



Research article

Reactivating underpopulated areas through participatory architecture in southern Italy by creating a home for newcomers

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Abstract

Crossing Cultures is a university-based research initiative that is part of London Metropolitan's Centre for Urban and Built Ecologies (CUBE) which aims to develop a new pedagogical model. The focus is to provide an inclusive learning environment that facilitates intercultural relationships and group learning, equipping students with essential skills for a globally connected world beyond the subject of architecture. We have paired the design studio activities in London with a field experience of live engagement in southern Italy, in a region suffering from depopulation, while simultaneously experiencing the arrival of asylum seekers. The confluence of these opposing developments creates a need to rebuild local communities and presents an exceptional opportunity for our students to become agents of change. The article outlines how, through the creation of an additional teaching and learning platform for multi-disciplinary research outside the boundaries of the university campus, this teaching practice is raising social capital

by attracting and integrating students and asylum seekers alike, adding to population and economic growth. The article concludes by highlighting the unique opportunity to scale up this hybrid studio/field study model, which has arisen because of the COVID-19 pandemic. What is proposed is that now, as universities are developing blended learning delivery models, our observations could feed into a new, expansive model for studying architecture as a student-in-residence mode of study.

Keywords Crossing Cultures; architecture workshops; studio; teaching practice; integration; social capital; COVID-19; multidisciplinary; architecture student residency

Introduction

We need to invite more young people back to the old towns ... I ... would like to see an International School in the old town of Belmonte, creating a lively international environment.¹

Since 2016 Crossing Cultures, a university-based research initiative and part of London Metropolitan's Centre for Urban and Built Ecologies (CUBE),² has paired design studio activities in London with field experience of live engagement in southern Italy. What has been developed as a result is a new pedagogical model, which takes students out of the studio and into the field. The aim is to prepare students for professional life in a multicultural and globally connected world beyond the subject of architecture, by offering them an inclusive learning environment which facilitates intercultural relationships and group learning. While contributing to the regeneration of a marginal area in southern Italy, different student groups participate in recurrent architecture-informed workshops that take place in the small village of Belmonte Calabro. Here, they complement their studio design work with hands-on activities. This new pedagogical model, which I will describe in this article, expands the traditional field trip through an immersive and engaging travel experience and a residential visit.

Fundamental to this model is that students are given opportunities to share the life of the villagers and to live on their project site as part of their studies. Caroline Butterworth highlighted the importance of such projects, defining the skills students acquire as a 'live currency', essential for 'the social production of architecture, developing soft skills, collaborative working, participatory practice, professionalism, the expanded role of the architect, social and environmental sustainability, affecting real communities, policy and people, research by design'.³ As such, the location for the field activities has been sensibly chosen: having been invited by the vice-mayor of Belmonte, Luigi Provenzano, and working with the local not-for-profit organisation Le Seppie, it is a place that can benefit from the students' engagement.⁴ The old town of Belmonte is a picturesque medieval hill-top village situated between the Mediterranean Sea and the mountains. It is vastly underpopulated as for decades young people have moved away from this rural location to find work in larger cities. Historically a crossroads in southern Europe where different cultures have come to live together successfully, the region is today suffering from depopulation and economic regression, coinciding with the arrival of asylum seekers. The confluence of these opposing developments creates a need to rebuild local communities and presents an exceptional opportunity for our students to become the agents of change.

This article first describes the traditional studio culture dominating today's architecture education. It then explores how through curriculum design, Crossing Cultures has acquired an additional teaching and learning platform in Italy, where it seems that the parameters of the pedagogic environment have disappeared, thus establishing a common ground for multi-disciplinary research. The studio design activities, which intentionally introduce students to themes of 'skilling, empowering local networks and helping people to settle', are complemented in the field, where they can explore the relationship between citizenship, architecture and place through hands-on activities with local stakeholders, and build a body of work over a period of several years.⁵ The article goes on to refer in more detail to a multi-disciplinary study conducted in 2019 with academics in the fields of psychology and health sciences, outlining the benefits of this teaching practice for the different participating groups, which are made up of students, local communities and asylum seekers.⁶ This study points to the importance of 'group cohesion' to foster integration and demonstrates that students are instrumental in enhancing

this process.⁷ In addition to the subject-based learning of architecture, students acquire new skills and values during these workshops, such as citizenship, which we consider of great importance to their overall learning beyond architecture.⁸ Next, the article focuses on how it has been suggested that this teaching practice, which combines pedagogy with the practice of architecture, could be a successful tool to repopulate this marginalised area, and consequently how the arrival of newcomers temporarily living in the village could help reignite the local economy.

