Expanding the Scope of Architectural Education:
Creating a culture of global citizenship for students

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Abstract

This paper describes an alternative model of community-engaged architecture teaching, bridging professional practice activities and speculative studio-based reflections by enabling experimentation within the context of the needs of communities. Our unique teaching framework uses a project entitled Crossing Cultures as its vehicle of investigation to experiment with forms of integration of refugees into depopulated Italian villages, whilst offering students to positively impact and become an integral part of this new community, thereby, ensuring its continuity long-term. Such pedagogical experiments provide an education beyond architecture, and shape society by teaching citizenship to students.

Keywords

Introduction

As increasing numbers of young people are given access to universities, HE is provided with the unique opportunity to shape their formative experience. This paper argues that universities can play a key role in the development of active citizenship amongst students, which is in line with the Charter for Active Citizenship[1] developed in the UK by GuildHE and the National Union of Students in 2016, and it explores if this can be done by actively initiating community projects which engage students during and beyond their studies in social activities, developing a greater appreciation of their role as global citizens.

This paper presents a case study of practice-lead teaching within the field of architecture to explore, reflect upon and understand the real-life setting for innovation in this sector. It provides an opportunity to evaluate if our ambitions have been met and what was achieved to date, after four years of building a community in one location. The paper will explain in more detail how this project adds ingenuity to the educational context of architecture through a carefully designed framework which secures three annual engagement points within the academic curriculum and, thus, can grow the body of work and the community. Further, it will discuss the advantages to students, communities and society of undertaking such projects within the university framework, and how students experiencing such learning environments during their studies might contribute to setting up similar projects in the future, growing and spreading this knowledge.

The paper describes how students work on a design project titled Crossing Cultures. It came into being after a student-led summer workshop in 2016 and was initiated by a group of students who formed the non-profit organisation La Rivoluzione delle Seppie (Le Seppie)[2] – an active ensemble interested in exploring the boundaries of practice and education. The project aims to equip students with the diverse skills needed for their future profession and learn how to design with "accuracy and specificity, straight lines and window schedules"[3] and, in reference to Jeremy Till's Architecture Depends, how to negotiate with "people, time, politics, ethics, mess: the real world … beyond the direct control of the architect."[4] Much of the referencing of this paper relates to the teaching practice in the UK where students are taught. However, the project is sited in southern Italy, where the students spend scheduled time during their studies, during which learning and innovation is nurtured through time-based interventions, such as small constructions, events, community dinners, as well as architecture designs and urban strategies. Reaching out of the London-based studio has also created a platform for different disciplines to collaborate with each other and a growing number of stakeholders, adding to what Jane Anderson describes "…tackling problems that we cannot address on our own."[5]

Architecture of Multiple Authorship - developing citizenship

Architecture of Multiple Authorship, a university practice established in 2000, has provided students with opportunities to work on live projects to learn citizenship and global competences during their studies. 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 "studio" - the dominant learning environment in architecture education through which students acquire knowledge[6] - this practice creates real situations often referred to as "live projects".

For 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 crucial to understand the fundamental difference of this practice to other examples of practice-led teaching in architecture education situated in the context of "architecture [that] is no longer simply about designing buildings, places and spaces"… and "has not been for some time".[7] Crossing Cultures, discussed below, demonstrates the important role that architectural education can play in supporting long-term and open-ended participatory processes in order to develop a common ground amongst different groups and in doing so build new communities. It is located in a wider educational framework of what Jane Anderson calls "finding ways and reasons to go outside" and an architectural education "[pushed and pulled] back into the real world", and "stimulating new [connections]."[8] The process and creation of a situated learning environment are fundamental and based on the belief that "knowledge needs to be presented in authentic contexts – settings and situations that would normally involve that knowledge."[9]

A comparison to Leeds Beckett University's work on the New Wortley Community Centre can be drawn as this project is equally validated through situated learning. But the outputs of both projects are very different: the first is an example where the situated learning of students working with a specific community has led to the successful construction of a building, whereas the situated learning environment of Crossing Cultures is essentially the growing of the community itself, wherein students can develop a clear understanding of citizenship by experiencing the impact they have on communities without budgetary or time pressures. When students learn and develop knowledge through addressing real-life community issues but do not have to deliver a traditional client/architect service, experimentation and individual self-fulfilment seem more achievable.

