Architectural Regeneration (ISBN: 9781119340331)

Chapter 7

Rural regeneration

Sanja Lončar and Marcel Vellinga

INTRODUCTION

Architectural regeneration tends to be an urban affair. Regeneration projects that focus on the adaptation, reuse or repurposing of buildings or places are commonly focused on needs, challenges and opportunities in urban settings. Regardless of the nature or scale of a regeneration project (i.e. whether it is government- or community-led, permanent or temporary, or on a neighbourhood or building scale), it is almost inevitably city based. The literature on architectural regeneration equally focuses almost exclusively on urban regeneration. Studies that look at the history, economics, planning or design of architectural regeneration projects nearly all deal with the situation in towns and cities, most often in a Western (i.e. European or North American) context (Roberts and Sykes 2000; Pierson and Smith 2001; Leary and McCarthy 2013). This urban and Western focus is understandable seeing that the origins of the practice may be found in early attempts by late nineteenth century social reformers to alleviate the poor, crowded and unhygienic living conditions in the rapidly growing industrial cities of Europe and North America (Roberts and Sykes 2000; Hall 2014). It is even more understandable in view of the unprecedented level of urbanisation today, not just in the West but all around the world, and the inevitable interest in urban issues that this has generated (Nel-lo and Mele 2016). Nonetheless, it does mean that the extent to which architectural regeneration projects are carried out in non-urban, rural settings, is much less known and understood. The aim of this chapter is to address this gap in knowledge.

The interest in rural architecture has commonly lagged behind that in urban architecture. Apart from its sustained interest in country estates and village churches, architectural history has been predominantly a history of urban buildings (Fleming, Honour and Pevsner 1999; Sennott 2001; Curl 2006). Other disciplines like anthropology, ethnology or geography have similarly shown relatively little interest in rural architecture. The study of rural architecture has commonly been subsumed under the study of vernacular architecture, a field that itself has been consistently marginalised in architectural discourse (Oliver 1997; Asquith and Vellinga 2006; Brown and Maudlin 2012). The architectural design profession has similarly tended to prioritise work done in urban contexts. Nonetheless, the turn of the twenty-first century has seen a slowly increasing interest in rural

architectural design. A large number of successful practices that expressly specialise in design in rural contexts have been established around the world. At the same time, various publications that deal with the specificities, challenges and opportunities of architectural design in rural contexts have begun to appear (Thorbeck 2012; Arendt 2017). However, much of this new interest is focused on new design in rural contexts and is thus not concerned with the regeneration of existing rural architecture, or rural regions; even if the new designs often draw on vernacular rural precedents. In some instances professional and academic interest has focused on the conversion of existing agricultural buildings, particularly barns, or the adaptation of rural housing for tourism purposes (e.g. Corbett-Winder and Parmiter 1990). Architectural regeneration projects that focus on the reuse and repurposing of rural architecture with the specific aim of revitalising not just the buildings, but the local communities, economies and places of which they form a part have received much less attention - other than as the focus of educational projects (see Orbasli, Vellinga, Wedel and Randell, this volume).

This academic and professional lack of interest in rural architectural regeneration is remarkable for two reasons. First of all, despite consistent popular conceptualisations of the rural countryside as an idyllic counterpart to the city, rural areas all around the world face serious social, economic and environmental challenges that are not dissimilar to those faced by urban communities. Problems like economic decline, environmental pollution, social division, substandard housing or poor healthcare facilities are not the prerogative of cities and urban conglomerations, but are equally prominent in rural towns and villages across the globe (Cloke, Marsden and Mooney 2006). Indeed, in some instances, especially in the developing world, they may be seen to be more acute than they are in urban areas. Of course the underlying causes of such issues and the specific ways in which they manifest themselves will be different in rural areas. One key distinction in this regard is that, whereas in urban areas problems are often caused by rapid and sometimes uncontrolled population growth, in rural places it is often the decline of population that creates and exacerbates difficulties. Although the literature on the social, demographic, economic and environmental challenges faced by rural areas and the ways in which they may be overcome by means of rural development programmes is extensive (Shepherd 1998; Moseley 2003), it hardly ever takes into account the role that architectural regeneration can play in such projects.

The second reason why the lack of interest in rural regeneration is remarkable is that in many parts of the world, rural architectural heritage is in a state of dilapidation and decline. In many countries, rural houses have often been abandoned by their owners or are now only inhabited by (often elderly) family members who do not have the resources to leave the area or maintain the buildings. In many cases, especially in the developing world, the inhabitants may have simply left the region and moved to the city, leaving behind buildings that they no longer need. In other instances, old buildings have been replaced by new houses that have been built alongside them and that incorporate more up-to-date facilities and conveniences, and better meet contemporary expectations of what a 'modern' house

should look like. In yet other instances, rural housing remains inhabited, but the owners lack the means to properly maintain it or to adapt it to current requirements and standards. This may also be the fate of rural community buildings, such as parish churches, schools or village halls. In rural areas in the developed world that still maintain their agricultural function, it is not uncommon to come across abandoned farm buildings (barns, stables, sheds) that are no longer needed because they have been replaced by more modern facilities that better suit more intensive and industrialised contemporary farming practices. In those rural areas characterised by the presence of industrial buildings (for example in Eastern Europe), abandoned factories and high-rise housing blocks may dominate the rural landscape.

