

Studio South: Co-creating Architecture Education through Residencies in Calabria

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ABSTRACT

The research initiative Crossing Cultures introduces an innovative pedagogical model, immersing London-based architecture students in a Calabrian village through residencies, in collaboration with a local non-profit organisation (NPO). Since 2016, the program has addressed migration and depopulation, fostering a community of practice with locals, asylum seekers, and other newcomers. Since 2020, the residencies, known as Studio South, have enabled in-depth situated research and contributed, with the presence of young people, to the village's sustained reactivation. They have disrupted traditional pedagogy, emphasising students as research partners, fostering hybrid roles, and transcending research-practice boundaries. Reflections from a range of stakeholders reveal a convergence of students' and the NPOs concerns, endorsing residencies as a model which bridges academia and practice for societal impact and supports students' transition into the professional world.

KEYWORDS

Studio South, architecture residencies, engaged pedagogy, immersive practice, marginal areas

Crossing Cultures - Disrupting Pedagogy

The research initiative Crossing Cultures¹ at London Metropolitan University explores new pedagogical models within Higher Education that facilitate the development of intercultural relationships and collective practice while bridging the gap between academia and practice.

In collaboration with the interdisciplinary not-for-profit organisation, Le Seppie², London-based students have engaged with an Italian village and its inhabitants since 2016 through a flexible timetable. Activities within and outside of the curriculum have resulted in small-scale constructions (Fig.1), art-led community activities (Fig.2) and large-scale regeneration strategies for the Calabrian village and the surrounding territory (Fig.3). Through field trips, workshops, and residencies these activities take place within the academic curriculum, while additional voluntary activities are located outside of the curriculum, e.g. the summer workshops organised by Le Seppie and individual initiatives.

Particularly the long-term student residencies, referred to as Studio South in contrast to the London-based studio, disrupt traditional research and studio-based pedagogy through their immersive nature. This theme will be outlined throughout the paper, demonstrating that it serves as a pedagogical model which benefits students, but also is a key mechanism for rural revitalisation through university engagement. As such, the residencies are key for the village's sustainable development and could ensure its future vitality and resilience.

Under the umbrella of Crossing Cultures, onsite activities have grown a lasting presence of young people in the village over time. These growing activities have had a profound impact on the revitalisation of the Calabrian village called Belmonte Calabro, which is grappling with depopulation due to its rural location in southern Italy. Situated in a region affected by rural exodus since the early 20th century, the village serves as a fertile ground to provide students with research-led learning for their individual projects, while also working on a collective response to the challenges arising from migration and depopulation in this marginal European territory.

Belmonte, classified as one of Italy's *aree interne* (inland areas), embodies the challenges of demographic decline, economic stagnation, and limited access to public services – issues faced by many rural settlements, not only in Italy. According to the *Strategia Nazionale per le Aree Interne* (SNAI)³, these areas reflect broader national trends, with inland areas covering over 60% of Italy's landmass but encompassing more than half of its municipalities, yet are inhabited by only 22% of the population. The SNAI, 'a policy approach intended to ensure local development throughout Italy, developed to rectify the demographic decline in the country's rural inner areas'⁴, operates through external interventions. Crossing Cultures is noteworthy in this context, as it offers a rather bottom-up alternative for territorial development and

Figure 1:
Public furniture constructed during
the summer workshop
(Silvia Gin and Zeshan Mazhar,
2018)



Figure 2:
Workshop with students and
refugees (Jane McAllister, 2017)



Figure 3:
Regeneration strategy for Belmonte
by student (Meis Alsaegh, 2017)



contributes to a discussion about the future of aree interne by developing a broader framework for rural revitalisation at the intersection of policy and locally driven, participatory strategies.

Leveraging the opposing conditions of emigration and immigration, the initiative of Crossing Cultures has positioned students and academics as 'agents of change'⁵ in rebuilding the local community. This success can be attributed to its sustained engagement with Belmonte and the support of Le Seppie who mediate between the local community, students and their tutors. The curriculum, intentionally designed to engage different student cohorts from London, facilitates short- and longer-term involvement alongside Le Seppie's continual presence in the village. Repeatedly bringing students and activities to the village, has established a strong connection between the London-based university and the village.

