

Crossing Cultures

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ABSTRACT The title suggests journeys and mixing of cultures. The project brings depopulated Italian villages in close proximity with a growing need to integrate refugees arriving on its southern coast. This is an on-going research project based in the small abandoned mountain village Belmonte Calabro in Southern Italy, which started in summer 2016. The region is currently a frontier for migrants and refugees from West Africa, attempting to gain access to Europe, as well as a frontier for Italians, attempting to sustain their towns against the magnetic influence of the growing cities. The project focuses on the development of public spaces and buildings which can enrich the everyday life of the town, steered through consultations with key players which include refugees and inhabitants. These dialogues address the challenging aspects of Belmonte's future - currently a derelict town at the fulcrum of migration from the southern hemisphere. The problematic, but potentially fortunate coincidence of these two is the need to settle and (re)build local communities, which is fuelling the subject of inter-disciplinary cultural integration in a wider sense. The project was developed after a student led summer workshop, which casts its nets wider than the academic studio: This brought various government stakeholders in holistic dialogue with Cass students and tutors, seeing this collaboration as an innovative contribution to the ontology of practice. Our working method has involved discussions with refugees, town inhabitants, school children, local and regional government, asking how this inevitable crossing of cultures - induced by global politics - can continue to create the richness of architectural setting already enjoyed as part of Italian culture and at the same time develop the skills that empower both, brief encounters and settled stays. Resulting from investigative workshops earlier in the year, the projects developed during the past academic session have been speculative. This paper highlights participatory events based on our previous speculations, organised by *La Rivoluzione di Seppie'* - an active ensemble interested in exploring the boundaries of practice and education. Our endeavour is to surface Belmonte's cultural memory through participatory practices and to re-imagine the village's identity. Our interests have therefore explored both, theories on cultural memory and on participatory systems of governance. It is worth noting that the Calabrian virtue fortunately is hospitality, and as such Crossing Cultures have been practiced in their cuisine, customs and architectures for centuries. As a result, our group of architecture tutors and students have sensed little estrangement as curiously we are but another foreigner engaged in dialogue along a border of history, culture and human finitude.

KEYWORDS crossing of cultures, abandoned village, ontology of practice, contemporary migration, foreigner, cultural memory

Introduction

The live project *Crossing Cultures*, based at The Cass, explores a new form of architecture design practice, bridging boundaries between academia and professional practice. The work is developed within the architecture studio, but takes students beyond the conventional studio

space. Undergraduate and postgraduate students, recent graduates, tutors, and different stakeholders outside of the university are in dialogue with each other, jointly involved in developing the architecture project.

While the overall project evolves beyond one academic year and stakeholders might shift,

our students and graduates continue showing commitment often enabling easy transition into entrepreneurial practice. Students are encouraged to rethink the traditional role of the architect as a service provider, develop new initiatives which can offer future employment, and contribute to the innovation of current culture in architecture.

It is an important methodology of *Crossing Cultures*, which opposes more established architecture education, that architects and students become community collaborators over a long period of time, relatively free from the academic calendar. The unrestricted engagement with a place and community allows trust to be built up and encourages an experimental approach to projects, especially in the challenging socio-geographical contexts, we work. This participatory working method develops a presence in the place and establishes new networks amongst the communities we work in, all required to make comprehensive and often radical changes within challenging places, which include physical as well as social engagements. In return, our presence in this context empowers local communities and gives the university a presence outside of academia.

Sited in Southern Italy, the project attempts to develop a cross cultural identity through participation. Initiated, organised and publicised by a group of students who formed *La Rivoluzione delle Seppie* (RdS) - an active ensemble interested in exploring the boundaries of practice and education - we, their tutors, were invited to participate and give direction to the questions they were asking. The title *Crossing Cultures* suggests journeys and mixing of cultures to develop architecture and urban proposals for Belmonte Calabro, an abandoned mountain village in Calabria. The project started in Summer 2016. Currently running in its second year, it has already created a growing network of local people and other stakeholders involved.

