

**Participatory architecture workshops with asylum seekers and
locals: experiences from the Crossing Cultures project in
Southern Italy**

Federica Calissano¹,

Sandra Denicke-Polcher², Domenico Giacco³,

Corinna Haenschel¹

¹ Psychology Department, City, University of London, United Kingdom

² School of Art, Architecture and Design, London Metropolitan University,
United Kingdom

³ Division of Health Sciences, Warwick Medical School, University of
Warwick, United Kingdom

Corresponding Author

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Federica Calissano, City University London, Northampton Square, London EC1V OHB, Email: Federica.calissano@city.ac.uk

Abstract:

Participatory architecture can promote dialogue across cultures, whilst working together on creating physical outputs. A team of academics with a background in architecture, psychology and health sciences evaluated a specific participatory architecture workshop in Southern Italy, part of the Crossing Cultures project, to explore participants' experiences and perceived benefits. In the context of situated learning, the workshop brought together architecture students, Italians and asylum seekers, who by working together and learning from each other have formed a community of practice (CoP). The aim of this study was to explore experiences of members of this CoP and their beliefs on the benefits of this project and ways to improve it. Twenty-five asylum seekers, locals and students took part in in-depth interviews, which were later subjected to thematic analysis. Participants reported experiences relating to *“living together”*, *“working together”*, *“making home”*, *“making locals comfortable to be involved”* and of *“understanding and respecting differences”*. Perceived benefits were *“creating a space for connection”*, *“revitalising local communities”*, *“promoting development of towns”*, *“broadening horizons”*, *“gaining or practising skills”*, *“having your ideas heard”* and *“creating lasting things”*. These data suggest that creating a CoP, as per Lave and Wenger's theoretical framework, not only fulfils individual goals but also, importantly, common concerns. In conclusion, participatory architecture workshops in an area with high immigration can create connections between asylum seekers and locals, and promote intercultural dialogue, whilst helping to reactivate deprived areas.

Keywords: Migration, Mental Health, Integration, Architecture, Crossing Cultures

Word Count: 5,937 (including References)

INTRODUCTION

During the last decades, the number of asylum seekers moving into Europe has substantially increased. Asylum seekers face lack of integration and inclusion in their host country, and this can impact their mental health (OECD, 2006). Collaborating in community initiatives and activities, which bring together native-born individuals and asylum seekers, can contribute to the social integration of migrants (OECD, 2018).

According to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), asylum seekers are individuals asking for international protection after escaping a conflict or political persecution in their home country. Research identified that asylum seekers have a higher risk of certain mental disorders (Priebe et al., 2016). As delineated by Giacco (2019), refugees face several risk factors for their mental health during the integration process in the host country, such as social isolation, discrimination, unemployment, and acculturation issues. This is especially the case if, after resettlement, they fail to integrate in the host communities (Priebe and Giacco, 2018; Bhui et al., 2012). On the other hand, this risk of experiencing mental disorders has been found to be lower if a sense of belonging to the host country is developed by asylum seekers (Cooper et al., 1992; Grieco, 1998).

Integration is a multidimensional process. Developing a positive relationship between the host communities and the asylum seekers is believed to be crucial: if asylum seekers can create a social network and participate in social and employment activities in the host country, this will benefit their mental health (Priebe and Giacco, 2018). Integration of asylum seekers may also benefit the host country itself, as they become productive citizens that effectively contribute to the country's economic growth making use of their knowledge and skills (OECD, 2006).

Nevertheless, integration is a long-term process in which time and space play an essential role. Over time, asylum seekers understand and learn more about their new

community, its language and how its labour market works, and become able to contribute to it. Space in a broader sense often acts as a tool that allows the host communities to connect with the newcomers. In our project, we arranged an interaction between newcomers and local citizens within participatory architecture workshops. These workshops are part of a larger strategy, which repeatedly brings groups of London-based students to a depopulated village in Calabria in order to help the reactivation of this marginalised area in Italy (Denicke-Polcher, 2022).

