Expanding the Scope of Architectural Education:
Creating a Culture for Students to develop Global Citizenship

Abstract:

This paper describes an alternative model of architecture teaching which bridges the relationship between professional practice activities and speculative studio-based reflections. In the process, it also enables experimentation within the context of the needs of communities and offers new approaches to the designing and procuring of architecture. It argues that universities could provide an education beyond merely a chosen subject area and instead also offer to shape society by teaching citizenship to students.

The vehicle for this investigation is a project entitled *Crossing Cultures,* which has become part of a movement aiming to integrate migrants and refugees, who arrive on Italy's southern coast, into the fabric of depopulated Italian villages. The paper will describe how, in developing the teaching agenda for this project with the students from The Cass at London Metropolitan University, the students obtained a clearer understanding of citizenship by experiencing the ethical and social impact they had on communities in a particular village in Southern Italy.

The paper offers a range of insights that emerge over the lifespan of such pedagogical experiments, providing an opportunity to reflect upon and understand the real-life, real-time setting for this innovative approach in architecture education, and the opportunities this brings to universities as "enablers" of such projects. It concludes that such projects can empower the next generation of architects to explore new ways of practicing, while finding a sense of fulfilment in their profession and achieving positive change for society as a whole.

KEYWORDS: Citizenship; global competences; multiple authorship; crossing cultures; collaborative learning; inter-disciplinary research

Introduction

HE institutions have historically been important places for political debate, knowledge creation and with a tradition of community engagement. But skills and knowledge related to active citizenship are becoming marginalised amidst the increasing marketisation of HE. In order to address this issue universities could begin to contribute to the debate relating to societal change by initiating community projects which engage students during and beyond their curriculum in social activities, thus, developing a greater appreciation of their role as global citizens. As such, this paper argues in line with the Charter for Active Citizenship[1], developed in the UK by GuildHE and the National Union of Students in 2016. Increasing numbers of young people are given access to universities providing HE the unique opportunity to shape the formative experience of these students.

This paper presents a case study within the field of architecture education to explore, reflect upon and understand the real-life, real-time setting for much innovation in this sector. Entitled *Crossing Cultures*, the project came into being after a student-led summer workshop in 2016 and was initiated by a group of students who formed *La Rivoluzione delle Seppie*[2] – an active ensemble interested in exploring the boundaries of practice and education. Reaching out of the London-based studio, this has created a platform for different disciplines to collaborate with a growing number of stakeholders. The project applies itself in the Calabrian village Belmonte Calabro, where creative thinking, learning and innovation is nurtured through onsite events and small construction projects, as well as urban strategies and architecture designs that strengthen Belmonte's identity. While different student cohorts contribute to the project as part of their curriculum and build a growing body of work over several cohorts, the project has its own timeline, involving students beyond the curriculum and enabling the skilling of locals and migrants outside of the academic calendar.

By involving students in a project outside of the UK, we noticed that not only our students benefitted. This holistic collaboration which includes undergraduate and postgraduate students, recent graduates, tutors, local inhabitants and migrants, can achieve meaningful change in a place through students' engagement with the public, sharing and connecting skills and knowledge. This has created an international and inclusive educational environment, echoing the OECD's agenda to develop "global competences".

Architecture of Multiple Authorship - developing citizenship

Architecture of Multiple Authorship, a university practice at The Cass ongoing since 2000, aims at actively teaching students citizenship and global competences during their architectural education. Education and students are taken out of the "ivory tower" to share the privilege of knowledge with community members outside of the university. Enriching the "signature pedagogy" of the architecture

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[1] 'Active Citizenship: The role of higher education' (2016),
<https://guildhe.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/6710-Guild-HE-Active-Citizenship-Report-44pp.pdf>
[accessed 20 May 2019]
[2] 'La Rivoluzione delle Seppie', <https://larivoluzionedelleseppie.org> [accessed 20 May 2019]

"studio" - the dominant learning environment in architecture education through which students acquire knowledge[3] - this practice creates real situations often referred to as "live projects".

