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Territorial Identity as Engine of the Project:

The Sustainable Cellar *HIC ET NUNC*

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ABSTRACT

In Vignale Monferrato there's a road called Ca' Milano, where wonderful vineyards are dislocated actually not too far from large urban centers in the north-west of Italy, sufficiently accessible via the existing infrastructure, in a depressed area that, scenically and economically, deserve a speculative appreciation for the territory. The new winery, called HIC ET NUNC, is an opportunity to experience a totally sustainable design, from the architectural, economic and social point of view. The basic idea then was to not move the business to a place most economically favorable but add to an already positive context and improvement, a branch of business that soundings new prospects for a qualitative and respectful of the market context in which you live. Sustainability 360 degrees is the centerpiece of the project: economic (production and sale not only of wine, but all that with grapes and its waste can be produced), construction (in the attention to the construction, choice of materials and the transparency of processing quality), management (in the relationship with the territory and the re-evaluation of workers figures, to ensure an induced economic revival), communicative and social (in the will to interact for educational/artistic/cultural level with major local, national and international). The territorial identity issues of the project, or the capacity of the local population to recognize the goals and values that the cellar HIC ET NUNC wants to promote, and attention to the physical building perception, understood as a new element added to a valuable context, make this experience an interesting example of how contemporary design must go beyond the mere architectural appearance involving all economic, cultural and social aspects.

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Srl, for the support in modelizing the “sharing thinking process”, Arch. Michela Scaglione and Prof. Giulia Pellegrini, for the affiliation with the University of Genova.

After a Glass of Good Wine

In 2013 a dear friend manager of a cellar¹ in the province where I live, asked me a rate: “How would you sell wine without selling it?”

It was a direct and quite challenger question, and I couldn't react immediately to find the right answer. Looking from the top of the hill where the cellar is located, and admiring the panorama during the sunset (the new slogan of this cellar is: “You can't buy the panorama, but you can taste it”), I tried to search particular material about wine and landscape. So, my personal bet was: selling wine thanks to landscape research to be presented in a convention settled in the cellar itself.

The operation involved different actors (from event organization, to university call for papers organized in different themes, to an editor who published the results of this work in the book: “I paesaggi del vino²”), but everybody participated with enthusiasm, thanks to a big sponsorship who gave visibility not only to the cellar, but also to those intellectual and researcher movements that even now that Expo is finished, are continuously making research and producing interesting data about wine, history, architecture, landscape, territory and all related things.

It was perhaps the first approach to a new way to communicate business in an ethic way, that engaged a lots of relationship and new kind of “stimula” destined to become the spin off of different kind of methodological research.

Figure 1. *The Panorama from the Hill of “Le Corne” in Grumello del Monte*



Source: www.lecorne.it.

¹ Azienda Vitivinicola “Le Corne” – Grumello del Monte - Bergamo (www.lecorne.it).

² A cura di M. Paperini e G. Galeotti, *I paesaggi del vino* Edizioni Centro Studi Città e Territorio, Debate 2015.

This experience caused the necessity to oversee different presentation of the book (from the company to various cultural associations, to the most important one "Salone del Libro di Torino"), while in expo2015 a special section to wine was dedicated, and it was so important that this activity was mentioned in December 2015 during an international meeting in our "House of Representatives".

It was in those days that, during a workshop for the development of a new business model of one of our customers, the manager of a big firm arrived with some auto-produced wine: "Wine of my territory: as you are an expert, can you help me to build a cellar?"

A Tour in Vignale Monferrato

The exploration of the territory of Vignale is easy: simply going onto internet you find everything and the contrary of everything, so the necessity was a scouting on the territory, directly, to see and try to give an evaluation to the quality of land in the perspective of the production of wine.

There's no problem effectively in producing low cost wine for bulky wine or large distribution chains, but the necessity was to do something different in a depressed zone, with a wonderful landscape and officially protected by UNESCO (so with limitation in the exploitation of space and in the use of architecture and colours). Moreover, the worst limitation I found was in the mentality of local people: used to live in a zone defined depressed, they effectively think, live and act as depressed people, without updating their skills in buildings, nor trying to exploit something different under cultural or economic point of view, limiting their referral to two or three main elements that aren't really involved in any net of change nor of sharing competence. This attitude caused at the beginning an unpleasant loop, especially with local workers, totally not used to quality works and with a destructive attitude towards all could be interpreted as original.

So after a first visit to the location, during which, without any idea on what to do (mainly with no idea of what building a wine cellar really implicates), the local manufacturer easily proposed to build a cellar, estimated a value for the expenses (more or less).