This chapter aims to provide an introduction to the topic of rural regeneration. It will argue that rural areas all around the world are environmentally, socially, economically and architecturally varied, dynamic and complex, and constitute what, in a European context, has been called a 'differentiated countryside' (Marsden *et al.* 1993). Rather than the bucolic backwaters of popular imagination, defined as 'timeless', 'slow' and 'unchanging' in direct and exclusive opposition to the 'fast' and dynamic city, rural areas are integral, productive and ever-changing parts of the modern world that face a complex myriad of demographic, environmental, social and economic challenges. Although unique in their specific manifestations, those challenges are not unlike those faced by urban areas. The chapter will show that, despite a common recognition of the challenges faced by rural areas all around the world, work in the field of rural regeneration has lagged behind that in urban contexts. It will argue that architectural regeneration projects that build on existing local opportunities, take into account place-specific cultural characteristics and use the transformative potential of architecture may nonetheless help to enhance and develop rural economies, places and communities in the same way that their urban counterparts do so in cities.

The chapter is based on a literature review that covers several topics of importance to our understanding of rural areas, including the definition and perception of rurality, rural-urban relationships, the transformation of rural space and architecture, and current economic and social trends. It further includes several case studies from a number of European countries (Croatia, Slovenia, Italy and Poland) that present examples of the different contexts in which architectural regeneration can appear.

CONCEPTUALISING RURALITY

The adjective 'rural' (noun: 'rurality') is commonly defined as 'in, relating to, or characteristic of the countryside rather than the town' (Oxford English Dictionary). Although seemingly unproblematic in that it appears to capture popular understandings of the kind of place the term relates to, this definition

does not necessarily capture what different people in different places actually mean when they use the term. As has been frequently observed, in the English language at least, 'rural' has a range of synonyms (for instance 'countryside', 'outback', 'wilderness') that generally invoke similar kinds of places, but that nonetheless may have very different meanings in different geographical and cultural contexts. To travel to, visit or live in the English countryside is an altogether different experience from doing so in the Australian outback or the Canadian wilderness. And indeed, a similar variety may be experienced within England itself too. As Halfacree (2006: 45) has noted, the notion of 'rurality' (whether used in relation to an actual locality, an idea, or both) is thus strongly contested and debates about its definition, usefulness and applicability in different historical and cultural contexts continue. Like its antonym 'urban', 'rural' is undoubtedly a contemporary 'keyword' (Williams 1976) in that it is able 'to engage very different situations under a single conceptual banner' (Cloke 2006: 18). When reference is made to a rural place or a rural building, it is generally understood what kind of place or building this is: agricultural, say, or isolated, or slow-changing. Yet, as Cloke continues, 'as soon as attempts are made to deconstruct the rural metanarrative, much of that conceptual strength dissipates into the nooks and crannies of particular locations, economic processes and social identities'. The term rurality can refer to a vast array of places, each of which will be specific in terms of its history and identity.

Recent decades have seen an increased interest in rurality and the kind of places, societies, things and practices the term refers to. Since the 1980s the field of rural studies has gone through a process of revival, partly at least as a result of the rapid way in which many rural spaces around the world have been transformed in response to the increasingly predominant process of urbanisation (Cloke, Marsden and Mooney 2006). Although by no means comparable to the amount of attention that has been paid to urban issues, many studies of rural culture, politics, economics and identity, among other themes, have appeared in recent decades, from a variety of national and disciplinary backgrounds. Those studies have not only explored the multifarious meanings of the notion of rurality itself; they have also shown that any distinction between what is rural and what is urban has become more and more blurred over time. Whereas the countryside was still seen to be fundamentally different from the city during the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, today it is recognised that many parts of the world constitute a so-called 'urban-rural fringe', where previously rural areas that are located close to urban centres are ever more characterised by land uses, facilities and activities that are urban in nature. Even if rural areas are geographically far removed from cities and still appear 'truly' rural (for example, agricultural or sparsely populated), due to the influence of new communication technologies the people that live and work there often have lifestyles that are not fundamentally different from those of their urban counterparts. This is true for much of the developed world, but is more and more apparent in rapidly developing countries like China and India too. Rather than a dichotomy, the rural and urban form a continuum.

Despite this recognition of the increasingly blurred relationship between the rural and the urban, in popular imagination the rural generally continues to be seen as fundamentally separate and different from the urban. In particular, the idea of 'the rural idyll', that is the notion that rural areas are somehow more natural, healthy and pleasant than their urban counterparts, remains persistent and dominant (Bell 2006) (Figure 7.1.). The rural world is often seen to be remote, slow, quiet, natural and peaceful. It is characterised by lots of space, small (and often historic) settlements, cohesive and tight-knit communities and specific, commonly more traditional values and mores. In a Western context at least, it is often a place of farming, fishing, hunting and wildlife, as well as (increasingly) a place of leisure; of hiking, for example, or bird-watching, cycling or paintballing. Indeed, those associations are so strong that such activities are sometimes purposefully enacted or 'performed' by immigrants or visitors from the city (Edensor 2006), while other types of activities, or indeed people (shopping and clubbing, for instance, or homeless people or asylum seekers) may be expressly excluded from the idyll as they are deemed not to belong in the countryside (Bell 2006). At the same time as the rural is idealised and romanticised, it is also sometimes belittled, as a backward and boring place where people are often conservative, inward-looking and narrow-minded, life is slow and stuck in time, choices are limited and opportunities hard to come by, and nothing ever happens. In either case, as an idyll or a backwater, the rural is completely unlike everything the city stands for.