Innovatively, Crossing Cultures has transcended traditional pedagogy through experiential fieldwork and research-led live projects. Students advance their individual academic pursuits while collectively addressing societal challenges linked to migration and depopulation. This distinctive approach has not only attracted more students but has also sparked the rejuvenation of Belmonte,



Figure 4:
Communal cooking during the
second residency
(Giulia Rosco, 2022)

fostering social capital and stimulating economic growth⁶.

Teamwork, peer learning, experimentation, and agency have grown a community of practice (CoP) embracing students, local residents, asylum seekers, and professionals. In the academic context, architecture live projects that produce such CoPs are not unique; examples include the University of Sheffield's Castlegate project, which 'has grown beyond the limits of the design studio to reach out for a broader constituency'⁷; and Cardiff University's Grangetown project, which has 'co-produced an annual cycle of public celebrations and collaborative research'⁸. Importantly, all three projects emphasise the impact of collaborative processes over final outputs.

Parallels can also be argued to an Italian project around the former convent SS. Trinita delle Monache in Naples, which has spanned over twenty years with the contribution of the University of Naples Federico II. The process of integrating a large monumental complex has been achieved through 'a consistent thread of collaboration involving various stakeholders'⁹. Giovangiuseppe Vannelli describes the process as a 'time-based approach', recognising that 'multiple and interrelated temporalities'¹⁰ are indispensable design tools for the project. This paper extends previous research about how *Crossing Cultures'* collaborative and *cross-cultural* methodology, similarly based on 'interrelated temporalities', has created 'a culture of global citizenship'¹¹ and 'a home for newcomers'¹².

With migration and depopulation being central to the research initiative of *Crossing Cultures*, the early participatory architecture workshops intentionally invited asylum seekers to participate. While a cross-university study with

Figure 5:
Relaxing during the first residency
(Myles Albon-Crouch, 2020)





Figure 6:
Students socialising with locals in
Bar dello Sport during UK lockdown
(Rita Elvira Adamo, 2020)

mental health experts discussed the impact on the integration of asylum seekers¹³, this paper focuses on the student residencies as an innovative form of engaged pedagogy. Disrupting the formal pedagogy of academia, these residencies contribute to a new outlook for co-productive, university-based live projects.

Studio South - Disrupting Studio-based Pedagogy through Residencies

Be free and don't stuck in a circle, explore and be open to meet people... it will... change your experience and... help you learn and understand more about culture, traditions, languages, and dialects, talents and creativity, values and much more...¹⁴

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent shift to online teaching set the stage for the first residency. We named it Studio South to highlight its southern location and its parallel connection to the design studio in London. *Casa di BelMondo*, a partially renovated building, served as studio space, where students worked, but also cooked (Fig.4), relaxed (Fig.5) and interacted with new people during both residencies.

Following the initial lockdown in 2020, UK universities continued online teaching in compliance with government directives. Faced with the prospect of studying at home in isolation rather than on campus, ten final-year undergraduate students proposed to their tutors to relocate to Belmonte as the satellite Studio South, while continuing online classes from there. Notably, most of their peers had returned to their respective homes across the UK to live with their parents. In Belmonte, the students were able to live together

as a 'bubble' and even socialise with the locals (Fig.6), alleviating the isolation they experienced early in the pandemic. Their studio tutors developed a brief aligned to the Crossing Cultures initiative, enabling them to study in Belmonte and reside on their project site while supported by Le Seppie.

In 2022, the residency was developed as an eight-week student-in-residence programme, this time financially supporting seven students through the study-abroad Turing scheme. The funding application was managed through the university's Study Abroad office as part of a larger submission to enable students from low-income households to learn about foreign cultures. In Belmonte, this allowed the participating students to develop their individual design projects for the village, building on the knowledge acquired by previous cohorts while fully immersed in the local community. Students on the scheme spent the first five weeks of the academic year in London, then moved to Belmonte for the remainder of semester 1. They returned to London before Christmas to complete their coursework in London with the rest of the cohort.

Contextualising the residencies within the traditions of experiential learning and teaching in architecture positions them as a unique extension to established live project pedagogy. Drawing on two examples, the Community Design Centre (CDC)¹⁵ movement in the US, best known through the work of Auburn University's Rural Studio, and the Urban Rooms Network¹⁶ in the UK, both initiatives share a commitment to long-term engagement and community transformation over time by 'Being There'¹⁷. While the CDC's model is rooted in politically engaged service delivery to communities, the emphasis is on 'the physical labour ... of student architects' with projects 'built by students and volunteers under the direction of design educators'¹⁸. In Belmonte, where the population is sparse, service delivery is less direct and physical building is only a small part of students' social purpose. Here, the role of the architect as a 'client-oriented' service provider – an 'agent for' – has developed into a partner and collaborator – an 'agent operating with'¹⁹.