The pedagogical model used for this activity is situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Taking architecture students out of the classroom is instrumental for students' learning within communities, in which what is "practiced is learnt and vice versa" (Handley et al., 2006: 1). The work in partnership of locals, asylum seekers and students is intended to establish a CoP, referred to by the participants as "common ground" and "safe working and learning environment" (Denicke-Polcher, 2022: 4). Literature has highlighted the opportunities that this model offers to students' learning beyond the individual learner and beyond architecture as it creates a "culture of global citizenship". As it is explained, Crossing Cultures enabled "cultural encounters of difference which created an inclusive educational environment and a platform for international collaboration where all participants are involved in negotiating the shared terms" (Denicke-Polcher, 2022).

The pedagogy of this social practice and its effects on feeling *at home* for the asylum seekers as well as students has also been referred to in the literature (Denicke-Polcher, 2022). However, targeted research is needed into the development of social identity within communities of practice. According to Handley et al. (2006), "learning is not simply about developing one's knowledge and practice, but also involves a process of understanding who we are and in which communities of practice we belong and are accepted", arguing that communities of practice are closely linked to the construction of identity, sense of belonging

and commitment (Handley et al., 2006: 644). Here, we considered that Crossing Cultures consisted of individual students, locals and asylum seekers within the CoP approach. The study thus focused on understanding what were the perceived benefits of the common interest and learning from and with each other in the participatory workshop.

Background to this question is that it has been demonstrated that the segregation of asylum seekers in particularly deprived and poor areas of cities can contribute to their social marginalisation and discrimination (OECD, 2018). To avoid this, some countries, such as Italy, facilitate the settlement of asylum seekers in less populated rural areas, such as small villages. The opportunities of being involved in socially relevant projects is a vital aspect for the integration of asylum seekers. Local initiatives can offer opportunities for newcomers to socialise with other asylum seekers and local people, create trust and links within the community and understand and discover more about other cultures. For instance, “Camini Jungi Mundu” (“Unite the world”), a small Italian association close to the city of Riace (Eurocoop Servizi “JUNGI MUNDU” cooperativa sociale, 2021), welcomed and integrated people from third countries to repopulate the village of Camini. This has not only increased integration through social opportunities and events (Marcher et al., 2017), but also brought Camini socially and economically back to life and positively impacting social capital in the region of Calabria (Eurocoop Servizi “JUNGI MUNDU” cooperativa sociale, 2021).

Engaging migrant communities with local communities promotes a cross-cultural experience, achieved when different people with culturally diverse backgrounds work together on the same project. Mohandas (2018) provided some evidence that small scale architectural interventions can help asylum seekers in Greece to create a connection with a place and define it as “home”. It has been observed that working together promotes the acceptance of diversity, integration, and inclusive behaviours (OECD, 2018). The creation of a sense of community reduces the feelings of rejection and alienation that asylum seekers face as a result of

discriminatory behaviours (McMillan and Chavis, 1986), which has been demonstrated to harm their mental and physical health (Sellers et al., 2003; Nauck, 2001). More specifically, by increasing asylum seekers' social interaction and integration with the host community, their isolation, as well as their perceived rejection, decreases, increasing their feelings of belonging and emotional relations (Pickett and Wilkinson, 2008; Cochrane and Stopes-Roe, 1977).

Within situated learning, participation and engagement are described as crucial for the development of identity. Indeed, as explained by Wenger (1980), participating together in activities is not just limited to the act of participating in the activity, but it represents being active in the practice of social community that results in the creation of an identity of CoP.

Art-based activities are recognised as tools to encourage dialogue and communication between cultures. Art has been described as a tool that helps to approach the unfamiliar and broaden individuals' comfort zones (Mohandas, 2018). Art can be seen as a neutral contact zone that connects cultures and creates intercultural experiences, which are essential for the integration of asylum seekers. Here we are interested in understanding how creating a sense of community can be achieved by physically building and making things together. Indeed, as suggested by Wenger (1998), by taking part in activities and practices with a community, newcomers have the possibility of developing awareness around that group, learning to engage with their language, characters and tools. Therefore, literature has claimed that it is through the physical act of participating and engaging with communities that individuals can adapt and reconstruct their identities (Ibarra, 1999). However, the degree to which architecture in form of participatory design can facilitate dialogues across different cultures and promote integration (Mohandas, 2018) has not yet been investigated.

