

Student Residency 2022 – Report

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of
La Rivoluzione Delle Seppie

The opinions here in are of the author.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide documentation and reflection on the student residency in collaboration with the on-site host organisation and local NPO, *La Rivoluzione Delle Seppie*, within the territory of Belmonte Calabro, Italy. On reflecting through journaled notes, observations and other media on the duration and experiences had during the residency, the essay aims to provide an overview of the student activity by identifying the key areas and moments that respond to the larger research questions of the residency, and the shared ambitions of the local NPO, those being:

What and how do day – to – day activities of the students contribute to cross cultural experiences with locals and other actors?

What do students develop as their design projects and what interactions take place with locals and other people in relation to their research?

How can these experiences be seen as data for an understanding of a student residency “model”?

The residency took place from 24th October – 21 December 2022

Main Themes

NPO as beneficiary of the student residency

Asking the question: *who benefits from the residency most?*, in the context of the development of the work in the territory, it could be said the NPO.

This question developed from the earlier thinking of “what is the benefit of the residency beyond the different positive and informative experiences of the individual actors and larger groups in Belmondo?”. When the students are present for that duration, it is effectively a moment of hyper exchange between the two communities, one of the main aspirations and objectives of the NPO, thus the residency serves as a catalyst for several aims of the NPO. Further more, because the NPO have most on-site action, responsibility and time investment in the territory, they also possibly have the most efficacy and potential to put the trust built and connections made during the residency, and its reach of engagement, back into developing the same aims.

It came to attention during the course of residency between members of the NPO that often the exchanges and experiences locals have in general with all Belmondo inhabitants, including the students during their residency, from the perspective of the locals, reflects on the NPO. Although locals meet Belmondo inhabitants and are aware of the differing reasons for their being here, it is the NPO that uses, works with, reflects and acts next on these experiences, relations and exchanges, in the same spaces. The NPO, therefore, longer term or “post-residency” stands as the entity in which the local community associate with these exchanges and other experiences involving all temporary inhabitants. Although the actors can vary throughout the year(s), the trust gained, in particular through the longer moments of intensity, and situational changes, feeds back into the same physical and social spaces with which Le Seppie work.

A similar notion was had which echoed the relationship between the work of students, the NPO work and the hospitality of, and connections, with the locality in this period. During conversation with Max of Collectif Etc., after seeing the student presentations during the SOC., it was said of the degree of time and energy Jim’s work had clearly taken, and wondered could the time be spent (individually / collectively / part - digitally) developing a site-based project (long term / short term / ongoing etc) within the territory, using the connections the NPO have, as “we know everyone”.

Max described the input and depth of work from the student Jim, presented in the context of that wider moment of the School of Commons (SOC), a platform co-developed by NPO, about the territory to the locals, as somehow a form of content of the NPO. The idea of it being somehow described as “content”, is here interpreted to be more of an “asset”, used for discussion and exploration particularly in a moment when presenting to the community. This essay asks if this work done should be conceived of as more of a tool, but for the idea of furthering student engagement in the territory, functioning also between the NPO and the locality.

The conversation asked:

Could a student residency beyond the primary spaces of the NPO such as the Casa, use this concept as an ongoing form of research for the NPO and the project, whilst developing and furthering engagement between the students and the locals?

If until now the relationship between the university and the village has focused on the Casa (as inhabitation and work, outside of the individual student projects), what can the current relationship between the NPO – Locality – Students, do to further the project through student engagement, beyond the previously mentioned “individual experiences”, and in acknowledging the NPO have the “on-site efficacy”.

Students in BelMondo: Processes of living and working together

As with all inhabitants within the project, the NPO aims to see inhabitants as collaborators beyond guests, and thus it is important to share both the practical and theoretical idea of being in “Belmondo” (the main physical and psychological framework of the project within the larger territory). This ranges from the more natural things such as daily living, sharing space and resource to organising events with locals independently of the NPO.

It serves as a useful consideration for practical concerns but also interestingly theoretically as a way to live and work together between people of differing levels of experience and understandings of a place. Describing the NPO's relationships with actors this way allows for introducing the ideals and ambitions of the project, as the on-site NPO see and work within the territory.