[INSERT FIGURE 7.1. HERE rural idyll]

The reality, of course, is much more varied, complex and dynamic. Many parts of the rural world are characterised by the economic activities and social customs that have traditionally been associated with rurality, but they are simultaneously also home to others that historically have been more commonly related to urbanity. For example, an area can be farmed by people whose families have done so in the same place for generations, while simultaneously housing service economy office workers who have moved to the area in recent years and who are able to work there due to the opportunities offered by new information technologies. At the same time, it may be a popular destination for foreign tourists who visit the place to hike, sight-see or enjoy the views, while retired couples buy up local properties to escape the hustle and bustle of the city. In the meantime, commuters may travel to a nearby city on a day-to-day basis to work. In such an instance the area concerned is neither a rural idyll nor a rural backwater, distinctly different from nearby cities and characterised by a tight-knit community and traditional customs, but a complex and diverse place inhabited by various communities that in a sense is rural and urban at the same time. At the same time, it is also not static but in a never ending state of becoming, as people continue to come and go, and activities and values accordingly change. The rural and urban merge and blur, even if the people who live and work in the area, or who visit it, may still imagine it as a fundamentally rural place. Such an instance of what has been called 'the urbanisation of the rural' is not unusual these days, neither in the developed nor the developing world; nor, indeed is the reverse 'ruralisation' of urban space

uncommon (for instance by means of farmers markets or urban allotments), albeit that the latter has received less attention in academic discourse (Cloke 2006). It once more illustrates that the rural is more varied, dynamic and complex than often imagined.

RURAL REALITIES

During the early 1990s, Marsden *et al.* (1993) introduced the term 'differentiated countryside' to capture the fact that rural areas are not homogenous and that apparently similar rural places may be very different in terms of their economic and social structures and trajectories. In relation to the UK, but also the European Union, for instance, some regions are characterised by a lack of development, remaining largely remote and agricultural, with relatively low incomes, while others have seen a rapid growth in economy due to the influx of manufacturing industries, tourism or middle-class commuters and retirees. In the case of the UK, Marsden *et al.* (1993) distinguished various 'ideal type' countrysides to capture this variety. Thus they identified the 'preserved countryside' as attractive areas in which the economy is booming and influential middle-class groups oppose development; the 'paternalistic countryside'(in which traditional large landowners shape development; the 'contested countryside' where the interest of new incomers from the city clash with those of the traditional local communities; and the 'clientelist countryside' (where the economy relies on external state subsidies to survive). Later writings added more variations of those 'types', such as the 'rent seeking countryside' where the economy is mainly based on agriculture or extractive industries like mining; the 'dependent countryside' where income is primarily derived from external private or public sources; and the 'entrepreneurial countryside' where the economy primarily thrives on the valorisation or branding of local resources and products (Marini and Mooney 2006). In reality, regions may of course come under one or more of those ideal types, or transform from one into another. Different types may perhaps be added in other parts of the world too.

The concept of the 'differentiated countryside' and the resultant typologies are useful in that they point to the varied and complex nature of rural areas. The traditional dichotomy between 'town and country' has given way to new perspectives in which the rural and urban are part of a continuum and rural areas are recognised as being as diverse and complicated in nature as their urban counterparts. What is more, they are as dynamic as the latter too and continuously transform in response to environmental, social and economic challenges and opportunities. In relation to rural economies, for instance, very different models can be distinguished. The 'agro-industrial' approach characterised by agricultural intensification, monoculture, mass cultivation and the use of pesticides and genetic modification technologies continues to be dominant in many rural parts of the world. Nonetheless, more traditional subsistence farming still exists in the developing world, while alternative forms of agriculture (organic, cooperative) have sometimes established themselves in response to concerns

about the environmental and social credentials of the agro-industrial model. In other regions, agriculture has been replaced by new high-tech or service industries, as new information technologies allow businesses to settle outside of the more expensive urban areas. At the same time, parts of the rural world have become sites of consumption rather than production. Instead of producing resources or goods, those regions provide opportunities for leisure and recreation, both to tourists and newcomers from the city who have moved to the countryside to escape the urban noise, pollution and crowdedness. They sell natural vistas, hiking trails or, indeed, the notion of rurality itself, rather than agricultural products (Edensor 2006).

In a social context, diversity and change are omnipresent too. In popular imagination, the countryside is often associated with stable, cohesive and culturally homogenous and distinctive (and often conservative) communities. While such communities may still be encountered in some parts of the world, in many instances the reality of rural social life is much more complex. For example, de-ruralisation, the flip side of urbanisation, is a common phenomenon in many parts of the world. In such instances, as individuals, couples or entire families move elsewhere to look for employment and opportunities (or, sometimes, to escape war, violence or persecution), they leave behind fragmented, broken and shrinking communities, often consisting of elderly people or those who for one reason or another cannot afford to move. In other instances, especially in the developed world, counter-urbanisation (the move of people away from cities into rural areas) results in the arrival of newcomers from the city who are looking for a better quality of life and hope to find it in the rural idyll. Such a process may result in the transformation or even replacement of traditional local communities, as new social relationships, identities and forms of belonging inevitably constitute themselves. In both instances, rural communities are no longer fixed and necessarily homogenous. Various different communities may exist alongside one another, be in conflict, or only interact in specific contexts or at particular occasions. They may also merge and form new associations, or become integrated into new (often virtual) networks that expand well beyond the rural locality.

