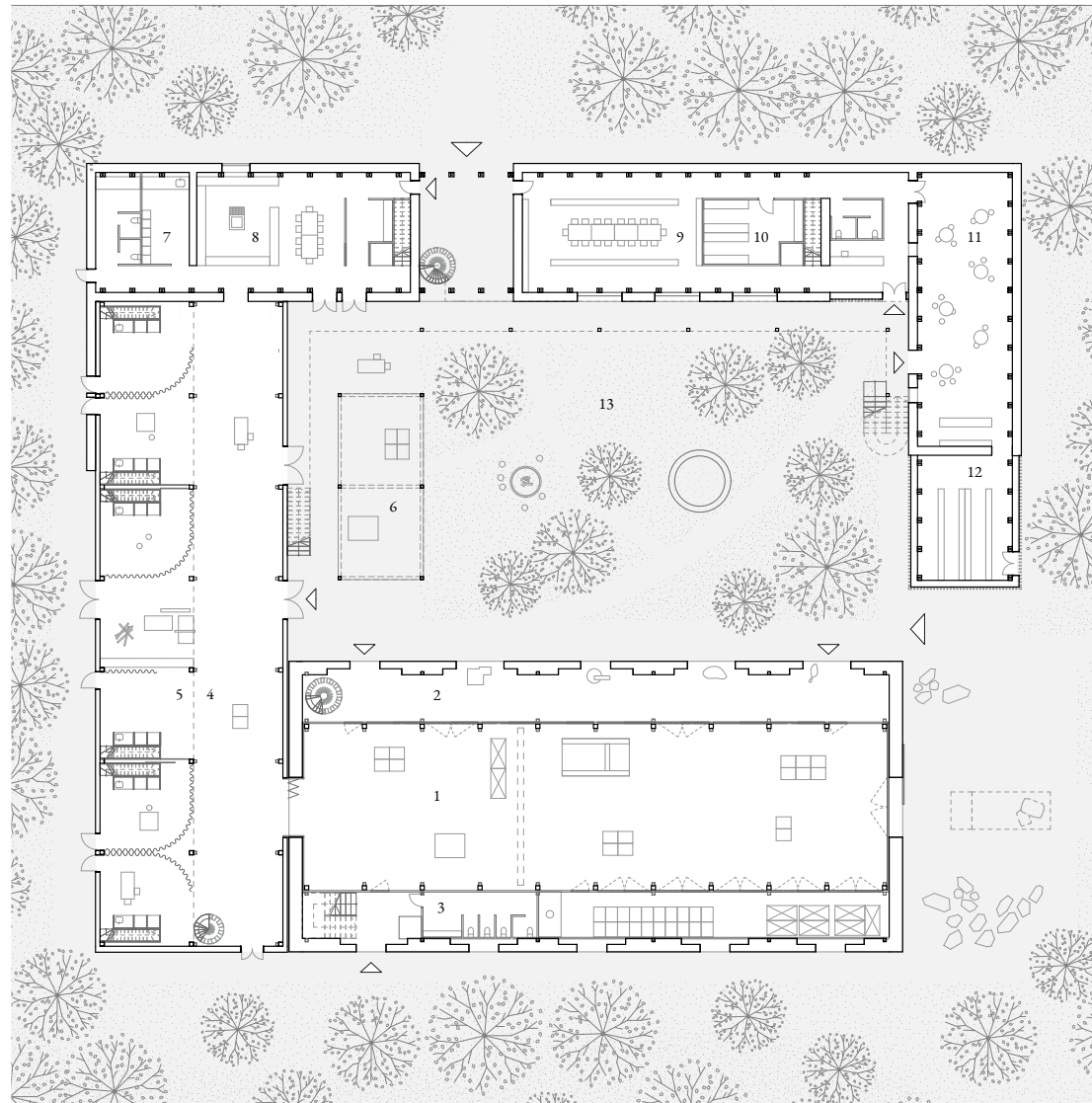
There is a certain grace and beauty to the ruin that derives from forms invested with multiple histories. Their decline is attributable to the second law of thermodynamics, which asserts that entropy always increases, thus inevitably reducing man's attempts at order. This entropic process makes an artefact more relatable to human beings, as it impacts the building's appearance in the same manner it affects our bodies. As we contemplate a ruin, we often look back at our past, accomplishments, and losses. Contemplating entropy brings us to think beyond the moment of conception of a building, as this universal law of impermanence is a force that is constantly shaping architecture and our cities. As architects, we often ignore the irreversibility of time resulting from this law or acknowledge it as a critical architectural dimension. Entropy becomes part of the design alongside its restoration to celebrate the history of the place, the landscape and the site's return to its natural state.

↑ Fig 40; → Fig 41: Castello Vecchio Duino



-  Existing Ruin
-  Additions over the existing ruin Stonelab and community spaces
-  Expansion with Ateliers and co-living
-  Courtyard Garden of sculptures