The aim of this qualitative study was to evaluate the experiences that asylum seekers, local citizens and architecture students had of participating in a one-week collaborative architecture

workshop taking place in the depopulated village of Belmonte Calabro, South of Italy, during July 2019. The outputs of this participatory work include small-scale, mobile constructions, e.g., benches, chairs, shelving towers (used for exhibitions and events) and canopies (covering large tables for community dinners). Since 2019, the workshop activities have become more permanent and long-lasting for instance by focusing on the renovation of the Casa, a former nunnery in the centre of the medieval village. The Casa has developed into a community hub where villagers, newcomers and visitors alike can come together for workshops, celebrations, and events. The result of all these engagement opportunities is an overall body of work which builds a new vision for a positive future for Belmonte and its inhabitants. These participatory architecture workshops have initiated a process of regeneration. In addition to this, we felt it was relevant to identify how students and locals, as well as participating asylum seekers, navigate cultural difference beyond the subject of architecture and help fostering a dialogue and intercultural exchange. Here, we aim to understand the experience and benefits of the workshops for the asylum seekers, locals and students and identify perceived benefits and limitations of this initiative to understand whether larger scale implementation is warranted, and how this should be evaluated.

METHOD

Nature of Workshop and Location

Since 2016, the work of Crossing Cultures has taken London-based architecture students out of the Design Studio and focused on regenerating deprived areas in South Italy. Several times a year, different student groups work and live in Belmonte for one week. They help to reactivate this depopulated village by involving locals and migrant asylum seekers in hands-on activities and organized events. The Workshop in Belmonte Calabro took place over seven days in July 2019 as part of *Crossings*, an annual event organised by La Rivoluzione delle Seppie, a non-

profit organisation founded by former architecture students. This was the fourth summer workshop organised in this area, with the first workshop held in 2016. These summer events have had a growing number of participants, consisting of architecture students at the London Metropolitan University, asylum seekers residing in the Calabrian towns Longobardi and Amantea in the vicinity of Belmonte Calabro, and local people. The summer workshop 2019 was the last workshop before the Covid pandemic started and had the largest number of participants so far, which will be the focus of this study. The activities during this particular workshop focused on small scale constructions for the renovation of the Casa as a new community hub in the village centre. Construction and renovation activities took place on an old building situated in the heart of the historic centre of Belmonte. These activities were also aimed for the village by creating a community hub in the village for locals and newcomers. The context-bound learning of these activities arose from the relationship between the different participants as a CoP, linking action with knowledge.

Participants

We recruited a purposive sample with a homogenous number from the three groups (students, asylum seekers and locals). Participants included workshop participants, citizens of Belmonte and asylum seekers recruited from Longobardi and Amantea to join the workshop. All participants provided informed consent. One interview with an asylum seeker was conducted in French with the help of an interpreter.

The study was approved by the Psychology Department Ethics Committee at City, University of London.

Data Collection

The interviews explored experiences of participating in the workshop. A topic guide was used during the interviews. Participants were asked about what they liked the most and the least about the workshops, what were the potential benefits on a personal level and for the town's development, and, lastly, if they had suggestions on how to improve the workshops. Two trained interviewers conducted the interviews in English and in Italian.