Crossing Cultures has already established an overtly participatory engagement with the subject for our students, as well as integrating “our clients” in this engagement. The client in Belmonte is not a singular commissioner like in a traditional client/architect relationship, but

our client body is made up of a network of partnerships between local community members, local stakeholders, our students and the tutors. Here, the architect is not a service provider - an “agent operating for”, but becomes a collaborator and partner - an “agent operating with”ⁱⁱ. Clients become integrated as co-learners and co-creators of the projects, but for us most importantly, they also become co-educators to our students and contribute to the overall learning experience.

This collaborative architecture practice is well placed within the university context, offering students the experience of working on real issues for real clients within their studies, whilst enabling an experimental and inquisitive approach to architecture. We have found that our students develop new and unforeseen solutions while working in this unconstrained and open-ended manner, which is opposed to an architect who is a service provider “by appointment” and with limited time resource.

The project in Belmonte focuses on issues, which bring the depopulation of the village in close proximity with a growing need to integrate refugees arriving on Italy’s southern coast. The region is currently a frontier for Italians, attempting to sustain their towns against the magnetic influence of the growing cities, and for migrants and refugees from West Africa, attempting to gain access to Europe. As Belmonte empties, its history also fades, leaving only traces of its cultural memoryⁱⁱⁱ in its fabric; architecture, squares, domestic bricolage, food, stories and music. On the other hand, the migrants and refugees, mostly young men, bring only things they can carry, so memories are embedded in their belongings, their music, food and customs, as the only precious remains of their cultural identity.

The interest in the site is on one hand our attempt to influence politics and the geography and region of Belmonte to become a larger vision of European integration. On the other hand, it is our very specific interest in Belmonte’s spatiality: It seems, the town was built without any concept of privacy, and its medieval architecture creates true civic-ness through the promotion of human interaction and spatial closeness. Steered through

consultations with key players, including residents, politicians, agriculturists and refugees, the project develops public spaces and buildings which can enrich the everyday life of the town and create a larger scale strategy for the area.

A student-led summer workshop took place in Belmonte in 2016, outside of the academic year. This brought various local stakeholders in holistic dialogue with students and tutors from The Cass and initiated the projects, developed during the following academic year: undergraduate and postgraduate students made diverse proposals for Belmonte, ranging from real events, for instance a group of undergraduate students bringing local school children into the abandoned town centre and turning it into a place of memorable play and activity, to postgraduate students developing urban and architectural strategies to strengthen Belmonte's identity. A second summer workshop took place in July 2017 in order to test the students' proposals through 1:1 making workshops and a series of events with local stakeholders. In addition, we held interviews with local and regional specialists to draw upon external and local knowledge (refer to interview extracts in main part of this paper).

The events organised had immediate impact on the locals' use and perception of the old town spaces. As a result, and proving the effectiveness of the events, new opportunities have developed, such as formalising a Memorandum of Understanding with the Municipality of Belmonte to provide a physical base in Belmonte's old town for our students and staff to return to for research. In November 2017, we will be returning to Belmonte with undergraduate and postgraduate students to advance existing projects and propose new ones, focusing on the development of public spaces with the aim to (re)build local communities and fuel the subject of inter-disciplinary cultural integration in a wider sense. We will set up a research "lab" with a public interface in the old town to become a base for collaborative work and to develop projects which are physical, social and sustainable and reflect a vision for the town's future. Involving local communities and practical knowledge into research with local expertise and specialist knowledge from

academia, we want to bring vacant sites imaginatively to life, while demonstrating innovative potential uses through organising events and happenings, and continuing engagement with the local communities.

The Calabrian virtue fortunately is hospitality, and as such *Crossing Cultures* have been practiced in South Italy's customs, cuisine and architectures for centuries. This is also the ground for students and tutors becoming collaborators and proposals being presented as "gifts" to local communities, instead of being considered as "a service". As a result, our group of architecture tutors and students have sensed little estrangement, as curiously we are but another foreigner engaged in dialogue along a border of history, culture and human finitude.