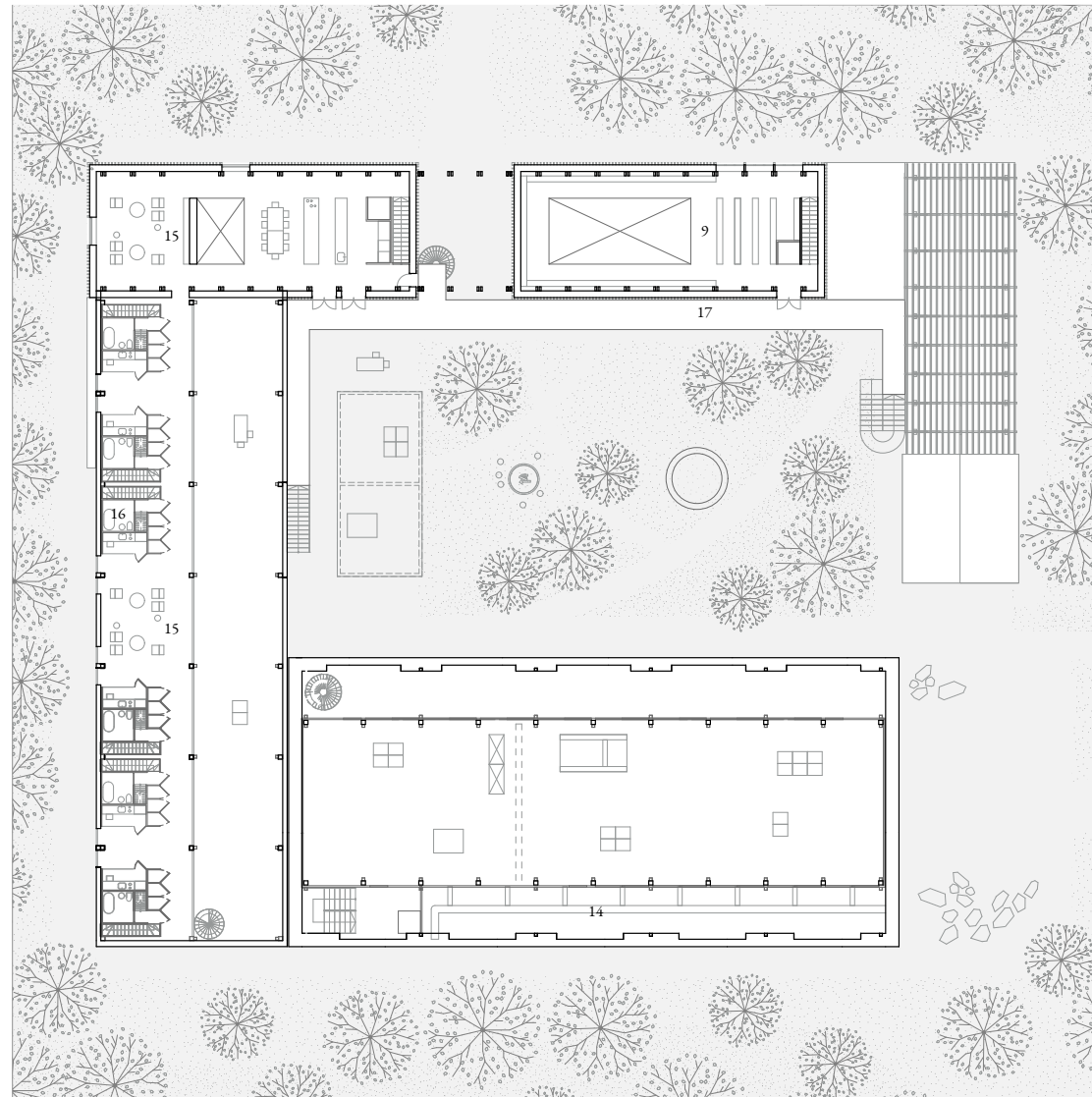




- 1: StoneLab
- 2: Sculpture portico
- 3: Ancillary spaces
- 4: Atelier space
- 5: Individual atelier
- 6: Outdoor crane
- 7: Laundry room
- 8: Izba (fire space)
- 9: Library
- 10: Archive
- 11: Osmiza
- 12: Canteen
- 13: Sculpture garden



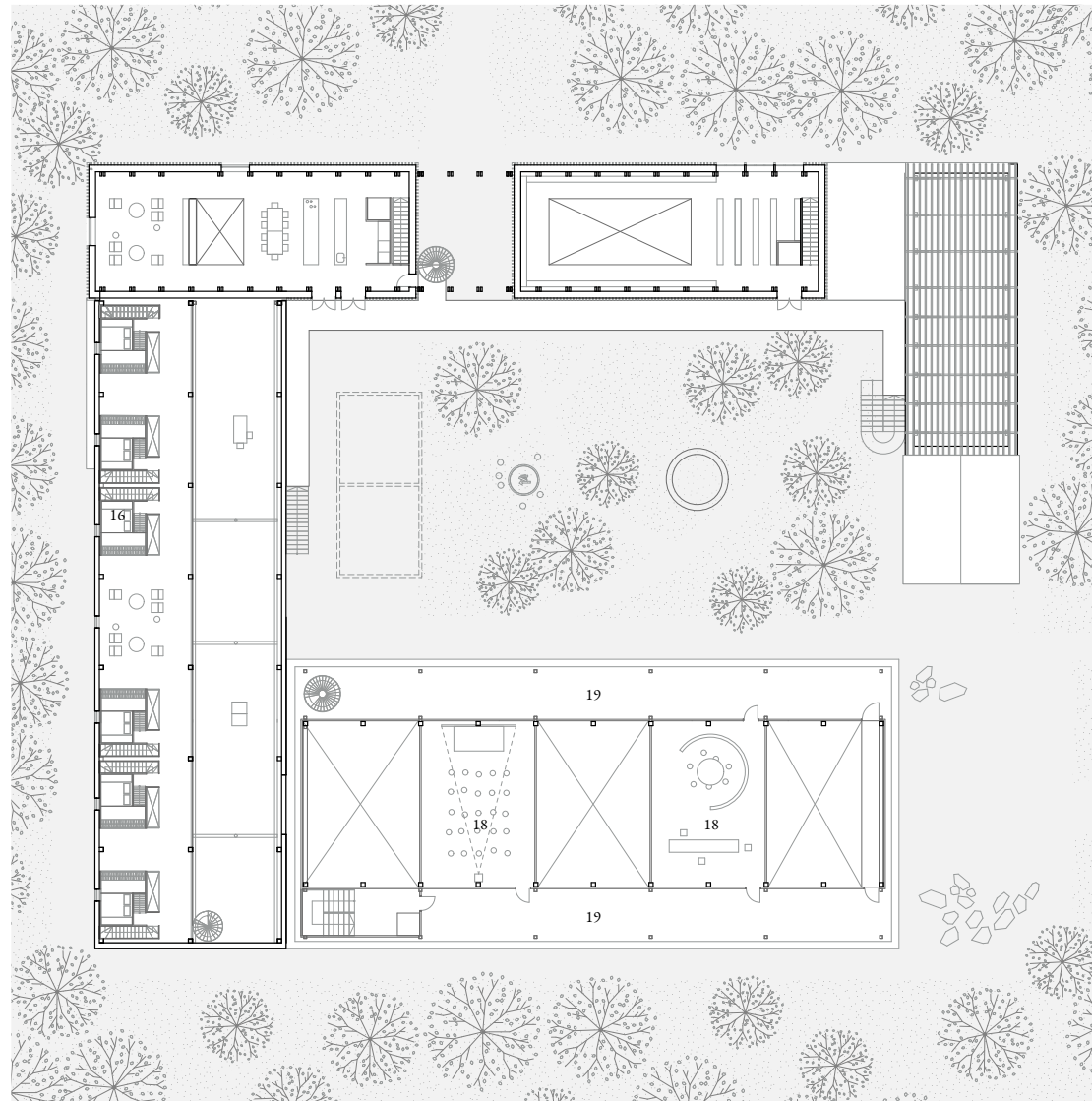
↖ Groundfloor 1:500



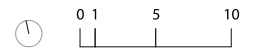
- 14: Central dust collector
- 15: communal spaces
- 16: Individual units
- 17: Gallery