Procedure

Each participant was approached in person by an interviewer and provided with a Participant Information Sheet. In addition, researchers explained to participants what was expected of them, how long the interview would be (30-60 minutes) and that they had the right to decline participation at any stage of the research. All information was available both in English and Italian. All participants' questions were answered before proceeding with the interviews and they gave written consent to record the interview. After obtaining informed consent, interviews were conducted and recorded. A bilingual study researcher (Italian English) then transcribed the interviews, which were checked by two independent analysts.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to identify and analyse the patterns across participant interviews focusing on participants' experiences and meaning. The six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was applied. The analysis started with the *familiarisation with the data*: the audio recordings were transcribed, allowing the researcher to get familiar with the interviews. After carefully reading the transcriptions, first notes were taken. Then, *initial codes* were generated, indicating potential patterns across the interviews. Following these recurring patterns indicated by codes, the *search for themes to capture important aspect within the data* started. Themes were then *reviewed*, analysing which

ones needed to be retained or discarded, for instance due to overlapping with another theme. Then, *themes were defined and named* to clarify which aspect of the interviews each specific theme captured. Lastly, the *report was produced* with the final themes, illustrated with quotes from participants' interviews.

RESULTS

A total of 25 participants (14 males, 11 females) from three groups (students, asylum seekers and locals) were interviewed. 10 were students, 6 asylum seekers and 9 locals. Participants were all adults and they ranged in age between 18 to 51 (SD = 14.67); however, 19 participants did not provide their age.

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) produced two themes and several subthemes for each of them, which are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Themes and Sub-Themes.

Participants' experiences of the workshop

1. "Living together" and being part of the community

Both students and locals who participated in the collaborative architectural workshop declared that collaborating closely in the workshop made them feel as part of the same community. The workshop provided them with the opportunity of spending time together during the evenings and connect, creating the experience of "living together".

“We [...] made friends with the locals at the bar, we used to get to the bars in the evenings and play cards with the local men, which is a good way to connect with them.”

- Student

“They all created a big family. They stay all together without differences: they seem like a big community when they are together.”

- Local

2. Working together

The experience of collaborating and working jointly was positively identified in particular by asylum seekers, who saw the workshop as an opportunity to get to know each other without gender or ethnicity differences. “Working together” also provided asylum seekers with the possibility of sharing their stories and experiences with the locals.

“It is a big thing for me. It is a big experience, because when I meet you, I want to know you and be close with each other. I don’t want you to be afraid of me. Here we are all curious about each other. If I meet you, I can share a lot with you. It is a big experience for me.”

- Asylum seekers

“It is really great that there are no colour differences, and everyone is working together. And even the girls working on the constructions and guys working together, that is not very common in Pakistan.”

- Asylum seekers

3. Making home – getting to know the place

Both students and asylum seekers expressed the desire of creating home while participating in the workshop. Asylum seekers described that they become willing to create a home when they find a community that accepts them and, most importantly, a place that has potential and offers possibilities for them.

“This concept of the refugees coming here now [...], and they are willing to create a home here and if we are providing them with the possibilities.”

- Student

“Belmonte [...] is very peaceful and it calms me. So, living in Italy, especially seeing the locals and everyone as well, they accept me, so I feel that there is potential.”

- Asylum seekers

4. Making locals comfortable to be involved at their own pace

Some students who took part in the interviews felt that the workshop allowed locals to get comfortable and be involved at their own pace. The workshop was characterised by open dialogues and conversations, which helped local people to get used to the presence of students and asylum seekers, and to get involved in the workshop without any kind of pressure.

“It was good and did help to create an atmosphere and a conversation, which is the most important thing: to create and to carry this forward but I think we need time to build this so we can have a bigger conversation in the future eventually.”

- Student

“I see local people kind of getting used to you and recognising you and it is a really nice feeling.”

- Student

“It is beautiful being involved and getting to know new people from different cultures and ethnicities.”

- Local

5. Understanding and respecting differences

Both students and asylum seekers felt that the workshop represented an opportunity to learn how to understand and respect differences. Indeed, several people from different countries and speaking different languages met in Belmonte and worked together. This was seen as a way of connecting and learning new things from others, accepting, and respecting cultural, social and background differences.

“It is beautiful that all these young people from different cultures and languages come here.”

- Student

“All different cultures can connect and do things together; this makes things better because we can all learn something new from the others.”

