

Typology of Losses

Adaptive Reuse Strategies

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Abstract

This paper explores the reinterpretation and regeneration of places in the South Moravian borderlands that have lost their original function and meaning due to historical disruptions. Conducted within the NAKI¹ project, the research focuses on identifying and interpreting the region's Baroque cultural landscape and proposes a methodological framework based on adaptive reuse and the concept of place attachment. At the core of this framework is the Typology of Losses which defines five forms of disrupted relationships between people and place: loss of form, loss of meaning, loss of home, loss of spirituality, and loss of life. Each category reflects a distinct historical or socio-political breakdown and suggests a corresponding strategy for renewal. The framework is applied through five architectural case studies (one realized) developed by students of the Faculty of Architecture at Brno University of Technology. These projects range from small-scale interventions to complex scenarios of transitional urbanism and temporary use, emphasizing sustainable, context-sensitive solutions that aim to reconnect communities with their lost environments.

Keywords: Borderland Heritage, Sustainable Regeneration, Place Attachment

Introduction

Historically, the South Moravian borderlands were defined by a culturally rich and diverse landscape integrating agricultural holdings, industrial structures, and religious architecture. After World War II and imposition of the Iron Curtain within the territory during the early 1950s, many original settlements were systematically depopulated or demolished, giving way to border defense zones. This transformation caused a profound rupture in the continuity of human habitation and landscape development, resulting in the collapse of long-standing socio-economic and cultural relationships many of which remain unresolved even decades after the fall of the communist regime. Numerous abandoned and heritage-protected structures persist across the region, posing significant challenges for local communities. Our team, as part of the NAKI project, spent four years exploring the areas of Mikulov, Jaroslavice and Znojmo; three regions with landscapes that still display traces of lost human presence. From the outset, our attention was drawn to sites we identified as *places without memory*, i.e., locations that once served as meaningful and purposeful settings for dwelling and sacred rites but have since faded into historic obscurity and neglect. Although the physical objects may have disappeared, the imprint of the landscape survives in the collective human consciousness. Such residual marks, scars etched

into the spatial framework, continue to be legible and invite renewed interpretation. This research explores how architectural and spatial design approaches can engage with such landscapes to reestablish severed connections, and propose sustainable and resilient models of revitalization utilizing principles of adaptive reuse. Developed via a multi-case study methodology, the *Typology of Losses* offers a dual function: a conceptual approach and a practical tool for guiding these explorations.

Searching for a Theory of Landscape

The aim of this work was to renew the relationship between people and place within the historically rich South Moravian borderlands. This required uncovering the landscape's inherent qualities, reinterpreting its meaning, and questioning its past and present roles in human life. If architecture is understood as the formal articulation of a place's meaning, it must engage with archetypal forms, i.e., forms that imply specific patterns of human behavior, and understanding of the significance of places, both inhabited and abandoned. Our exploration of the South Moravian borderlands deliberately departed from conventional urban paradigms, as it soon became increasingly apparent that functionalist planning models fail to capture the complex spatial and relational networks of this region. Instead, Kevin Lynch's concept of legibility of place defined by elements such as paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks offered a more fitting model (Lynch 1960, 2-14). When humans enter a landscape, an undifferentiated geographic space becomes a place. Through naming and recognition, individuals establish a relationship with it, perceiving it as distinct from its surroundings. Some places have deeper significance for individuals or communities, creating a heightened experience, forming what can be described as a *sense of place*. The narrative of the South Moravian border landscape, presented in *Landscape as a Cultural Work* (Svoboda et al. 2016), unfolds through three spatial forms - area, line, and point - tracing the evolution of human experience and meaning. This raises the question of forms that predispose human behavior. Unlike Lynch's urban context characterized by relatively healthy and functional relationships between city and user, the borderlands show that architecture alone cannot sustain a living place. Rather than formal abstraction alone, ideal architecture may draw on principles of nature, as seen in SANAA's *architectural topology*. Juan Antonio Cortés describes Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa's pursuit of spatial compositions in which boundaries and enclosures actively condition the relationships between architectural objects and their surroundings (Cortés 2008, 33-57). These concepts ultimately converge in the notion of *place typology* (Kohout 2014, 68-75), understood as a systematisation of recurring spatial situations, defined by the relationships between form, scale, use and context, through which experiential and cultural meanings may emerge. In the case of the South Moravian borderlands, it was also essential to consider the mental and emotional bonds whose faint traces are embedded within the landscape. Although one might argue that what remains has lost its significance for the present generation, these extinguished territories are often intuitively safeguarded and often become subjects of landscape or heritage protection. This raises a critical question: can such lost connections be understood as the invisible components of architecture itself?