For nearly two decades, this work-based learning practice has offered an alternative model to the conventional education by bridging professional practice activities with speculative studio-based reflections. Today, this not only enables experimentation within the context of the needs of communities and informs new approaches to architecture, but also enables students the experience of making a difference in the world. It is important to understand the fundamental difference to other examples of practice-led teaching in architecture education, e.g. the *Baupiloten*, who aim "to combine education, practice and research"[4], but effectively implement the work as traditional client / architect service limiting the scope for experimentation and individual self-fulfilment for students. Working on projects of *Architecture of Multiple Authorship*, students in contrast can develop a clear understanding of citizenship by experiencing the ethical and social impact they have on communities without budgetary or time pressures.

There are numerous examples of volunteering opportunities supported by universities, usually engaging students outside of the curriculum, e.g. *Give it a Go* at the University of Winchester,[5] offers "one-off accessible opportunities to try out volunteering in the local community". In contrast to volunteering opportunities, however, projects by *Architecture of Multiple Authorship* are initiated within the university curriculum. Students learn and develop knowledge through addressing real-life community issues, allowing them to experiment and leading to new knowledge creation.

There perhaps is a parallel to "service-learning" developed in the USA at the turn of the 20th century, an approach to education founded on John Dewey's ideas of "democracy as a way of life, where everybody has to participate in order to bring democratic values to life".[6]

Crossing Cultures - developing global competencies beyond the curriculum

Crossing Cultures is a community-led architecture project in the Italian mountain village Belmonte Calabro. The site is currently a frontier for migrants and refugees from Africa, attempting to gain access to Europe, but also a frontier for Italians, attempting to sustain their towns against the magnetic influence of the large cities.

For the first summer workshop in Calabria, a group of students invited refugees and their tutors to explore with them the boundaries between practice and education, which became the leading theme to continue *Crossing Cultures* as a university project (fig.1). The particular project discussed in this paper grew out of this workshop and started to engage Architecture students from different year groups during the academic year to develop architecture proposals and strategies. It has since become a movement of integration in the region.

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[3] Lee Shulman, 'Signature Pedagogies in the Professions' in *Daedalus*, 134, 3 (2005), p. 52.
[4] Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, 'Spatial Agency, Baupiloten Group - Berlin, Germany'
<http://www.spatialagency.net/database/baupiloten> [accessed 20 May 2019]
[5] 'Give it a Go, Winchester Hub', <https://www.winchesterhub.org/projects> [accessed 10 April 2019]
[6] Titus Pacho, 'Unpacking John Dewey's Connection to Service-Learning', in *Journal of Education & Social Policy*, 3 (2015), pp. 8-16,
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285200637_Unpacking_John_Dewey's_Connection_to_Service-Learning> [accessed 14 October 2019]

Undergraduate and postgraduate students can opt to work on it as part of their year-long design studio choice with a ten-day field trip. Second year students can also apply to join a one-week construction workshop in Belmonte as part of the compulsory "making week" of the technology module. This way, different cohorts build a growing body of work whilst passing knowledge from one to the next. Students are additionally offered to join a one-week summer workshop outside of the curriculum, also open to students from other universities and countries and after their graduation, students often continue contributing to the project in a self-initiated manner. The project's success is built on the continuity in Belmonte, operating independently from the academic calendar, with only some activities being part of the curriculum, but other activities separate from it (fig.2).

The different engagement methods produce a body of work which creates a vision for Belmonte and a more positive future for its inhabitants potentially attracting new settlers. The architecture designs and urban strategies are developed by students during the academic year and taken back to Belmonte as paper-based "visions" (fig.3). Small scale architectural constructs, furniture pieces and the recent building renovation of *Casa* (fig.4) are then happening during the on-site workshops to materialise selected visions (fig.5). The locally produced physical outputs are manifestations of change with flexible use (fig.6), providing an aide-memoire for positive change in the everyday life of the village, and continue being used by the locals when students have left.