As practitioners, part of our concern has been how we enter the politicised stage, and for this reason have treaded lightly across its fragile landscape, taking leaf from Elinor Ostrom: "Organizing is a process; an organization is the result of that process."^{iv}

The format of the paper makes dialectical links between a series of interviews we conducted with specialist areas of the workshop and the way the participants (students, refugees, villagers) experienced the key sites in which the workshops were conducted.

Surfacing the latent Figure of a Town through participatory Practices

The project was attractive as a potential subject for the studio because it identified social, political, cultural and architectural issues involving agriculture, property ownership and cultural crossovers in close proximity. This part of the Mediterranean has been experiencing the effect of migration north; across the waters, as refugees attempt to find safe haven in Europe, and within Calabria, as young Italians seek work in the northern cities and leaving the elderly in the depopulated hill towns behind.

So far, we have worked dialogically with the project through drawings, sewing, theatre, furniture making, dancing, making music,

cooking and eating; skills and specialisms that each of the stakeholders have brought with them. Our engagement with villagers and migrants aims to develop *Crossing Cultures* as a sustainable and collegiate identity for the community and precipitate industry.

We do not consider our role as architects, solely confined to the pragmatics of building, but also as “cultural protagonists”, stimulating questions through involving the “practice of embodied memory”¹ within the spatial context of the village and its surrounding areas. What became noticeable during the last summer workshop and we will describe here, was the way in which the different people involved – ranging from refugees to representatives of the municipality – jointly re-imagined and re-engaged with the public squares and spaces in the village. Each square taking on a new character in relation to the imposed activity, this began to give a new spatial identity to each site and the village as a whole. As activities progressed during the summer workshop, it became clear that the inert character of the squares were being surfaced, unwittingly as they were revisited through the events which involved making, dance, dining etc.

Researching the village from afar already brought a rich catalogue of histories, involving nobility, industry and community that served it. In contrast, the workshop program focussed on culturally engaging suburban dwellers, elderly, refugees and students within the village. This became animated and most fulfilling, when played out in selected Belmonte locations. Here, we discovered reciprocity between the chosen activities and the qualities of the chosen squares to host the activities, which surfaced appropriate practices of behaviour in accordance with scale, views and occupancy of the chosen village locations.

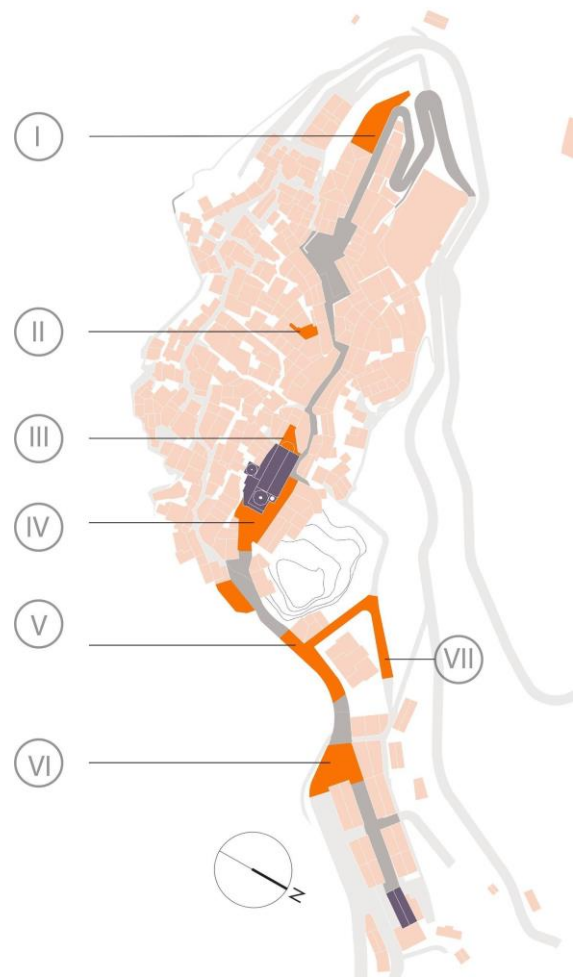


Figure 1: Belmonte village showing piazzas (authors & Estelle Hobeika)