Methodology

Within the NAKI project, annual student workshops were held on-site, supported by

heritage specialists who provided historical context. Students were expected to define both the theme and scale of their design proposals based on this input and their own on-site observations. However, the first year revealed a gap: while students could articulate *what* they wanted to address, they struggled to explain *why*. This highlighted the need for a broader theoretical foundation beyond conventional urbanist paradigms. Most students intuitively chose abandoned sites marked by turbulent histories and severely degraded architecture, reinforcing the relevance of focusing on such environments. Over time, this led to a formulation of a concept of *places without memory*, shifting project objectives from mere formal preservation of the site toward remembrance, revitalization, finding new meaning and the reintroduction of human presence according to the principles of adaptive reuse. Our research then focused on defining a methodology for approaching renewal of *places without memory* through an exploratory multiple-case study using *research by design* methodology (Cavallo 2009, 779-788). Subsequent workshops assigned sites exemplifying characteristics of *places without memory*, requiring students to analyze, engage experientially, and define new meanings expressed through architectural proposals. Project scales varied from urban interventions to small works bordering on land art. Each assignment began with an ideational framework emphasizing spatial qualities of the area perceived as three-dimensional landscape networks, supported by architectural theory described above. Identifying functional and emotional bonds to the site and methods for uncovering them was left to students. Twelve diverse case studies were conducted in total. Field visits revealed that absence often matters more than what remains. Analysis showed the most significant factor was the presence or absence of inhabitants' bonds to a given place, which became the defining criterion for *places without memory*. To address this, we examined these bonds and aligned our approach with the environmental psychology concept of *place attachment*, adapting it to an architectural perspective.

Place Attachment

According to Niesner, the roots of this theoretical framework in developmental psychoanalysis and environmental psychology date back to the 1970s, when researchers extended the concept of primary attachment to include attachments between people and places - a phenomenon now widely known as *place attachment* (Niesner 2014, 21-29). In its contemporary interpretation, *place attachment* is a multidimensional concept involving the individual, the psychological processes at play, and the place itself. It encompasses affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions, reflecting the dynamic interaction between people and their environments. This *place attachment* is further shaped by social relationships - whether individual, communal, or cultural - and by temporal aspects, perceived as both linear and cyclical (Scannell, Gifford 2010, 1-10).

Typology of Losses

Within our research and architectural practice, we focused on the theme of loss or disruption of bonds to a place, aiming to identify their types and explore strategies for restoring these severed connections. This process required understanding how previous relationships and the place itself once functioned. We took into account both the meaning and the nature of the new bond, as well as the possible scenarios for its further functioning over time. Naturally, their exact replication was often impossible; nevertheless, new architectural



Fig. 1. Slup Tensegrity Footbridge (Petra Buganská, 2015)

interventions frequently engage with the original meaning or symbolism of the site, either directly or indirectly through spatial or material interpretation. Our selection presents five cases exemplifying different forms of lost connections.

Loss of Form / The Bridge near Slup

The ford between Slup and Valtrovice remains in use today, primarily for kayaking and tourists. Historically, a bridge stood here until it was destroyed by a flood in 1853, leaving visible traces such as the embankment on the left bank. The students' task was to design a bridge or footbridge reconnecting both banks while preserving the site's natural character and accommodating seasonal water-level fluctuations during spring floods.