Equally important to these physical outputs are social activities and events, such as community dinners (fig.7), dance and music events, outdoor cinema, exhibitions, and talks, which together create lasting memories for the village.

Crossing Cultures has already had a measurable impact on the village creating interest from other academic institutions, local business activity picking up, and migrants entering traineeships (fig 8). Long held attitudes are opening up in informal conversations towards a more positive future and discussing the integration of migrants.

Internationalising the curriculum

The project has shown an impact on many levels, connecting students, graduates and tutors from London with locals and migrants in Italy, as well as students and academics from the local Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria, involving all in a shared future for Belmonte and the region. As one of the participating migrants explains, "[I'm here] because it gives me many experiences to meet with people I don't know". Creating opportunities to meet is a first step to mediate cultural difference; in the migrants' words, "you would not know about my culture if meeting [me] on the street" (fig.9). It is important to recognise the benefits for our students to be part of this initiative taking place in Italy, because these cultural encounters of difference can create an inclusive educational environment and a platform for international collaboration, "a common ground", where all participants are involved in negotiating the shared terms.

While building lasting emotional relationships which in turn "impacts on better learning",[7] students, locals and migrants develop empathy and respect for each other, as well as a sense of equality. This

[7] David Brookes, 'Students learn from people they love, Putting relationship quality at the center of education', in *The New York Times* (18 Jan 2019), 23

has surely developed intercultural awareness, an understanding of global issues and social justice, essential attitudes in a well-functioning society. As such, this holistic collaboration has created an international and inclusive educational environment, which echoes the OECD's agenda to develop "global citizens [who] have the knowledge and understanding, relevant skills, and the values and attributes to meet the demands of globalisation."[8]

With this success, the university is nevertheless in a difficult position, as it is the students' success in Italy which gives legitimacy to their work and this is often not visible in the portfolio to be assessed in grades. What seems to count more, is that the participating students experience the ethical and social impact they have on the communities in Belmonte as confidence boosting and uplifting. Making a positive change in communities has benefits for students' mental health, and this experience instigates also later volunteering, essential for our society, where "charities, societies, clubs and public bodies [all rely] on volunteers"[9]. Fascinatingly, by taking the focus off grades, students' academic performance has often improved, too. Students put extra effort into their work as they experience a duty of care for people who are in need together with the stimulating feedback of effecting change to outcomes through their hands-on engagement.

Required conditions for successful outcomes

Our experience working with students on different projects of *Architecture of Multiple Authorship* has shown that for community projects to promise a successful impact it is vital to meet several key criteria. As a starting point, the chosen location should be open for experimentation, typically placed in a deprived area to be "awakened" and transformed through a new vision. Students are obviously fundamental to this process, even if only joining temporarily. They contribute critical mass to the project, a "crowd" of students building up a workforce over time. They also benefit from a unique status between citizen and professional, permitting an understanding of what is happening "on the ground" and often invisible to professionals. The project should also be supported by influential local "insiders". The vice-mayor, who dreams of an "International Campus" in Belmonte, pushed for a 3-year Memorandum of Agreement between the municipality of Belmonte and the university (fig.11), securing onsite support beyond several academic years. A PhD student, co-founder of the local not-for-profit organisation *Le Seppie*, acts as the onsite Academic Facilitator for the university and backs the project development, both in Calabria and in London.

Further, it is important to avoid the creation of hierarchy and service production, familiar to the conventional architect / client relationship. As such, all contributors are equal co-creators and co-learners and build a productive workforce without the need for a client-commissioner, and the network of partnerships between local community members, local stakeholders, students and tutors can develop over time into a trusting relationship. Drawing upon the literature concerning participatory practice and

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/17/opinion/learning-emotion-education.html> [accessed 3 February 2019]
[8] 'Preparing our Youth for an Inclusive and Sustainable World, The OECD Pisa Global Competence Framework' (2018)
<https://www.oecd.org/education/Global-competency-for-an-inclusive-world.pdf> [accessed 14 October 2019]
[9] 'Active Citizenship: The role of higher education' (2016), p. 7.

