

Article

Farmhouses in the Mid-Adriatic: From Architectural Artifacts to Devices for the Landscape Development

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Abstract: Rural settlement in Central Italy represents one of the most original heritages for understanding the link between architectural principles and the environmental, economic, and social aspects of the cultivated land. The scattered farmhouses are the basis of a particular land management strategy, the Mezzadria (sharecropping), a contract between a landowner and a farmer. The structure of the architecture is always the same, with slight variations, and is characterized by an external staircase that is the prevailing distinctive element. However, the isolated buildings developed a complex system of relations in the territory, a cultural landscape process made up of physical and visual connections. This paper investigates the rural architecture of Central Italy, particularly in the mid-Adriatic area of southern Marche, renewing the knowledge of this peculiar heritage. The exploratory method considers different scales and is based both on the interpretation of hilly geography and on architectonic comparison between artifacts. Ruins in situ visual exploration, valuation of historical maps, and transcription of signs elaborated in drawings and photographs allow us for better identification of the open space relations and building characters. It is concluded that farmhouses are not only architectural objects with 'honest functional logic' but real devices for the creation of the hillside landscape, so they need broad investigations that start from solid scientific references to direct future trajectories.

Keywords: historical agricultural landscape; vernacular heritage; cultural landscape



Citation: Cipolletti, S. Farmhouses in the Mid-Adriatic: From Architectural Artifacts to Devices for the Landscape Development. *Heritage* **2024**, *7*, 6791–6805. <https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage7120314>

Academic Editors: Arlen F. Chase, Fernando Vegas López-Manzanares, Camilla Mileto and Sergio Manzano-Fernández

Received: 25 September 2024

Revised: 3 November 2024

Accepted: 20 November 2024

Published: 3 December 2024



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1. Introduction

In 1936, at the VI Milan Triennale, Giuseppe Pagano, with the collaboration of Guarniero Daniel, proposed an exhibition entitled 'Architettura Rurale Italiana' (Italian Rural Architecture) with the related publication of the catalog in one of the 'Quaderni della Triennale' [1]. The two works became a manifesto, and they are part of a vast and preponderant research project through which the author explores the rural house in the entire Italian peninsula [2]. The survey represents one of the most erudite and solid references for the study of the vernacular heritage within the architectural disciplines.

Pagano affirms a sincere interest in the minor and spontaneous buildings; he reveals the aesthetic and modern value of the rural architecture in relation to their function and technical necessity; he spoke about an actual 'dictionary of constructive logic' that had evident ties with places [1] (p. 12). The ground, climate, economy, and supply of resources have a strong connection with the action of building [1]. The organization of space and the abstraction of shape and volume are considered a product of social life, where nothing is useless.

Pagano's studies of rural buildings are important because they bring architecture up to a multidisciplinary level, closer to anthropology, geography, and economy [2]. With the aim of understanding both the architectural characters of essentiality and constructive declinations in relation to the environment, the scholar defines a method of study in which in situ exploration, direct observation, and photography assume a main role in gathering and systematizing as much information as possible [2,3].

Pagano's method is defined as 'ethnographic', by the studier Bilò, a practice shared with other twentieth-century architects, Italian and otherwise, who have an operative approach to the spontaneous and everyday context, reinforced using photography; they contributed to restoring a humanistic and civic value to architecture [2].

Research on farmhouses and the rural context should also be considered a cornerstone of the scientific need for studies on the complex territorial manifestations and the characterization of the landscape based on human land use [3,4]. Rural buildings, in addition to representing an architecture of 'honest functional logic' [1] (p. 23), as Pagano concluded, have a strong ability to relate to the open space, a dialogue between localization and topographical data. Isolated buildings and social, productive activities stabilize hierarchies, directions, and connections built through artifact positions, visual lines, paths, and specific techniques in sustainable land use. Under this transformation process simple terrains and hills become landscape [3].

The knowledge of vernacular architecture and the recognition of its regional characteristics belong to a broader and deeper debate than just historical view or district references. It concerns the quality of the minor building practice and learning from the everyday; furthermore, the shape of territory and the interpretation of landscape as an expression of a specific culture [5], are included.

After Pagano's research, in the 1960s in Italy, when major transformations started to affect rural territories by changing the original productive economies or inducing abandonment, theories that emphasize the relations between architecture, landscape, and culture were consolidated, several disciplines were involved again such as agronomy, architecture, anthropology, and geography [4–6].

