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**AUTHOR:** VERONICA VONA  
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# Dervişan: a morpho–typological development analysis as a tool for its conservation

Key words / cultural heritage, urban morphology, typological analysis, urban lacuna, intervention strategies

Veronica Vona

PhD researcher / Ferrara University

## Abstract

*The rehabilitation of the rural villages with a strong heritage value like Dervişan pose many questions that need to be addressed in order to find practical answers concerning a problem that is strongly felt in different countries and contexts. We are talking about social and economic issues: how to prevent the risk of depopulation, how to regulate the new expansion, and how to preserve the historical and architectural characteristics.*

*The most important matter is the knowledge of the morphological development and typological analysis of the urban tissue and, as mentioned by Riccardo Dalla Negra, regardless of the approach whether such knowledge is in the field of restoration or renovation.*

*The methodological assumption used in the analysis of Dervişan's tissue comes from the school of Saverio Muratori and his students, who sees the typological and anthropization process not merely as a static categorization of building types and building features, but instead as a process that, under certain aspects, it is still evolving in Dervişan.*

*This analysis aims to identify the rules with which the buildings have changed over time and have adapted to new ways of living.*

*These resources range from the use of the identified rules for planning the new city development in an organic and integrated manner, to the identification of historical paths with a view to valorisation, not only of the Dervişan village, but also of the complex system of settlements in the Dropull area.*

*Thus, at a first analysis, it can be affirmed that the village of Dervişan, initially developed as a high promontory settlement near a punctiform polarity, over time turned into a low promontory settlement, attracted by a continuous cross-ridge, a new linear polarity.*

*This magnetic element, still interpretable, has started to shift, in a more or less planned way, until it turned into the current Highway that leads from Gjirokastër to the Greek border: a new linear polarity, which, due to its characteristics, also acts as a limit to the expansion.*

*On a closer scale, moreover, the analysis leads to a conscious action on the built, by respecting its identity, but at the same time allowing a transformation that takes into account the modern needs.*

*The identification of those legitimate changes within the historical building, respecting what Arch. Riccardo Dalla Negra defined as "the physiological limitation of historical building type renovation", represents the analytical method to follow, which aims not to overcome a limit that would involve the loss of the object itself as a heritage.*

The relationship between "old" and "new", between what it has been preserved and new functional requirements, is an essential part of every intervention on the historic building. This concept applies both to a single building and to the urban tissue. The key points are generally always the same and they range from

the overall purpose of the intervention to the evaluation of economic issues (e.g., the reason why and what to preserve, the approaches, limits, possibilities, technologies and costs of the project). While dealing with rural areas, we should also take into consideration pre-existing sociocultural and economic issues, which

have been leading the inhabitants to abandon these areas and settle into better ones. There is a contrast between empty and decaying buildings on the one hand and the still inhabited buildings on the other. Those few residents that have remained in the village are neglecting the historic value while indiscriminately upgrading the function and structure of their houses. Such diagnosis accurately portrays of the village of Dervişan, one of the inhabited centres of Dropull municipality.

It is quite a difficult challenge to deal with the recovery<sup>1</sup> of valuable rural villages, like Dervişan, since we could use a variety of approaches. It is worth mentioning two interesting cases. The first one is Santo Stefano di Sessanio (AQ), a rural village that is known for the cultivation of a special legume, nowadays a Slow Food outpost. In the nineties it was turned into a hotel diffuso (widespread hotel), so the few inhabitants witnessed the recovery of the historic areas and their repurposing, together with the reopening of several commercial activities. Already in 2013 the village came back to life and several activities re-opened, even if the post-2009 earthquake's reconstruction and recovery works were not completed yet. The second example is Craco Vecchia, a rural village known for rice cultivation whose transformation dates back in the seventies. But in this case a different

solution was applied. Having to decide between solving a structural problem - due to a natural collapse - or to abandon the area, they chose the second option. Craco Vecchia was transformed into a ghost town, now used as a filming location and a tourist attraction site for its evocative ruins.

