

Rural houses of Italian immigration in Southern Brazil: cultural valorisation and preservation at risk

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Abstract

From 1875 onwards, Italian immigrants occupy a large area in the Rio Grande do Sul State in southern Brazil producing deep changes in the territory, whose structural features still can be observed nowadays. This paper aims at examining the rural houses produced by the Italian immigrants from the point of view of the relationships between the houses built in Brazil and those from Veneto and Trentino Alto-Adige regions in Italy, where most of the first immigrants came from and the role of these houses today. Through a comparative analysis using space syntax methodology (Hillier, B. & Hanson, J., 1984; Hanson, J., 1998) it is observed how Italian immigrants reproduce or innovate in Brazil the structure of the houses they used to live in Italy as well as the relationships between spatial and social organizations. As witness of an important part of the recent history of Brazil and, specially, of a social group, the rural architecture of the Italian immigration was able to produce cultural distinctions and values that justify its preservation as a document of this historical process. Changes introduced in the last decades in family structures and in rural production in this area, in the one hand, are responsible for the valorisation of the Italian colony, particularly the vines tradition and, on the other hand, old houses are at risk, because of their modernisation, abandon or demolition to build new houses. As a result, the area occupied by Italian immigrants in Southern Brazil faces an ambiguous process: the same aspects that are responsible for cultural, historical and special values are responsible for the exploitation and destruction of these cultural roots. The description of this process and the need of strategies and policies able to protect this cultural heritage will be central in this paper.