According to Turri's point of view, to better understand the cultural dimension of the landscape, the knowledge of the territory is fundamental; this intends to give meaning to territorial objects, recognizing their shape and value [7]. The farmhouse can be interpreted as a 'culture sign', a mark in the landscape, which is representative of man and the society in which he lives, and as a reference it is linked with other territorial signs, building a set of relations that link man to nature [5] (p. 137).

The architect Ferrara, who considers the landscape a slow construction on a geographical scale, made by a community that lives on the land [4], ponders the isolated farmhouse as the element that enabled the process of rural landscape formation. The presence of farm residential buildings on the land is an emblematic human organization correlated to the rural condition, an opportunity for the farmer to create an original settlement in which human culture and nature come together through agricultural developments [4] (p. 205).

Emilio Sereni's famous description of the rural landscape 'as the shape that man, in the course and for the purposes of his productive agricultural activities, systematically imprints on the natural environment', evaluates how much rural territories evidence the complementary relationships between human action and physical and social characteristics of a site, which can be felt both in the built presence and open space design [6] (p. 15).

These concepts intersect international arguments, as seen in the definition of UNESCO Cultural Landscape, or those of Vernacular heritage, which come from ICOMOS Charters and underline the connection between natural environment and humankind; in both, the historical rural territory is considered one of the best contexts in which to identify the link [8,9].

All over the world, historical agricultural areas are at the center of the topic of cultural value, heritage protection, conservation, and sustainable development [10–12]. Even the UNESCO Cultural Landscape concerns exceptional cases; rural zones are important components of entire territories, as they comprise 95% of the land and they coincide with a large part of the EU [10]. The degradation and simplification of rural landscapes reveals the importance of the observation and knowledge of all vernacular landscape and architecture to extract wisdom and direct future trajectories, especially in the design scenario [10,13–16].

The valorization and re-use of the rural heritage, often abandoned or underutilized, the developments and the sharing between tourist and local community, food security,

sustainable agriculture, climate, and environmental actions are other aspects of scientific debate [10]. Therefore, it is worth continuing to explore rural architecture, considering tools, sources and methods to apply for the evolution of discourse. However, if there is a growing interest in the cultural landscape perspective today, which combines nature and human action, will it be necessary to assume an expanded and hybrid gaze, from architecture to geographic open space, for farmhouses?

This paper focuses on architectural quality and landscape process of vernacular heritage in the rural area of Central Italy, where typical farmhouses reside, and the expression of the Mezzadria (sharecropping) land management method. The exploration is centered on a very precise area of investigation, the southern mid-Adriatic, by constructing a method based on architectonic comparison of buildings and architecture in reference to landscape perception and territorial organization; farmhouses, topography, connections and visual components are analyzed [14–16].

The discovery of the subtle variances in the rural architecture found and the transcription of their landscape relations are represented in graphic elaborations and photos, and they are finalized to build a deepen knowledge of the rural landscape that exalts the structure of the geographic area from which it takes its approach.

The anthropic value of the vernacular architecture of Central Italy will be demonstrated to both the architectural and the landscape scale.

This intersection between architectural character and territory configuration unites the findings in function of a possible narration of the sharecropping landscape, within which the possibility of transformations is considered [14]. The role of the landscape and architecture interpretation questions the design practice to obtain strengthening territorial resilience in front of the new requests [13,14].

2. The Rural Landscape in Central Italy and the Investigation Method

2.1. The Vernacular Heritage of Mezzadria

In Sereni's studies, the area of Central Italy is considered one of the most original characteristics of the Italian agrarian system [6]. Here, where the relevant physical datum is the hills, a millenary process of adaptation and exchange between man and the environment takes shape in a way of managing and cultivating the land and it is expressed in a widespread living, in opposition with the compact urban model of the historical villages [17].

The farmhouse along with its surrounding terrain made up a unique system, testifying a particular form of land management, the Mezzadria (sharecropping), which was a contract stipulated between a landowner, the grantor, and the tenant farmer, called the sharecropper, where both parties committed themselves to share the crops and the profits of the farm which take place on that very site.

Specific researchers on historical agricultural landscape in Central Italy, such as Henry Desplanques, Marco Moroni, and Sergio Anselmi, formulate profound and ample considerations on the relationship between hill, sharecropping society, and rural constructions [18–22].

The farmhouse, called 'casa colonica', was included as the founding element of humanized landscape; a symbol of the garrison as the solution for keeping man on the land and working it [18]. The isolated built system gives a formal unity and continuity to rural landscapes as it corresponds to a complex organization of the farm space and the entire rural territory [21,22].