- Asylum seekers

Perceived Benefits of the Workshop

1. Creating a space for connection

Students perceived that the workshop created a space for people to regularly visit during the year, and therefore a space for connection. Students also shared that collaborating in the workshop allowed them to create strong friendships with the asylum seekers that then lasted throughout the year.

“I think the project, the workshop helps to develop that relationship as we are building and renovating a house now and I think that is where is the space for people to continuously come throughout the year, then it will continue to grow as a place.”

- Student

“I made friends also with the immigrants. They are my friends. We made a relationship, we stayed in contact during the year, we talked by phone, by message: we created a link.”

- Student

2. Revitalising local communities

The workshop was seen as an opportunity to revitalise the local community and the village: the locals became aware of the potential of the place they lived in, and having more people in the village increased the activity and profits of local businesses.

“The workshops provide Belmonte with the opportunity of experiencing different activities and of showing the innate potentialities that human beings have. In addition, the village starts to be populated and there is both a commercial and cultural exchange.”

- Local

“The community is growing. And it is amazing to see just this all process growing, developing and just creating a positive change that is the whole point of it at the end.”

- Student

3. Promoting development to deprived towns

Locals who participated in the workshop identified the development of deprived towns, like Belmonte Calabro, as an important benefit and result of this participatory architecture intervention. The workshop helped Belmonte being more alive and dynamic.

“Belmonte needs more visibility, and we need to publicise it more as it is a really beautiful place.”

- Local

“[Belmonte] is alive now, there is more movement.”

- Local

4. Broadening horizons

Locals and asylum seekers felt that the workshop helped broadening horizons: participants from different backgrounds shared new perspectives and thoughts, offering each other with the opportunity of learning new things.

“The workshops are really innovative. Participants provide new perspectives, different from the ones that we are used to see and live.”

- Local

“I like the fact that I am learning languages. I like that when people speak, I learn different things.”

- Asylum seekers

5. Learning skills

Some locals who participated in the workshop shared that they were learning skills: they felt the desire to learn things from others, enriching their knowledge.

“They all have different ideas, but they all share the desire to learn and do new things.”

- Local

“I am enriching myself while learning new methodologies, and I am sure that people from Belmonte will learn new things as well.”

- Local

6. Feeling all ideas are heard

Many students spoke about how everyone was free to share their own ideas and that these were always heard by the local community, as well as by the other participants.

“They bring their own ideas, and they get the bits and pieces from the community and everyone is around the table and can bring themselves. It is part of the place, but they are creating something new”.

- Student

“[The workshops] can open their minds [of the community], their visions with more possibilities. [...] It can be very beneficial.”

-Student

7. Creating things that last

Some participants' responses revealed that, during the workshop, they felt that they were creating something that was going to last. They explained that taking care of something created a sense of belonging. Because of these feelings, people felt that there will always be space for them to go back to, allowing Belmonte Calabro to keep growing.

“[We are] creating the sense of appropriation: when people feel to belong to something, they take care of it, and it lasts.”

- Student

“There is space for people to continuously come throughout the year, then it will continue to grow as a place.”

- Student

DISCUSSION

Main findings

The study explored the experiences and benefits perceived by asylum seekers, locals and students following a collaborative architectural workshop that followed the pedagogical model of situated learning, in Belmonte Calabro, in the South of Italy. Overall, the participants confirmed that the common interest and learning from and with each other created a sense of belonging and identity.

Generally, the workshop was described by all participants as a positive experience. It was perceived as an opportunity to live together and to feel part of the same community. Participants described the workshop as an experience that enabled them to work closely together, getting closer with others, while creating a home for all of them. Participants therefore felt that the workshop represented an opportunity to understand and respect cultural and social differences, promoting integration of different cultures.