As a result of such economic, social and demographic diversity and change, many parts of the rural world today face a multitude of problems and issues. In many instances, those problems and issues are exacerbated by increasing environmental challenges in the form of extreme weather events, natural disasters or slow environmental transformations such as deforestation or desertification. Rural poverty is very common, both in the developed and developing world, to such an extent that the majority of the world's poor can be found in rural areas (Tickamyer 2006). Political indifference, poor governance and a lack of economic investment often result in or reinforce a dearth of rural employment, skills and opportunities. The availability, suitability and affordability of housing is another common concern in many parts of the rural world, as is the quality and accessibility of healthcare facilities (hospitals, clinics, nursing homes), schools and childcare facilities, and public transport and communication infrastructures (roads and railways as well as data roaming and mobile

phone networks). Environmental pollution and the degradation of both agricultural land and natural landscapes, including wildlife, is a major problem in many parts of the world also, especially where the agro-industrial model dominates. Finally, social exclusion and division can be a real issue in rural areas, both historically and as a result of recent processes of depopulation or counter-urbanisation. Differences in unemployment rates, risk of poverty or social exclusion can be seen between countries and regions. For example, rural areas in several eastern and southern European countries have the highest risk of poverty or social exclusion (ESPON 2017). As has been observed by Phillips (1998) and DuPuis (2006), among others, the countryside can be a space where otherness may not be tolerated.

ARCHITECTURE IN RURAL AREAS

The dynamic differentiation that characterises rural places and the environmental, social and economic challenges that many rural areas face, inevitably have an impact on rural architecture, that is, on buildings and corresponding architectural practices and traditions found in, or associated with rural areas. As rural areas change, the local architecture follows. In many parts of the world, the move from traditional farming practices to more intensive ways of cultivation has resulted in both the emergence of industrial-scale farm buildings and the abandonment, dilapidation and sometimes disappearance of historic, vernacular barns, sheds, stables and granaries. The reduction of rural populations due to emigration and urbanisation has had a similar effect all around the world. In some cases, the population that stays behind tries to look after and maintain the local architectural heritage, with varying degrees of success; in others, entire villages may be deserted. In turn, particularly in the developed world, the process of counter-urbanisation has resulted in the rediscovery and revitalisation of rural architectural heritage. Previously abandoned barns or farm houses are converted into homes, offices or tourist accommodation by newcomers from the city who often are attracted to the region for the very reason that the vernacular heritage is part of the rural idyll they hope to find – and is often more affordable than property in urban areas. In the so-called 'contested countryside' or the urban-rural fringe, old architectural forms may mingle with new ones, as new housing, industrial warehouses, shopping outlets and the associated infrastructure (petrol or service stations, railway stations, healthcare centres) are developed at sometimes rapid speeds.

The diversity of rural architecture, both contemporary and historical, is not always recognised. In general, in comparison to the vast academic and professional discourse on urbanism, architecture and the city, and urban design, the literature on rural architecture is limited. As noted, architectural reference works tend not to pay special attention to it, whereas they often do dedicate (sometimes extensive) entries or chapters to topics like 'urban design', 'urbanism' or 'urban planning' (e.g. Fleming, Honour and Pevsner 1999; Sennott 2001). In contrast, those that do discuss rural architecture

tend to be very brief. Curl (2006: 668), for example, defines it as 'buildings associated with the countryside, but especially eighteenth and nineteenth century *cottages ornés* and *fermes ornées* or other buildings designed to suggest the rural ideal, as in a Picturesque landscape, using free compositions, asymmetry, vernacular detail, and materials such as roughcast, thatch, rubble', and to affirm the influence of the notion of the rural idyll on this rather limited definition, he adds 'see also: rustic'. A similar restriction of the category rural architecture to historical buildings designed by architects can be identified in other literature on the subject, much of which dates back to the nineteenth century (Goodwin 1835; Gray and Fyfe 1852; Sanderson 1854). No standard works on the subject of rural architecture exist, although works that deal with specific rural vernacular traditions are many. Indeed, most of the extensive discourse on vernacular architecture tends to focus on rural traditions all around the world (interestingly, often at the expense of urban vernaculars). The diversity of this vernacular heritage is of course recognised (Oliver 1997), but the same cannot necessarily be said for other forms of rural architecture.

Vernacular forms of architecture no doubt make up much of the world's rural architectural heritage. They may include farm houses, village houses, cottages, barns, stables and other agricultural outbuildings, as well as civic and religious buildings such as town halls, chapels or guildhalls. In some parts of the world those traditions continue to thrive and develop; in others they may be under pressure to change or even be at risk of disappearance because of the impacts of modernisation and globalisation, or of conflict or environmental change. But rural architecture is more than just vernacular architecture. In many parts of the world it also includes other, more 'modern' or 'formal' forms of architecture, such as petrol stations, hydro-electrical or nuclear electrical plants, military bases, tourist resorts (hotels, campsites, caravan parks), industrial buildings and science parks, or popular housing estates. In addition, one may find historical country estates and holdings, castles and fortifications and religious buildings, as well as more contemporary forms of architect designed rural housing. Like the country houses, castles and churches, the latter receive their fair share of professional attention. The former, on the other hand, tend to be much less studied, possibly because their architectural pedigree is not always clear and they represent the kind of buildings that are not expected, or indeed supposed to be found in the countryside.