Mezzadria agriculture, unlike other rural settings, is characterized by the presence of a settled farming family; the farmhouse was the place where the farming family lived as well as the site where productive activities were, so dwellings and workplaces were divided yet never separable [19,20].

In relation to the hilly landscape, the farmhouse often had a dominant position; it assumed a privileged role of control as well as being a unit connecting other units in a dense road network that crosses over and organizes the entire territory [21,22]. Vernacular artifacts dot the hilltops and arrange in succession along the ridges and roads that cross

into the reliefs, building distinctive relationships with the lands and other structures and elements present, for example mills, little rural churches, and trees (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The hilly rural landscape in the mid-Adriatic. (Source: Mariano Andreani, 2018).

The scattered settlement gives a domestic character to the rural landscape; residence and the cultivated area are in perfect functional continuity [4] (p. 201), mediated by the open space of the farmyard, around which other smaller constructions gravitate, such as the pig sty, the well, and hay, tools, and storage sheds. The farmyard was a sort of ‘plaza’, an expression of work and social life itself, the site for the relations that surround the house itself; often it traces the roundish form of the knolls [16] (pp. 238–239).

The architectural aspect of the artefacts is very simple and poor in structure and materials; generally built with a rectangular layout and gable roof, these structures immediately admit a multifunction relationship between the residential and working space, which is organized on two levels. In Central Italy it is in fact possible to identify one of the most characteristic motifs of the rural house, as emerged from the Pagano and Daniel investigation: the external staircase that connects the ground floor, where the workspaces and stables are found, to the dwelling, which is separated onto the first floor [1,14].

In 1964, a law prohibited sharecropping contracts, so the Mezzadria was definitively abolished in Italy, and the farmhouses were progressively abandoned leaving behind traditional farming practices that were largely replaced by mechanization and intensive agriculture.

2.2. Materials and Working Methods

The territory of the mid-Adriatic, in Central Italy, along the east coast, is characterized by a ‘comb structure’ of hydrography, where rivers and valleys alternate, orthogonally

positioned to the sea, and furrow the hilly mass, shaped by the millenary agriculture activity and by the sharecropping process, recorded in these areas as early as the 15th century and definitively structured between the 18th and 19th centuries [17,18]. The rolling hills zone is structured by the typical diffuse rural settlement, and it is crossed with various connecting roads covering the high grounds.

The Gregorian Land Registry (Cadastrale), dated 1835, mapped the rural landscape of sharecropping before the abandonment, coinciding with the 1964 law, and the important post-war urban transformations of sprawl in the valleys and along the coast.

Among the valleys, in the southernmost hilly portion, between the Tronto and the Tesino rivers, was the area with the highest percentage of farmhouses; the 1934 census registered over 100,000 [21–23].

Many ruins remain as traces, but the advent of extensive viticulture and the subsequent birth of tourism in the rural hills produced widespread agritourism, wine cellars, holiday farms, restaurants, and B&Bs, often housed in these former farmhouses.

Ruins are one of the elements associated with the aesthetic emotion of the landscape [24]. In the rural context, they are extremely fascinating objects, suspended in time, not manipulated by the most recent transformations regarding agritourism or new country residences [14]. Ruins are expressions of the original vernacular architecture qualities in Central Italy, and the sharecropping heritage is becoming a tourist attraction in relation to the rural landscape.

For several years now, a young start-up called ‘Mezzadria Stories’ has been running a program to enhance the tangible and intangible traces of sharecropping on a farm, Contrada Forola (land district), owned by a prestigious winery. Tourists from European and non-European countries are welcomed to the farmsteads to visit the rural landscapes and the ruins and listen to the stories of the farmers who worked there, collected in valuable oral interviews [16].

A research team from the University of Camerino, in contact with the start-up and its founder, in 2018 for the Rural Estudio scientific seminar began to learn more about the hillside landscape of the Mezzadria with a tour curated by Prof. Cipolletti [17] and to study traces of Mezzadria, rural artifacts in design and thesis labs, coordinated also by Prof. Coccia.

The working method drew on that tradition of studies conducted in Italy since the Pagano e Daniel survey focusing on agricultural architecture and the cultural landscape approach. Research is supported by the consultation of historical maps from the Gregorian Land Registry, which are planimetrically elaborated, and an extremely synthetic view of the subdivided fields, construction, and roads is represented; these documents are fundamental to understanding the territorial structure and recognizing the permanence of the signs. Ruins are analyzed based on three main topics: relations with the open space and the landscape process; essential and primitive forms and the distinguished theme of the external staircase; and the transformations, enlargements, and added volumes.