Students participated well in this respect, within their means and responsibilities, adapting to transport situations, organising themselves around possibilities of part-taking in activities with the NPO and locals, site visits, cleaning and maintaining their use of shared spaces etc.

Furthermore, beyond the basics, from this came and can be discussed moments of collaboration beyond the daily (helping with small tasks collectively in preparation for an event or collective activity etc). Students get a good sense of how the NPO work by living and working together in this way, and would actively participate in helping during the residency. Understanding your own needs in a place and how to address them as a way to understand the place also.

The Casa is often the place where students engage with locals for the first time. The Casa plays a large role, as for most Belmondo inhabitants, in mediating between actors. The use of the Casa with locals is an ongoing point of research for the NPO, and the ideal engagement for students from the perspective of the NPO is that all inhabitants feel free to use the Casa as a place of exchange, that takes into consideration the organisational and logistical needs of everyone involved and or / present, when necessary. Again with practice this worked well with the students.

Interestingly the students and inhabitants of the Casa, during particular events or moments, start to welcome locals in (Rachel invited Gerrardo a few times, Enzo and others came in at the end of the wine festival possibly from speaking with Jim or Sandra of BelEx) and because of their daily presence, sometimes take on a hosting role or energy when socialising. Students doing so in turn furthers trust between the NPO and locals, and likely contributes to the locals own sense of belonging in the Casa, and other spaces within the project. From the perspective of the locals, although they meet and engage with many individual students during this period, over the course of several residencies, moments of exchange, workshops and events etc., it is their returning to the Casa, and other spaces within the project (inc. the town), that continues to build on these connections again, reinforcing the ideas said earlier.

When locals are present in the Casa, it is good for students to see how locals take part in the project, via their reactions, comments, actions etc. These relational dynamics between local and non local-inhabitants could begin to spark curiosity for students as to how they can live and work and take part in ways, outside of their residency, in places with lives and activities other than their own, in places familiar and not, and with what possibilities etc. Students seemed more than happy to be involved with re-arranging and organising the space for certain events and moments.

Depending on the event, students help and take interest in the flexibility of the space and how it works with their new understanding of the dynamics of the spaces. This seems insightful for them, in understanding the parameters and diversity of use of the Casa, something they contribute to as they become more familiar with it, but how it plays a very public role, particularly, with how Le Seppie interact and collaborate with locals (hosting, running workshops) and the municipality in negotiating use of equipment (projector, chairs etc), and other actors during events. They see an organisational, spatial and social setting shift, and the work and ways in which its done. In the end the goal becomes less about moving furniture and more about how managing the Casa reflects a certain type of aspiration for the place and people in it. Hopefully it becomes an architectural precedent and project n the town that may inform their own projects. Sharing responsibilities and roles in maintaining the Casa even if socially. Students were typically fine with this, often helping to maintain the Casa etc., during the larger events or engagements and always maintaining their own spaces and use of the kitchen and communal spaces etc. This is something communicate by the NPO to work with all inhabitants in this way, and is practised over the course of people staying in Belmonte.

On one occasion, the students, BelEx guests and the NPO were invited to dinner by local farmers Marissa and Fiore. In the process of organising, a small miscommunication occurred between the NPO and a student, and led to misunderstanding the price of the dinner, possibly causing attendance numbers to change, concern therefore for the expense of Marissa and Fiore. Soon after it was resolved, and knowing the relationship the NPO have with the hosts it would never have been hugely problematic, but on reflection it occurred that when the NPO collaborate with “new parties”, even on smaller things such as communicating with locals, ensuring timings, correct information etc., there is a need to share the same perspective and communicate clearly, something to be practised always, as all encounters and opportunities had with locals, reflects on the NPO, and thus becomes ultimately a responsibility of the NPO. It was enjoyable to do this with students and fruitful as conversation. Doing this activity alongside the students as a professional action in collaboration is possibly a unique experience for a student to have and is an interesting mentality, behaviour and relationship to develop together, for the NPO also.