Recent years have seen an increased interest in contemporary rural design (Stringer 2017). Various architectural studios in both the developed and developing world now focus specifically on design in rural contexts. Some of those studios, such as Rural Studio and Rural Urban Framework, are high-profile award-winning practices whose work has helped to put rural areas on the architectural map. In some cases, such as Rural Studio, the design builds on vernacular precedents and uses reclaimed materials to alleviate poor living conditions and social inequalities. In others, the work is more mainstream in nature, resulting in ultramodern and often expensive houses that could just as well have been built in a city and are in truth only "rural" because of their location. In yet other instances, the

work is focused on the conversion of rural farm buildings, the extension of existing buildings or the conservation of rural churches. Altogether, the work indicates that there is a growing interest in rural architecture per se, as well as an increasing recognition of the problems and issues facing the rural world, and the role that architectural design may play in trying to solve some of them. The growing academic literature on rural design signifies this increased interest as well (Ballantyne 2009; Thorbeck 2012; Versteegh and Meeres 2015).

Despite this increasing interest in rural design, however, architectural regeneration projects that use new design or reuse and repurpose existing rural architectural heritage with the specific aim of revitalising local communities, economies and places remain rare. This is not to say, though, that they do not exists at all. A number of case studies from across Europe serve as an illustration that architectural regeneration projects can help to enhance and develop rural economies, places and communities in much the same way that new rural design projects may be able to do so.

ARCHITECTURAL REGENERATION AND COUNTER-URBANISATION

Architectural regeneration in rural areas can sometimes result from counter-urbanisation or migration from urban to rural areas. In recent decades this process has involved people of various ages moving to rural areas in search of a new (different, more affordable, more sustainable, more pleasant, quieter or safer) way of life. In many parts of the world the development of communication technologies, the ability to work from home, the availability of public transport and the personal ownership of cars has made the process of moving from urban to rural areas easier (Champion 2001; Mitchell 2004; Warburton 2008). Since newcomers commonly inhabit new houses or buy and adopt old properties to convert them into second homes, counter-urbanisation could slow down rural decline and influence the revitalisation of an area (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Benson and Osbaldiston 2014; O' Reilly 2007).

Migration in search of a sustainable rural lifestyle is often linked with eco-villages. Eco-villages are small-scale communities and settlements that are organised with an aim to achieve social, economic and ecological sustainability, and to regenerate social and natural environments (Bokan 2016; East 2017; Losardo 2016; RIVE 2015). Their origins can be traced to the 'back-to-the-land' movements of the twentieth century, especially those of the 1960s and 1970s. Although living in accordance with nature can be seen as one of their defining characteristics, they vary in their philosophical and organisational approaches, as well as in their appearance and size – from more traditional to more modern, and from a dozen to a few hundred inhabitants (RIVE 2015). Today, eco-villages are found in at least twenty European countries, and are often part of national or international networks.

Examples include the Italian Network of Ecological Villages (RIVE) or the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN EUROPE) (see https://gen-europe.org, https://ecovillage.org/).

Several eco-villages can be found in Croatia. One of them, called 'Recycled estate' (*Reciklirano imanje*), is situated in the village of Vukomeric, thirty kilometres from the capital of Zagreb (Figure 7.2). It was founded by an ecological NGO called 'Green Network of Activist Groups' (*Zelena Mreža Aktivističkih Grupa*) that has been active since 2002. The 'Recycled estate' is formed around an old and traditional wooden house on a family estate in a small village with circa 150 inhabitants. The house was renovated by a group of young people and the surrounding area is arranged to act as a platform for experimentation in three areas of sustainable development: ecological food production, renewable energy and natural building. Gradually, it has become a well-known educational centre for permaculture and sustainable living. Since its establishment, a great number of people have passed through the village, taking part in various workshops, courses and events (Lončar 2013). Today the 'Recycled estate' consists of an educational building, various housing units, several experimental natural buildings and gardens for growing food. Most buildings have been built during courses and workshops. They comprise natural materials (wood, stone, straw bales and so on) and a combination of traditional and modern forms and techniques (solar collectors, green roofs, natural plaster). Moreover, the centre has conducted educational projects in cooperation with schools, published several free publications and opened its own advisory centre for permaculture and sustainable living. Because of these activities, the centre has attracted people from urban areas into the village and surrounding rural areas. Several dozen of those newcomers have bought houses and turned them into permanent or second homes, while others have bought land and built straw bale houses.

[INSERT FIGURE 7.2. HERE A traditional house]

[INSERT FIGURE 7.3 HERE Prekmurje Region]

Often, however, newcomers to rural areas are not only attracted by natural, aesthetic or recreational characteristics, but also by the affordability of living. Planning a new family or retirement in the countryside is often linked with more affordable land and house prices, lower living costs and more attractive environmental conditions. Rural locations across southern European countries are often presented as desirable retirement destinations where one can buy affordable first or second homes, sometimes in planned retirement villages or resorts (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Benson 2010). Today, Central and Eastern Europe have become the most popular destinations for second home owners (Lampič and Mrak 2012).