The holding Contrada Forola is a well-defined area within a single property. There are four ruins that have retained their original characters and remain as the outposts of sharecropping along with other traces (Figure 2).

The special conditions of the Contrada Forola make it an ideal study site [15]. The rural district is taken as a sample model from which to learn and to get basic information to construct comparisons and identify possible elements of variation or repetition that can be detected both within the rural district itself and in the territory.

In the second step, the field of exploration of farmhouses was expanded upon. The research has constructed a methodology based on the distinctive geography of the mid-Adriatic territory, identifying a criterion for investigation within the intervals between watercourses: a cross-geographic reading of the vernacular landscape according to the west–east and north–south trend [14].

The rivers and valleys run from west to east, coinciding with the slope of the reliefs towards the Adriatic Sea. This allows the identification of three distinct rural segments:

the mountain high hill, hill, and coast, useful for the observation of variations in relation to altitude and climate. The identification of the roads, which cross the hills from south to north, connecting the valley infrastructure with the historic centers and the dense network of scattered farmhouses, can constitute a further condition for recognizing local specificities [14] (Figure 3).



Figure 2. The Contrada Forola (Source: Sara Cipolletti, 2024).

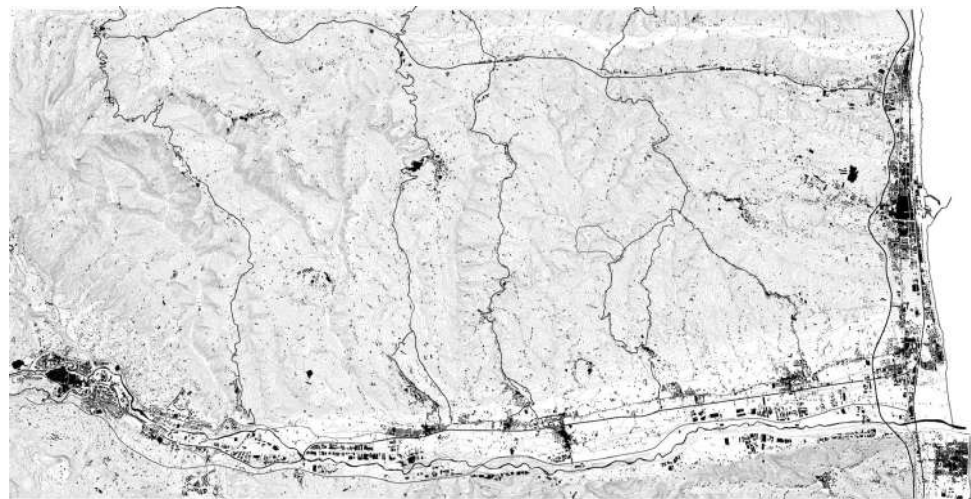


Figure 3. The rural territory between Tesino and Tronto rivers; the transversal roads which cross the hills and the Contrada Forola (Source: Sara Cipolletti, Alessia Guaiani, 2022).

The main transversal roads are the historical traces from which the agricultural organizations branch off into the hillside, organized into minor strands. The study of rural heritage continues to focus only on the most original artefacts which today have been reduced to a state of ruin, detectable in the historical maps followed by verification in situ.

Drawings and photography are chosen as descriptive tools for identifying the physical shape of the territory in the landscape scenario and elaborating architectonic comparisons.

By varying the point of view from which the objects were looked at—wider on the geographical scale or concentrated on the artifact scale or in-depth on a single architecture or according to the criterion of grouping—interpretations are developed. The methodological approach is influenced by the nexus between signs transcription and drawings, photography, and landscape [16]. Capturing the farmhouses in relation to the undulating lines of the hills is an exercise in perception, an impression we receive when we walk through the territory, as opposed to a zenithal view [25]. Some photographic experiments on rural landscape and anonymous buildings are considered. Such as Mario Giacomelli's series of photographs 'Presenza di coscienza sulla natura', taken in the rural areas of central Italy between the 1970s and 1980s, are processed by repeatedly moving along the ridges, choosing vantage points from above with the help of small aircraft [26]. It's an exploration of the signs and memory of the landscape, expressed through a high-contrast black-and-white photograph that abstracts shapes and traces [26]. Or the taxonomic investigation of the Becher couple's industrial artifacts in the German countryside [27], sequencing shots of similar objects, placing them next to each other because they are constructed in some way, makes access to information more visible by enhancing peculiarities and formal qualities of buildings.