Engaging with the NPO as a form of research and vehicle for exchange between students and local actors

After the students had spent time helping out small tasks with the NPO, an inquiry of thinking begun into the different ways and motivations for the students to participate and engage with the wider research work and activity of the NPO. This was beneficial in helping the NPO with certain tasks and hopefully as well for the students own enjoyment, understanding and education about the research activity within the territory.

The students and the NPO and made a small “work in progress” presentation to share with each other, a helpful step in getting to know their projects, and them getting to know the NPO. The students gain a slower and deeper understanding throughout the residency. Understanding the work and research of the on-site NPO and thus the wider picture in which they and their own work are a part of, beyond an introduction, was naturally an ongoing conversation with the students and NPO. The experiences had during the residency, could possibly contextualise and inform their own projects, and begin to inform and connect students with people within the local community (this is also something that happens in non-work / social contexts). Furthermore, it allows for successful collaboration on day – to – day activities, by learning to share responsibilities within the main shared space (La Casa), but also with sharing time, work and ideas with the NPO and other guests / collaborators staying in Belmondo, with similar research interests (BelEx, Politecnico Torino students etc). In short, learning the wider picture, can help contextualise the smaller things.

Where students enjoy helping the NPO, it can be advantageous for the NPO, and ideally vice versa, as the more they spend with us the more they help with logistics and communication and thus in small ways they gain another type of engagement that can contribute to their learning of the place and life etc. The enjoyment of certain activities can depend on the interest, and possibly the relevance, to the student and the students collective and individual project research. Rachel volunteered to drive, helped with HappyLab, helped translate (also for her own interests and research). Jim played a role in meeting people based on his two experiences here; Nunzio, the son of farmer Giuseppe, and was particularly pro-active in meeting and engaging with other locals, initiating football with Matteo and the young locals, one of whom works for the Servizio Civile scheme with Le Seppie. All students typically spent time speaking with locals in varying degrees throughout.

In the context of engaging with the locality and understanding the work of the NPO, this idea also helps reinforce earlier topics such as collaboration. The idea they are playing a role in the research (as outlined in the wider research brief), and particular to this project, and that it is their individual “soft skills” that when applied naturally (socialising, organisational / logistical help, occasionally language translation), things that would typically involve engagement, they are contributing to the forms of activity we consider “work” and are just as highly tangible.

Some ideas mentioned during the residency:

Rita suggested moments of Social Media / Communication work etc.

Possibly their sites / on-going surveys / architectural projects could somehow play a role although how this would involved further student – local engagement is unclear.

HappyLab, working with children, clay, workshop organisation etc.

Is there a working relationship with local NPO and students beyond the Casa? Can the work of the local NPO be integrated into the students *life* (without being the main objective of being here)? What criteria must such moments include to be both beneficial and feasible for the students and engaging for the locals?

Diversity of student research enquiries

From the perspective of the NPO, engagement with the locality and collaborating with the NPO, was largely successful because of the difference in research inquiries and reasoning for taking part in the residency.

Jim and Rachel were particularly proactive which seemed natural given the nature, medium (writing), and timetable of their work (they had more flexibility). Azar, found themselves meeting other local young people; seemingly a result of her explorative and independent nature paired with her desire to do something different other than work and stay in the town, particularly when there were temporarily transport difficulties etc.

These are particularly profound levels of engagement, from the perspective of the ideas of Le Seppie and becomes an interesting point of research and activity for everyone involved. In essence people from the two different communities enjoying spending time together within the spaces and realms of the project (from both work and social points – of – view).

Is there something to gain from returning students, diversity of research enquiries, general energy and ideas shared within the student – NPO relationship.
How would locals fit into this?

Diary

The diary here contains most information on weekly and daily activities had by the students, and notes on the specific people, locals and non-locals, that they engaged with. Thoughts on these engagements are noted. Summaries were finalised retrospectively.