The article concludes by highlighting the unique opportunity to scale up this hybrid studio/field study model, which has arisen because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The recent offer of online classes by most universities, and the challenges of isolation for students studying alone at home, resulted in the initiative by a group of students to move to Belmonte for the 2020–21 academic year. Engaging with their university in the UK solely through online teaching, this new architecture student residency, called Studio South, allowed uninterrupted engagement with the village and locals. Looking at the achievements of Crossing Cultures in terms of social integration and local economy, the work with our students appears to have impacted positively on both and it has been fundamental to the reactivation of this particular location. Finishing with a reference to artist-in-residence practices and what the latest developments of Studio South have so far meant for the students and their hosting community, and speculating on what they might bring in the future, the article aims to respond to Julian Williams' recent question: 'if we can no longer sit at the students' side and convey through tacit action our own embodied practices, what new distanced practices do we need to develop instead?'⁹

The architecture studio and the field

Today's architecture education is based on studio culture as the predominant mode of learning. The studio, according to Philip Crowther, is still the 'signature pedagogy of design education ... not only the physical space where the learning takes place, but also the flexible pedagogical process which happens within this space'.¹⁰ Students mostly work on individual projects, whereas the activities in the field, which this article will frame later on, complement studio work by encouraging intensified interaction among the students and with stakeholders. In contrast to other learning environments at the university, the studio space does not offer a sealed or quiet experience, nor is there a fixed timetable for the teaching. Instead, its flexible pedagogy allows students from different year groups to work beside each other for a whole teaching day, with much of the learning happening through informal conversations among peers and with their tutors.

People are drawing, making models, working on laptops, boiling the kettle, talking about their work as well as their daily life. Their tutors, not always easy to distinguish from the students, give formative feedback in the form of tutorials where other students can listen to their peers' reviews. As a consequence, much of the learning comes not only from the tutors but also from the other students. The lack of formality in the studio's physical space (no front of the classroom, movable furniture, space to present drawings and models during crits) not only encourages a flexible pedagogy, but, according to Summer Smith Taylor, is also an immediate 'response to the flexible nature of the design process itself, in which there is no single correct answer'.¹¹

We observed that the studio space, where boundaries between formal and informal activities blur, can become a second home for students. At London Metropolitan University, students are offered a dedicated studio space for working outside scheduled teaching hours. For many students the studio space has become not only a place to work but also a base to live during opening hours. They meet with fellow students, eat, relax, store materials, drawings or models and, referring to Spatial Agency, observe 'other ways of doing architecture'.¹² The diversity of the cultural backgrounds of our students, who often have multicultural identities and whose native language is not English, creates an international learning environment in the London studio.

Although the semi-structured learning space and strategy of the studio culture based on project work are still valid in offering opportunities for experiential learning and making collegiate bonds among students, it has its limitations when it comes to students' communication and testing of ideas with non-academics, client representatives or the professional world. As a consequence, our studio work has engaged students in live projects where they learn from the engagement with communities and potential clients. For example, before setting up Crossing Cultures, consecutive cohorts worked with shifting community groups in Hayes, West London, for five years. They presented their designs to

non-academics, receiving feedback from the people they designed for, and built trust among the local community over time.¹³ The closeness of the live project site was beneficial as students could visit on a regular basis.