All viewpoints and tools used were aimed at enriching the gaze on the farmhouses and their cultural landscape.

3. Results

Contrada Forola is demarcated on the boundaries by a natural system of ditches and vegetation, and it is connected by a thin road that forks at the end, a branch of one of the main routes which crosses the hills in a south/north direction, connecting the valleys of Tronto and Tesino [15]. The ridge road identifies the access to the farm and directs the path that slopes down, penetrating the fields to connect four farmhouses.

Comparing historical maps, the first two artifacts are already present in the Gregorian Cadastre (Figure 4); halfway along the trail, the road separates in two directions to connect two other small rural buildings of more recent construction, dating from around late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [15].



Figure 4. Contrada Forola. Comparison of Gregorian Land Registry map 1835, the orthophoto maps 1978, and satellite views 2024. (Source: Sara Cipolletti, Alessia Guaiani, 2022).

The landscape process is clearly identifiable and the architecture is a small catalog of the rural house, in which it is possible to find and compare, all the characteristics of agricultural artifacts typical of the hillside context to compare in the entire rural territory: the open space relation, the rectangular floor plan, the gabled roof, and the composition in two separate and specialized levels, in particular the motif of the external staircase, as well as the building transformations.

3.1. Open Space Relations and Landscape Process

The landform of the Contrada Forola has profoundly influenced the settlement organization and landscape process. The road running through the center follows the ridge, connecting buildings and crops; the path that enters the countryside from the main transversal road links the villages, it constitutes a gradual principle of land domestication where farmhouses are garrisons in a linear succession as man advances over the undulating surface. Cultivated textures on this side and on the other side of the ridge follow the slope to the low areas of the ditches, characterized by lines of crops, water drainage, and trees.

The land use registry of the historical maps shows arable areas only near the houses and the path. The farm sizes range from 3 to 10 ha, as some scholars hypothesized [19–22] (Figure 5). The distance between the buildings generally measures anywhere from 300 to 500 m, rarely over a kilometer, since the road network is a connecting structure made use on a local level, most often by people on foot or with the farm animals.

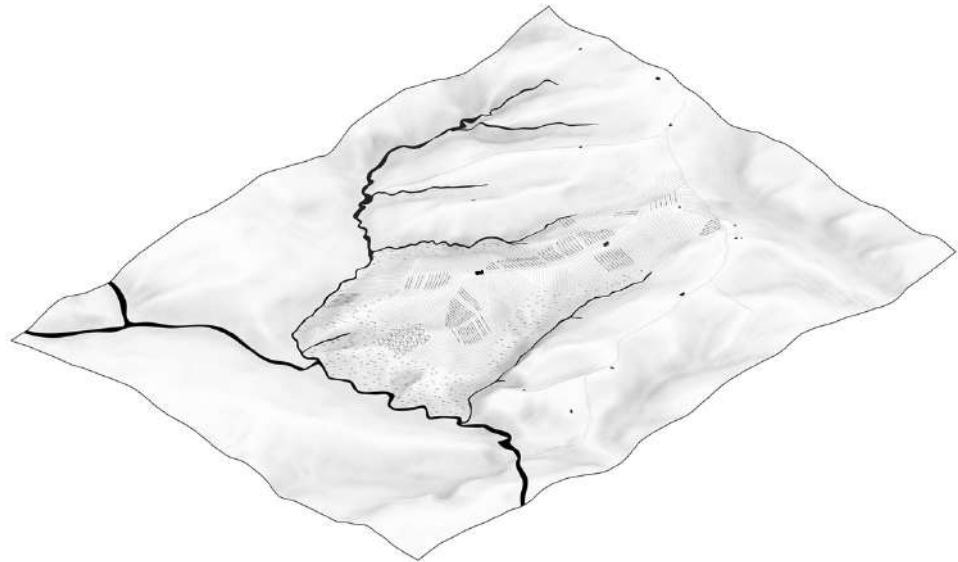


Figure 5. The Mezzadria landscape of Contrada Forola. (Source: [28]).

The two ancient farmhouses present a dominant position over the area, and they are the most representative and complex, while the arrangement of more recent buildings is less relevant in the visual relation with the landscape [15]. Small hierarchies, due to location and the size of the farmhouses, are recognizable, and vernacular artifacts on the hilltops are landmarks in the wide-open country space; the largest one has a baricentric position in the district. The other artifacts, which retain less advantageous positions, testify a moment of expansion of the sharecropping management due to the growth of population and improvement of better agriculture techniques, which required the construction of other presidium points [19–22]. It is possible to notice that the first foundation in the rural landscape coincided with the settlement of the best knolls to control the lands. Their oval and circular shapes are highlighted through the space of the farmyard (Figure 6), and the view is of the surroundings of the building. The farmhouses are unique and self-sufficient but organized with others in succession, determining the plural system of settlement.