Moreover, asylum seekers, students and locals, described several benefits that they perceived as positive consequences of this collaborative workshop. For example, as participants were renovating a building for community use, they felt they were creating a space for connection and for people to visit on a regular basis, and they felt strong friendships were created between them. The local community was also revitalised by the cultural exchange that came with the

workshop. The promoted development of Belmonte Calabro was perceived as an extremely beneficial consequence of the workshop: locals felt that the town had become more dynamic, active, and revitalised while the workshop was taking place. In addition, the presence of individuals from different cultural, social, and economic backgrounds enabled participants to broaden their horizons, sharing different perspectives, ideas, and skills. This cross-cultural and open environment created the feeling amongst participants that everyone's ideas were heard and, most importantly, that they were creating something together that was going to last. Participants developed a sense of belonging to Belmonte Calabro and a feeling that there will always be space for them to go back. This sense of belonging to a community has been reflected into the naming of Belmonte as 'Belmondo', translating as 'beautiful world' by replacing *monte* ('mountain') with *mondo* ('world'). Consequently, the emerging community has been described as 'an open and inclusive imagination, (where) anyone can become a local' (Ricci, 2020).

Regarding participants' suggestions for improvements, practical issues represented an important aspect; for instance, participants talked about choice of food offered during the workshop. In general, taking all the subthemes identified, participants described both positive experiences and perceived benefits. The benefits experienced provide testable hypotheses for future larger scale quantitative research of a wider roll-out of this project and/or of similar initiatives.

Strengths and Limitations

This is the first study that investigated the experiences and the perceived benefits of asylum seekers, locals, and students after participating in a participatory architecture workshop. Having bilingual researchers helped to maximise the participation of asylum seekers and locals in the interviews. One-to-one interviews looked at individual experiences of the participants,

giving them the opportunity to share constructive feedback which may have been difficult to share in groups. Another strength of the study was that interviews were conducted directly at the time of the workshop, not afterwards, minimising recall bias. Lastly, the interviewers did not participate themselves in the workshop to be clearly separated from the team organising workshops.

Some limitations need to be acknowledged. The study included a relatively small sample of participants and was only conducted in one location. Whilst the themes identified cannot as such be generalised to other countries; they may recur or inform other similar experiences of participatory architecture workshops in rural villages. Moreover, despite our previously described safeguards, it is possible that desirability bias influenced our results and that participants may have focused on identifying positive aspects of a novel initiatives, rather than critical feedback.

Comparison with literature

All participants described a strong connection with the village and a higher understanding and respect of cultural differences. These findings were in line with a previous study by Mohandas (2018), who investigated whether small scale architectural interventions could help asylum seekers in Greece to create a connection with a place and define it as “home”. Mohandas’ findings (Mohandas, 2018) demonstrated that architectural interventions could facilitate the “creation of home” for asylum seekers and create feelings of deep connection to a foreign place. The architectural interventions in Greece represented spaces where people could share their cultures while learning and respecting differences. Mohandas (Mohandas, 2018: 48) also argued that “we must engage and interact with difference to create more tolerant and democratic societies”. In this study in Greece, similarly to Belmonte, the

spaces used for architectural interventions also promoted the creation of connections and engagement amongst participants.

Sennet stated that “the act of making is a method of integrating people with difference through a collective act” (Sennett, 2008: 29). Through the collective act of making within the CoP in Italy, individual students, locals and asylum seekers, have created their shared identity and effected the integration of asylum seekers.

Furthermore, our findings showed that the collaboration of students, asylum seekers and locals in the act of practice can initiate and promote the regeneration of deprived villages and cities and thus, also positively impacting on the local economy. A study called “Refugees as City-Makers”, conducted in Lebanon in 2018 (Fawaz et al., 2018), presented a collection of studies which identified similar positive effects by describing refugees as active agents in the construction of their lives in the new country. These studies demonstrated the importance of the presence of refugees in cities and smaller towns: their contribution is seen as essential for the revitalisation of urban and more rural places, which become more active and dynamic through refugees’ presence.