Definition of the Loss of Form: A place may lose its (architectural) form through either a natural disaster or human intervention, yet its meaning and function often remain at least partially intact. In such cases, only certain bonds to the place are disrupted, while others endure, making this the simplest scenario for architectural restoration. **Project:** To address the *loss of form*, we selected the design proposal by Petra Buganská. Her intention was to reconnect the two riverbanks physically. Given the natural character of the site, she opted for a tensegrity structural system rather than reconstructing the original robust bridge. This approach significantly lightened the construction and gave it a delicate, almost organic appearance harmonizing with the riverside vegetation along the unregulated stream.

Proposed Therapy: Identifying existing bonds, enhancing them through additional functions, and designing of a form that respects the anticipated use, meaning, and character of the place.

Loss of Meaning / The Tasovice Mill

The loss of meaning often results from a moral obsolescence of a building or, as in the South Moravian borderlands, the displacement of its original population. The loss of meaning is often accompanied by the loss of form. In the case of the Tasovice mill, its original function has vanished. For such a large complex, the most viable approach is a strategy of temporary use, testing potential functions and gradually working toward a permanent solution.

Definition of the Loss of Meaning: A place loses its meaning either through moral or cultural obsolescence or, in borderland regions, due to the displacement of its original population. This loss of meaning is often accompanied by the gradual degradation of its physical form. **Project:** The project by Martin Surovec aims to restore meaning to the

place by enhancing its appeal to both locals and visitors. Rather than imposing a single fixed solution, Surovec introduces a strategy of functional variability through a “testing phase”. Simple, flexible structures are used to verify the viability of the intended uses and explore potential emotional bonds between contemporary inhabitants and the site. From this process, a stable combination of functions can emerge. For the initial stage, the author proposes accommodation, dining facilities, and a cultural venue - choices that are simple, feasible, and aligned with the envisioned purpose of the mill. **Proposed Therapy:** Based on an analysis of existing functions or those absent, new *attractors* are introduced into the deprived site: additional functions supported by a new, initially provisional, architectural form. Another strategy is to relocate nearby functions from unsuitable spaces and to concentrate them within the “healing” site itself.

Loss of Home / Ječmeniště

Ječmeniště, a village founded in 1787, was evacuated in the spring of 1952, subsequently incorporated into the border zone, and ultimately razed to the ground. Today, its sole surviving trace is the original chapel, now a protected heritage site, though neglected and unused. In situations where the original population has been displaced, the sense of belonging breaks down. Over time, newcomers gradually develop their own relationship to the site, albeit in a different manner. As part of a case study, students were tasked with proposing strategies to revive or commemorate the sense of place attachment.

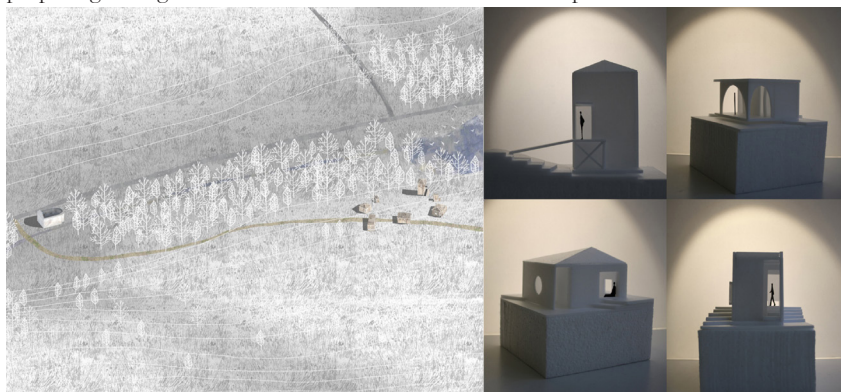


Fig. 2. Ječmeniště - Continuity without Distance? (Tereza Novotná, 2014)