The Pomurska Region in Slovenia is an example of a rural area that has attracted new inhabitants and home owners from abroad. It is situated in north-eastern Slovenia, near the borders with Austria, Hungary and Croatia. The region is characterised by a picturesque countryside with hilly areas and

lowlands (Figure 7.3). It is an agricultural region with vineyards, orchards, meadows and cultivated fields, but with a weak economy and high unemployment levels that have compelled a large part of the local population to emigrate. For visitors the region is attractive because of its well-preserved nature, thermal springs, hiking trails, and wine roads with vineyards and wine cellars. Even so, as the most peripheral rural region of Slovenia, Pomurska has seen a severe population decline that gradually led to the availability of low-price real estate (Lampič and Mrak 2012; Lampič et al 2012). In Pomurje, by 2002, 11 percent of the region's dwellings were permanently uninhabited and over 2,500 dwellings were known to be abandoned (Pavlin 2009 in Lampič et al 2015).

After Slovenia became a part of the European Union in 2004 there has been significant interest from Western European buyers in real estate in Slovenian rural regions. From 2004 to 2012, 729 West Europeans had purchased real estate in Pomurska (Lampič et al 2015: 136). Those new homeowners had different motives to migrate to Pomurska, but the most important drivers were low real estate prices, low living costs, and low-cost airline connections. Some of the newcomers publicised the region back home, which attracted others who also now inhabit the region permanently or as second homeowners. The whole process had an impact on the region and local people (Lampič *et al.* 2015: 136). The new homeowners renovated dilapidated houses in the traditional style, respecting the region's environment and local tradition. Moreover, the process led to an increase in real estate prices in the region, but also to a positive change in the attitude of locals toward the traditional housing in the region (Lampič et al 2012).

ARCHITECTURAL REGENERATION IN ABANDONED RURAL AREAS

The phenomenon of architectural abandonment has been present throughout history in different parts of the world. In recent decades, a number of global processes, most notably environmental and economic crises, conflicts and migration have caused its resurgence. Areas with hundreds of thousands of abandoned properties can be found in Europe and the USA, and their numbers have increased in the last few decades. The phenomenon can be observed in other parts of the world too, in both urban and rural areas, and is a result of a complexity of factors. In urban areas it is closely related to deindustrialisation and failing investments and housing markets, while in rural areas depopulation and agricultural decline play an important role (Lončar 2016). Statistics for Europe show a number of trends that contribute to architectural abandonment: low birth rates across the continent in general; young people leaving Southern Europe (especially its rural areas) and migrating to north-western Europe (mainly its urban areas); and declining populations in Southern and Eastern European countries (ESPON 2017; Eurostat 2019). These trends have resulted in scores of vacant and increasingly dilapidated buildings, villages or towns (so-called 'ghost towns/villages') and have significant economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts. The regeneration of such abandoned

rural areas involves complex challenges and the urgent need for holistic, creative and sustainable policies and practices that address the problem is becoming more and more apparent (Lončar 2016).

A large number of abandoned villages and small towns can be found in Mediterranean Europe, especially in Portugal, Spain and Italy (Figure 7.4). Italy alone is home to approximately 2,500 to 5,000 abandoned villages and small towns, many of which are situated in its southern regions of Abruzzi, Calabria and Sicily, with more of them at risk of being abandoned (East 2016; East 2017). Often, they are situated in the relatively inaccessible hilly areas, several hours away from big cities. In some cases they are uninhabited or have had only a dozen inhabitants for decades, with no public services (school, hospital, pharmacy). Local governments and tourist boards have developed various initiatives in order to boost their restoration and revitalisation. A number of villages has been on the market for low prices, and some have been converted into tourist destinations. The model of the 'scattered hotel' (where tourist rooms are distributed throughout various historic buildings within a village) has been introduced in the 1980s in order to regenerate historic villages and towns (East 2017).

[INSERT FIGURE 7.4 HERE Abandoned farmhouse in Limousin]

Civita di Bagnoregio presents an example of recent attempts to revitalise small historical abandoned towns in Italian rural regions. The town is situated in the Lazio region in Central Italy. It traces its history back to the Etruscan period 2,500 years ago and owns its strategic location to an ancient trade route. The town is renowned because of its position at the top of a cliff situated on a volcanic plateau, which is subject to gradual erosion (Bartolucci and Pratesi 1992; Medori 1994). Although vital during the medieval period, Civita di Bagnoregio has experienced a slow decline since it was struck by an earthquake in the seventeenth century and has had only a few permanent residents since then. In recent decades, however, the isolated town has experienced a rebirth. From being a destination for people with weekend and summer houses, Civita de Bagnoregio has gradually become a tourist destination for day tourists. As a result, the number of permanent residents has changed from circa ten during the winter to 100 during the summer months, while the number of tourists had increased to 800,000 in 2017 (Attili and Sordilli 2015; Needleman 2017; Romehints 2018). Different cultural and artistic activities have influenced the revitalisation of Civita de Bagnoregio. From the 1960s onwards the town inspired several film directors and was the location for films such as *The Two Colonels* (1962), *Let's have a Riot* (1970) and *It's all about the Karma* (2017). Moreover, the town served as the inspiration for *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986) by the well-known Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki, which increased the town's popularity among Japanese tourists. The local architectural heritage, including churches, palaces, narrow lanes, medieval courtyards and little squares, and the story of the town as the birthplace of Saint Bonaventure, the medieval theologian, helped turn the town into a tourist attraction. Furthermore, the town has attracted visitors thanks to a range of cultural

festivals, meetings of international professionals from the fields of arts and design, and educational activities focused on historic preservation that take place during the year. Gradually, these have stimulated the need for architectural restoration and adaptation projects and the redevelopment of public spaces, and given rise to facilities such as restaurants, craft shops, clubs, and tourist accommodation (Attili and Sordilli 2015). A number of collaborative projects with local communities have also influenced the increase in number of renovated buildings. One of the latest projects, a partnership between the local government and the accommodation-sharing site Airbnb, resulted in a one-bedroom house being restored and adopted for tourist accommodation (Airbnb 2017).