Although the two examples above are quite similar from an urban point of view, they definitely differ in the chosen approaches. The aim of the present study is not to discuss either of the outcomes, or approaches. The former can be criticized only by taking into consideration every single case. The latter specifically addresses the methodological approaches being used, referring here to the "the clear-cut distinction between restoration, that is to say, a particular architectural practice with special conservation aims, and renovation, namely, a way of practicing architecture that sets out to markedly transform pre-existent structures." (Dalla Negra, 20173:39). What lies or should lie behind any analysis related to the recovery of the building tissue is a deep and complete knowledge of the historical development of the area. The same concept should be used to examine Dervişan as well. We can do it by examining the historiographic data and eventually matching them with the modifications on the masonry. The aim is

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<sup>1</sup>It is mandatory to specify some terminological issues. It was intentionally chosen to use the generic term recovery, although it is used here to address cultural heritage. The purpose is to not exclude any kind of approach to urban heritage: restoration, renovation, regeneration, retrofitting, etc. It should also be underlined that the term restoration is used here as defined by prof. Dalla Negra and the Ferrara restoration school. Therefore, the distinction between restoration and conservation is not admitted since any restoration could have a different purpose than the conservation itself.



Fig.1 / The village of Santo Stefano di Sessanio before the 2009 earthquake.  
Source / [www.anciabruzzo.it](http://www.anciabruzzo.it).

to gather information on how the village's urban tissue has changed and evolved over time.

The most useful methodological approach we can apply to analyse Dervişan village comes from the School of Saverio Muratori. Through his studies on the cities of Rome (Muratori, 1963) and Venice (Muratori, 1960) he overcame the concept of building typology as a static classification by approaching a more process-oriented and developmental view. Gianfranco Caniggia, one of Muratori's assistants, considers the 'procedural typology' as its most important aspect and ends up identifying the change of the housing requirements as one of the main factors to boost the developmental procedures in pre-existing buildings (Caniggia, 1976). This process leads to an analysis in which the constant shift from urban to architectural and from morphological to typological investigation becomes the key to identify all the visible tracks in the historical buildings and therefore understand how they developed.

Studies conducted by Prof. Dalla Negra and his students in the city of Ferrara serve as a recent example to show how the changes in scales are essential to understand morpho-typological processes. Dalla Negra's analysis aims at well explain the development of the historic city through the survey and the study of its continuities and discontinuities and it also aims at

assessing and/or eventually exceeding historiographic sources. (Dalla Negra, Zuppiroli, 2012 and Dalla Negra, 2014). A morpho-typological investigation has not only a historic purpose. It can also become a useful tool and great source of ideas in identifying intervention strategies on a different scale – urban, territorial or architectural (Capelli, 1986). The above concept appears to be quite relevant for Dervişan's village with its peculiarities, especially if we look at the current, unplanned development.

A first analysis carried out by using the Muratorian school methodology with the aid of ortho-imagery and cartography showed that the village was founded near an important polarity point, the Church of the Holy Archangels Michael & Gabriel. The first main urban centre can be defined as a high promontory settlement and is located near the church<sup>2</sup>. Traces of old routes – used as mule tracks - of the first settlement are still visible, together with the remains of some buildings. We can identify a first developmental phase after the down-hillside routes - continuous cross-ridge - gained more importance, then becoming a very relevant new linear polarity linking the city of Gjirokastër to Greece. Consequently, several, both old and new, small centres sprung up on the route edges of both sides: Goranxi, Sofratike, Frashtan, Jorgucat, Peshkëpi and Poshtme, Glinë, Lagjja and Fushës,

<sup>2/</sup> Typical attitude in the European Middle Ages – the third cycles-, but we can find several examples in the next Ages as well. The religious orders built their monastery in a new area and became a new attractive point for population that occupy the bordering territory.





Fig. 2 / An example of historical abandoned buildings in Dervişan.  
Source / the author.

etc.... Dervişan's city centre gradually came down, attracted by the new polarity and eventually establishing what is currently the city centre, located between the new church and the old settlement – a low promontory settlement. During a second and planned phase the village kept extending itself to the point of reaching the current highway.