The immersive learning experience of the studio is, however, increasingly limiting because many students must work alongside their studies to sustain the cost of living in London. Enrolled as full-time students, they can only study part time, restricting their time at university, and ultimately missing out on the opportunities the studio can offer as both a second home and a culturally diverse learning environment. In contrast, the field trip to Belmonte, which students join as part of their studio work, becomes a residential visit, providing the opportunity for an immersive living experience. Without distraction or possibility of retreat, this more responsive teaching and learning environment helps students to leave their everyday worries and work commitments behind, offering them an opportunity to share intensive time and space. The boundaries between formal and informal learning environments are blurred to the advantage of students' overall learning. The alleyways in the medieval village where they might meet the few people still living here, the communal kitchen where they cook dinner together, the Bar del Sport where they play cards with locals might offer a greater opportunity for students' personal development than any formal learning environment. The philosophy underpinning the pedagogic processes in both the studio and the field is based on an understanding that 'any environment is a learning environment' that is made up of both intentional and unintentional activities.¹⁴

In comparison to the predominantly individual project work in the studio, the field trip to Italy is dominated by working, producing and experiencing as a team and offers students interaction through making together. We have created a 'common ground' and a 'safe working and learning environment' for diverse learners, including people outside the university.¹⁵ David Killick and Monika Foster emphasise the importance of integrating relationship-building into higher education, particularly in today's interconnected world.¹⁶ According to the authors, developing 'interdependence' among learners, as opposed to 'independent learners', makes students fit for the needs of today's world.¹⁷ Interdependent learners grasp those essential attributes of 'intercultural relationship capabilities' and 'critical consciousness'.¹⁸ They call Crossing Cultures 'a model of an empowering curriculum', achieved through 'the alliance between academic work and enabling students to experience their ability to make an impact and create positive change'.¹⁹ In Belmonte, students and tutors work with local communities and experience how they can have a positive impact on the integration of the different groups, including themselves.

Crossing Cultures: growing a teaching and learning platform in the field

The teaching philosophy of Crossing Cultures is to help students develop the essential skills of 'intercultural relationship capabilities' and 'critical consciousness' in order to position themselves within and navigate differences across a multicultural and globally connected world beyond architecture.²⁰ According to David Killick and Monika Foster, higher education can prepare students to play an active role in society and contribute to the 'betterment of communities and societies, locally and globally'.²¹ Pairing the studio activities in London with a field experience and replacing the traditionally observational architecture field trip – intended to take students to look at historic and contemporary architecture – with live engagement in southern Italy is a consequence of sharing this ambition. Only about 50, mainly elderly, people either live in the old village of Belmonte or return there for the summer months. The old centre is close to being abandoned during the remaining seasons, but, paradoxically, the area evidences high immigration numbers within Europe. Three times a year, since 2016, the work of Crossing Cultures has brought students to Belmonte to involve them in small-scale, hands-on construction workshops with the remaining locals and arriving asylum seekers.

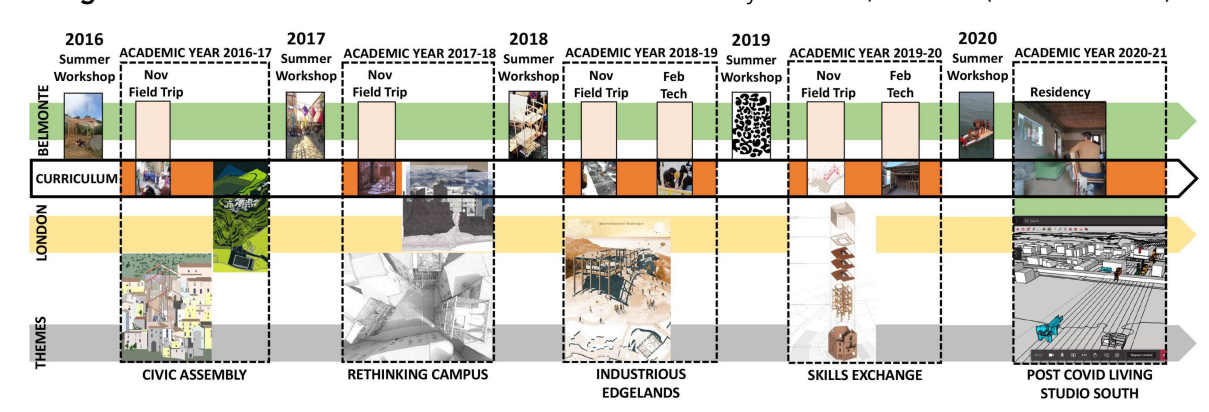
With an experimental 'learning by doing' approach, reminding us of the pedagogic process proclaimed by John Dewey,²² the field offers a more culturally responsive environment and facilitates more room for diverse approaches and individual development than the studio in London. Our working method has involved discussions with different stakeholders, such as asylum seekers, town inhabitants, school children or local and regional governmental bodies, on how this inevitable crossing of cultures can continue to create the richness of architecture already enjoyed as part of Italian culture, while at the same time developing the skills and jobs that can enhance both temporary encounters and settled stays.²³ In