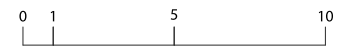
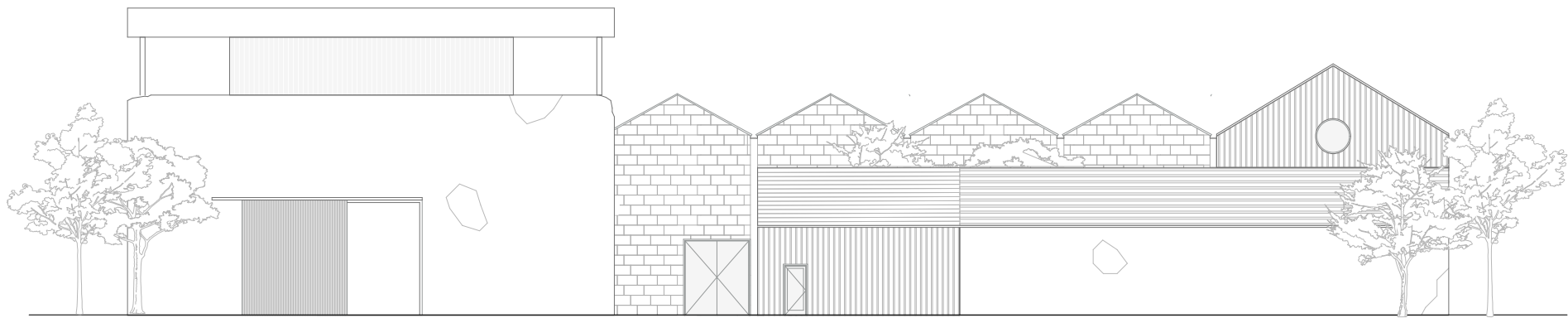
↖ First floor 1:500



18: Collective  
multi-purpose space  
19: Promenade

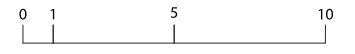
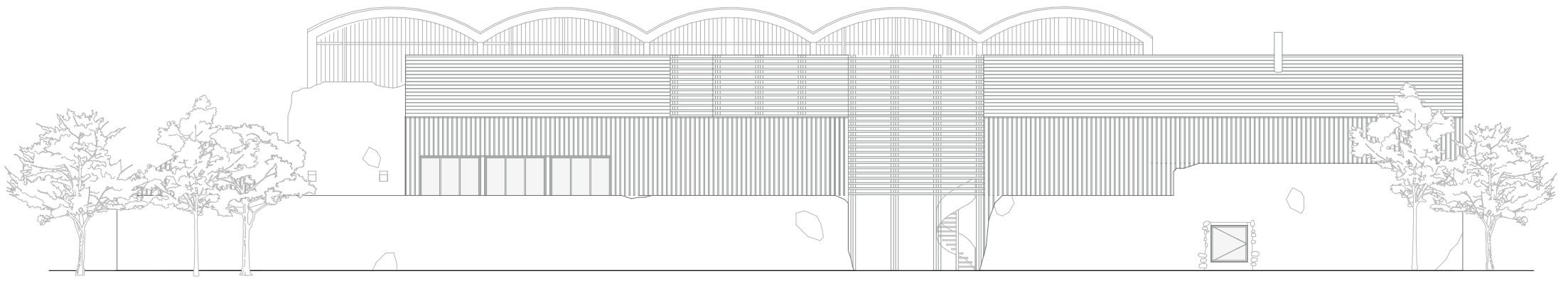
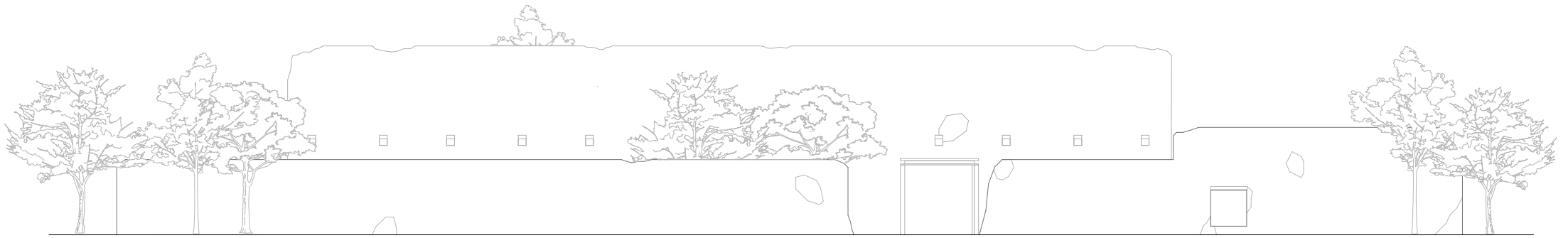


Second floor 1:500

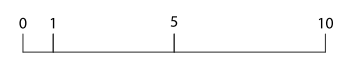
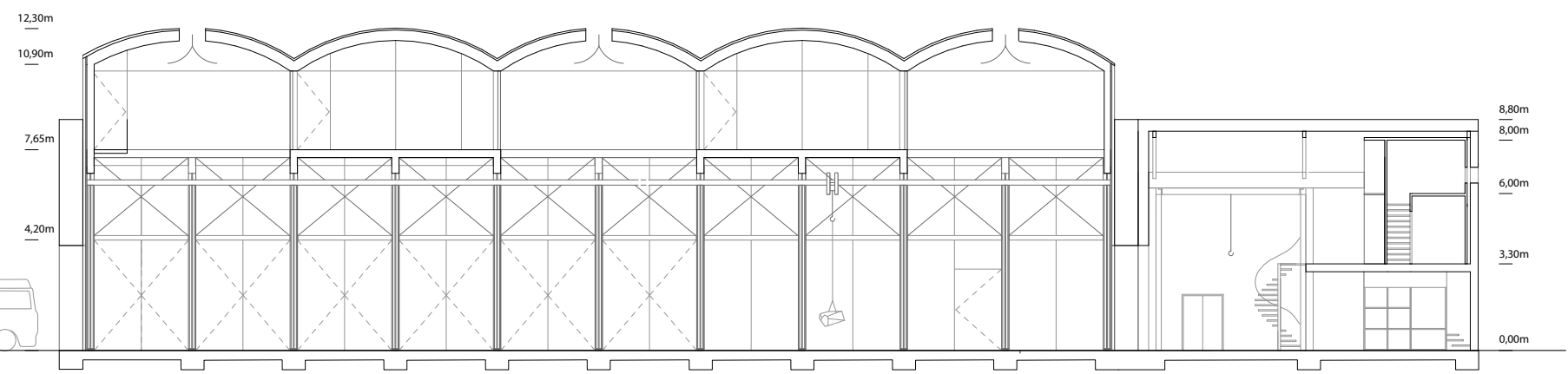
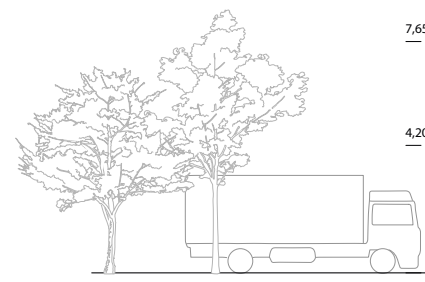
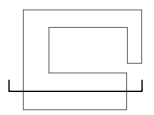
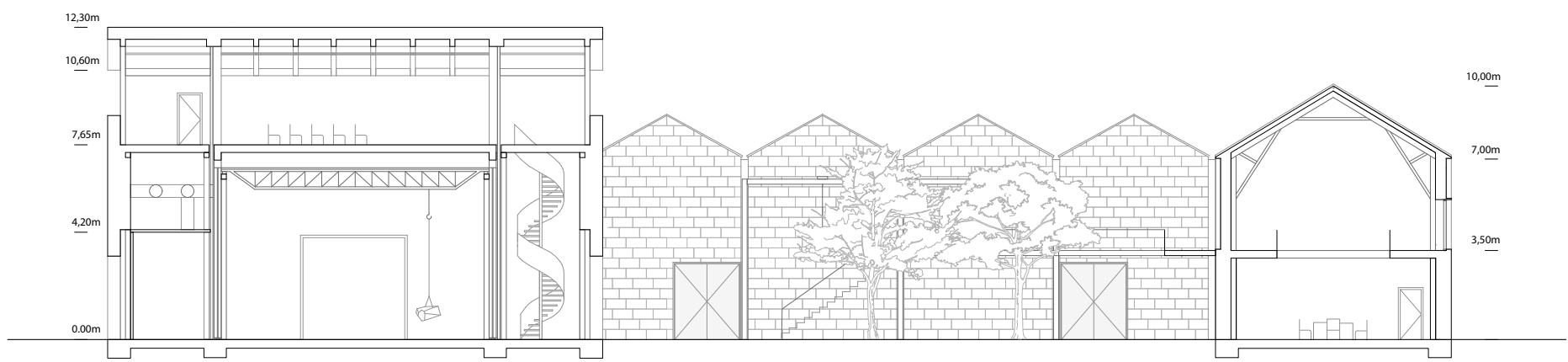
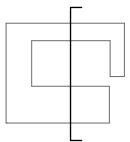