All three projects revolve around a central space as a hub for collaborative activity, providing a base for engaging with surrounding communities. Situated off-campus, all three projects disrupt traditional studio-based design teaching. While the Urban Rooms Network prioritises public dialogue about the 'shared built environment' by being 'on-site'²⁰, Rural Studio and the Italian project stand apart for their intensive residency format. Rural Studio's Samuel Mockbee described that the 'act of living in a different cultural and economic landscape was meant to take students outside themselves'²¹. In this sense, the immersive nature of the Calabrian residencies integrate students' daily lives into the rhythms of the site, fostering a profound connection between the learning process and the social and spatial dynamics of the place. This ethos is enhanced by its rural setting, where there is not much distraction, integrating living, working and reflecting on-site.

With reference to CoPs already in the previous section, the Calabrian

residencies have encouraged students to extend their learning beyond 'knowledge and practice'²². The residencies foster a process of understanding their own identity and their belonging to and acceptance within a community of practice. Living and working within the local community and with Le Seppie, the students embody the principle that what is 'practiced is learnt and vice versa'²³.

In the context of practice, architect residencies lack historical ties to the better-known artist residencies, but there are international parallels with architecture practices working as collectives such as Exyzt, Collectif Etc, and Assemble. Édith Hallauer's article, 'Living to build, building to live...'²⁴, has been instrumental in comprehending the opportunities presented by 'residential architects'²⁵. As part of the large-scale renovation of a social housing estate in Boulogne-sur-Mer (2010-2013), the architect Sophie Ricard was referred to as the 'neighbourhood referent'²⁶. She lived and worked amongst the residents while the renovation took place²⁷. 'Living on the site' facilitated an 'understanding of the societal issues'²⁸ and built trust over time, essential for the project's success.

Studio South aligns with the above practice's aspirations and methods. While aiming to transform social living conditions through the experience of *living*, the boundaries between living and working are blurred. We suggest that the residencies' place-specific nature and joint venture contributes to the enhancement of the village's community life. It marks a new form of architectural practice which can benefit long-term residents, asylum seekers and other newcomers, as it will be outlined below.

La Rivoluzione delle Seppie - Disrupting Research and Practice

The movement La Rivoluzione delle Seppie (LRDS) was started by Italian architecture students who studied at London Metropolitan University. Returning to their country of origin during the summer months, they wanted to meaningfully contribute to local developments by experimenting with more practical methods of education, some of what they had experienced during their studies. They wanted to create new possibilities for the Italian hinterlands by inviting unexpected interlocutors to participate in rethinking architecture and for their careers to potentially sit outside of the architectural tradition.

An initial workshop in Belmonte, organised in 2016 without a fully formed plan, quickly developed into an expanding network of like-minded young people. Anyone who arrived in Belmonte over the next years was welcome to become part of the so-called *BelMondo*²⁹, the imaginary world parallel to the physical Belmonte, created by the encounters and interactions between students, locals and newcomers.

We observed that the young people's initial presence during the first summer

Figure 7:
La Rivoluzione delle Seppie's
collective working in the Casa
(Nicola Barbuto 2020),



workshop had an impact on the local community and the integration of asylum seekers in Belmonte. In conversations held in the local Bar, we could hear a shift in the perception of the locals and how they viewed the recent arrival of asylum seekers. They also reflected on themselves as migrants in countries such as the United States, Germany and Switzerland, and they had returned to retire in Belmonte. As a result, ambitions to continue the work beyond the first workshop grew quickly. Less than a year later, the informal group of students founded the NPO, called Le Seppie. Serving as the formal counterpart to the LRDS movement, Le Seppie marks a significant step towards professionalism.

Le Seppie's current presence in Calabria is founded on a transdisciplinary approach, fostering collaboration with various entities, including London Metropolitan University, the Municipality of Belmonte, the Italian architecture collective Orizzontale, and other international professionals, students, and collectives (Fig.7). Crucially, everyone engaged in these collaborative efforts is actively contributing to the long-term development plan for the village. Inspired by the approach of the French *Encore Heureux* agency, these activities aim to cultivate spaces that are open to 'the unexpected'³⁰ and provide hybrid environments adaptable for collective needs.