contrast to the project work in the London studio, the parameters of the project change for students and tutors alike while they live in the village, as the above question becomes an inescapable reality in which the site and the people of the village are always present. While the teaching boundaries in the village are blurred through students and tutors working, eating and living with and among the locals, the pedagogic environment is further characterised by merging formal and informal learning spaces through a hidden curriculum. The 'hidden curriculum', defined by David Killick as a space 'in which norms and values are powerfully, if unintentionally, conveyed', is characterised in Belmonte by tutors engaging with locals and asylum seekers.²⁴ They convey their values to the students while exhibiting their curiosity about the world and participating as equals. According to Heather Ward, this attitude can send a powerful message to students and, I feel, it has most likely contributed to all participants sharing those values.²⁵

Furthermore, the teaching boundaries in the field are not maintained by a hierarchy but are established by mutual respect for each other and each other's differences. Based on curiosity and the belief that education is constructivist, namely, that learners bring their own valuable experience to build on, everyone's contribution to the project in Belmonte is appreciated. Learning about the world happens everywhere in the village, for example on the construction site (also a space for celebration as town people are invited in the evening) and in the Bar del Sport (also a space for tutorials and formal presentations during the day). It seems to me that the construction of a learning environment through the presence of a culturally diverse group, in which all learners are invited to fully participate and flourish, have further dissolved the parameters of the pedagogic environment.

The long-term engagement in Belmonte is key for the project's success. We have thoughtfully designed the curriculum to continually bring students and activities to the location. This academic structure comprises several onsite workshops during the academic year and establishes a continuous link between the activities in Belmonte and the university in London (Figure 1). The repeated periods of engagement are designed both as a regular part of the curriculum and as separate, voluntary activities, independent from the academic calendar. The latest engagement in 2020–21 was initiated by 10 students who had taken part in the previous technology workshop and felt welcomed by the locals. They moved to Belmonte for nearly a full semester, which added a new residency mode of attendance, named Studio South, to the project. One student compared this move to a 'sort of student halls within the town'.²⁶ The result of all these different engagement opportunities – curriculum related, voluntary activities and residency – forms an overall body of work which can build a new vision for Belmonte and its inhabitants. Students have developed design projects pointing towards a lively future for Belmonte as a place that attracts young people to live, learn and work in the village. As recently evidenced by the self-initiated arrival of our students, these projects illustrate how the local traditions and agriculture can develop small-scale industries in this rural area and, in an increasingly interconnected world, create an attractive place for young people to settle (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Academic structure with curriculum and voluntary activities, 2016–21 (Source: author)



During the first three years of the onsite activities, the work focused on small-scale, mobile constructions. Benches, chairs, shelving towers (used for exhibitions and to fix projectors at events) and canopies (covering large tables for community dinners) were made jointly with locals and asylum seekers (Figure 3). Since 2019, the workshop activities have taken a long-lasting character in the shape of the renovation of

the Casa. This former nunnery in the centre of the medieval village quickly developed into a community hub where villagers, newcomers and visitors come together for workshops, celebrations and events. With a recently established internet connection, there has been a shift from working *on* the Casa to working *in* the Casa, as it became the studio space and living room for Studio South (Figure 4), where the 10 students regularly met online with their tutors in London. We observed through the different engagement modes over several years that students and participating communities navigated their cultural differences and positively experienced the impact of empowering and integrating asylum seekers into the community.