Our study adds to the available literature and shows how a sense of community can be fostered by initiatives such as architecture-based workshops and CoPs. Past research has shown benefits of participatory architecture workshops in terms of reducing the negative effects of perceived discrimination (García-Cid et al., 2020), which is confirmed by our study. Our study findings add that participatory architecture workshops may be a way of promoting a sense of community. Participants reported that our workshop did increase sense of community across different areas, namely: a) Membership, a sense of belonging; b) Influence, a feeling that one can make a difference to the community; c) Fulfilment of Needs and d) Shared Emotional Connection (McMillan and Chavis, 1986).

Our findings need also to be considered in the context of the large body of literature produced by national and international schools of architecture on the art of making (Gropius, 1965); this literature has been so far focused on the pedagogical benefits rather than on the positive impact that architecture-informed workshops can have on students or other participants, including their mental health. However, contemporary perspectives (Gaber, 2014) have emphasised that the act of physical making, especially involving groups of people, is linked to increased wellbeing. As outlined by Mitchell (1996), making at the scale of 1:1 in education fosters communication and the sharing of skills amongst the participants: the act of making at large scale ‘involve[s] all participants in a joint endeavour’ and further highlights the advantages of architecture workshops as a tool to foster ‘group cohesion’ (Mitchell, 1996: 173). In summary, emerging evidence shows that architecture workshops generate positive experiences in participants and deliver tangible benefits for the towns and communities that host them.

Our study can create an interdisciplinary bridge allowing a better understanding of the potential of participatory architecture workshops and situated learning theory, while also maximising the positive impacts of a CoP on social integration and mental health of marginalised groups such as asylum seekers.

Implication and further research

The findings of the present study contribute to emerging evidence (Mohandas, 2018; Gaber, 2014) that architecture workshops and the pedagogical model of situated learning can be highly beneficial towards the integration of asylum seekers and regeneration of rural and urban areas. Benefits for students are also of importance, as participatory architecture provides students with the opportunities to engage in socially relevant activities. Working in the context of an

area of high immigration and the need to integrate asylum seekers, the project has created the opportunity for architecture students to help to reactivate a deprived area.

Whilst previous studies had identified the potential of art-based workshops in reducing discrimination attitudes, our study adds that participatory architecture workshops through creating things that last over time, might foster a sense of community between people from different backgrounds. Politicians and local authorities may consider a wider implementation of these initiatives in consideration of the different benefits experienced by the different groups of participants.

In addition, this research demonstrated that attention to cultural aspects needs to be extended to issues which at times may be considered secondary. For example, the food offered at such events, is important. Participants' experience may be negatively impacted if they do not feel their cultural habits and traditions are respected in the choice of the food available during workshops.

Lastly, future research studies evaluating larger scale roll-out of such workshops should focus on assessing not only experiences but also outcomes, such as personal connections made, attitudes towards asylum seekers/locals/students, sense of community and mental health benefits. These studies may focus on rural and deprived areas or assess these initiatives in a more diverse mix of rural, semi-rural and urban sites.

CONCLUSION

Asylum seekers' integration in host countries can be extremely challenging, and for asylum seekers establishing trust and dialogue with native-born communities can be difficult, leading to poor integration, and negative consequences on asylum seekers' mental health.

This research has highlighted the importance that participatory architecture workshops can play in promoting dialogues across cultures. Through participatory architecture workshops, locals and asylum seekers can positively and successfully collaborate, connect, and communicate and a sense of community can be created. Through the meaningful activities of this workshop, relationships and shared identities have been created. Hence, such interventions show promise in fostering the integration of the newcomers and reactivating depopulated villages and towns.

Acknowledgments: DG, CH & SD designed the study, CH collected the data, and FC, DG, CH analysed the data and FC, DG, SD, CH wrote the manuscript. DG is partly supported by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Applied Research Centre (ARC) West Midlands. The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care. SD is member of the Centre for Urban and Built Ecologies (CUBE), London Metropolitan University, supporting the research on the project Crossing Cultures.

Declaration of interest: We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

REFERENCES

Bhui KS, Lenguerrand E, Maynard MJ, Stansfeld SA and Harding S (2012) Does cultural integration explain a mental health advantage for adolescents? *Int. J. Epidemiol.* (41): 791–802.