Week 1 w/c 24th: *Introduction to Casa and Belmonte*

Summary: Casa, familiarising with place, establishing relationship between working in Casa and living in town etc., more of Le Seppie there at the beginning, Isacco and Emma (possibly split over first 2 weeks) which helped with logistics, Verina as BelEx was there, juggled space with her. Many things established, learning through doing, some things quickly (living in the Casa, excellent care for space quickly), some ideas / perspectives such as organising events between the communities are understood better as they arise. They adapt quick. What must that feel like? What does it mean to feel at home quick. What's the role of the casa in this. How can this be utilised as an experience to build on as a strength?

What is the casa's role in relation to the students and the town?

Locals / engagement

Students first visit to local farm, introduced to Fiore and Marissa etc., who later in the residency would provide a home restaurant experience.

Day 1 (wed): Welcome to the casa. Discussions about organising best housing situation.

Day 2 (thu): remaining 4 students arrive in the evening.

Day 3 (fri): students work then go to garden of Fiore

Day 4 (sat): Students live / work in casa

Day 5 (sun): Students chill

Week 2 w/c 31st: *Working, changing rooms, smaller room, establishing routines*

Summary: Going down in morning early, or working early and finishing early? Establishing possibilities of exploring the town / having an "active" breakfast period, with a suitable work routine.

"Different distractions", interesting comment on observations of dealing with, and very much enjoying, a very new environment (rural, coastal, mountainous, culturally, different work / shared spaces etc.)

Suggested to starting work early, but then finish early, rather than super early active starts etc?

Comparisons of work / life balances between here and London / the City.

Students continue to adapt and adapt to the Casa, which slowly allows them to become more comfortable with their work environment and being there. Signs of looking to explore beyond the town. Students generally began wanting to either socialise (go out, bars, clubs etc., or explore the region further). Students were encouraged to take initiative with regards to furniture and space use. They tested rooms, outside – inside, changing weather conditions changed use of space throughout residency. They sporadically used tools for making, different objects: a few models, small drawing instrument (T-square ?), possibly a chair (?). Overall on and off.

Generally students were quick to adapt to the desks and spaces etc, but the quality of the studio environment seemed to take longer to manifest (possibly this only really happened in the last half – last few weeks, eventually put a few extra desks in their final room of choice for spreading out further, possibly cold didn't help). Encouragement from NPO. Hailey found a large cloth as a model backdrop.

Hailey suggested an interest and understanding in how different activities, such as going around with cienghale hunters, can be forms of research that help build an understanding of a place, even if seemingly just enjoyable etc.

Locals / engagements

Charlotte of Belmondo Experience arrived.

Students meet locals at the bars and generally get to know the territory still. Met Gabriella of the Alimentari, who was expecting students.

Day 1: Jim and Johan went swimming in morning, students working in Casa, Amantea market in the evening, until late

Day 2: work

Day 3: students work, take car down shopping,

day 4: Chilled work, scattered around Casa, Jim set-ups desk + curtain

day 5: Verina leaves, students re-purpose room, marina in evening, walk up with shopping

Day 6: wander in rain in morning, students have lunch then go chill / work

Day 7: Mountain walk and walk to Vadi during day

Week 3 w/c 7th: Working, changed rooms and spread out in Casa in smaller groups

Summary: Casa got busier, after Verina left and now new BelEx people came, this slowly introduced the students to the *in-flux* nature of the Casa, again making students, like all Belmondo inhabitants, get to know and work and live together etc. Rachel and a Bel-Ex guest Charlotte went cienghali hunting with NPO. Charlotte and Rachel wanted to come. In general it was an activity some wanted to know, but like all activities was more appealing to some than others as something to get to know more.

Hailey commented on something said and had recognised the potential of going around with cienghale hunters as part of understanding the locality and the wider territory on a cultural level.