The following describes the layout of the village in relation to the series of squares threaded along the central east-west axis, from sea to mountains, an axis which in the old town has spatially divided civic from residential. Although Belmonte’s origins are medieval, the most prestigious buildings are from the 17th century and form the “prow” of the village overlooking the sea. From this vantage point the main street runs along the “ridge” of the mountain in an east-westerly direction, hosting seven squares of varying scales and typologies. It is notable, that from west to east, the sequence, scale and outlook of these squares form a civic hierarchy: The most westerly promontory, historically associated with civic wealth and pride, is now almost entirely abandoned. In contrast, the most eastern squares associated with the everyday are almost entirely inhabited and became the most used parts of the town. Almost centrally

positioned is the Piazza Galeazzo di Tarsia, which establishes a break between old to new; civic and every-day, depopulated and populated. The sequence of squares along the main street forms nodal points to combine audiences for both residential and civic engagements throughout the village. Each square therefore is already characterized by its position, frequency of use and scale along the “ridge” in relation to, civic-ness and every-day; for example the village library in relation to bars.



Figure 2: The “prow”, square I (authors)

The “prow”, square I:

Jane McAllister (JM): *Would it be beneficial for the old town if the demography changed from currently very old inhabitants to include more young people?*

Luigi Provenzano (LP), vice mayor of Belmonte: *This is a national issue, and it is time for change. We need to invite more young people back to the old towns. There are areas in North Italy, where specialised schools have been moved to small villages in order to attract young people and families. I personally would like to see an international school in the old town of Belmonte, creating a lively international environment.*

The original entrance to the town would have been announced by the handsome 17th century uninhabited Palazzo Ravaschieri Fieschi della Torre through Via Della Porta di Mare. This square at the “prow” of the village is surrounded by a number of walled gardens which cascade below the main entrance square and conceal a passageway, which connects with the historic fort in the marina 200 metres below. On the third evening, RdS had arranged

for a traditional Calabrian band to play ethnic music, mixing traditional and modern instruments, attracting people not only from the village but from the surrounding municipality.

We argue that the effect of the band in this location, in particular its ethnicity, was to animate the environment through cultural memory^{vi} in a number of ways, which then became valuable in re-imagining this area in its contemporary context. Firstly, the “embodied memory”^{vii}, revisited spatially through performance, dancing and spectating, allowed the partiers to explore the territory experientially and negotiate the space through the spectrum of intimacy and public-ness in relation to scale and its appropriateness of use. Secondly, the re-imagining happened through cultural association of objects and events; the hybridity of modern-traditional music and instruments played folk, ceremonial, dance, and brought refugees, suburban and villagers together through dance. Thirdly, the re-imagining was associated with spatial hierarchies and a sense of overlooking. As the event took place on the “prow” of the village, this meant overlooking the sea, suburbia, a fascist monument and the sky as a backdrop to the musicians’ stage. The location brought a sense of metaphysical elevation to all dancers, locals and who had travelled across the sea.



Figure 3: Piazzetta, square II (authors)

Piazzetta, square II:

JM: *Our interest in Belmonte is that we see lots of things happening here, which represents a microcosm of what we see happening on much larger scale in our large cities. Understanding the mechanisms here on a smaller scale also will create a knowledge to*

be transferred to a larger scale. How do you think a laboratory between Belmonte and Londonmet could benefit the town?

LP: *Opening up a laboratory for collaboration here in the town, I wish this would happen. This could include to partner up with a Calabrian University. The municipality can find a space in the old town for you as a base. One of your students proposed a project which opens up the fragmented small houses into a large space. This could become real, if resolved in a simple engineering way.*

Continuing along the main street to the next square, we enter a piazzetta through a narrow passageway on the south side of Via 4 Novembre. This tiny square, no more than eight metres in diameter, frames an oleander tree which gives the square a distinct floral smell contained between the walls. Here, the piazzetta was only able to host a couple of people on the “dance floor” at a time, so most of us sat on the surrounding steps to the houses focussing the gaze inwards onto people, clothing, their dance steps and movement. This gave the square the quality of a domestic living room, inhabited by a public family party.