Figure 2. Proposal for the creation of new piazzas in Belmonte, constructed with the local community and students (Source: Maya Shankla)



Figure 3. Construction of mobile shelving towers in 2018 (Source: photograph by Silvia Gin and Zeshan Mazhar)



Figure 4. The studio space and living room in the Casa in 2020 (Source: photograph by Francesca d'Agnano)



This social practice has grown the teaching and learning platform in the field to also enable other disciplines to enter research collaborations with architecture through the network of allies (students, academic tutors, professionals). Precedents of art practices have proven to foster dialogues across different cultures. As pointed out by Susana Gonçalves and Suzanne Majhanovich, art has been used as a tool that helps approach the unfamiliar and broadens individuals' comfort; however, this research has not yet been extended to architecture.²⁷ With only a little factual evidence on how these positive experiences benefitted mental health and social identity, this platform has attracted researchers from mental health and community psychiatry to engage with our architecture community project and conduct research on the inclusion and mental health of asylum seekers. Leading up to the 2019 summer workshop, our network offered to extend the pedagogical research in Belmonte into a cross-disciplinary study to find out how this new pedagogy enabled students to have an impact on cross-cultural understanding and the integration of marginalised communities, and how this might benefit the local economy.

Cultivating a common ground for integration and multi-disciplinary research

In the area of southern Italy where Crossing Cultures takes place, there is an acute need to integrate newcomers and cultivate a common ground. A peak of over 180,000 asylum seekers, mostly from Africa, arrived in 2016, and although numbers have dropped since then, asylum seekers often remain in Italy for more than two years before their application is processed. By then, those who are officially granted asylum will have lived in a state of uncertainty and without anything resembling a home for several years, which calls for their integration into our societies early on. As Federica Calissano and colleagues argue, creating positive relationships between local communities and asylum seekers is most important for their successful integration, and I feel that Crossing Cultures has contributed to the discussion of best practice to achieve this.²⁸ The project helps integrate newcomers by briefing students to invite locals and migrant communities to all work together. Engaging people with different cultural backgrounds in working together results in a cross-cultural experience and as a consequence of their differences, quoting Spatial Agency once more, in 'other ways of doing architecture'.²⁹ Art processes have been described as tools to approach the unfamiliar and broaden individuals' comfort zones.³⁰ Similarly here, the co-production of tangible outputs is used as a method to encourage dialogue and communication between different cultures and to create a sense of community.

As outlined earlier, architecture has joined forces with a team of researchers from mental health and community psychiatry to collect data from the participants in the 2019 workshops and study the impact on their mental health. The results of these interviews gave us more precise evidence about the experiences and benefits of the workshop, paramount to understanding how future workshops with

students could be deployed to foster more inclusive societies and help reactivate marginalised areas. Topic guides were used to conduct 25 interviews with the three participating groups (asylum seekers, students and locals), enquiring what the participants liked the most and the least about the workshop, what the potential benefits were both on a personal level and for Belmonte's development and how the workshop could be improved.³¹ Applying thematic analysis across the interviews produced two themes: 'participants' experiences of the workshop' and 'perceived benefits of the workshop'.³²

The analysis showed that students believed they had learned from the hands-on experience of working on a building site, but, more importantly, they explained their learning beyond architecture, as they described skills acquired and the value of working with a diverse group to broaden their horizons. Both students and locals declared that their close collaboration during the workshops made them feel part of the same community. Students and asylum seekers felt that the workshops encouraged people from different countries who speak different languages to work together and learn from each other, while respecting cultural and social differences. As research defines refugees and asylum seekers as particularly vulnerable individuals with a higher risk of stress and mental health disorders, we recognised that the experience of collaborating and working jointly was felt to be particularly positive by the asylum seekers, who saw the workshop as an opportunity to make contact.³³ One asylum seeker said: 'here we are all curious about each other. If I meet you, I can share a lot with you.'³⁴ This was an important outcome as, together with our students, it identified these newcomers as the key players in repopulating the area.

It is certainly worth elaborating on the role of the architectural design and build activities as a vehicle to create opportunities to engage in new relationships. As such, the initial building activities, and less so the physical outputs, contributed to the creation of an affirming learning environment that enables this fostering community to grow. The later renovation of the Casa heightened this experience further. The interviews revealed that not only the time spent together, but, importantly, the physical space of the Casa played an essential role in enhancing the connection between the students and the local community with the asylum seekers. Students stated that the renovation of the Casa created a space for people to regularly visit during the year, and therefore they had created 'a space for connection'.³⁵ They said that collaborating in the workshop allowed them to create strong and lasting friendships with the asylum seekers.³⁶ The interviews revealed that students and asylum seekers identified 'making home' as a consequence of participating, and one student explained: 'The refugees ... are willing to create a home here and ... we are providing them with the possibilities.'³⁷