↖ Elevation East 1:250  
Before and after





↖ Elevation North 1:250  
Before and after



Sections 1:250



# StoneLab

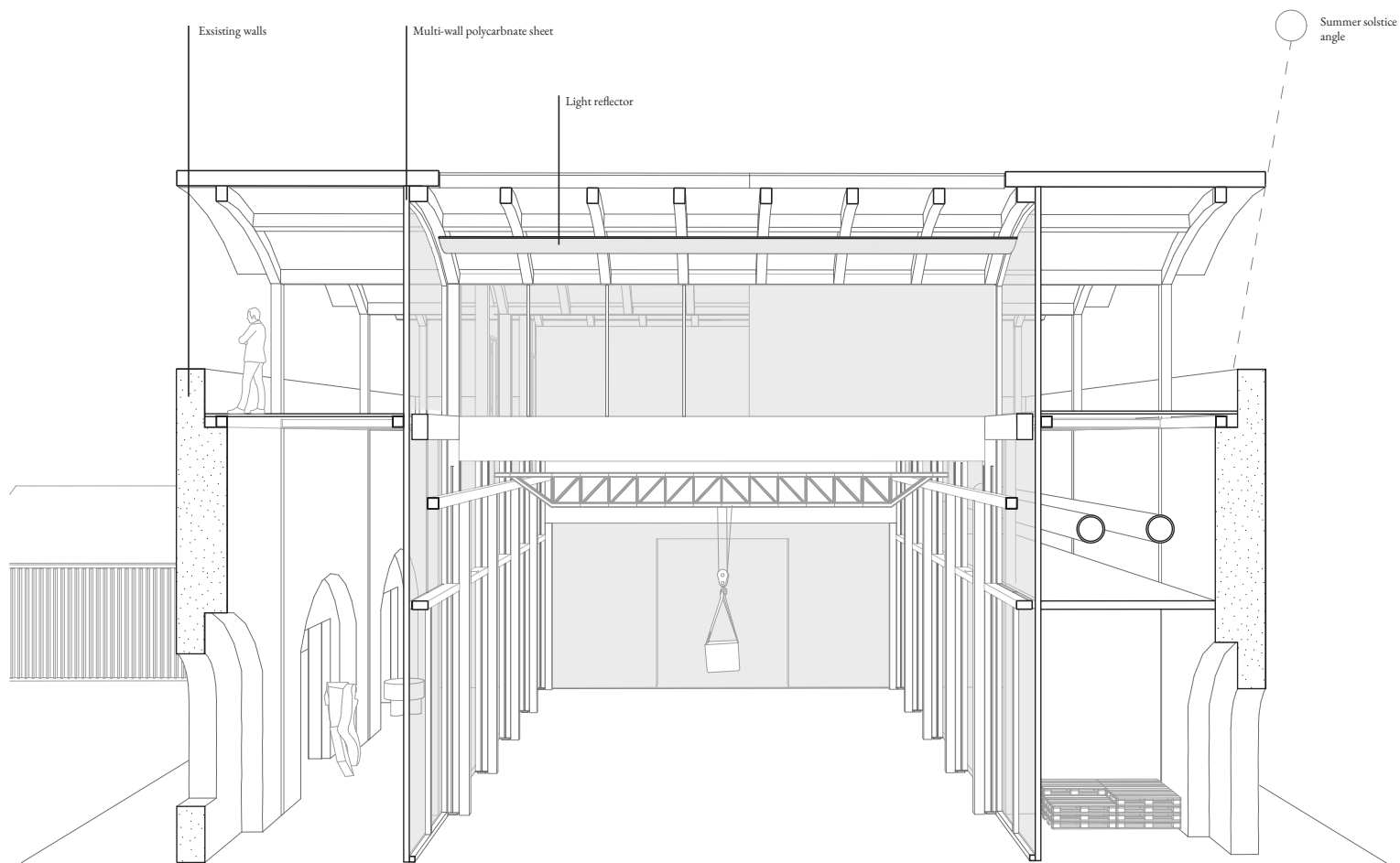
Stonelab seeks to reconnect with the site's and the region's productive memory, returning to its original function as a stone workshop and promoting social interaction between different groups of people; it is accessible to professional sculptors, artists in residence, students as well as to beginners from the surrounding areas and the city. Thanks to its proximity to the active quarry, waste blocks are provided to the laboratory, and the crane truss and the diamond wire saw allow working with stones of all sizes.