Figure 4: Piazza Santa Maria Assunta, square III (authors)

Piazza Santa Maria Assunta, square III:

JM: *What do you think has been achieved with the events of “Crossings” for Belmonte’s inhabitants?*

LP: *I consider this a journey which has started, bringing a different way of looking to our town. “Crossings” brought an outsider view. Your research, point of view and way of thinking about this village is very important for us, because it is different to the Italian way of*

seeing things. The community of Belmonte would not have been able to believe and see things, as it can now after the events.

Piazza Santa Maria Assunta is situated at the foot of the steps to the main church entrance, and larger than the previous square, which we called the “domestic living room”. This square is conveniently formed to create a stage, with the steps forming the auditorium, balconies and side entrances creating stage and backstage. It is an intimate public space, where during the summer workshop projects were presented and films projected. During our stay, an afternoon wedding ceremony happened, which according to its tight entrance onto the square increased its privacy on such occasions. RdS hosted a seminar with anthropologist Gian Piero Frassinelli, co-founder of *Superstudio*. Gian showed a TV series called *Meet the Natives* and originally made for Channel 4, which depicted five elders of a tribe from an island of the Pacific archipelago in a reversed anthropological role visiting the Royal Family. It showed footage at a finishing school, where the tribe members were introduced to the etiquette of dining and fake fox hunting, thus, highlighting the absurdity of ritual customs out of context. However, it did also highlight the necessity for recognising cultural belief systems and their evolution in new contexts to form new cultural identities, raising questions to the residents of the village and the workshop participants about their past, present and future.



Figure 5: Piazza Galeazzo di Tarsia, square IV (authors)

Piazza Galeazzo di Tarsia, square IV:

***JM:** How has the initial design of the furniture been transformed and taken over by people who built it, and what did it then become?*

***Giuseppe Grant (GG) from architects collective Orizzontale, Rome:** We see our role as mediators, guiding the process, but not the final outcome. We have developed a prototype which can develop a new typology with variations. We wanted the construction to be possible within a laboratory-style workshop situation, defining clear rules and allowing flexibility in the making. We have pre-fabricated the steel profiles to guarantee the rigidity of the structure, still, flexible enough to allow the participating community and refugees to add their own creativity, for example pre-drilled holes suggest an additional structure can be added.*

Situated in one of the larger squares to the rear of the church, Piazza Galeazzo di Tarsia became a bustling industry of constructing furniture and carnival props. From the rear of the church perches the bust of heroic 16th century Galeazzo di Tarsia, an aristocratic merchant who supported both the academic culture of the region as well as the rights of the

common farmers, making us feel as if we were in good company. The ground floor of the library opens with generous doors onto the square. With equally grand elegance these rooms served us as sewing workshop and general storage area, as well as functioning as the village museum with an oversized shelf cornice, supporting many ancient pieces of pottery and carefully preserved artefacts. On the later evening of the carnival procession, the square's versatility seemed unsurpassed: the props stood on the east side, their flags billowing in the wind, casting long shadows across the courtyard, while a yoga session "Om-ed" and the church bells claimed their territory as well. As the sun went down and the workshop finished for the day, materials were stored in the library garage and the vespa "farm truck", used during the workshop, settled in its elaborate garage beneath the carnival props.

Throughout the three activities inhabiting this space – furniture making, carnival floats construction and tablecloth sewing – the scale, location and generosity of neighbouring buildings in this square highlighted its ability to accommodate overlapping programs. The square became a site of both, spiritual and secular inclusion; a place to eat, work, park the car, and practice yoga. The most important effect the square had on our understanding, was highlighting the importance of the interconnectedness of our practices, customs and behaviour, whether it be parking the car or travelling to the "Om".