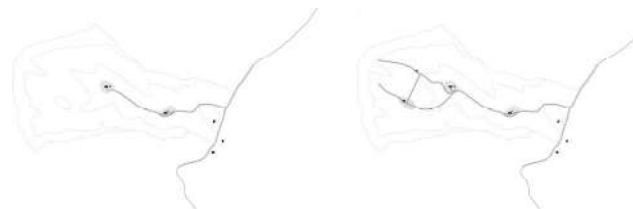


Figure 6. The landscape process in Contrada Forola. (Source: Sara Cipolletti, 2024).

The location of vernacular architectures always presupposes the interpretation of hill topography and the action of gaze, which summarizes the close relation between an observer, namely the farmer, and the open space of the fields (Figure 7). The infrastructure of paths, in addition to the gaze, as a device of relation and control, comprise the capillary network. It marks the ridges and distributes and physically connects the many houses in filaments and small groups (Figures 7 and 8).



Figure 7. Section of Contrada Forola hillside. (Source: Sara Cipolletti, 2024).



Figure 8. Landscape relations of farmhouses in Contrada Forola. (Source: Sara Cipolletti, 2022).

Along the ridges, the exposure of the farmhouses coincides with the main elevation in the southeast direction [14,15]. In this way the structure, along its entire length benefits from the sunlight and the sea breeze, conditions typical of the Mediterranean climate, gradually becoming milder toward the coast. The façade with the best exposition generally coincides with the access to the farmhouse and is the most representative of the buildings.

3.2. Architectural Characters and the Scale Motif

The rectangular layout of the plant, divided into two floors with an external staircase, is always respected. The dwelling and all workspaces were contained in the same construction; the stable, the cellar, and the farm equipment storage rooms well were all found on the ground floor for maximum efficiency and accessibility to the cultivated terrain. The central kitchen with a large fireplace and the bedrooms were located on the first floor to be isolated from the damp ground while benefiting from the added warmth of animals in the stable below.

The iconic element of the external staircase, which connects the two levels, was always built juxtaposed to the farmhouse longitudinally and never orthogonally, with a covered loggia and presents obvious variations and differences in the position of this architectural element, although it is often on the longer side of the farmhouse rather than on the gabled, short side [14]. The motif resides in the relationship respecting the cardinal points and the open space of the farmyard, so the stairway, and the longitudinal façade, which, address in fact the social and workspaces, was the meeting places for the farmers and the members of the family.

Within the Contrada Forola, in one case, the loggia is absent, in another, the ascending element is found, rather exceptionally, within the perimeter of the volume, circumscribed by the facing wall, while the largest farmhouse, with the most dominant and central position, has two staircases, present on both the long and short façade [24]. This very special condition still anticipates building alterations (Figure 9).

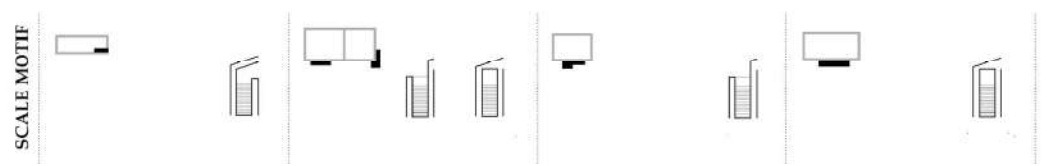


Figure 9. The staircase variations in Contrada Forola: internal, two in same building, external open, external close with loggia. (Source: [15]).

The dynamics of adaptation to changes in the workforce and the socio-economic needs of the agricultural family have imposed transformations and greater complexity on this artifact; an extension widens the rectangular perimeter of the volume to create the space necessary for the inclusion of a second agricultural family. The division into two residential units is evident, each of which is served by its own external access staircase, producing a variation of the recurring motif of a staircase located along the same building (Figure 10).



Figure 10. The presence of two staircases in the same building, Contrada Forola. (Source: Sara Cipolletti, Alessia Guaiani, 2020).

It is not possible to define distinctions in the staircase element in either the higher hilly regions or those nearer the sea; differences are found in the same buildings, within the Contrada Forola and in the entire hilly territory. Later variations, which have been detected, originated from round arched, segmented, or rectangular openings of the covered loggia, but it is the presence of an oven under the staircase in front of the entrance to the stable that characterizes some districts from others. This derives from the existence of microeconomics and particular crops, such as hemp, which necessitated specific treatments (Figure 11).

