



**Living Landscapes - Landscapes for living
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Minimum Living

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Minimal architecture perceived as a true transversal strand that combines cultural, social and historical points which are very distant between them. A way of practising architecture by taking care of landscape and positive criticism of “bulimic” consumption of resources, environment and energy. A tool able to comply the basic needs without reducing the quality of private and social life, searching a possible alternative to the use of land. The small scale architecture viewed as a paradigm of a broad concept of sustainability, which goes beyond experimentation of new materials and technologies, including concepts such as proper and gradual socio-economic development. A tool of practical response to the urgent needs of society and environment, rediscovering practices in disuse as self-construction and self-supply, of energy and nourishment. The best practices for an anthropological sustainability, even before the technological one.

Minimum Living

“Perciò dobbiamo imparare a pensare nei termini di una struttura articolata che sappia cavarsela con una molteplicità di unità a piccola scala”. Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, 1973

“Perché l'angelo spostava i piccoli oggetti, cioè creava via via piccoli spazi, ma creava un tessuto entro cui la sua vita si svolgeva molto dignitosamente..” Giovanni Michelucci, 2001

“Il progetto, seguendo il paradigma entropico, congiuntamente al pensiero dell'essere, dovrebbe saper pensare più in termini di decolonizzazione dello spazio, contribuire a una riduzione dei carichi ambientali” Nicola Emery, 2010

The proposed action in the study “living the territory - inhabited landscapes / 9” is part of a research project which aims to analyse the architectural project on a smaller scale as a relational paradigm with the reference environment. “Minimal living” is the definition given to this model. Living the landscape, in fact, is not only the explanation of an action, but also and above all a way to position yourself and then to live. It has not only to do with the sheer number - which is the consequence - but primarily concerns the qualitative sphere, starting from the relationship and behaviour that we are able to establish with the environment that receive us.

From this close relationship, more physical than conceptual, begins the experience which I have tried to convey: a seemingly distant position at first sight, however close to the themes suggested by the seminar. The research, which over the years has taken a scientific nature, finding in literature - inside and outside the discipline - references and acknowledgments, firstly explored examples of some typologies present on the countryside landscape. In fact, if the scope to which it refers comes from spontaneous architecture, one that Bernard Rudofsky called “Architecture without architects”; in the history of “learned” architecture there are evidences that somehow it followed this same path.

It is, therefore, possible to describe Minimum Living as a small scale architecture capable of building a broad concept of sustainability, that goes beyond experimentation of new materials and technologies, including concepts such as proper and gradual economic, social and territorial development, able to combine cultural and social realities far between. A sort of *ante litteram* network. The study examples have revealed the natural use of materials and building systems that today would be called organic, as they belong to the site, they come from the soil. The essential protection of the environment, of the landscape, was a result of this behaviour. Paradoxically, it was the building process which was protecting the landscape, indeed, which was creating it. Many buildings were extremely small, used for basic, immediate needs. The repetition of the same typology, of the same structural system, of the same materials, of the same shape, produced a resonance with the place, with that place, as if it had always been there, indeed, as if nature accompanied the human action. (Image 1)

From this point of view we can consider micro - architecture a typology without limits, whether by the functional or the constructive aspects. A model which can be applied in different layouts as shown by the many manifestations in the territories where we live, in the numerous examples of historic architecture, in the architectural debate and in the contemporary and academic fields experimentations. All examples of small architecture, finding their own strength in their relationship with the multifaceted context: economic, social, territorial and cultural. It is under this perspective that minimum living may be useful to reflect on a larger scale, involving the planning tools.

If we look at our territories we realize that in the last decades the practice of territorial planning has suffered from a contradiction between project and its implementation. Despite the multiple regulatory instruments, we have witnessed an environmental destruction unmatched to other historical periods. It is true that all began with industrialization and the subsequent economic boom, but it is equally true that the landscape protection has been delegated to the law instead of the care of its inhabitants. Looking at the not much



reassuring effects of the last thirty years, the result in front of us prompt us to seek solutions by questioning the “system” that has created these phenomena. The search for new prospects has become these last few years challenge. Associations and organizations have raised the attention and fuelled the debate, but for now the real effects are late in coming, especially in our discipline, landscape design, more and more distant from the real effects. It is self-criticism but also encouragement to face and solve the environmental problem with the tools of design.

The study of minimum living wants to represent a viable alternative. The effort is trying to see things from a different point of view. There are in fact assumptions, in this model, which are not covered by sedimentary dynamics and applied to the government of our territories. First of all, there are no lucrative reasons, man builds for himself and with nature, and there is not the possibility of “building to sell.” Historical examples teach it, but also the simple fact that living, intended in this way, is itself a personal act, and therefore can only be good for the people who generates it. It is like a garment: no one will buy a garment for himself and then sell it for speculative purposes. Managing a territory “from above”, on the contrary, meets economic logic, policies and management of environmental resources associated with vicious cycle processes. You would think that [for the same reasons of the garment] a more direct link, from below, could induce the necessary respect for our common well: the environment that allows us to live. For this reason, rediscovered practices as self-construction and sustainability - understood as human behaviour as well as technological opportunity - become important. While environmental emergencies have increased the level of attention to energy supply, the collective consciousness is still far away. I am therefore led to believe [and many studied examples prove it] that where there is a direct work - not intermediated - between man and land, that can easily assure the preservation of environment, by ensuring “the needs of present generations without compromising the possibility of future ones to meet their own.