Vino Veritas wine festival: students open up with locals more, joined by BelEx (Charlotte and also Berlin Collective). Students blew off steam a bit as well, busy environment. Possible strength of context and “folk music” element. This is a characteristic of Belmonte, and rural Italy, that is

particularly attractive possibly? “Do you now Franco has some?” - comment of Natalia about something to buy from susy bar, getting to know the place and sharing the info herself. Large social events as described are great ice breakers for the students and feeling like they are within an existing community, and a good way to get to see faces etc., and how the town works in relation to these people. Furthermore, the Casa played host to the party continuing into the Casa with some locals. Quite an eccentric evening and probably quite interesting to see the Casa be used spontaneously, and how this reflects on our relationship with them.

Locals / engagement

Berlin collective of Belmondo experience arrived.
Rachel and Charlotte came cienghale hunting.
Wine Festival on Friday evening.

Day 1:
Day 2: Collective x 2 arrive. Students work
Day 3: Collective x 1 and Milena arrive
Day 4: Cienghale w/ Rachel and Charlotte
Day 5: Wine festival proves very popular with students. Worked in the day calls etc.
Day 6: Used projector for film
Day 7: Chilled

Week 4 w/c 14th Field Trip

Summary: Arrival of other students for one week. Larger collective exploration. Joe Genie and Chiara went into a small construction site in a house where builders described a little history of the building, but also the building works (Chiara translated) and structural layers / techniques being used in the building. This appeared to be stimulating for students in regards to insights in local construction, but also as a general encounter with local builders.

Overall it felt as though students enjoyed a sense of support by having tutors and the extra students arrive, particularly as means of sharing project work and having some familiarity etc. Possibly this is something to consider in regards to the “studio environment”. However, paired with the busy nature of this week and the following week with SOC, students noticed they found it harder to focus on work so much during these 2 weeks.

Locals / engagement

Students Met Miranda, at Colavolpe, who they later organised to drink with on their last evening. Students began to wish to go out, with locals also, (in this case another young person) outside of formal visits etc.

Field trip students: Cantiere with Genie and Chiara.
Mattaseo and Colavolpe.

Day 1: Worked remotely, did pin-up, interesting moment ???

Day 2: Tutors + extra students arrive

Day 3: Chiara, Joe and Genie enter into a construction site with builders (joes prompt, chiara translated)

Day 4: Sandra, Group Feedback session no. 2

Day 5:

Day 6:

Day 7:

Week 5 w/c 21st SOC, engaged in SOC lectures, Jim's friend Nate, a new guest, mediated a presentation during SOC

Summary: Students engaged with SOC, through following some of the various shared presentations and engaging mostly with members of the other collectives (Jim and Max of Collectif Etc spoke in length of Jim' design presentation etc).

I think there was a large interest from the students, even if at times they were not entirely sure of the purpose of the workshop. Ultimately the students seemed to enjoy, and took something away from it, the shared research interests and methods shared by the other collectives and students. There was less direct engagement between the two groups of students (PoliTo and Met), beyond the larger co-ordination of the event.

In general, during the middle – latter half of the residency, for approximately one week students stated they were less focused during this time, seemingly owing to several factors, such as:

- the point in their stay (late - middle)
- activities in the Casa serve as stimulation but also partly a distraction (SOC, social events etc)
- studio environment possibly needed shaking up.

This was something acknowledged and accepted by students as not really a problem just part of the experience of the residency and its timings etc., and events such as this actually help stimulate their time and interest here., including as a work of the NPO.

Locals / engagements

Whole SOC cast (collectifs, students, PoliTo some locals such as Mercurio etc)

Mercurio, as a well known local and semi-regular person to engage with the NPO, had been around also owing to a relationship he built up with the Berlin Collective of BelEx. Students spent time with locals based on relationships built by other Belmondo inhabitants. The students also ultimately see the response the NPO get from the local community when exchange events are organised (such was the final event / dinner to round-up the SOC week).

Day 1:

Day 2: HappyLab in the market (Jim went)

Day 3:

Day 4:

Day 5: "Dinner Finale" by BelEx, guys chatted with Mercurio much, made lamp shades, small engagement with Polito students

Day 6:

Day 7:

Week 6 w/c 28th Mostly Dissertation (Azar said)

Summary: Students continued to work, and began the final few weeks by continuing to focus on their individual priorities. Hailey began model making at a larger scale, finally using the workshop tools to do so. This was particularly interesting to see, as it felt like owing to the pending time pressures (also likely owing to the residency ending soon), there was a small surge in activity like such. In the end students did adapt the spaces around them to suit, and in collaboration with other Casa inhabitants, however, student also seemed to end up slightly "desk-bound" when compared to a more typical studio environment.