Since 2019, Le Seppie has been operating from the Casa di BelMondo, a former nunnery owned by the municipality. They have transformed the abandoned building into a creative hub through architectural interventions, such as timber and travertine floors and furniture-sized installations over a series of workshops with students, asylum seekers and local craftsmen. Various activities, including building, studying, communal cooking, dining at an extended table, watching movies on a large projector and enjoying sunsets, rely on the physical space of the Casa and its virtual counterpart, BelMondo. It is the hope that, together, they generate, elaborate and transmit ideas, processes and events which can have social impacts.

Alberto Magnaghi explains that such experiments are 'helping the growth of "place consciousness" or the ability of active citizenship to develop ... enhancing the current forms of social mobilisation, ...and self-management of territorial and environmental commons'³¹, which can create sustainable wealth globally. As such, Le Seppie's collective action aims to reflect the cultural values of both, newcomers and locals. These values are communicated through BelMondo also globally, with the result that partnerships and the network of national and international stakeholders rapidly expanded.

We regard Le Seppie, the students and young professionals who are actively engaged with the local community as central figures. While architecture is at the forefront of their transformative efforts, with the Casa reimagined as an informal action research laboratory, their practice emphasises continual experimentation. Unlike established institutions, they can employ research practices that defy specific categories. Characterised by conviviality, their research is carried out in a cooperative and autonomous manner, for example, they construct tools and equipment ad hoc and as needed for diverse activities. We believe it is the autonomy of this approach, which could be problematic in other contexts, that has enabled them to conduct research without conforming to standard methods and yielded a model that integrates practice and theory across various disciplines.

The first student residency in 2020, served as a crucial catalyst for advancing the endeavours of Le Seppie and the BelMondo project. Through the immersive experience of residing and working together on-site, Le Seppie and the students transitioned from being visitors to earning recognition and becoming integral members of the local community. Significantly, we noted that the foreign students as temporary residents played a transformative role in influencing local perspectives and attitudes towards the area, expressed by Luigi Provenzano, vice-mayor of Belmonte at the time: '...The community of Belmonte would not have been able to believe and see things as it can now.' Since our arrival, the two village bars received a significant uplift, while the school children and young people expressed that they saw a future in Belmonte instead of moving to the large cities for work. The impact the students have stems from their close integration, where the daily lives of the community intertwine with their ongoing research. This reciprocal relationship between students and locals, facilitated through Le Seppie, emerged as a noteworthy outcome of their shared experiences on-site.

Students as Research Partners - Disrupting Established Roles and Hierarchies

Focusing on the intercultural live engagement of the Studio South residencies in Calabria, the paper draws on research conducted by students, tutors and a graduate research assistant during the 2022 residency. To develop a better understanding of the residencies as a pedagogical model and extract insights for potential student residencies in other areas, we asked students questions such as 'what additional knowledge and skills have you gained whilst overseas,

beyond your studies in architecture?', and, 'has the experience changed the way you view your future career?'³² The answers helped analyse the impact of the residencies on the students and local people, and discussing with the locals how the students' presence impacted Le Seppie's work, better understand the dynamics between students and the hosting NPO.

Five undergraduate and two postgraduate final-year architecture students participated in the 2022 residency. Despite its rather modest size, the group demonstrated how the residency fostered peer mentoring and knowledge exchange not only amongst the students but also beyond the group and the residency's timeframe. By sharing their research and projects with each other through a digital archive, and with the locals through presentations in Belmonte, knowledge developed by the students is passed on to the next cohort and to the local community while the students also learn from the locals. As such, long-term engagement has become the methodology for knowledge exchange.

Challenging the traditional hierarchy in academic research, the residencies represent a disruptive method which intricately weaves academic work and student life together. While students temporarily make Belmonte their home, this setup simultaneously allows students the opportunity to become research-active within the village and its surrounding territory in pursuit of their academic objectives.