On the contrary, we decided firstly to make some territorial analysis to understand better what was possible to produce and with what kind of probable quality, and moreover we did some "radon surveys" to be aligned to the new environmental and building rules.

Thanks to Dr. Massimo Gigola (a determined innovative oenologist), an agronomist, and a specialist (everybody taken out from the territory), we discovered the good news: wonderful land exposure that allow to produce a very good product, unexploited territory (no intensive cultivation before), and a big old house near to the possible cellar site: born as a family-home, now has been transformed in a farmhouse for guest, just to let everybody know that something new is happening in Vignale Monferrato.

Figure 2. *Picture of a Panoramic View of the Site in Vignale Monferrato*



Selling Wine without Talking about it

The inspection in Vignale opens unexpected perspectives. First of all, the discovery of typical stone and of a typical cave called “infernot” give us the possibility to work on the identity of the territory³. There are lots of association that take care of historical aspects of the zone, and thanks to one of this we get the right idea on what a tourist can really find in the zone (also regarding the fragmentation of the touristic offer: too much things, always in the same time of the day, without having personal characteristics) and what even local people sometimes doesn’t know (es i.e. the survival of the Colombo da Cuccaro’s family, a branch taking its origin to the Costantin emperor of the Roman Empire). So starting from what we had, we decide to revitalized an hold family home, renewing the buildings under the new law construction and farmhouse restriction, to begin to have an affluence of people to the location. To implement the right communication through alternatives media, we shared a Tesla-project, to give to people who travel with electric cars the possibility to recharge the vehicles, and organizing an electric bike sharing in the location to align to the new sustainable trend. This caused a re-interpretation of the business model: wine is still important as a product, but we begin to use alternatives channel to sell it, or to make it tasting in a wonderful place where a Cellar will be soon built, but still doesn’t exist. This caused good effects also into the business plan: less costs at the beginnning, more economic and financial control. Anyway some architectonical stimulation about the future cellar begin to appear, light drawings that start from a rigorous needings of a very well organized production work, buried to warrant a better and natural refreshment with no extra costs,

³ Maurizio Carta, “L’armatura culturale del territorio”, Franco Angeli editore, 2002.

and finished in a suggestive selling area, well defined, but without big impact on the territory, and respectful of UNESCO indication.

Figure 3. *The Swimming Pool of “Ca’ dell’ebbro” on the Valley in Vignale*



Research⁴

The project assumes a multidisciplinary story telling as lots of aspects are involved, if we will do a good work⁵.

Mainly, the necessity to adequate bulidings and working process to laws and to indication due to the fact that in the UNESCO land the use of material and colours (i.e.) are really controlled. Anyway, transofrming this aspect from a bond to an opportunity, it has been easy to project something already respondig to the necessity: just previewing all these aspects, allow the architect Gianluca Erroi to define better the circumstances of his work, organizing better the space of work, and creating some stimulation based on transparency and neutrality that avoid colours.

The necessity of economic sustainability, obliged ooenologist and agronomist to find the shortest way to experiment best production solution to improve quality

⁴ By Walter Brenner and Falk Uebernickel, Design Thinking For Innovation, Springer 2016.

⁵ A. Rondi, Project Management As A Tool For Multidisciplinary Project Approaches - Business Oriented: Operating Methodologies Analyzed Through Case Studies – P. 437, In 2017 De-Sign,Environment Landscape, David And Matthaues 2017, https://Docs.Wixstatic.Com/Ugd/Ca02d2_C9d1eeb229594c09b93f4a2c3e53b043.Pdf.

of wine: the marginality on the cost of the product shall be interesting to subtain the cost of an entire buildings dedicated to wine production.

The possibility to use a farmhouse will allow to have a cashflow that of course will help the diffusion of the product and of the location to involve and engage people better.

The necessity to provide a hospitality put the focus on family and children: this move to the research of local association to make an evidence on cultural activities on the territory, not necessary involved with wine.

The “quality philosophy” in product and environmental attitude give a push to a gastronomic research to allow people to “taste” the territory, thanks to local production of typical dishes and business partnering with local farmer activities.