Definition of the Loss of Home: For local communities, the loss of a home or familiar place often manifests as a disruption of the emotional bonds associated with a sense of rootedness. With the disappearance of regular rituals associated with dwelling, the site ceases to function as a locus of shared practice, and the territorial behaviors of its inhabitants gradually fade. **Project:** The project by Tereza Novotná, Ječmeniště... continuity without distance?, redefines the residential function of the site by introducing a new typology – a “mini-hotel” derived directly from the character of the place. On the formal village green, Novotná positions a cluster of six rentable “rooms” designed for individuals or couples seeking solitude and immersion in the landscape. Each structure evokes archetypal domestic layouts - living room, study, bedroom, bathroom, observatory, kitchen with dining

area – while a garden occupies the preserved space of the original chapel. Guests inhabit not only the rooms but also the surrounding landscape, which functions as both “corridor and courtyard.” Rather than replicating the original form, the new architecture becomes an autonomous spatial framework, enabling a renewed experience of dwelling in Ječmenišť.

Therapy: In the short term, reintroducing a spatial form that emphasizes the site’s intrinsic qualities can encourage longer stays by locals and visitors. In the long term, simply restoring the locality to the awareness of its inhabitants constitutes success. Over time, this renewed awareness may foster deeper interest in reintegrating the place into the community’s sense of territory.

Loss of Spirituality / Liščí kopec

The imposition of communist ideology led to a widespread departure from traditional religious practices, resulting in the abandonment of numerous sacred sites. This shift particularly affected chapels and small elements of sacred architecture. This phenomenon has been addressed through a student project, later realized with the support of a grant. The initiative focuses on a site where a 19th century chapel dedicated to Saint Roch once stood. Its original architectural form has not survived; today, its presence is signified solely by the remnants of a cross.



Fig. 3. Chapel Along the Way, Project and Aerial View (Vojtěch Kolář, Jan Foretník), 2016

Definition of the Loss of Spirituality: The spiritual significance of a site often diminishes alongside the disappearance of the religious rituals once practiced there. Sacred architecture, which served as the formal framework for these activities, is abandoned and left to deteriorate. In certain cases, such structures are deliberately demolished as a consequence of political decisions. **Project:** The project *The Chapel Along the Way* by Vojtěch Kolář engages with the historical memory of the Chapel of St. Roch on Liščí kopec through a symbolic rather than literal interpretation. Along the historic path to the hilltop, the author introduces five symbolic elements evoking the furnishings of the former chapel: a stairway (entry), a bench (rest and prayer), an ambo (a podium for dialogue with the landscape), and a kneeler (for personal reflection beneath the cross). These archetypal forms, crafted from limestone blocks, recall the tradition of small-scale sacred architecture, e.g., roadside shrines, devotional crosses, and chapels, scattered along pilgrimage routes. The composition culminates in the fifth and final element: a restored cross re-erected near its original stone base. **Proposed Therapy:** The initial step in revitalizing such a place is

to re-establish its meaning, embracing not only its spiritual essence but also its cultural and historical significance. Should the location be intended for renewed spiritual practice, its architectural expression should accommodate a broader spectrum of contemporary spiritual concepts. A sustainable approach involves assigning the space a new function that, while not exclusively religious, still evokes a sense of spirituality.

Loss of Life / Annahof

On the edge of the South Moravian borderlands located just meters from the Czech-Austrian border lies the vanished manor farm of Annahof (also known as Anenský dvůr). Once a thriving agricultural estate, it functioned until the 1950s, when border postwar closures and depopulation stripped it of its purpose. Its buildings fell into disrepair, and nature reclaimed the site. Today, Annahof persists as a silent fragment of the past. Among all the sites examined, only Annahof presented an extreme case of such complete abandonment.