In recent years, the UK's academic landscape has witnessed a trend towards research-based education, exemplified by initiatives such as UCL's Connected Curriculum³³. This programme emphasises that it connects students not only 'with researchers and with the institution's research', but also 'with each other and with alumni'³⁴. Likewise, the Calabria residencies develop students as research partners while they also contribute to the data that informs this paper as research subjects. As such, the students' presence and active involvement in Belmonte serve a dual purpose. Living in the village offers the students unique opportunities for enriched learning experiences, as well as becoming subjects for research in - and by - the students.

Firstly, through their individual design projects, students engage in an organized investigation of a theme set by the tutors each year. These themes are developed from discussions with the local community to visualise a possible transformation and reactivation of the village through paper-based projects. For instance, under the theme of *Parallel Farming* in 2021, students investigated the agricultural opportunities of the region (Fig.8); In 2022, they explored how Belmonte could transform into a *Factory Village* to boost local industries (Fig.9). Focusing on the Calabrian territory and Le Seppie's practice, students also extended their research into dissertations and essays for other modules.



Figure 8:
Coop tomato factory
(Jim Wyatt Gosebruch, 2022)

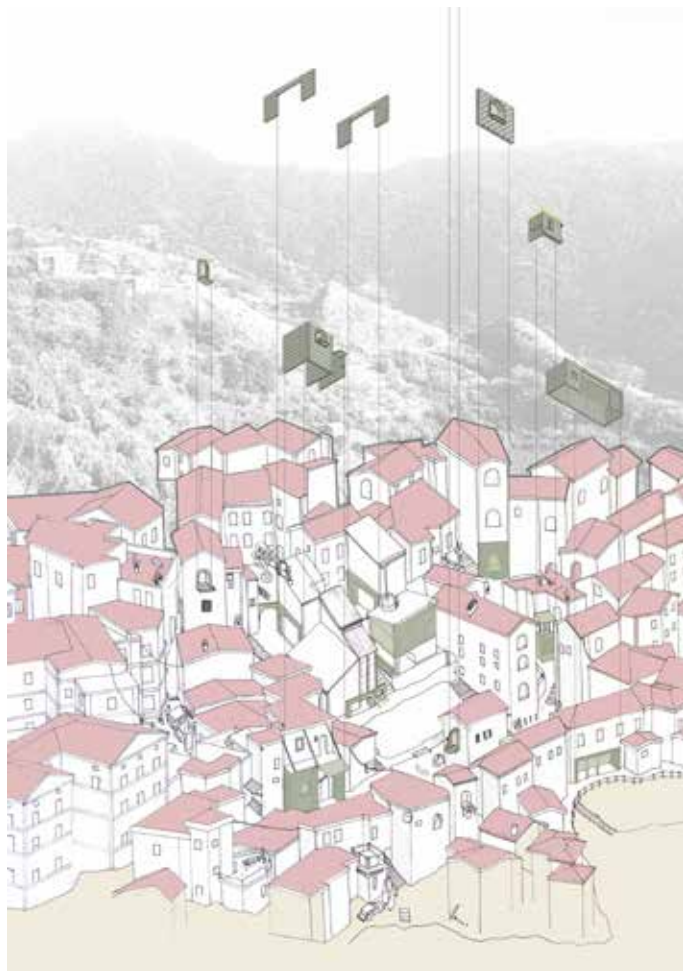


Figure 9:
Bioplastics Factory Village
(Hailey Savage, 2023)

Secondly, the student-researchers play a vital role as subjects in this action-research endeavour. In this context, their activities and responses generate the data that underpins the pedagogical and cross-cultural findings for this paper. Thirdly, the students' presence in Belmonte acts as a catalyst for social engagement with the locals in which the relationship with Le Seppie forms a structured framework for mutual support and collaboration.

To further dismantle traditional hierarchies, key members of the research team hold multiple and hybrid roles within the project; Dr. Rita Adamo, former lecturer at London Met, is also co-founder of Le Seppie and a former student; Joe Douglas, a free-lance architectural assistant who lived in Belmonte for 3 years, is also a member of Le Seppie and a former student of the initial 2020 residency. Following his move to Belmonte during the pandemic, Joe became a research assistant to collect data throughout the 2022 residency and only returned to the UK recently.

Research Methodology

To understand the relationship between the students and Le Seppie and the residencies' impact, our data collection employed a multifaceted approach. Joe compiled field notes over the eight weeks of the residency. We asked students about their experiences and observations via a questionnaire at the end of the residency and conducted focus group interviews at the beginning, middle, and post-residency. These were carried out in a hybrid format using a semi-structured interview approach.