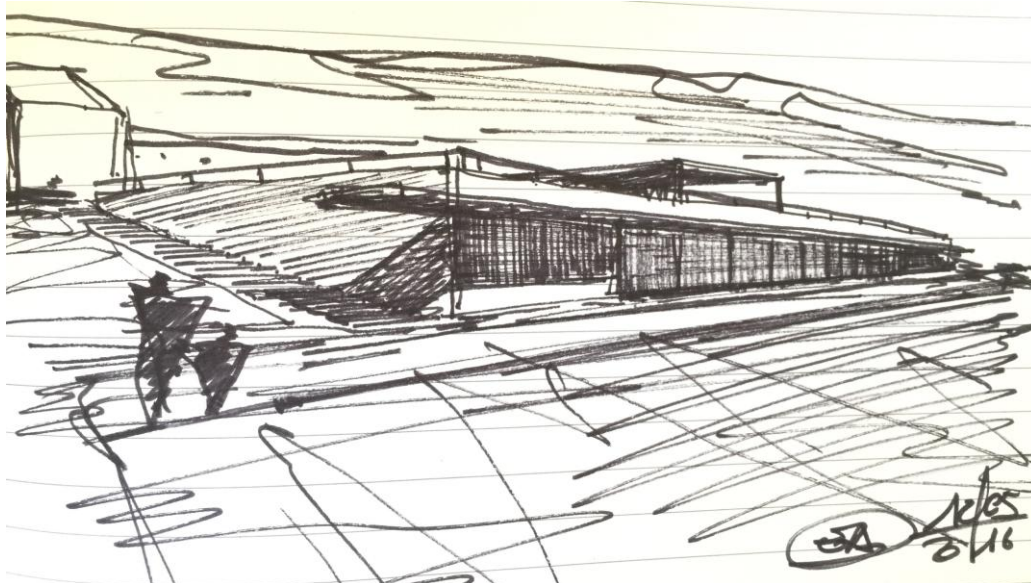
The possibility to give information about the historical and architectonical story of the territory, makes the owner affiliate to different Universities: this will provide to one or two young students a “Study allowance” to write a fresh research on the territory, focused on the hill where the cellar will be built, to an expert of history of the territory to work on new evidences, to marketing students to improve selling format and business model, and to different artists to express and show their activity in an original place

The necessity of selling the first wine produced, to implement production and extend the range of the product will develop the possibility to take contact with foreign countries and develop the well-known made in Italy.

The necessity to produce a good wine, and to give hospitality to people in the cellar, when ready, will provide places of work for local but qualified people.

So mainly, in this project, “necessity” has be seen not as an obstacle to the realization of the project, but as a possibility to develop a better project, under a strategical and consequently practical point of view, beginning to create a particular net of activities and professionals, in and out the territory.

Figure 4. *First Architectural Project Sketches*



Management

All this anyway is possible in such context where the management opens to new style, innovative ideas and fresh novelty⁶. Even if the economic sustainance of the project is still the focus, the possibility to work on the territory and to open the project on different points, help to reduce costs and to make the project itself more efficient, as it will not be configurate as a speculative project, but as en enterprise of large and far vision. Speculative actions in these times must be rapid, and with no scruples. Building a family enterprise cannot be speculative, but shall be built on a really solid base, that gives resources enough to develop spin-off of the same activity to warrant the survival for next 20 years, with a fresh possibility of low-cost rennovation ideas thanks to satellite-projects. All these satellite projects, to have a solidity, cannot preclude from territorial identity, nor for intellectual resources and a practical culture is the real possibility to re-interpret each time the economy.

Figure 5. *First Architectural Project Sketches*



⁶ Jim Whitehurst, *The Open Organization: Igniting Passion and Performance*, Havard Business Review press 2016.

The Project: Doing Something Different – How?

First of all, think, think, and think under a modality that someone called “co-design” but we prefer to call “sharing thinking”: a kind of multidisciplinary brainstorming that allow to put on the table all the possibilities related to the necessity of produce and sell high -quality wine.

Second, redefined the relationship on the territory and with the main stakeholder to define the correct approach to establish the correct priorities.

In this case the management share this fundamental steps:

1. Economic Business plan (5 years) based on production first to acquire the wine quality and to generate business, first thirdy-part production to taste wine and definition of the market-segment.
2. Touristic hospitality: re-vitalized a farmhouse to open the hospitality in the location to allow people to begin to live in the territory and to understand the project, without massive communication.
3. Buildings: building project directed by the oenologist first to warrant the most efficient process of work, together to the architect to homologate the law and UNESCO request to the production necessity in a particular style that satisfy both the liking of the commettee and the enjoyment of the buyer.
4. Cultural activities: links to the universities to warrant fresh approach in territorial, historical, architectonical and gastronomic researches, finalized not only to drinking but also to a more extended knowledge of the typical food local and regional.
5. Environmental activities: taking care of special needs of people preferring low impact zone, warrant service as electric recharge for electric mobility, byke renting, running and walking paths, pet friendly spaces.
6. Gatronic activities: links to local production of high quality food to “taste” the territory and give a complete sensorial experience.
7. Social activities: links to the school and to cultural association to open to didactical interventions, create permanent cultural activities and events related to art, music and shows.
8. Communication activities based mainly on the topic of the projects (conventions, meetings) finalized to export first culture and mentality of a new kind of project, and then wine (so back to point one).