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". According to Titus Pacho, Dewey saw "the fundamental purpose of education … to prepare students to function productively as adults in a democratic society, … regardless of social class, race or gender".[10] If effective learning consists not only of the architecture course curriculum, but benefits of active engagement with potential clients, then working with communities as part of students' studies can serve both, the process of learning and the outcome for communities, including students. Similarly, Laura Martínez de Guereñu and José Vela Castillo at the IE School of Architecture and Design in Madrid, Spain, believe this is achieved through the educational framework at their school. Comparable to our ambitions, they have created settings for learning which provide a "multi-national and multi-cultural forum" and require students to "find a common ground", hoping to educate students as "engaged global citizens" who can be successful professionals in "an uncertain, multi-cultural, and complex world."[11]

Another parallel can be drawn to the Grangetown project by Cardiff University: our emphasis is on the development of long-term partnerships between architectural students and locals as a base for active engagement, and the Grangetown project has also "co-produced an annual cycle of public celebrations and collaborative research" through long-term community engagement.[12] The argument to place such projects in the university is significant for us, whereby Mhairi McVicar's and Neil Turnbull argue that the university and students are in a unique position "to dedicate substantial time and resources" into such projects, while they are researching, experimenting and learning, and that a "commercial practice" might not be able to financially sustain or value such projects.[13]

<INSERT Fig. 1: Refugee Centre in Amantea 2016>

Crossing Cultures – curriculum design to develop global competencies

Crossing Cultures, the current project of Architecture of Multiple Authorship, is a community-led architecture project in the Italian mountain village Belmonte Calabro. It facilitates a process which leads to community integration and cohesion of local groups in Belmonte, including asylum seekers and refugees. Moreover, it offers different student cohorts to become an integral part of the community they are helping to build through continuous involvement and ongoing presence during field trips and construction workshops. Most students even remain part of this community beyond their studies. We have observed that our students' *becoming part* has secured continuity and steady growth of the community, and we believe this will be decisive in ensuring the project's and community's long-term continuity. It is this community building which differs from community live projects at other architecture schools, where the focus is on working *with* communities through time-restricted interventions.

The site, currently an important frontier for migrants and refugees from Africa attempting to gain access to Europe, is also a frontier for locals attempting to sustain their towns against the magnetic pull of the large cities in the North. The overarching task of this project is to build reasons for the local young generation to stay and build up the community by integrating newcomers, refugees and – what makes this project original – the students themselves. Lately, this has developed into calling the community "Belmondo" and described in was Domus as "…an open and inclusive imagination, [where] anyone can potentially become a local."[14]

For the first summer workshop in Belmonte, a group of our students, including Italians with local connections to this area, invited tutors and refugees to explore with them the boundaries between practice and education, becoming the leading theme of *crossing cultures* to be continued as a university project (fig.1). This was the "seeding event" that developed the engagement of architecture students from different year groups during the academic year to develop architecture proposals and strategies for the region. It has since become a movement of integration. The care given to the first summer workshop has started to "reseed" itself, with young locals and migrants having taken ideas from Belmonte to other villages in Calabria, where they started similar initiatives.

The key areas of innovation of this project are the three annual engagement points within each academic year and how this has been integrated into the existing courses to build the framework for the project. We have not changed learning objectives or assessment criteria, but interpreted module speculations, interweaving the UG and PG curriculum with credit-bearing but optional engagement opportunities within different year modules. This way we have successfully created a structure of continuous engagement for different student groups with the growing project. An additional summer workshop, Crossings, is organised by ex-students Le Seppie. This sits outside of the curriculum and brings students and professionals from all over the world to the project.