Furthermore, farming and crops generated characteristic brickwork, which fostered simple decorative motifs elicited by their different dispositions (Figures 12 and 13). In some districts the ventilation windows of haylofts or barns have vertical brickwork, while in others pigeon or dove breeding structures are recognizable by brickwork with small, altering peep holes for the birds to access or rest in the form of small rosettes or ledges, both elements that were adopted even in the most modest of structures, derivatives of precedent, and more costly rural tower-houses.



Figure 11. Variations of the external staircase in the hilly territory of Tronto and Tesino Valleys. (Source: [14]).



Figure 12. Characteristic brickwork in the hilly territory of Tronto and Tesino Valleys. (Source: [14]).



Figure 13. Characteristic brickwork in the hilly territory of Tronto and Tesino Valleys. (Source: [15]).

3.3. Building Transformations

The farmhouses always have an elongated, rectangular shape, with a succession of juxtaposed rooms organized on two levels and protected under one gable-pitched roof. The size of the rectangular plan in Contrada Forola is between 7/12 m wide and 10/25 m long; these measures provide a reference for interpreting other cases. Obviously, the largest farmhouse (12 × 25 m) still coincides with the most dominant and ancient building and the most composite in transformation and scale motif.

In observing the buildings, the construction of modest architectural elements was preceded by simple volumetric built-on additions where the new elements would have been added onto the minimal unit of the main rectangular structure with the external staircase found along the wall (Figure 14). In some cases, the built-on bodies are small annexes, such as a stall or an oven. On the other hand, there are more complex situations where

the pre-existing building has been maintained and amplified in equal volumetric form and dimension. These circumstances are extensions, which are downright duplications reinforcing the length of the rectangular buildings and the length of the façades, as was the case with Contrada Forola. The effects of time and the dilapidated state exult the disconnect of the added structures and additions or the annexes, the traces of which are found on the brick walls.

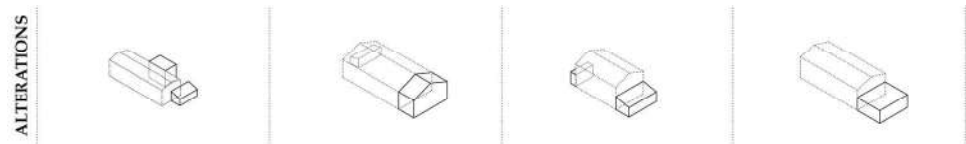


Figure 14. Building transformations in Contrada Forola. (Source: [15]).

The alteration of the original volume over the years has produced suggestive and entirely spontaneous rhythms in the openings, which are of great aesthetic value and appealing to contemporary perception (Figure 15). Rectangular windows alternate with recognizable elements in straight brickwork or carefully handled arched or more essential square openings next to small holes. Within the territory, in only a few cases are the built-on elements of a façade, where the orientation is different from the original one, clearly discernible in the pattern of the openings and altering the relation to the road and the view of the landscape. Dependent upon the necessity, generally dictated by the work conditions and number of inhabitants, the farmhouse is a highly adaptable construction [14]. It is possible to find this result in other case studies spread throughout the territory.



Figure 15. Building addition in the Tronto valley. (Source: Sara Cipolletti, 2022).

4. Conclusions

The study of the rural farmhouse in the mid-Adriatic area and in the Contrada Forola confirms how profound the ties between Earth and man, who works the land, were.

The need to link utilities in a territorial system and control the lands whilst retaining a visual relationship between crops and farmhouse, the admixture of production and living functions, together with the necessity to adapt to the scarce local resources available for construction were all factors which lead to the development of the cultural landscape and the diversification of the building schemes. While being a simple project, the planning and architectural choices were linear and logical, contributing to render the rural farmhouse as honest architecture nearer to contemporary taste in its relationship between utility, technology, form, and aesthetics, as asserted by Pagano and Daniel in their research [1].

However, in relation to the landscape and open space, the farmhouse acquires an additional quality: it is a wise construction that gives a new interpretation to rural architecture because it admits the importance of the landscape process in the interpretation of territory.