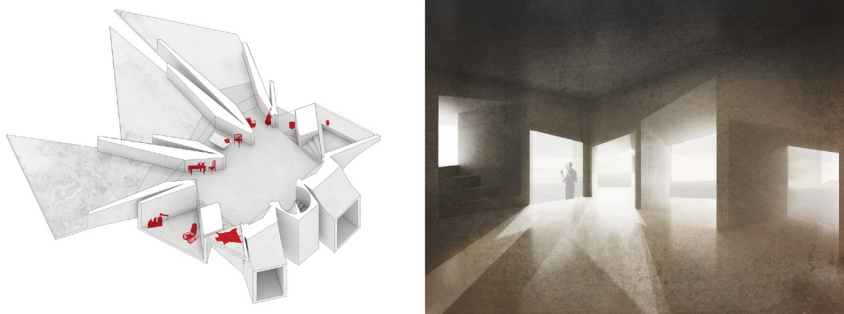


Fig. 4. Absolute Absence (Norbert Obršál, 2015)

Definition of the Loss of Life: A place loses all meaning and form. It becomes a wasteland (Shepherd 2016, 25). **Project:** The project *Absolute Absence* by Norbert Obršál reflects the authors's critique of today's over-technologized world, starting from the premise that modern society is "socially and professionally dependent on the internet" and that „being offline has become a new form of luxury". Obršál identified the abandoned complex as an ideal setting for this exploration. The spatial configuration of the estate becomes a literal manifestation of this notion of luxury: a rediscovered Eden with a small orchard, a well, and a central dwelling tower. Temporary tenants live entirely detached from technology, their ritualized daily rhythm is guided solely by the movement of the sun. **Therapy:** Introducing a new function while simultaneously recalling the original meaning of the site represents a key design strategy. In certain cases, the isolation of the place may itself constitute a new quality. Where no viable function can be identified, or where its reintegration into the site proves impossible, one may even consider an extreme architectural approach: a deliberate, designed disappearance.

Conclusion

The possibilities outlined here emerge from the cases studied and are not exhaustive. Nevertheless, given the scope and duration of the research, certain generalizations can be drawn, at least for the region under investigation. Ideally, our conclusions should be

validated through practical implementation. To date, the only realized project is *The Chapel Along the Way*³. Its execution was challenging, as the site lies within a protected nature reserve. Thanks to the support and enthusiasm of a local conservation officer, we obtained building permission and a consent to plan the restoration of the original orchard. Initially intended for tourists, the site unexpectedly became a venue for weddings. The project remains active and continues to evolve: the temporary wooden cross was removed, and we are preparing to restore the original cross, now listed as a cultural monument – an outcome made possible through the NAKI project. Today, the initiative is attracting renewed public attention as part of the program *In the Middle of the Edge*⁴ which focuses on the Sudetenland. We believe that a deliberate engagement with bonds to place is a critical tool in addressing architectural challenges associated with the renewal of deprived sites. Recognizing and understanding the loss of these bonds, and subsequently attempting to restore them or establish new ones holds the potential to generate viable and meaningful outcomes.

Notes

1. NAKI (DF13P01OVV019, 2013–2016); principal investigators: National Heritage Institute, Regional Expert Workplace in Brno, Faculty of Architecture, Brno University of Technology, Faculty of Philosophy, Masaryk University; in collaboration with the Regional Museum in Mikulov;
2. The theory of Yi-Fu Tuan mentioned by Jaroslav Vávra in the article *The Individual and Place, the Individual in Place, the Individual through Place*, *Geografie*, No. 4, Vol. 115, 2010, p. 464.
3. Vojtěch Kolář, Barbora Ponešová (Krejčová), Jan Foretník, *Chapel Along the Way*, realization, output of the NAKI project DF13P01OVV019, Dolní Dunajovice, September 2016.
4. *In the Middle of the Edge (Mitten am Rande)* is series of books published by Antikomplex Foundation dealing with former German regions of Czechia, see more at <https://antikomplex.cz/de/bucher/>

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