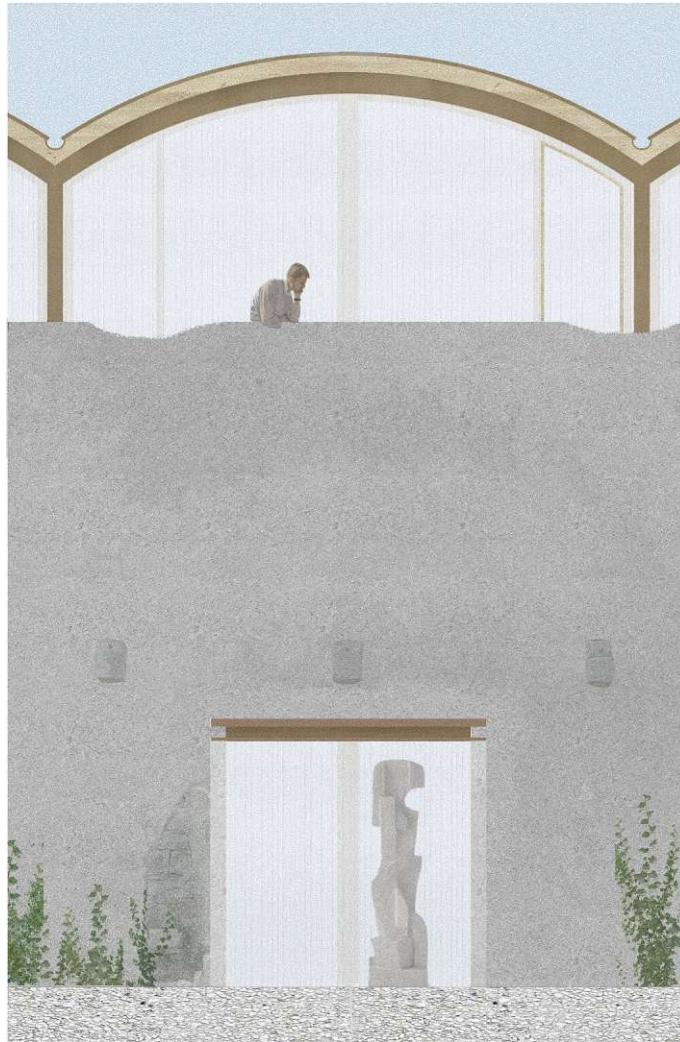
On the upper floors, overlooking the productive area, multi-purpose spaces are available to the community for different functions, and a promenade offers views of the karstic landscape and the courtyard, connecting the users to the surrounding territory.

The ruin's walls are preserved and reinforced with steel, while a new structure made out of polycarbonate and wood encloses and insulates the productive spaces of the buildings. Voids between the old walls and the new polycarbonate ones function on one side as a portico exposing sculpture facing the courtyard and on the other for ancillary spaces.

The productive area is lit with indirect natural light, thanks to a light reflector positioned under the skylights and the extended roof construction, which blocks direct sunlight on the southern side during summer.







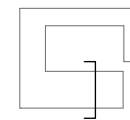
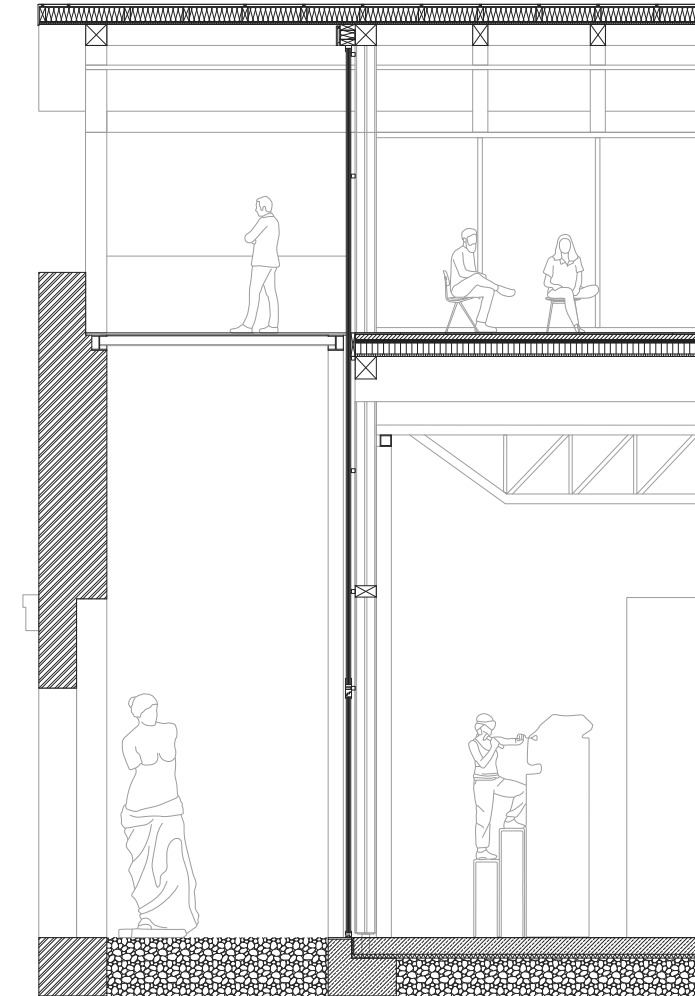
**FLOOR:**

220 mm trowel-finished rein-  
 forced concrete ground slab  
 PE-foil separating layer  
 50 mm thermal insulation  
 sealing layer

**FACADE:**

60/495 mm recycled poly-  
 carbonate multi-wall sheet,  
 light-diffusing  
 50/50/4 mm aluminium SHS  
 suction anchor  
 280/280mm column beech  
 laminated veneer timber

Section-elevation  
 1:100

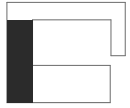


**ROOF:**

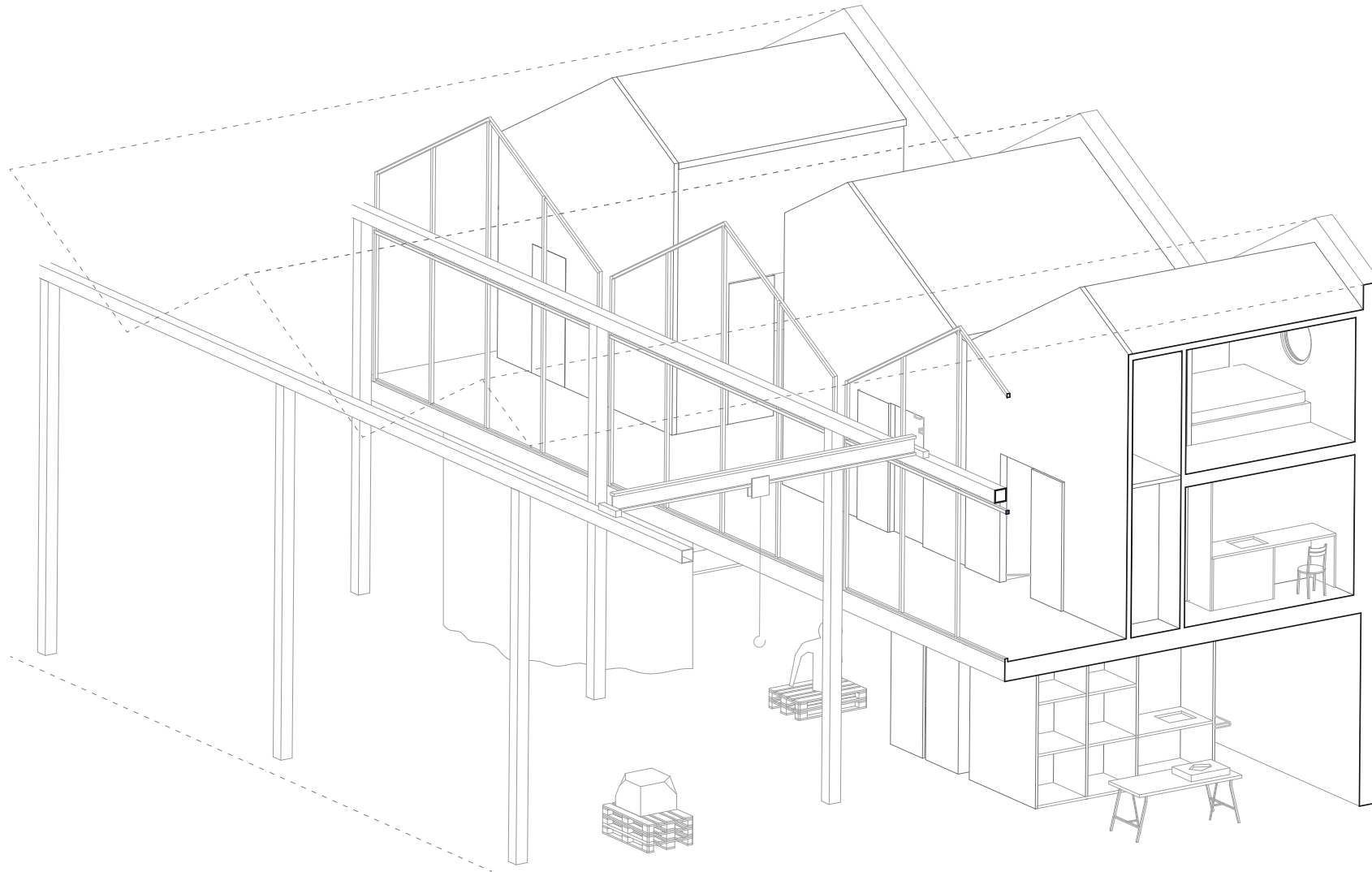
33 mm steel sheet with sub-  
 structure  
 80/200 mm structural timber/  
 200 mm mineral-wool insu-  
 lation  
 vapour barrier 1.0 mm  
 wood boarding 30 mm  
 waffle structure timber beams  
 280 x 200 mm