It seems between the various factors affecting the students "studio environment" (project development, familiarity / possibilities with the space, conversations with NPO) meant the working space of the students was a constant thing in development, being mostly successful but with possible ideas for improving this.

Locals / engagements

Azar by this point had come to befriend some of the young guys (Manu, Orlando, Alfredo), and had been out with them exploring other parts of the region in-fact.

Jim met Nunzio in the Bar (asked Joe to translate with him), after having met his father on his last visit. This furthered the feeling of creating relations in the town. Nunzio then became a regular face on and off for the following weeks.

Nunzio speaks English, so translation not necessary.

Party Friday meant students met people they had not in our community previously; Elio, Saffa and Valentina (our extended group of collaborators, also typically young people). Again diversity of people. Its good for students to see not only the young people within the locality, but also the other young people such as those that have previously and / or still are involved with the NPO, and working often with NPO, together in the same place etc. Seeing the wider network of collaborators and people who have passed through and still remain is quite an interesting thought. A map should be created.

Football with Jim and young boys living in Belmonte Marina (locals + Servizio Civile collaborators), initiated without NPO was great.

Genie and Azar also both participated in HappyLab, enjoyed working with children. Azars Arabic meant she could speak with the migrant children.

I wonder if the “hands-on” moments such as these can feed into diversifying the slightly desk orientated studio environment in the Casa, but also the experience can help inform imagination on how groups in a village can work together.

Different activities with the NPO could be seen as moments for the students that break – up their working routine and actually inspire their time here beyond a place to study.

Day 1:

Day 2: HappyLab at the Casa, not in the Market

Day 3:

Day 4:

Day 5:

Day 6: Elio, Valentina, Saffa, party in evening, BelEx,

Day 7: Market, Rachel drove, dropped guys to longobardi, bit stressed about car again, me jim n johan walked down mountain half way, we bought stuff, guys found lunch, busy / productive morning, Johan worked a bit, they watched football at the bar in the evening

Week 7 w/c 5th

Summary: Students were focused on developing as much of their projects as they could. Busy finalising necessary engagements and priorities before leaving Belmonto.

Locals / engagement

Jim and Fiore spoke and with the help of Vito of the NPO translating, spoke about feelings towards life and community within the agricultural network and spaces of Belmonte. Jim was surprised by Fiore's comments, typically did not match his ideas of community network might function. Strong moment of furthering understanding of mentalities and cultures of the place.

Day 1: Dissertation (Azar), me, vito + BelEx bar in evening, students cooked with Vito, Gerrardo Vespucci, long talk, intimate, Rachel, Jim, Sandra (BelEx) helped translate, Hailey begun model, Jims essay changed, Jim went to Fiore w / Vito, surprised by Fiore's response to the “local agricultural network”

Day 2: Design (Azar), Shaung (BelEx) left, hailey finished model, used power tools upstairs

Day 3:

Day 4:

Day 5: Day Out

Day 6: Football Amantea?

Day 7:

Week 8 w/c 12th

Summary: Owing to the Crit, design students continued to work as much as possible. In the end certain activities did not take place (DIY in the Casa), another cienghale hunt etc. This possibly

reflects both the unexpected busy nature of the Casa and everyone's schedules, particularly in the last weeks, but also the need to organise and establish things quicker if need be. Plan most "activities" towards the beginning of the residency. Students tidied spaces and packed down. Johan mentioned looking forward to going home by the end, missing the comforts and offers of the city.

Locals / Engagement

Went out with Miranda very last evening. Interesting to see students encourage Miranda to join, I think as a last moment in Belmonte they wanted to do as much as they could etc.

Day 1:

Day 2:

Day 3:

Day 4:

Day 5:

Day 6: All Depart