

Stables and barns: Challenges and opportunities of re-using obsolete farm buildings in Grisons

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The cultural landscapes of Grisons are characterized by their diversity and their small-scale structures (Figure). The locally grown knowledge has been developed over generations and can be reconstructed in the landscape. Traditional mountain farming has produced a variety of farming methods and buildings. These buildings fascinate by their simplicity and their vernacular construction and design. In their basic form as cuboids with a gabled roof, the old stables belong to the constants of human construction. They store, in addition to livestock and fodder, locally grown knowledge about cultural-historical building material and construction methods (Huber, 2006). Since the middle of last century agriculture has changed fundamentally due to industrialization and the related technical achievements. The centralization of farms and the increase of mobility were drivers for the structural change. Many of the traditional farm buildings are no longer needed for agricultural purposes (Bösch, 1992). While in other sectors obsolete buildings are simply demolished, in the case of old stables, even the natural decay is met with great rejection by the local society (Capaul, 2019). This is primarily due to the fact that traditional farm buildings are perceived as identity-forming and landscape-shaping elements (Kianicka, Knab, & Buchecker, 2010). In contrast to purely economic buildings, farm buildings in which residential use has been proven can be converted into holiday homes. The proof is given by a fireplace in the building. There are many exceptions within the framework of spatial planning regulations: if a purely economic building is located in a so called «conservation zone» or under protection, it can still be reused for residential purposes (KRG, 2004). This leads to profound changes in the surroundings of the building and the landscape. The current practice is diametrically opposed to the spatial planning principle of separation building zones from non-building zones. The preservation of stables and barns leads often to a paradox. The protection of the building goes hand in hand with the conversion into private holiday homes and a beautification-process. The cultural researcher Diego Giovanoli describes the current landscapes in Grisons as «recreational collages of historical shells and macroeconomic facts of the Alpine region» (2003).

References

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The upper part of the image shows a cultural landscape in the region of Hinterrhein in the Swiss Alps. The old stables are not used for their original purpose but are not yet converted into holiday homes. The lower part shows a traditional purely economic farm building, which is currently used as decentralized storage space.