This feeling was reciprocated by an asylum seeker who said: 'living in Italy, especially seeing the locals and everyone as well, they accept me, so I feel that there is potential'.³⁸ From these comments we can conclude that we have created a common ground in the field where 'students and staff can express, encounter, negotiate and enjoy difference in a climate of respect and learning', as deemed essential for a quality experience in higher education according to the Equality Challenge Unit.³⁹ Experiencing social integration has certainly empowered our students to develop 'intercultural relationship capabilities' and 'critical consciousness' which they can apply back in London, but also when encountering intercultural environments beyond their studies.⁴⁰ This positive experience was described by a student who said: 'The more I do this, the more I appreciate that people can contribute to things that at first I didn't recognise. These experiences heightened me.'⁴¹

Raising social capital and growing the local economy through an architecture residency

Crossing Cultures is part of a tradition of university live projects, described by Harriet Harris and Lynnette Widder as including 'design/build work, community-based design, urban advocacy consulting and a host of other forms and models' happening in 'the borderlands between architectural education and built environment practice, and benefitting the world outside of academia'.⁴² Julian Williams described the experience of our students working *with* and *for* communities and engaging with real people on this project as 'a journey of self-formation through civic activity and social bonding' and makes reference to Wilhelm von Humboldt's concept of *Bildung*, 'the cultivation of my inner self, just as I am'.⁴³ However, it is not just students who are at the centre of this education; society is too. While learning, students can give back to communities who would otherwise not be in a position to appoint an architect and can help foster more inclusive societies. Crossing Cultures has evidenced that engaging consecutive cohorts in one specific location for several years not only benefits students, but can also bring lasting change to a location.

With the vice-mayor talking about how the temporary interventions and paper-based visions have changed the villagers' perspective on their village,⁴⁴ it seems that we have succeeded in raising social capital by combining pedagogy with the practice of architecture. Prior to the 2019 interview study, the positive impact of Crossing Cultures on the life of the villagers and newcomers was of an observational nature. In the village, we had already witnessed a more positive atmosphere involving new initiatives, such as the villagers self-initiating a communal dinner with a long dining table going through the whole village, organising a wine festival with the medieval village centre as the backdrop and installing the first ATM machine. Our students, in turn, had demonstrated positive attitudes beyond the physical, developed enthusiasm for the village and their academic projects during and after the workshops,⁴⁵ which led to the conclusion that on an emotional level the experience of working together as equals and creating things that last might have formed them for life.

While students have observed how over a period of more than four years they have visibly helped to reactivate the village of Belmonte through short stays and the 2020 residency, themes brought up through the 2019 interviews evidenced the potential of economic growth for the village and its area. The locals especially considered the workshops as an opportunity to revitalise both the local community and the economy of the village. They referred to the positive commercial aspects, as well as to the workshops facilitating change and openness for the village. The students and the locals mentioned that they were contributing to something that was continuing to exist. They explained that 'working and taking care of something' initiated 'a sense of appropriation and belonging to it', making them believe that there would always be space to return, and allowing Belmonte 'to grow as a place'.⁴⁶ This trend has lately given rise to Studio South, the self-initiated move of 10 students to Belmonte, which I consider a valid response to the important question of what we leave behind for others to benefit from when the organised student groups are not present in the village. One local explained it as 'crucial' for the local people who had seen the depopulation over time, to 'review the situation' and 'have human contacts [with] the students, teachers, people'.⁴⁷

To understand this potential further, it might be useful to compare Studio South to an artist residency. As an answer to the holistic framework encompassing and connecting integration with economic benefits, feedback, particularly from the villagers, has shown that integrating the students of Studio South into the village was considered a successful and welcome tool to regrow the local population. The economic benefits, supporting the long-term legacy of the programme, have also been evidenced by a local who stated: 'the fact that students live in the village on a daily basis means that everyone benefits, even economically'.⁴⁸ Despite the ongoing pandemic, the students' residency has also attracted other young professionals to join in the new – partly socially distanced – life and activities in the village. This has further helped the local economy as the newcomers live and shop locally, while developing ideas for new industries which could grow in the area. The innovative teaching model of this student-in-residence scheme – studying away from campus while engaging onsite – can push the positive attributes of the traditional university life project much further. This has greatly improved the long-term engagement in one location and resulted in integrating the students to the villagers' benefit; in turn, students have helped to reactivate the village. As a local explained: 'the students need the locals and the locals need [the students]. If this merges, there is even greater growth'.⁴⁹