“Yes, because the direct action on the territory induces a “treatment”, preventing or at least slowing down the environmental disruption [hydro-geological and aesthetic] seen in these years, that has a common matrix in an anthropocentric activity, based more on the exploitation of capital rather than on its preservation and enhancement. Therefore, it is surprising how the words of the German Economist Ernst Friedrich Schumacher have not been put into practice: “Let’s look more closely at this so-called natural capital. [...] I am sure that no one will deny that we are treating it as if it were an income, while it is, without a doubt, a capital. If we treated it as a capital, we should care for its conservation, so we should do everything in our power to try to minimize the current rate of consumption.”

From the point of view of territorial planning, it would mean reducing the land use but also [and perhaps even before] changing the widespread opinion which to a lower territorial employment [understood as protection], corresponds a greater safeguard. This last statement may appear inconsistent because you lose sight of the importance of the direct relationship with the environment. But then how to hold together these two elements? And more, “build less or build more?” An easy answer might be to build less and inhabit more, in the sense of protection. A widespread distribution of living will have the immediate effect of protecting the environment. The goal would be to reassign a scale, which means, once again, not to conceive the territory as a distant element, but let it sum up that “human dimension” which belongs to the landscape system, drawing closer the people to the territory. Is not exclusively a discipline’s aspect, something concerning just architecture, but also a social principle. Since I deal with the themes of landscape, of living the landscape, I have the impression that this aspect is crucial, because it’s in the direct and physical relationship with architecture that man finds its proper size, and it is in the physique of space that he’s able to react, to influence, to be affected.

That’s why Minimum Living may represent a possible way out, especially in light of the teachings of a tradition. In fact, in history, the relationship between man and his territory founded its roots on mutual exchange. While, on the one hand, the environment was used as a resource for the livelihood, on the other hand - for

this same reason and for the importance that took place - inhabitants took care of that ecological system, which mainly meant to act in that place, work, protect, value and all resulted in a mutual exchange. Tangible features of this “rule” was not only the products, but also and specially the preservation, the maintenance and the organization of the relevant area. Architecture followed this path. There was no construction that was not born from the materials’ characteristics and from the building traditions of the place. Not only. In the most of cases [if not totally] it was built “on the cheap”, by exploiting the human resources of a family, a community and, where possible, of a single individual. The origin is probably to be found in the habit of self-made as rapid, immediate and, not least, convenient means. If today we easily link sustainability to technological aspects, in the past it was a usual, widespread and shared practice. It was not possible to build a farm with different materials than the cirmolo wood and the dolomite rock, as it was inconceivable in Sardinia to build a shelter without using the Rockrose, Juniper and local granite. This method has given rise to widespread cases which produced examples, related to their geographical scope and, simultaneously, parallel to other cases in other similar environments. We can consider, for example, the cross-fertilization that combines the architecture of the Mediterranean, from Greece to Portugal via Italy and Spain. (Image 2) What matters most is not only the climatic, geological or production similarities, but the design and methodological principles that have supported these architectures, I mean the ability to transform the “taking place” into a “taking care” of the territory. From these considerations it can be concluded that the matrix of the minimum living is due to the rural world. All the above examples show an agribusiness activity. This was his purpose, to support and facilitate the work of the man on the earth. And today? It is from the social issues that in the last decade new trends have grown, related to international cooperation and enhancement of the landscape. In the first case, non-governmental organizations and private associations endeavour to address and solve social and territorial critical situations, in the second case, there is a growing conviction, especially in northern Europe, that the enhancement of the environment can pass through a system of micro - infrastructure supporting tourist flows, but also local communities. In some cases, these two modes merge, working also on the reconstruction of the identity of a place.

There are also other reasons why we can think about the need for a renewal and a perpetuation of small scale architecture. The theme of minimum architecture could be understood as a tool of concrete response to the needs of a society in flux. The times we live in are causing a rethinking of design and constructive standards as we have lived for the last twenty years. Despite a gradual increase of land employment, the housing needs related to environmental and social emergencies increase, the latest originated from those atypical figures of our own times. Think of working students, young couples, precarious workers, single parents, but also to temporary and then to the mobility as a necessary condition to work and improve their opportunities and knowledge [see in this regard the paper that Jaques Attali has dedicated to the nomadic man]. To this was added the always increasing demand of “non-standard” housing, able to meet the basic needs without reducing quality of life, private and social. Now, in face of these urgent needs, what we might call “trans-architecture”, based essentially on a “temporary stay”, it may be an instrument to give concrete answers to these needs. It is clear that a new way of living must be closely related to a new way of inhabiting, mainly represented by new solutions. To do this we need to challenge the “habits”, legislative before constructive, that socially and almost blindly we have taken; to involve local governments as custodians of citizens’ needs and keepers of territory where the virtuous actions become more and more necessary.





Figure 1 | Vals, Switzerland, 2006



Figure 2 | Putignano, Italy, 2012

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