**RECYCLED MATERIALS FROM**

**THE QUARRY:**  
 Solid waste is smashed to  
 create gravel and terrazzo  
 tiles  
 Waste quarry dust up to  
 15%, with low water-to-  
 binder ratios, is used as a  
 replacement of cement to  
 create concrete and cement  
 mixtures.



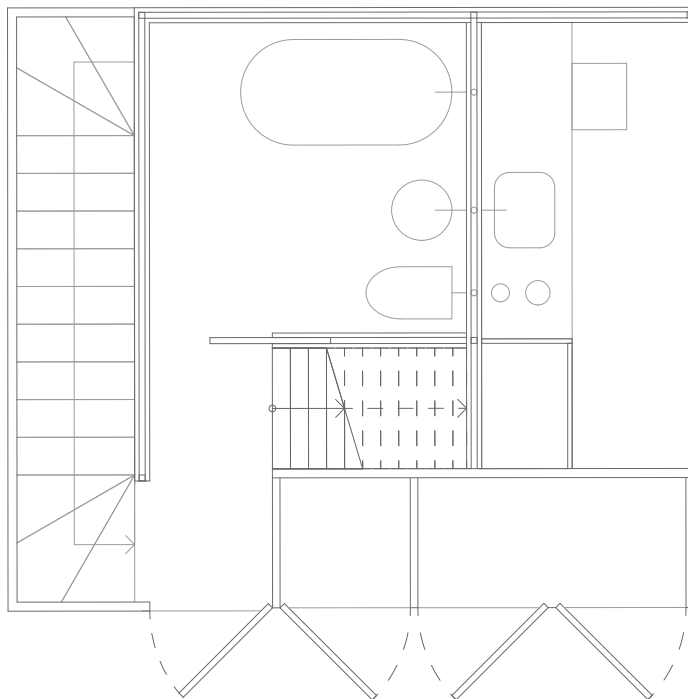
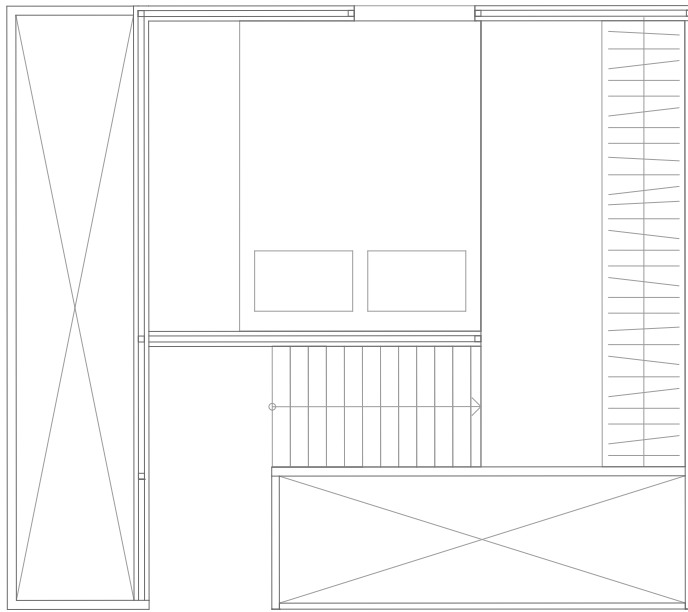
# Ateliers



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➤ Axonometry Section of the Ateliers

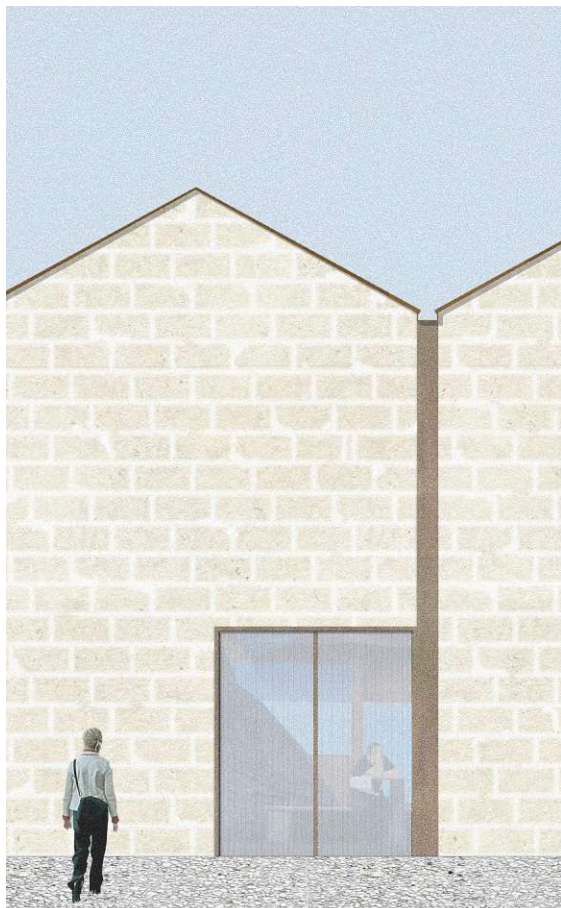


Inspired by the way of living in rural dwellings, where the house is also the space of work, I developed a communal living model that can host between 6 and 12 Artists in residence. This model goes beyond the city-like distinction between living and working; these two realms collide into a common space.