All this activities, based on a rigid economic and financial control, answer to a new philosophy that is now a trend: “less is more”. The aim is not to give few things, but to give life to a positive circle that thanks to few good things open perspectives and gives more opportunities in different fields. From the territory, to the product, to the territory again: from coherence and zero impact to profits and high cultural impact, refocussing constantly on the main necessities.

Figure 6. *First Architectural Project Sketches*

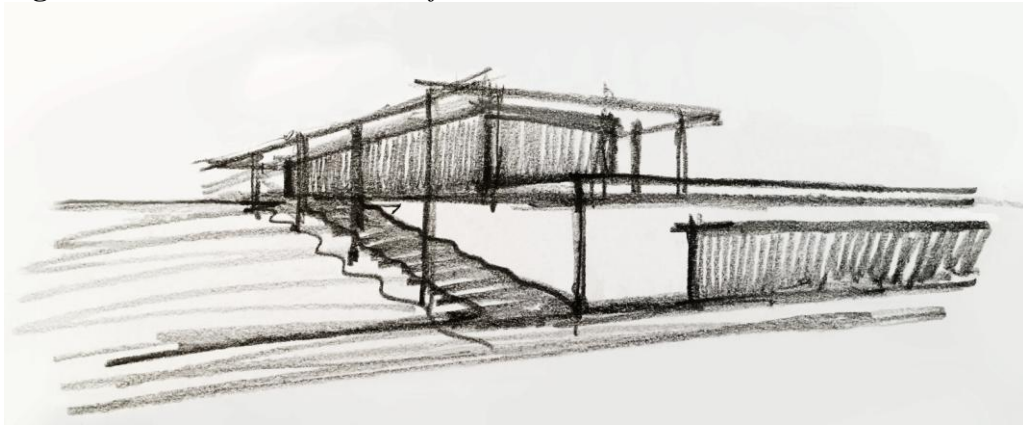
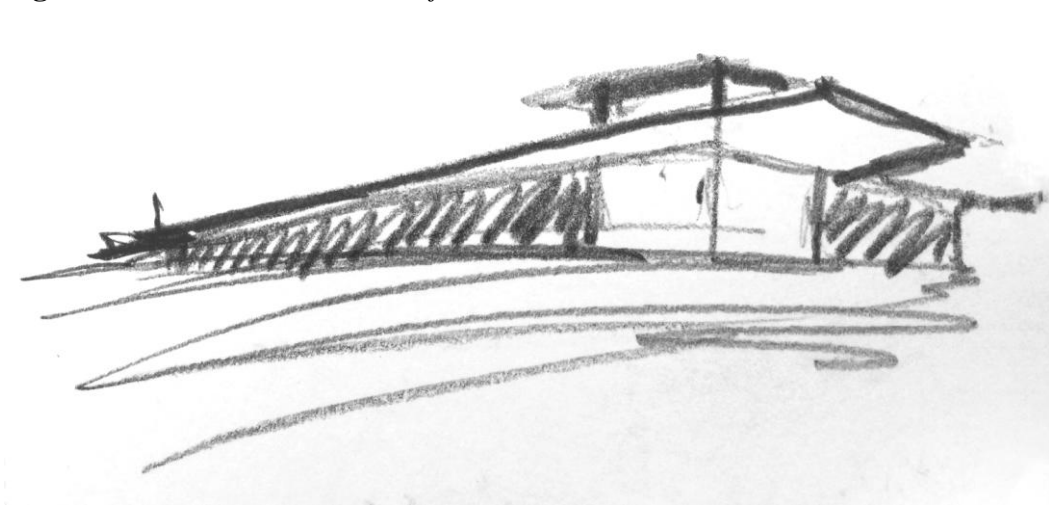


Figure 7. *First Architectural Project Sketches*



“Hic et Nunc”: Here and Now – Conclusion

From all these reflections, came the name of the cellar, and the name of the project.

“Hic et Nunc”, Here and Now, the perfect oxymoron that focused the attention on “time” as a value that normally is not considered in big projects: wine needs no hurry to be a good one, but taste is immediately enjoying; cellars need time to be built, but their view is quite immediate and suggesting, culture and mentality need time to be accepted in their completeness and complexity and a few time to become an habit.

Using such a project to redefined the concept of time means: no matter how long does it takes, but it matters it shall be affordable and strong, well built and managed, full of satisfaction for everybody and it shall make this experience an interesting example of how contemporary sharing thinking and re-design must go beyond the mere architectural appearance involving all economic, cultural and social aspects.



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