Up until recently, the development of the built environment, thanks to the economic, social and political stability, was a consequence of a spontaneous consciousness of man. Men gradually anthropized the territory by replicating and slightly modifying already known typological models and eventually built houses directly on the rocky cliffs. The courtyard house matrix is still easily identifiable in many buildings and, depending on the case, it keeps evolving. The birth of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania marked what it was defined as a 'crisis moment'<sup>3</sup> and gave birth to a new planned urban area. Here there is an attempt to create a critical consciousness toward a new polarity, which contrasts with the historic polarity, and whose symbol is the old church. This attempt aims to shift the city centre towards a new area. This expansion area shows a clear dichotomy between the political regulatory framework and the building type of the territory.

From an urban point of view, we see a plan

in full contrast with the past models and values. From a typological point of view, we can still find the typical features of the old buildings or the type. There are many houses that were built with stonewalls, roofs with stone slabs, and windows with the typical arch over a monolithic lintel standing next to more modern buildings. The border of the new area definitely crosses the cross-valley floor, which internally connected all the villages and let Dervişan enter a new phase. This phase is still going on, and if not properly structured, it will be a great missed opportunity in relaunching an economic and social development of the area and a great loss to show Dervişan's cultural value.

It is undeniable that the highway is not only a strong boundary, which is typical of such modern natural territorial routes, but at the same time it is an important linear polarity attracting Dervişan and the surrounding villages. Consequently, the main meeting place and all the new aggregation points are now located at the entrance of this route. First, this new and uncontrolled urban phase has denied old anthropic structures in order to fulfill modern needs. We can see reinforced concrete houses supported by over-sized pillars, which makes the ground floor of no use, standing next to basic buildings, free of any architectural value. Secondly, as identified by Caniggia, this phase established an urban process on historical

<sup>3/</sup> The crisis moment is the turning point when the equilibrium between a subject (the consciousness) and the object (the existent structure) is overcome and a new development is about to start (Cataldi, 1977 and Caniggia 1979).





*Fig.3 / The mule tracks of Deriçan: interesting routes for the naturalistic valorisation.  
Source / the author.*

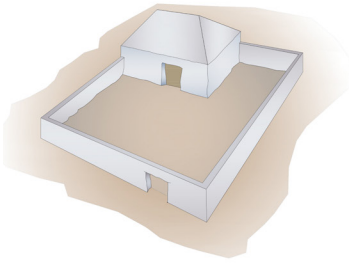


*Fig.4 / Example of wrong intervention in the cultural heritage of Deriçan: concrete elements replace ancient structure ignoring one of the restoration principles, the material compatibility.  
Source / the author.*

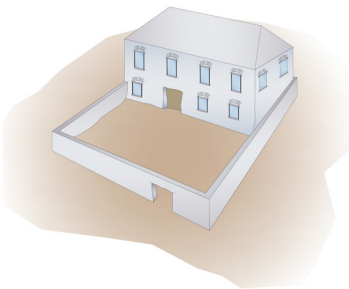
buildings in order fulfil modern needs (Caniggia, 1979). The profound change and the depletion of techniques and materials' knowledge following the introduction of reinforced concrete no longer allows us to leave the the historical building in the hands of the inhabitants. Only in this way we can prevent uncontrolled actions that can end up damaging and sometimes even erasing the historical heritage. For example, in Deriçan, extremely perishable wooden pergolas are being replaced with reinforced concrete pergolas, lime mortar replaced with cement mortar and stone roofs with terracotta tiles.