Situating a farmhouse in the complex hill system means gradually occupying and domesticating the land [15]. The topographical datum of the reliefs was interpreted and the settlement foundation of the farmhouse 'at the center of the farm on a mound, from which the view can sweep to the surroundings and to the barn' [12] (p. 601) was established. Choosing the location in a specific spatial context represents a tool for knowing places and prefiguring new relational systems since it means finding the right place in the space and in the system of conditions [29] that farms wanted to recognize and strengthen through the architectural project [15] (p. 132). We read in the studies of Anselmi and Volpe that the house assumes and always preserves a privileged position 'so that from its windows, almost with a single glance one can see everything that happens on the lands pertaining to them' [20] (p. 54). It was good practice for the sharecropper during copious downpours to first visually inspect the state of the ditches and drains, and then physically control the cultivations and possibly remedy the preservation of the drainage system and soils.

The simple action of linking farmhouses with a path is elemental but effective. It was a way to hold together and build the network; a highly modern spatial figure that neglects no point, spreading widely and evenly. The farmhouse shows great potential when it is set in a hilly environment, affecting different scales of the project.

The possibility to study the numerous farms left in ruins in view of their volumetric composition and subsequent modifications is extremely interesting and innovative. The transformation, the amplifications, and the additions on farmhouses demonstrate important ulterior suggestions on how to comprehend the vernacular heritage. The variations made, in fact, do not immediately or totally cancel the preceding phases. These transformations are still internal to the culture of the earth and to the life of the peasant family, so the farmhouse is a living body that is modified or modifies itself, growing with the support of parasites, in juxtaposition with the main body [14]. These are 'additionings' from which we may intuit that, by grafting, amplification, extension, and doubling, a dialogue can be opened between new intervention and ruins.

The possibility to work in juxtaposition with the ruin volume of the farmhouse using contemporary materials is suited to creating new possibilities in how to look at and experience vernacular rural architecture that permits the exaltation of the abstract and primitive forms of the ruins rather than a mere restoration or total recuperation project, which would only annihilate both the human presence and effects of time on these artifacts.

We can conclude that admitting into the study of the vernacular architecture the relationships with the landscape and open space, and the transformations of the artifacts, expansions, and added volumes broadens the knowledge of these architectures compared to the research conducted so far, which primarily emphasized the building and architectural features, the essential and primitive forms, the materials, and the distinctive theme of the external staircase.

The criteria of taxonomic groups, both by physical and visual connections or by differences, can determine the construction of possible discovery itineraries in the hilly landscape. A new knowledge that necessitates a renewal in the research tools, such as photography, which in Pagano's investigation was focused exclusively on the artifact, made with very close-up shots.

The research on vernacular heritage enriches the scientific debate on various aspects, as examined in the introduction: learn lessons from minor and anonymous architecture; consolidate study on the shape of the territory and the cultural landscape process; and valorize the vernacular buildings as well as transforming it with a much deeper knowledge of the heritage. The cultural value of the landscape through the observation of rural houses is a way to learn local conditions relating them to global problems in rural territories.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: The raw data of this article will be made available by the author on request.

Acknowledgments: The start-up ‘Mezzadria Stories. An oral History’ project was edited by Gianluca Vagnarelli, and won an award in 2018 from the Italian Ministry of Culture, patrimony and Tourism. ‘Rural Estudio’ is research program for the main characters and issues that connote rural spaces today, created in 2018 by the School of Architecture ‘E. Vittoria’, University of Camerino in collaboration with other international architecture schools. ‘Wine guest houses. Contrada Forola’, graduate architecture design laboratory, School of Architecture ‘E. Vittoria’, University of Camerino, coordinator Luigi Coccia, Sara Cipolletti, with Marco Borgioni, Maria Chiara D’Onghia, Marica Giommarini, Alessia Guaiani, Marta Ortolani, academic year 2019–2020. ‘Rural Architecture: the memory of the country’, National Study Day, May 2021, ICOMOS Italy Scientific Committee Vernacular Architecture. The talk given by Sara Cipolletti and Alessia Guaiani: Ruins of vernacular architecture in the Middle Adriatic. Landscape relations and architectural characters of farmhouses. The international seminar, ‘The Italian agrarian landscape. Sixty years of change from Emilio Sereni to the present’. The talk given by Sara Cipolletti and Alessia Guaiani: Transformations of the Middle Adriatic Sharecropping Rural Landscape at the Alcide Cervi Institute, Emilio Sereni Archive Library, 11–13 November 2021. The International Conference ‘Vernacular Heritage: culture, people and sustainability a HERITAGE 2022: VERSUS + people’, 15–16–17 September 2022, University of Valencia, talk given by Sara Cipolletti: A taxonomy of the rural heritage in the mid-Adriatic. Landscape relations and architectural characteristics of the farmhouses.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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