<INSERT Fig. 2: Academic framework for Crossing Cultures in London and Italy 2016-2020>
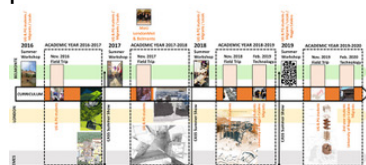
The framework allows many groups to engage through different methods in this project. For the last four years, undergraduate and postgraduate students can opt to work on it as part of their year-long design studio choice with a ten-day field trip. During the first academic year

running, we faced the challenge of ensuring the trust in the local community between the field trip in November and the following July Workshop, promising that we would be returning, and as a consequence, we added the third engagement point, a *making week* in February every year. Second year students can now apply to join the construction workshop in Belmonte as part of the compulsory technology module. This way, different cohorts build a growing body of work whilst passing knowledge from one cohort to the next. Students often take the opportunity to continue their engagement with Crossing Cultures by joining the summer workshop Crossings, which is also open to students and graduates from other universities.

The project's success builds on the continuity in Belmonte, operating independently from the academic calendar, with some activities being part of the curriculum, but other activities separate from and in addition to it (Fig.2). Moreover, bringing annually changing student cohorts to Belmonte has grown the community. Students stay connected with the people they meet and follow ongoing progress. It is notable that the curriculum enables students to return several times and some have become experts in introducing the next cohort. All individuals supporting this project have become an international community of open-minded people, not always present in Belmonte, but always connected globally through social networks. Importantly and additionally, a vision for positive transformation remains in the locals' memory, created through the small constructions and booklets with visual representations left behind.

<INSERT Fig. 3: Creating new *piazzas* within Belmonte 2018>

Through the different engagement methods our students produce a body of work which creates a vision for Belmonte and a more positive future for its inhabitants, potentially attracting new settlers. As part of their design modules and project briefs, they face design questions with a different theme related to education and industry every year (Civic Assembly 2016-17, Rethinking Campus 2017-18, Industrious Edgelands 2018-19, Skills Exchange 2019-20[15]), requiring them to design buildings which form part of a sequence of proposals. The design solutions developed throughout the year are presented back in July as paper-based *visions* for Belmonte's regeneration as a new place of civic living, learning and working. During Rethinking Campus, for instance, the removal of many dilapidated and unoccupied buildings was proposed to open-up new public *piazzas* for community services, which may be built by the locals and students (Fig.3). During Industrious Edgelands, students proposed a project to revive the local agriculture and industry and grow the trademarked Belmonte Tomatoes at the periphery of the village for a tomato processing factory and restaurant in the centre.

<INSERT Fig. 4: Renovated Casa di Belmondo 2019>
<INSERT Fig. 5: Roof Structure for Casa 2020>

Related themes would additionally be explored during on-site workshops with locals and refugees in hands-on construction of furniture pieces, small scale structures, a renovation of Casa (Fig.4) and the construction of an outdoor kitchen roof (Fig.5). These constructions are manifestations of change with flexible use (Fig.6) often testing selected student projects

(Fig.7). They provide an aide-memoire for positive change in the everyday life of the village, and continue being used by the locals when students have left and the village quiets down. Equally important to these paper-based and physical outputs are social activities and events, such as community dinners (Fig.8), dance and music events, outdoor cinema, exhibitions, and talks, which together create lasting and growing memories for the village.

<INSERT Fig. 6: Physical outputs of summer workshop 2017>
<INSERT Fig. 7: Materialised vision 2017>

Crossing Cultures has shown to have a measurable impact on the village creating interest from academic institutions, local business activity picking up, and migrants entering traineeships. On another occasion the villagers set up a long community dining table as joint eating experience, a follow-up to the community dinners we had organised during our stay (Fig.9). These positive observations are evidence that the long-term engagement in Calabria as a method to drive social change and integrate migrants is working.