Speculation and conclusion

A larger scale study is needed to further evaluate the long-term benefits of Crossing Cultures on integration, but I feel that our observations, particularly at a time when universities are developing blended learning delivery models, could already feed into a new, expansive model for studying architecture as a student-in-residence mode of study. This residency in the field, involving architecture students in reactivating marginalised areas through participatory architecture, could be applied to other areas in the UK or Europe. This could also help raise social capital and create homes for newcomers, including benefitting the students themselves. Providing the students with a site-specific design brief in Belmonte while living in the village meant that the classroom or studio have become the field or lab where students live and work and has scaled up our research. The classroom in the village and the studio located in the Casa has opened new questions on how teaching, learning and research could look in the future, and it is worth testing this pedagogical model further. In particular, where students are reported to have had mental health issues due to their isolation at home during the pandemic, Studio South has

offered this group a way to maintain a positive studio atmosphere.⁵⁰ The intensity of being together enabled peer learning beyond architecture and stood in contrast to the closure of the university and its studio spaces in London, where students were sent to mostly work in isolation. Online teaching enabled us, tutors in London, to stay in touch with the group by joining our students via video link in the Casa (Figure 5). This can be continued when the university goes back to teaching on campus.

Figure 5. Online teaching in the Casa with tutors from London (Source: photograph by Francesca d'Agnano)



Equally important to the positive experience for our students during the pandemic is the fact that the students themselves – by their presence and creative engagement – have added value to Belmonte and the region. If we consider that cultural industries can potentially be initiated through artist-in-residence programmes and become a driver for regional development, then the students from London residing for several months in Belmonte have been a magnet, attracting a creative community of like-minded young Italians to settle in this region.⁵¹ The students involved in Studio South contributed to the reactivation of the village without any organised workshops and certainly helped the economy to grow by increasing this sparse population and enlivening Belmonte with their presence. The vice-mayor, who has previously pointed out that the students' way of thinking about the village is very different to the Italian way of seeing things and that 'the community of Belmonte would not have been able to believe and see things as it can now',⁵² recently shared his view on Studio South: 'many municipalities wanted to contact the group because they understood that this type [of experience] can give new life to our villages'.⁵³

In order for this pedagogical model to be transferable to other locations, there are a few hurdles to overcome and it is necessary to further test the Studio South model in the next few years. For instance, there have been conflicts over the use of the Casa as a semi-structured learning environment between our students and the creative community of young Italians who joined the students in Belmonte in 2020. The nature of these conflicts is not dissimilar to those in the London studio when formal and informal activities overlap. The students suggested setting up clear house rules for the Casa to make the co-existence of different activities tension-free, and those are being implemented as a next step. The students living in Italy and receiving online teaching from London during the pandemic also fed back that teaching could be improved as a blended learning model, with tutors introducing the project in Italy at the onset and some teaching happening in person onsite, for example with an academic facilitator in Belmonte. Additionally, with the ambition to make this offer available to all students, the accessibility of the residency programme is an issue. Although life in this deprived area of Italy is cheap in comparison to the UK, some students will not be able to afford to live there for a longer period without the opportunity to earn a living while studying. Consequently, the model would benefit from a scholarship programme, which still needs to be developed.

To date, our university has shown great interest in this new pedagogical model. However, it remains to be investigated if there are obstacles to formalising and supporting it beyond COVID-19 as a regular way of teaching and learning without students attending campus. The momentum recently developed by Studio South students in Belmonte without their tutors onsite is a sign of its legacy. This student residency has sparked interest in the village from other newcomers, thus further carrying on the work of integration and reactivation, which I trust will be continued by the students even if the university moves on to another location to start a new project. This vision hints towards important research being required over the next few years to understand the impact of this pedagogical model on the different participating groups and, ultimately, the reactivation of the location in the long term. We have to research if and how particularly the local young adults and children will envision their future, and if this pedagogical model can help to repopulate Belmonte through our students living among them.