ARCHITECTURAL REGENERATION IN PROTECTED AREAS

Regeneration projects that aim to revitalise rural communities, economies and places are often closely related to tourist activities. The potential of architecture is recognised in rural tourism, and therefore adaptations of rural architecture are often directly linked with tourism activities. Protected areas such as national parks often recognise rural architecture as an important cultural resource and encourage its preservation and revitalisation. In this way rural architecture in protected areas is given greater attention by professionals and authorities than in other non-protected areas, which has an impact on research, the process of listing and funding for preservation and adaptation. Adaptations are usually done in accordance with recommendations made by experts, and often textbooks, monographs and practical instruction books are published that stimulate further interest among locals, owners and investors in investments and adaptations. The regeneration of protected areas is often supported with national and local funds, while the income from tourist activities also boosts the revitalisation and preservation of traditional buildings used as housing, tourist accommodation, restaurants or cultural or heritage centres.

Lonjsko Polje Nature Park is situated in Central Croatia, along the Sava River. It forms the largest protected floodplain in the entire Danube basin and has been protected as a natural park since 1990. Since 1993 it has been included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance and in 2005 it was nominated for Croatia's UNESCO Tentative List. The floods, as the important ecological element, result in a rich diversity of habitats, which include wet forests, meadows and marshes. The area has a high concentration of indigenous breeds (cattle, horses, pigs) and forms an important habitat for 'a large number of rare and endangered plant and animal species' (Ministry of Culture of Republic of Croatia 2005.). Besides natural heritage, cultural values are recognised as the result of the 'centuries long harmonious cohabitation of the human population with nature' (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia 2005). One of the recognisable characteristics of the area are historic rural settlements and wooden architecture. Among the seventeen villages in the area, two have a special status. The village of Čigoč was proclaimed 'European Village of Storks' in 1994, while the village of

Krapje was proclaimed 'Village of Architectural Heritage' in 1995. Moreover, there are around 700 traditional houses in the area, accompanied by a variety of outbuildings such as barns, hay-lofts, storehouses, hogs and corns sheds, and historical buildings and sites such as churches, rectories, chapels and schools (Belaj 2001; Mavar 2000; Mavar 2001; Mlinar 2000; Salopek *et al.* 2006).

[INSERT FIGURE 7.5 HERE Čigoč, Lonjsko Polje Nature Park]

The status of the area as a natural park has played an important role in the safeguarding of its natural and cultural heritage. The documentation and listing of historic settlements and architecture has been carried out by architects and ethnologists. Seven villages and a number of individual buildings have been included in the 'National Register of Cultural Goods' run by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia. Educational and tourist activities in the park have gradually increased, which has boosted the preservation of the traditional architecture and its adaptation as contemporary housing for tourist purposes (accommodation, museums, restaurants) and as offices for the park authorities (Figure 7.5). These projects have been financed by the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Tourism, and the regional government with the aim to promote and develop rural tourism. Some of the latest projects have been financed with EU funds. These funds have encouraged people to renovate houses and to adapt them, either for living in or for tourism purposes. Professional design experts and instruction manuals with examples of renovated buildings have had a positive impact on the perception of the traditional architecture even outside of the borders of the park (Petrić 2000; Salopek *et al.* 2006). Besides architectural reconstructions and adaptations, a number of projects dealing with local cultural heritage have been initiated. For example, educational programs for children and adults, events and festivals, exhibitions and promotions of traditional food, handicrafts and different forms of intangible heritage (songs, dance, customs) have been regularly organised. The increase of tourists and visitors has stimulated the local economy, especially the production of local souvenirs and homemade eco products (honey, cheese, liquors, wine). However, the economic crisis in 2008 has negatively influenced tourist activities and stimulated outgoing migration that has left the area with a lack of young people, which has consequently slowed down the process of regeneration.

ARCHITECTURAL REGENERATION AS PART OF THEMATIC ROUTES

Architectural regeneration projects in rural areas can be part of thematic routes, which usually connect a number of localities in one or more regions. The places that make up thematic routes usually have a similar cultural content. Sometimes they are connected by the same building typology and link groups

of buildings, such as castles, farmhouses, wine cellars, covered bridges and so on. In certain cases, thematic routes link architecture with other forms of local heritage (for example local customs or food), creating history and heritage trails, cycling routes, food trails and so forth (Briedenhann and Wickens 2004; Csapo and Berki 2008; Majdoub 2010; Nagy 2012; von Rohrscheidt 2012). Touristic routes are the result of planned investments and can encourage more demanding projects and the acquisition of funds for the renovation of buildings. As such, they can have a positive influence on the revitalisation of heritage in rural areas. The popularisation of thematic routes has been stimulated by the Cultural Routes Programme launched by the Council of Europe in 1987.