In the rural dwelling, form and structure depend equally on productive function and physical environment. The new expansion follows the simplicity of the typical Karsic home. The roof, constructed in rows of gable roofs, connects from a stylistic point of view to the vernacular constructions of the areas and, at the same time, provides the atelier areas with the optimal light for artistic production, thanks to the skylights facing north. In modern years, traditional stone and wood use was replaced by reinforced concrete constructions in the region. The expansion of the buildings is constructed using Aurisina stone for the walls from the nearby extraction basin and local Pine-wood to support the roof construction.

Similarly to the rural house, the private space is minimized, encouraging the artists to socialize in the collective areas. The six individual units are pre-fabricated and made of timber; they are accessible from the ateliers through private or shared stairs. They are organized on two floors, and their form follows the gable roof shape; on the first level, there is a bathroom, storage wall, and a small kitchenette facing the nearby unit. On the upper floor, a double bed, a closet, and a rounded window facing the forest and the karstic nature make it a perfect space to seclude oneself. All the units are connected to the collective rooms through an internal gallery. The gallery faces the communal workspace, and a glass wall protects the living area from noise and dust.

The collective spaces include a big communal kitchen, communal living rooms, laundry room, and an Izba. The Izba – inspired by the Robida project in Topoló – is a collective space organized around a fireplace.



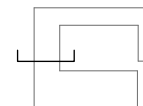
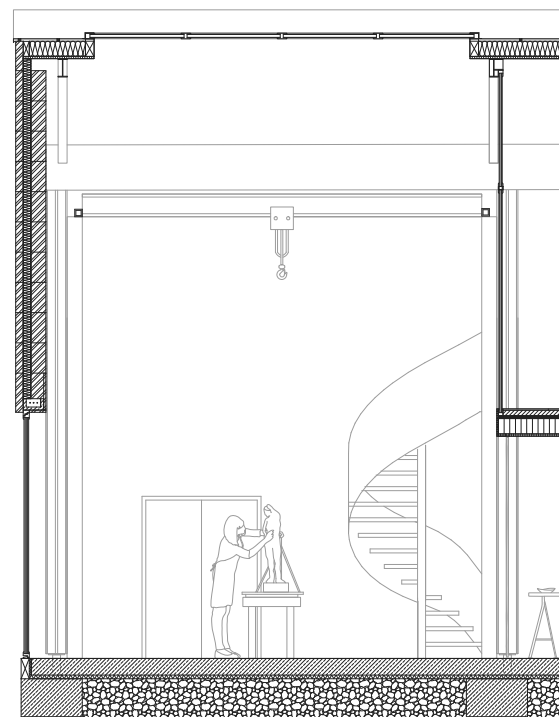
**FACADE:**

Aurisina stone facade, 80x40x-9cm, adhered with preocol mortar and joint made with 9 parts cement glue and 1 part cement made from quarry dust  
 Breathable waterproofing membrane  
 Recycled cotton board insulation t=10mm  
 Aurisina stone facade, 80x40x-20cm, adhered with preocol mortar and joint made with 9 parts cement glue and 1 part cement made from quarry dust

**FLOOR:**

220 mm trowel-finished reinforced concrete ground slab  
 PE-foil separating layer  
 50 mm thermal insulation sealing layer

Section-elevation  
 1:100



**ROOF:**

33 mm steel sheet with sub-structure  
 80/200 mm structural timber/  
 200 mm mineral-wool insulation  
 vapour barrier 1.0 mm  
 wood boarding 30 mm  
 240 mm IPE steel beam

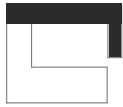
**RECYCLED MATERIALS FROM THE QUARRY:**

Second grade blocks, not suitable for producing ornamental stones

Solid waste is smashed to create gravel and terrazzo tiles

Waste quarry dust up to 15%, with low water-to-binder ratios, is used as a replacement of cement to create concrete and cement mixtures.





## Social interaction and connection to the site's memory

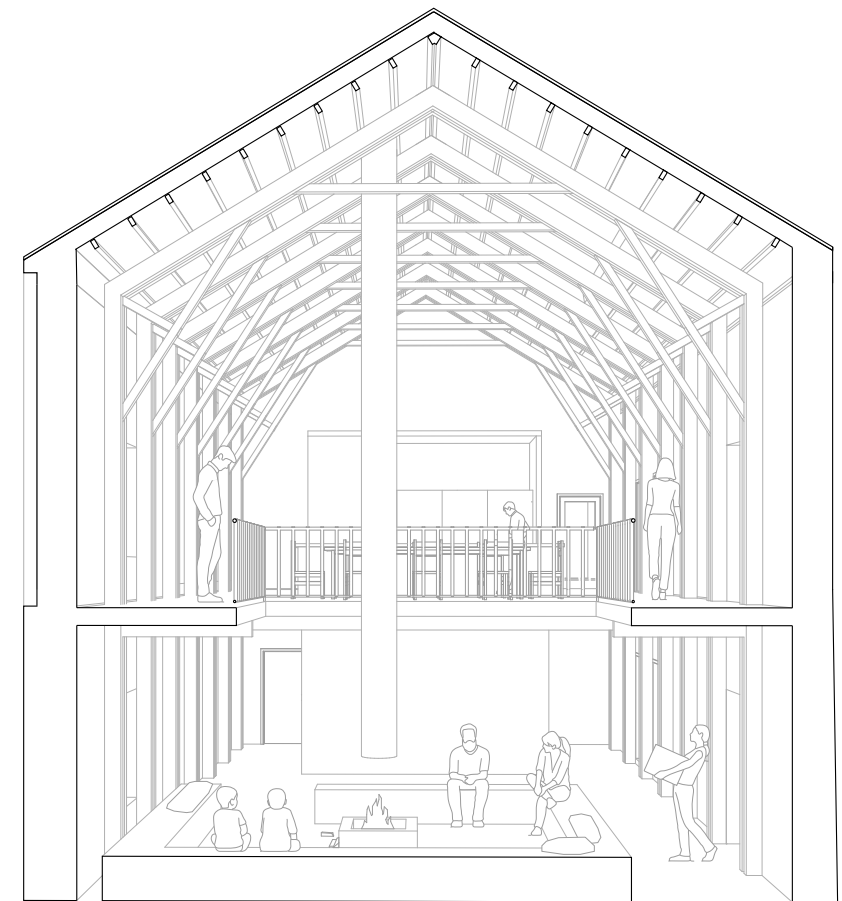
“The izba (...) is the room of conviviality. It is the clean room of the house, heated by the peč, the old stove made of majolica tiles, upon which children and elders used to nap, the room where tales were told and where guests felt welcome”<sup>56</sup>

The project explores the possibility of creating a program for social interaction inspired by spaces, practices, and rituals that recall the collective memory and identity of the place.