Figure 6: Via Michele Bianche, bike park outside "Men & Boys bar", square V (authors)

From old town to new town, squares V and VI:

Sandra Denicke-Polcher (SD): *What model of integration can you see as agriculturist for Belmonte and its surrounding territory?*

Prof. Silvia Mazucca (SM), agriculturist at Università della Calabria: *The particularity of a territory always needs to be understood first. This is not only about making money, but about respecting nature and a good quality of life, which I call an “economy of happiness”. In lots of cases this means that an agricultural product needs to stay more local, and the solution is not to export the product, but to “import people” and link industry to tourism. It also connects “la bella vita”, the sea and other aspects of the territory, to industry. It attracts people, who themselves bring their way of living and culture to this territory. This way of local cultivation and “importing people” is my vision for Belmonte. My dream of integration is this: young people come from different parts of the world together, creating a critical mass to be able to move politics. In my view, Calabria doesn’t need Italy, but needs Europe. I consider this the last train to the future, it is in the hands of the young people who want to live here.*

From the “civic assembly”, with high cultural activity of ceremonial gatherings, scholarly preoccupations and industrious makings, the bust of Galeazzo di Tarsia gazes towards the “other” part of the town where high culture disembarks into one of the two bars in the lower squares. Unfolding from the piazza, a new tree lined pavement threads patches of shade in front of the most active part of the village, with the “old men and boys” 60’s style bar (V), a new town hall sporting hints of a Spanish hacienda, and lastly Suzie’s bar (VI).

Although these areas that run down to the bars are more like a street than a square, they are the local focus of the village. The “old men and boys” settle around the first bar with its wrap around fully glazed windows, allowing scrutiny of the comings and goings. Amongst the motor bikes, table football and long benches under the trees, old gents, who would usually survey the local talent from their shady seats were now curious with the mix of multinational students from a London university, busy with a group of refugees from the nearby centre. It is worth noting that the bar performs both, a voyeuristic and communal

role within the village; and during the workshop it held both, a vantage point for people watching, and also cooked industrial quantities of delicious pasta for all participants in the project.



Figure 7: Via Michele Bianche, “Suzie’s Cafe”, square VI (authors)

On the other side of the town hall to the “old men and boys” bar, a little further down the street is Suzie’s Café, a traditional but homely cafe with a feminine interior and display cabinets showing her collection of designer espresso cups from the Milan Expo 2015: a formal indication of the duality and arbitration of sexes required for a balanced village.



Figure 8: Via Belvedere del Castello, square VII
(authors)

Via Belvedere del Castello, square VII:

JM: *Students and refugees suggested different associations in the canopy structures they constructed. What are your own memories and associations?*

GG: *The allegory to a carnival float is evident. My personal memories are of folkloristic nature and bring traditions back to the town. The parade with the canopies reminds me of a religious procession, like in Spain, where structures with the Madonna are carried from church to church. I like to “cross ideas”; the event of the “parade” and moving the structures was very important to create those memories.*

SD: *Leaving the project here today and returning to Rome, what is the future life and legacy of the structures made in Belmonte?*

GG: *The material object is part of a bigger and immaterial project. We left a greater “footprint” than the material one. The narrative, which the project brings with it, is very strong. The associations that people carry inside themselves and develop when seeing the structures in action, are manifold. This narrative, developed around the structures, is much bigger than the material structures and much more important to us.*

Cooking and eating became an important part of the events, as we ate “al fresco” with the neighbouring Via Belvedere del Castello transforming into an “external dining room”. This became a way of gifting techniques, produces and flavours across different customs and cultures. Prior to leaving London, students from The Cass designed a sketchbook tablecloth as conversation piece, seeing the dining cloth could provide a framework for collaboration, and the act of dining a metaphor for negotiation. They had arrived in Belmonte with a sketch to initiate the tablecloth tapestry and the intention of working collaboratively with the refugees to develop a cross-cultural mapping of their journeys. The refugees quickly took the 12 x 1.5 m cloth and drew memories and ambitions which they then embroidered with pride. This was added to with further conversations, spills of wine and the happenings over lunch. With

many settings, we were brought back the fictitious, representational or memorial embroidered images we saw next to our plates, which we shared and discussed over food.