The 'Wooden Architecture Route' in Małopolska in the south of Poland is a thematic route established in the early 2000s. This 15,000 kilometres long way includes more than 250 sights. It comprises different buildings and building complexes, including manor houses, agricultural buildings, open air museums (heritage parks), villages and churches. Six wooden churches on the route, built between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries are on the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List (Baturo and Bzowski 2017, Broda [n.d.], Kornecki *et al.* 2002). The buildings on the route are used for various purposes. Some houses are inhabited and in everyday use, while others are part of heritage parks or open air museums (for example Nadwiślański Ethnographic Park in Wygielzow) (Figure 7.6). Some buildings are used as museums (for example Koliba Villa or the Zakopane Style Museum in Zakopane), while the churches and chapels are in continued use. Yet other buildings are used as workshops or to host different cultural activities (concerts, lectures, exhibitions, and so on).

[INSERT FIGURE 7.6 HERE Nadwiślański Ethnographic Park]

The route is the result of decades-long work by professionals from different sectors (academia, heritage preservation, tourism), with the active support of the local authorities and regional tourist office of the Małopolska region. The wooden architecture has been recorded and researched, buildings have been conserved and through promotional activities the tourism potential has been increased. Today, all the sites have information boards and wayfinding signs, and are presented on an interactive website (see http://www.drewniana.malopolska.pl/). In 2013 around 700,000 tourists visited the route. Alongside all this, the wooden architecture has become an important identity symbol for the people in the region and renovated buildings have increasingly been focal points of cultural life and activities. The example of the Wooden Architecture Route shows the importance of tackling rural regeneration in a broader context (within a natural landscape or a cluster of cultural attractions) and the value of

partnerships and collaborations between governmental bodies, local and regional authorities, experts from different sectors, associations and locals.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that rural areas are dynamic and complex, and show differences and variation across regions and countries. Current global processes and trends significantly influence rural areas, resulting in a multitude of social, economic and environmental challenges. The role of architecture in relation to these challenges is still not recognised enough and rural architectural regeneration therefore remains little researched and understood. This chapter aimed to provide an introduction to rural architectural regeneration by opening up several broad and overlapping research themes, including the perception of rurality and its historical, cultural and geographical variety and change; rural-urban relationships; the changing nature of rural economies and communities; and the diversity and transformation of rural architecture and landscapes. There is a need for further in-depth and comparative research into all these themes, in order to understand the dynamics of rural regeneration processes in general, as well as the various ways in which they may unfold in different places, regions and countries.

The various examples of European rural regeneration projects presented in this chapter provide an insight into the ways in which the merging of global processes with specific local contexts can influence rural architecture. Specific economic, environmental, social and cultural conditions can encourage the migration of individuals or groups (both to and from rural areas) and foster new or different uses of existing rural places and buildings. As the examples have shown, a search for environmental sustainability, for affordable housing or for cultural and touristic content can attract populations to rural areas who adopt and reuse architecture. Gradually, such places and regions could attract more people and activities and initiate further economic, social and cultural practices and processes that could lead to the social, economic or cultural revitalisation of an area. The examples demonstrate the complex, dynamic and two-way nature of the processes that shape rural regeneration, which can be understood only in the specific environmental, social and economic contexts in which regeneration appears.

The general characteristics of regeneration processes and the specificities of local contexts raise questions about the possibility of successful rural regeneration strategies and policies. The example from Malopolska in Poland shows that regional touristic and cultural planning can have a positive impact if it engages existing local communities and comprises ongoing projects that are planned for long-time periods. The merging of different regeneration activities and strategies as part of a holistic approach can help to keep rural areas vital and sustainable. On the other hand, stand-alone, one-off

and short-term rural regeneration projects and policies are unlikely to survive environmental, economic or social changes on a global or local level. The example of Lonjsko Polje Nature Park in Croatia highlights how planned investments can contribute to the restoration and preservation of rural architecture, but how rural tourist activities can quickly stagnate in periods of economic crisis accompanied by depopulation. All the examples have revealed how a lack of people and economic possibilities make regeneration in rural areas comparatively more difficult to plan and manage over time than urban regeneration projects, but how the successful regeneration of rural places is necessary, possible and worthy of further attention.

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Captions

Figure 7.1 A cottage in Tissington (Peak District) in the UK exemplifies the remote, slow, quiet, natural and peaceful associations that rural architecture often evokes. (Photograph Aylin Orbaşlı, 2019)

Figure 7.2 A traditional house has been renovated to create the *Recycled estate* educational centre for sustainable development. Vukomeric, Croatia. (Source: ZMAG)

Figure 7.3 The preserved and pleasant environment of the Prekmurje Region in Slovenia forms an attractive element for newcomers. Kuzma, Prekmurje, Slovenia. (Photograph by Sanja Loncar, 2019)

Figure 7.4 An abandoned farmhouse in Limousin, France. Many abandoned rural buildings can be found all around the world. (Photograph by Marcel Vellinga, 2008)

Figure 7.5. Traditional buildings have been adapted for touristic purposes and now serve as a restaurant and accommodation venue. Čigoč, Lonjsko Polje Nature Park, Croatia (Photograph by Sanja Loncar, 2019)

Figure 7.6. Visitors to this open air museum can experience the reconstructed landscape of a village comprising various building types (houses, schools, churches, manor house), while also visiting a restaurant and souvenir shop. Nadwiślański Ethnographic Park, Wygielzow, Małopolska, Poland. (Photograph by Sanja Lončar, 2018)