Notes

- ¹Denicke-Polcher and McAllister, 'Crossing Cultures'.
- ²<https://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research/centres-groups-and-units/the-centre-for-urban-and-built-ecologies>.
- ³Butterworth, 'A live currency'.
- ⁴<https://larivoluzionedelleseppie.org>.
- ⁵<https://www.londonmet.ac.uk/schools/art-architecture-and-design/studios/2020/undergraduate-architecture/ug-architecture-studio-03>.
- ⁶Calissano et al., 'Participatory architecture workshops'.
- ⁷Mitchell, 'Educating through building', 173.
- ⁸Denicke-Polcher, 'Expanding the scope of architectural education', 31.
- ⁹Williams, 'Learning from practice', 6.
- ¹⁰Crowther, 'Understanding the signature pedagogy of the design studio', 18–19.
- ¹¹Smith Taylor, 'Effects of studio space on teaching and learning', 217–28.
- ¹²Awan, Schneider and Till, *Spatial Agency*.
- ¹³Denicke-Polcher, 'Architecture of multiple authorship', 120–1.
- ¹⁴Killick and Foster, *Learner Relationships*, 57.
- ¹⁵Denicke-Polcher, 'Case study', 79.
- ¹⁶Killick and Foster, *Learner Relationships*.
- ¹⁷Killick and Foster, *Learner Relationships*, 151.
- ¹⁸Killick and Foster, *Learner Relationships*, 12–16.
- ¹⁹Killick and Foster, *Learner Relationships*, 81.
- ²⁰Killick and Foster, *Learner Relationships*, 12–16.
- ²¹Killick and Foster, *Learner Relationships*, 1.
- ²²Williams, 'John Dewey', 92.
- ²³Denicke-Polcher and McAllister, 'Crossing Cultures', 384.
- ²⁴Killick and Foster, *Learner Relationships*, 84.
- ²⁵Ward, 'Internationalization in action', 10.
- ²⁶Denicke-Polcher, McAllister and Adamo, 'Studio South'.
- ²⁷Gonçalves and Majhanovich, *Art and Intercultural Dialogue*.
- ²⁸Calissano et al., 'Participatory architecture workshops', 2.
- ²⁹Awan et al., *Spatial Agency*.
- ³⁰Gonçalves and Majhanovich, *Art and Intercultural Dialogue*.
- ³¹Topic guides for the interviews: (1) How did participants hear about the workshop? (2) Did they have the chance to be involved in the workshop, and how? (3) What did they think were the benefits of the workshop, also for the village, and were there any downsides?
- ³²Braun and Clarke, 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', 77–101.
- ³³Priebe, Giacco and El-Nagib, *Public Health Aspects of Mental Health*, 1.
- ³⁴Calissano et al., 'Participatory architecture workshops', 7.
- ³⁵Calissano et al., 'Participatory architecture workshops', 8.
- ³⁶Calissano et al., 'Participatory architecture workshops', 8.
- ³⁷Calissano et al., 'Participatory architecture workshops', 7.

- ³⁸Calissano et al., 'Participatory architecture workshops', 7.
- ³⁹Equality Challenge Unit, 'Promoting good relations on campus', 3.
- ⁴⁰Killick and Foster, *Learner Relationships*, 12–16.
- ⁴¹Denicke-Polcher, Haenschel and Giacco, 'Refugees & mental health'.
- ⁴²Harriss and Widder, *Architecture Live Projects*.
- ⁴³Williams, 'Learning from practice', 3.
- ⁴⁴Denicke-Polcher et al., 'Refugees & mental health'.
- ⁴⁵Denicke-Polcher, 'Expanding the scope of architectural education', 44.
- ⁴⁶Calissano et al., 'Participatory architecture', 11.
- ⁴⁷Denicke-Polcher et al., 'Studio South'.
- ⁴⁸Denicke-Polcher et al., 'Studio South'.
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- ⁵⁰Ing, 'More than half of students'.
- ⁵¹Evans, 'Creative cities'.
- ⁵²Denicke-Polcher et al., 'Refugees & mental health'.
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Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

The author declares that research ethics approval for this article was provided by the ethics board of City, University of London (Ethics ETH1819-1383).

Consent for publication statement

The author declares that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflict of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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