Braun V and Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3:2, 77-101.

Cochrane R, and Stopes-Roe M (1977) Psychological and social adjustment of Asian migrants to Britain: a community survey. *Soc. Psychiatry* (12): 195–206.

Cooper H, Okamura L, and Gurka V (1992) Social activity and subjective well-being. *Pers. Individ Dif* (13): 573–583.

Denicke-Polcher S (2020) Expanding the scope of architectural education: Creating a culture of global citizenship for students. *Charrette* 6 (2):41.

Denicke-Polcher S and Donnellan C (2022) Reactivating underpopulated areas through participatory architecture in southern Italy by creating a home for newcomers. *Architecture_MPS*, 21(1).

Eurocoop Servizi “JUNGI MUNDU” cooperativa sociale. Available at <https://eurocoopcamini.com/> (Accessed 19 May 2021).

Fawaz M, Gharbieh A, Hard M and Salamé, D (2018) *Refugees as City-Makers*. Beirut: AUB-IFI, SJC.

Gaber T (2014) The Agency of Making and Architecture Education: Design-Build Curriculum in a New School of Architecture. *International Journal of Architectural Research: ArchNet-IJAR*.

García-Cid A, Gómez-Jacinto L, Hombrados-Mendieta I, Millán-Franco M and Moscato G (2020) Discrimination and Psychosocial Well-Being of Migrants in Spain: The Moderating Role of Sense of Community. *Frontiers in psychology 11*, 2235.

Grieco EM (1998) The effects of migration on the establishment of networks: caste disintegration and reformation among the Indians of Fiji. *Int. Migr. Rev* (32): 704–736.

Gropius W (1965) *The new architecture and the Bauhaus*. The MIT Press.

Handley K, Sturdy A, Fincham R and Clark T (2006) Within and Beyond Communities of Practice: Making Sense of Learning Through Participation, Identity and Practice. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(3), pp.641-653.

Lave J and Wenger E (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marcher A, Kofler I and Streifeneder T (2017) Social and Labor Integration of Asylum Seekers in Rural Mountain Areas—A Qualitative Study. *Mountain Research And Development* (4):37.

McMillan DW and Chavis DM (1986) Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology* 14(1), 6–23.

Mitchell D (1996) *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Mohandas PD (2018) *The HOME-MAKER. Exploring strategies for the re-creation of “Home” by the displaced in Athens, Greece*.

Nauck B (2001) Intercultural contact and intergenerational transmission in immigrant families. *J. Cross Cult. Psychol* (32): 159–173.

OECD (2006) *From Immigration to Integration*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

OECD (2018) *Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Pickett KE and Wilkinson RG (2008) People like us: ethnic group density effects on health. *Ethn. Health* (13): 321–334.

Priebe S and Giacco D (2018) Mental health promotion and mental health care in refugees and migrants. Technical guidance. *WHO Regional Office for Europe*.

Priebe S, Giacco D and El-Nagib R (2016) Public health aspects of mental health among migrants and refugees: a review of the evidence on mental health care for refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants in the WHO European Region. *Who Regional Office for Europe Website, PubMed Bookshelf.*

Ricci G (2020) La Rivoluzione delle Seppie: the constant movement of a hybrid community in Calabria. *Domus.*

Sellers RM, Caldwell CH, Schmeelk-Cone KH, and Zimmerman MA (2003) Racial identity, racial discrimination, perceived stress, and psychological distress among African American young adults. *J. Health Hum. Beha.* (44): 302–317.

Sennett R (2008) *The Craftsman.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Table 1. Themes and Sub-Themes.

Participant Experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. “Living together” and being part of the community2. Working together3. Making home – getting to know the place4. Making locals comfortable to be involved at their own pace5. Understanding and respecting differences
Perceived Benefits	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Creating a space for connection2. Revitalising local communities3. Promoting development to deprived towns4. Broadening horizons5. Gaining or practising skills6. Having your ideas heard – feeling all ideas are heard7. Creating things that last