"other ways of doing architecture"[10] that cast the practitioner as a "spatial agent", here the architect is no longer a service provider or "agent operating for" but rather a collaborating "agent operating with" other stakeholders.[11] It is this non-hierarchical working method based on mutual respect, which allows "clients" to be integrated into the project as co-creators.

Finally, if the university creates the framework for regular engagement opportunities through course design and other activities, we have found that this offers situations for students during their studies to develop a sense of belonging and increased social integration. The provision of a framework also applies for the physical outputs and social activities. Prefabricated structures are used in the construction workshops to guarantee the success of the outputs, enabling participants to contribute freely but fitting within a given framework. Similarly, events are part of a framework, which allows spontaneous activities within a given schedule.

Conclusion: Outputs, Outcomes, and Continuing Collaboration

Crossing Cultures delivered outputs – tables, benches, canopies, towers, exhibitions, events – and taught students design and detailing (fig.12). More importantly, however, it provided the "gift" of positive change and lasting memories that resulted in powerful positive outcomes – enthusiasm, excitement, a positive attitude towards difference, feeling part of an overall whole – and thereby created a culture to develop interdisciplinary focus, critical thinking and active citizenship, as demanded by the World Conference on HE (2009).[12]

The nature of the project facilitates continuing collaborations, and since the summer workshop in 2017, the Italian Architecture Collective *Orizzontale* joined as an expert in working with Italian communities on hands-on constructions. The project has also attracted numerous disciplines besides architecture, for example, setting up an ongoing collaboration between architecture and animation students, generating a dialogue and a need to think outside one's "tribe", in the process challenging established beliefs, and deepening the architecture students' understanding of their discipline whilst creating new knowledge (fig.13). These collaborations will continue to grow over time, for instance, the summer workshop in 2019 was joined by a researcher of Wellbeing and Mental Health, opening up new fields of inter-disciplinary research, involving Social and Community Psychiatry and two other London Universities into the project.

For the university initiating and supporting projects such a *Crossing Cultures* goes beyond simply enhancing its reputation as a HE institution within a specific subject area. Students become active citizens, acquiring knowledge, learning skills and forming values during their work and actively contributing to positive change in society, as it has been demonstrated that those "students who have taken part in [such projects] are more likely to take part in pro-social activities after graduating."[13]

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[10] Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, 'Other Ways of Doing Architecture', in *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*, 4 (2011).
[11] Doina Petrescu, 'Relationscapes: Mapping Agencies of Relational Practice in Architecture', in *CCS City, Culture and Society*, 3 (2012), pp. 135-40.
[12] '2009 World Conference on Higher Education: The New Dynamics of HE and Research for Societal Change and Development', (UNESCO, 2009), p. 2.
[13] Juliet Millican and Tom Bourner, 'Learning to Make a Difference', in NIACE the National Voice of Lifelong Learning (2014), p. 60.

This experience obviously provides students with skills to work and communicate effectively in an increasingly connected world, where individual actions have great influence on international as well as local communities, "signalling a shift in the role and purpose of education to that of forging more just, peaceful, tolerant and inclusive societies."[14]

Today's students will be "the employees, employers, parents, carers, leaders and citizens of tomorrow"[15], and having worked on projects such as *Crossing Cultures*, they will have gained first-hand experience of the benefits of being team-players (fig.14). Students who engage in society and understand community issues, who are globally aware and politically literate, are also capable to self-reflect and explore new forms of practice. With the fading image of the single "star architect", this type of generous team-building experience can begin to create learning environments which have the capacity to empower some of the next generation of architects to find a sense of fulfilment in their subject area, which will allow them to work towards changing their profession and society as a whole.

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[14] Qiang Tang, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO, in Active Citizenship: The role of higher education (2016), 31
<https://guildhe.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/6710-Guild-HE-Active-Citizenship-Report-44pp.pdf>
[accessed 20 May 2019]
[15] 'Active Citizenship: The role of higher education' (2016), p. 6.