The Izba reconnects to the hearth, a meeting point where people spend the long winter evenings in company because fire has always had a magical meaning, a source of light and warmth.

The Osmiza used to be a place where farmers - during the Austro-Hungarian period - had the opportunity to sell their surplus produce - such as wine, cheese, and eggs - eight days per year (the term comes from the Slovenian “osem”, meaning “eight”). It is a peculiarity in this border area in Italy and a beloved place to go during spring, summer, and autumn to taste local products and socialize. Built in the old ruin, with a wooden construction supporting a transparent polycarbonate roof, the osmiza in the project follows its original function. It can be adapted to host local events or other activities. A konoba (canteen) is equipped with local products and wine from nearby producers.

Additionally, a library with an archive and study rooms is included in the social infrastructure of the place.



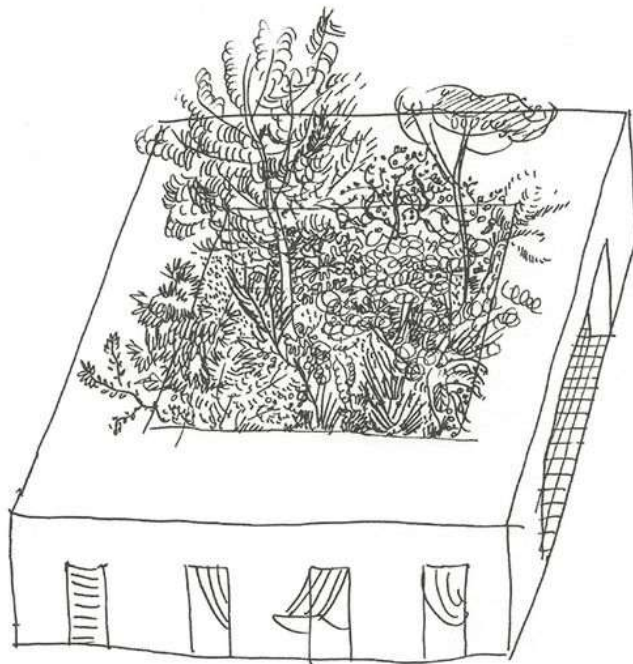
# The court-yard

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Fig 43: Bernard Rudofsky, sketch for a patio house

57: Bernard Rudofsky, Lectures Copenhagen (Back to kindergarten), April 8 1975, (Rudofsky Papers, Getty), p. 5.



The traditional karstic housing type coincides with the courtyard typology, which responds to the housing standards of a society strongly tied to the territory. Through addition and expansions, a courtyard was created in the project, which hosts a garden of sculptures, observable also from above, thanks to an external gallery and the StoneLab promenade. The enclosed garden reconnects to the ancient legend of how the devil influenced the creation of the karst; It used to be a garden of Eden until he spilled a bag of stones on it.

The vegetation that grew due to the entropic process is kept, and artists can exhibit their sculptures. This space is a metabolic space for active re-creation, where artists, locals, and non-locals can experiment, play, eat, and have fun, inhabiting and changing it.

**"If somebody would ask me how to enlarge, or to improve, the education of the student of architecture; how to offer them a more direct experience than the one they get in school, I would suggest that they be provided with an experimental yard -a Bauhof - where they could make architectural models, not 1:100, or 1:50, or 1:20, but full scale, one to one"<sup>57</sup>**

# Acknowledgments

This thesis allowed me to deal with a context and territory very different from my everyday one. Thanks to the people I met along the path, I learned a lot exploring and researching about this rural borderscape.

A special thank you to Fabiola, Maddalena, Sara, Mirko, and all the beautiful people that I met in Aurisina, who opened their doors to me, welcomed me into their homes, drove me around the countryside, and made me discover it from their perspectives. It is not easy to find people like this today, who put their time and energy into collectively transforming their surroundings and making them a better place for people to live in. I am thankful for this experience and the friendship that developed during this thesis work.

I want to thank my mentor Mladen Jadric, who believed in me, pushed me to do better, and was always there to support my ideas.

A particular thanks to my mother and my family, who always supported and believed in me through these years with their love and patience. Even if far away, they were always there to cheer me up in my most challenging moments, making things look good again.

A special thank you to my friends, the distant and the closer ones, who were always there, ready to help me and who made these years of university unforgettable.

Last but not least, thank you Dasa for always being there, giving me the wisest advice at the right moment, and being my biggest supporter.

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# Tables and Figures

Graphics and photographs © Carlotta Siciliani

With the exception of the following illustrations:

Fig 3: Massimiliano Melichione, 2022

Fig 4: Doberdò del Lago, online: (05.06.2023)

link: <https://catalogo.beniculturali.it/detail/PhotographicHeritage/0500694909>

Fig 5: Doberdò del Lago, online: [05.06.2023]

link: <http://www.seppenhofer.it/2023/camminata-tra-i-laghi-di-pietrarossa-e-do-berdo/>

Fig6: Fabiola Faidiga, 2022

Fig7: Riccardo Ciriello, 2022

Fig8: Riccardo Ciriello, 2022

Fig9: Mausoleum of Theodoric, online: (10.06.2023)

Link: <https://www.quora.com/Why-was-Victor-Emmanuel-III-not-so-popular-in-Italy-during-his-reign>

Fig10: Stazione Centrale Milano, online: (10.06.2023)

Link: <https://art-facts.com/famous-buildings-in-milan/>

Fig11: Hofburg Palace, Vienna, online: (10.06.2023)

Link: <https://www.timeout.com/vienna/things-to-do/best-attractions-in-vienna>

Fig12: New Parliament building, Budapest, online: (10.06.2023)

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facade-of-the-hungarian-parliament-located-in-budapest-seen-from-the-26387546.html

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Fig13: Nova descrizione del Friuli, online: (15.07.2023)

Link: <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-4303533>

Fig14: Southern Railway in Aurisina, online: (13.07.2023)

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Fig 16: Cave workers in Aurisina, in Cucchi, Franco et al. Der Naturstein aus dem Triester Karst, 63. Trieste: Camera di Commercio Industria Artigianato e Agricoltura, 1989.

Fig 17: A Nonsite, Robert Smithson, online: (21.08.2023)

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Fig 18: Monte Verità, online: (08.09.2023)

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Fig 19: MAD Architects, “Flow” at the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, online: (07.06.2023)

Link: <https://www.archdaily.com/983108/mad-architects-reveals->

an-art-journey-through-a-tunnel-at-the-echigo-tsumari-art-triennale-in-japan/629a29723e4b319d7b00000f-mad-architects-reveals-an-art-journey-through-a-tunnel-at-the-echigo-tsumari-art-triennale-in-japan-photo

Fig 20: Tadao Ando, “Benesse House Museum, online: (07.06.2023)

Link: <https://danpreston.com.au/photography/benesse-house-museum/>

Fig 21: DnA\_design and architecture, quarry #8, online: (14.09.2023)

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