An in-depth analysis which takes into consideration both history and cartography could be a great starting point to identify a strategy for planning and intervention. To know well the history of the routes around Deriçan, even if now abandoned and used as mule tracks, may give useful hints on how to better promote the territory to attract tourism. This strategic plan can be applied to Deriçan and to all the surrounding villages as well, connecting the entire valley. By doing so, historic fords and passes could become relevant connection points. On





*Fig. 5 / The elementary courtyard house permanence: presence in the Dervican tissue of buildings with low specificity level. Source / the author.*



*Fig. 6 / Increase of dwelling density in Dervican courtyard house elementary type. As we can observe in the tissue the elementary type and the first phases of insulisation and tabernisation, its development to house several families is present as well. Source / the author.*



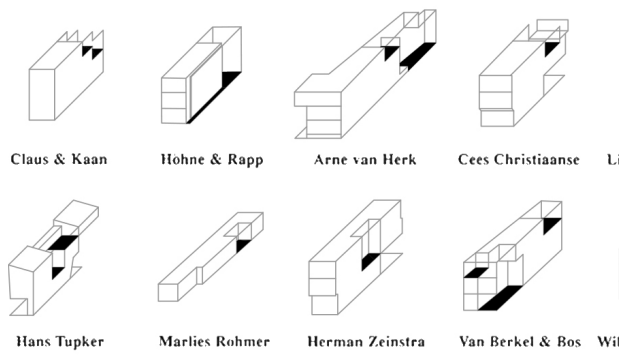


Fig.7 / Example of fixed criteria interpretable in the Borneo Sporenburg neighbourhood. Source / Elaboration of the image taken from [www.west8.com](http://www.west8.com).



Fig.8 / New structure and the total reject of the ancient value. Source / the author.

the other hand, on an urban scale, the rules related to the development of the built environment followed so far, appear to be the guidelines for any interventions on urban lacuna<sup>4</sup>. That should go along with pre-existing structures (Dalla Negra, 20171 and Dalla Negra, 20172), e.g.: compatible materials evaluation, buildings lineup, typological respect. However, it should not be used as an excuse to build new constructions trying to imitate the old ones<sup>5</sup>. It should not prevent the technical and intellectual expression of modern architecture but build bridges between modern buildings and historic heritage instead<sup>6</sup>. The analysis should define a masterplan where the order, type and wheelbase are fixed while every unit can

be freely interpreted. The Sluseholmen neighbourhood in Copenhagen is worth mentioning as an interesting example<sup>7</sup>, as suggested by Dalla Negra (Dalla Negra 20172).

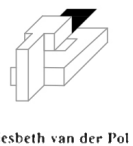
Since architecture is a functional art it is certain that the intervention on historical buildings in order to fulfil modern needs will be eventually implemented, even if it requires more efforts. The awareness of the different phases of building development and of its typological and architectural features is essential to identify "physiological limitations of historical building type renovation" (Dalla Negra, 2009: 109). The solution for Dervican's administration to prevent

<sup>4/</sup> In the Dervican case we refer to the void areas both in the historical center and in the area planned during Socialist Republic of Albania.

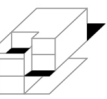
<sup>5/</sup> We clearly refer to the "Moderno ambientato" defined by Alfredo Barbacci (Barbacci 1956: 230), the approach to construct buildings externally old but internally built in order to accommodate modern facilities.

<sup>6/</sup> The "...buildings belonging legitimately to the modern world and able simultaneously to coexist with ancient ones" suggested by Miarelli Mariani (Miarelli Mariani, 2002)

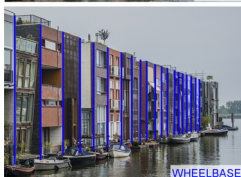
<sup>7/</sup> Sluseholmen is a recent example. Another similar interesting case, which dates back to 1996, is the Borneo-Sporenburg area in Amsterdam (J. Evert Abrahamse et alii, 2006). Even though these are a new formation, the masterplan approach is relevant for the urban lacuna in historical centres as well.



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any indiscriminate and detrimental interventions that cause of the cultural value of the buildings over time is through the evaluation of the possible limits of the intervention, e.g., to repurpose a courtyard house and preserve its historical value. How can we change the building's interior? What masonry must we preserve and what can we re-build? What kind of functions can we insert – the room's purpose (vocazioni d'uso – Dalla Negra, Nuzzo 2008:19), etc. In conclusion, starting from a morphological and typological approach, we mentioned above a series of possible points of view on preventing the abandonment of the houses and help in their rehabilitation. A proper combination of modern needs and historic heritage is key in planning, first, the conservation but also the promotion and enhancement of the historical built.

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