The canopy for the external dining room took on its own importance, both in terms of its location and the finer detail of the enclosure, created in addition to the furniture which was made in Piazza Galeazzo di Tarsia. The most memorable and moving scene was, when on the evening of the Yoga gathering its canopy was ceremoniously carried through the streets to its final location on Via Belvedere del Castello. Referring to the carnival processions which are part of the village’s cultural history, the canopy – although designed as a frame with an open program – immediately gathered symbolism from the Belmonte landscape and also offered private associations.

JM: *How was the furniture designed and conceived? How did the “processional route” influence the design of the canopies?*

GG: *The briefing started two weeks before the construction. Rita’s description of the students’ projects, e.g. Oliver’s project with the “processional route” and Lyndon’s project to conclude the procession with a dinner, were key. Our designs directly reflect our ambition of making these student projects “real”.*

On one side overlooking the sea and setting sun, the final location was perfect for the completion of the workshops. The procession brought the whole village out to watch whilst the enormous canopy, with strips coloured of fabric flying in the breeze, was squeezed through the streets. This was very definitely a public affair and one that mobilized the whole town to join both, the procession and the food celebrated after. The event had finally turned the village into a public living room and in doing so, animated its re-imagining.

Conclusion

During the last summer workshop we have involved a large number of different stakeholders in discussions, events and making. This reflects our working methodology: residents of all ages, local government representatives, refugees, agriculturists, architects, artists, film-makers,

graphic designers, musicians and students have all been involved and acted both as “clients”, as well as collaborators and partners.

On an educational level, this also represents our educational methodology: all those people involved have been co-creators of the project, at the same time being co-educators, and contributing with individual expertise and knowledge, learning from each other. The belief in life-long learning and the attitude of curiosity makes all participants equally important for the overall outcome of the project and has made this project so successful, creating true integration and “crossing of cultures”.

The developments of the public spaces, which have already started to enrich the everyday life of Belmonte, have been steered through dialogue and conversations in a non-hierarchical way. Opposed to conventional participatory methods and consultation, in Belmonte everyone can contribute with their own specific knowledge and culture. This knowledge ranges from the memories of an elderly lady living in the old town of Belmonte, to the contributions of Prof. Silvia Mazucca to our discussions about Belmonte’s agricultural future, to the foreign expertise of migrant Austin, who is a fabric designer educated in West Africa and who made an invaluable contribution to the making of the table cloth (refer to Square VII).

As outlined in this paper, our participatory working methods can be summarised to:

- 1- The provision of frameworks, which can be physical or social, and
- 2- The re-imagination of what is already inherent in a place.

The existence of frameworks is particularly important when working with a non-hierarchical methodology to guarantee the success of the project. A framework can be physical, e.g. Orizzontale’s prefabricated structures, or social, e.g. the event schedule during the workshop, which was advertised with posters and leaflets throughout the town and neighbouring villages. The different participants were able to add to the overall framework of physical structures, or to the

social and cultural events. Within each framework, all participants were free to fit in and contribute.

The frameworks used are closely linked to the events and the re-imagination of what is already inherent in a place. Through the events and how the village started re-using its spaces, we drew out the potentials and enabled them to resurface. Here, we discovered reciprocity between the chosen activities (the social framework) and the qualities of the chosen squares (the existing physical framework) to host the activities, which surfaced appropriate practices of unplanned behaviour in accordance with scale, views and occupancy of the chosen village locations.

As much as we have, through our visits and regular presence in Belmonte, added an international legacy to the town, we have only added to the inevitable “crossing of cultures”. It seems, we have not created anything new, but only revealed what was already inherent in the town and the area since centuries and since migration began.

In the next academic year, we will develop new strategies for Belmonte that will revive local agriculture and pair this with foreign expertise to create new industry potentials and employment opportunities. We expect this in turn to attract young people back to the area, as well as foreigners to contribute and to “cross cultures”. On a longer term, we expect these strategies to have wider implications and become precedents for other Italian regions in a similar predicament. Our conversations with the vice-mayor Luigi Provenzano and the agriculturist Prof. Silvia Mazucca have already demonstrated that our presence in Belmonte can establish a new vision for Belmonte with a more global and international outlook.

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