<INSERT Fig. 8: Community dinner during summer workshop 2017>
<INSERT: Fig. 9: Community Dinner by the villagers 2019>

Engaging with communities for the purpose of education while avoiding disappointment remains a challenge within academia because of the restrictive academic structure. The legacy of the site visits and onsite workshops, and what happens in the village when students leave, is a key priority for us. As students become themselves community members and return to Belmonte, they build trust, a key condition to ensuring the continuity of the project. Gaining trust between the different groups happens gradually, and also enables the integration of refugees as trainees by local craftsmen. The involvement of consecutive student cohorts in Crossing Cultures over several academic years has enabled the students to pass on their insights and constantly grow the overall knowledge base. Even if temporary, students gain a regular presence in Belmonte as collaborators and community members, which has established new networks amongst the existing population and empowered our students and the locals to co-ensure the continuation of the community long-term. As much as the university was key at the beginning of the engagement to validate the Municipalities' decision of supporting this project, we are lately reassured that the project can soon continue without the university's presence.

<INSERT Fig. 10: Locals and migrant 2019>

Internationalising the curriculum

The project has impacted on many levels, connecting students, recent 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, but most importantly, forging stronger links between the migrants, the locals and students, 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", and "[here] you are not afraid of me" (Fig.10).[16] 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. Interestingly, the foreign setting seems to produce a common language for interaction and communication "without language"; as a student describes, "at times in life differences are uncomfortable, here we can focus on the work".[17]

The reason why this particular location has been so successful in creating a strong sense of belonging amongst all participants might be linked to South Italy's history of being an ancient crossroad for different cultures, probably better placed to host our activities than the more individualistic culture in the UK. Today we recognise many foreign plants brought by foreigners as integral part of the Mediterranean landscape. Similarly, people arrived - and a great number settled - without us today identifying them as foreign to Italy. If we acknowledge that this locality is where cultural crossings have continually brought on and evolved new identities, we can assume that this also happens when people materially reflect on their social behaviours through simple day to day communal activities.

> Here we are all confronted with each other. There is a density of working in the same place and then meeting in the same bar in the evening and again for breakfast. It is good to be forced to be around each other.[18]

<INSERT Fig. 11: Students, locals and migrants working together 2017>

With the emphasis on working together and not on backgrounds or professions we have created a closeness amongst all participants, a safe working and learning environment, which is very different to the conventional academic environment, seldom genuinely inclusive (Fig.11). In the words of a student, here in Italy "we are all migrants, … everyone can take part."[19] While building lasting emotional relationships which in turn "impacts on better learning,"[20] students, locals and migrants develop empathy and respect for each other, as well as a sense of equality. This has surely developed intercultural competences, 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 educate "global citizens [who] have the knowledge and understanding, relevant skills, and the values and attributes to meet the demands of globalisation."[21]

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 they often do not reflect this successfully in the portfolio to be assessed and meet professional accreditation demands. The success of group work**,** result of a large part of our students collegiate working manner and echoing how most architectural practices work today, is still a challenge to assess and needs individual representation in their portfolio to comply. It is vital to also value this success, a dilemma which has been raised by Jane Anderson, who argues for an expansion of the range of learning outcomes of architecture education. New criteria of success should

"reflect the breadth, depth and vitality of work done by architectural students and supported by their tutors as being valuable, significant and relevant."[22] Our students experience the impact they have on the communities in Belmonte as confidence boosting, and the stimulating feedback of effecting change to outcomes through their hands-on engagement also benefits students' mental health. Fascinatingly then, by taking the focus off grades students' academic performance has often improved, as the real-life application of their work means that students often put much more effort in than in the purely academic setting.

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 argued above, it is the international environment of Crossing Cultures, which had a particularly positive impact on the student experience.

The university should create the framework for regular engagement opportunities through course design and other activities, which we have found offers situations for students during their studies to develop a sense of belonging and increased social integration. The provision of a framework also applies to the physical outputs and social activities, where 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.

The chosen location should be open for experimentation, typically placed in a deprived area to be *awakened* and transformed through a new vision. Belmonte's underpopulated old town offered a *blank canvas* situation, which we realised retrospectively made the entry easier than with existing community groups in denser, urban environments.

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 benefit from a unique status, something Jane Anderson calls the "non-expert aspiring-experts,"[23] between citizen and professional, permitting an understanding of what is happening on the ground and often invisible to professionals.

<INSERT Fig. 12: Signing of Memorandum of Understanding 2017>

The project should also be supported by influential local *insiders*. The vice-mayor, who dreams of an *International Campus* in Belmonte, pushed for a Memorandum of Agreement between the municipality of Belmonte and the university (Fig.12), securing onsite support. This agreement offered an important validation for the community-university collaboration with a growing number of partners and educational institutions (e.g. Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabro), and triggered applications for regional regeneration grants. Rita Adamo, PhD student and co-founder of Le Seppie,[24] acts as the onsite academic facilitator for the university and backs the project development, both in Calabria and in London. Her involvement is key to the success, as she is anchored in Calabria as local from the area and also ensuring communication with the students about project updates beyond academia.

Further, it is important to avoid the creation of hierarchy and service production, familiar to the conventional architect / client relationship. Students mentioned as a reason for their positive experience in Belmonte that there was "no vibe of hierarchy or intrusion" and the

"equal importance of all contributors".[25] As such, all contributors are equal co-learners and build a productive workforce without the need for a client-commissioner, thus, 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 "other ways of doing architecture"[26] 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.[27] It is this non-hierarchical working method based on mutual respect, which allows "clients" to be integrated as co-creators and which has developed a mutual learning environment for both, students and locals equally benefitting. This places all participants, including locals and refugees, as co-teachers within the university curriculum. The non-hierarchical nature of the project structure is intrinsically sustainable long-term, as it does not rely on individuals but on the whole group, and is not destabilised by the departure of a single participant.

<INSERT Fig. 13: Construction during summer workshop 2018>

Conclusion: Outputs, Outcomes, and Continuing Collaboration

To conclude, it is the scheduled framework of Crossing Cultures involving students on an ongoing basis that can host various collaborations, produce diverse outputs and positive outcomes.

The diverse outputs of the project – tables, benches, canopies, towers, but also exhibitions, events – are tools for students' learning of design and detailing (Fig.13), but they also learn from the hands-on making experience "how something really works for the contractor or construction worker."[28] Most importantly, however, the outputs provide the community of Belmonte with a *gift* of positive change and lasting memories that result in powerful positive outcomes – enthusiasm, excitement, a positive attitude towards difference, feeling part of an overall whole – and thereby create a culture which develops global citizenship.

<INSERT Fig. 14: Onsite screening of collaborative films developed by architecture & animation students 2017>

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 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 dialogues and thinking outside of their own *tribe*, has not only challenged students' existing beliefs, but also deepened the architecture students' understanding of their discipline (Fig.14). These collaborations will continue to grow over time. The summer workshop in 2019, for instance, was joined by a researcher of mental health, opening up new fields of inter-disciplinary research, involving community psychiatry and two other UK Universities into the project.

Students who revisit Belmonte acknowledge that change takes a long time: "It is good to see this project grow from the last year to [the next] year, … knowing it carries on, developing [and] creating a positive change over time".[29] Certainly, this observation reflects an optimistic viewpoint onto the world and understanding of the importance of continuing collaboration amongst our students.

For the university initiating and supporting projects such a Crossing Cultures goes beyond simply enhancing its reputation within a specific subject area. Students become active citizens, acquiring knowledge, 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."[30] The project has also taught students to have no fear of differences but actually learn to value these:

> I learned to appreciate that other people have much more to contribute … The more I do this [work], the more I appreciate that people can contribute to things that, at first, I didn't recognise.[31]

This experience 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. If more students can have such an experience during their studies, we can certainly expect a snowball effect and spur the development of similar projects, "signalling a shift in the role and purpose of education to that of forging more just, peaceful, tolerant and inclusive societies."[32]

<INSERT Fig. 15: Collaborators 2018>

The 21st century is characterised by globalisation, unpredictability and oversensitivity to risk, demanding to prepare students for times of uncertainty and to become architects who practice global citizenship. Today's students will be "the employees, employers, parents, carers, leaders and citizens of tomorrow",[33] and having worked on projects such as Crossing Cultures, they will have gained first-hand experience of the benefits of being team-players (fig.15). 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 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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