To deepen our understanding of how the students were recognised by the local community Joe conducted three additional interviews with local stakeholders.

Discussion - Co-production of Architecture Education and Practice

Analysis of transcripts and notes from the focus groups confirmed our expectations that the residency had helped the erosion of boundaries between living and studying, as well as allowed participants to play out hybrid roles between academia, research and practice. Joe also noted how the boundaries between the students and the NPO had blurred. This was an important new observation evidenced below.

Acting out our own hybrid roles as tutors/researchers/participants, we had previously observed how the residencies supported the development of collaborative relationships based on themes around common concerns and collective care. However, the themes that emerged from the data also supported a new theory of hybrid spaces and hybrid roles bridging education and practice, which will be outlined below.



Figure 10:
Studio South on the terrace after a
day of work during lockdown
(LRDS ,2020)



Figure 11:
Casa di Belmonto, Domestic
Building Site, Axonometric
(LRDS, 2020)

Blurring boundaries between academia and practice

Joe's field notes³⁵ and the student feedback supported previous observations on how boundaries between academia and practice were blurred during the residency. This was evident first in the overlap between students' daily living and working at the Casa and second in the interactions among diverse groups using the space at different times. In addition to the students from London and the members of Le Seppie, local people, students from other universities,

and visiting professionals also joined temporarily, supporting the claim that the residencies help students' transition into the professional world.

Joe mapped how the students' learning - about the place, themselves, other people - developed in parallel to their design projects during the residency. During Week 1, students got to know the Casa and a 'feeling at home' was fostered. In week 2, students started to 'establish a routine', but there were also 'different distractions' outside of the Casa presented by the new environment. Week 3 saw the 'Casa opening-up' and students started more actively to engage with the locals. During week 4, students felt 'supported' for their design projects as the London-based tutors arrived for a field trip with the London-based students. Activities in the Casa culminated during Week 5 with the visit of twenty people as part of School of Commons³⁶, one of LRDS's networks. Some students felt this was a distraction, while others considered it a tremendous source of inspiration for their work. In Week 6, the focus returned; students built relationships with locals which also informed their projects. Week 7 saw students finalising their onsite research and gaining new insight into both their lives and their projects. Week 8 saw most of the students departing, yet they identified 'opportunities for future engagement'³⁷. A student noted in the post-questionnaire:

...this was the best experience of my entire education... It allows students... to see the impact that their work could actually have on real people and motivate them to continue working within fields of architecture that directly impact people's lives for the better...³⁸

Our research makes the case that the residencies offer a model of immersive and applied learning that blurs the boundaries between academia and practice. Through this experience, we have observed that students build relationships and confidence which benefit their transition into practice and social entrepreneurship.

Hybrid spaces

To understand the significance of the Casa for the residencies, it is important to examine its spatial characteristics. The 2022 study supports previous theories that the Casa's hybrid structure functions similarly to the traditional design studio³⁹. The building hosts spaces for individual and collaborative work and a wood workshop, but also living spaces, a beautiful kitchen overlooking the landscape and sea and two large terraces where students can spend time relaxing (Fig.10). The Casa offers students the opportunity to interact and find inspiration with each other, often by creating synergies between different groups.

Furthermore, the building offers a distinct educational experience by allowing occupants to manually construct and physically adapt spaces to changing needs. As such, the inhabitants of the Casa not only plan for different scenarios at different times, enabling its inhabitants to enjoy the same spaces



Figure 12:
London Met and University
of Reggio Calabria students
collaborating during a workshop
with Le Seppie and Orizzontale, in
(Zeshan Mazhar, 2019)

in various layouts for different activities, but they also participate in its ongoing construction. In this context, LRDS coined the term 'domestic building site' for the Casa (Fig.11). This phrase stands for its constantly evolving nature, where the construction of spaces follows the changing needs of those who live here. 'Building as a verb'⁴⁰ has become an answer to the open-ended projects that incrementally take on meaning by constantly adapting to their context, changing objectives and arising possibilities.

During the residency, students have multiple opportunities to share their projects - while still in development - with the local community who provide insightful information when visiting the Casa. A student reflects:

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... outside of their residency⁴¹.

At the scale beyond the Casa, the immediacy of the residency has offered students a reality in the making. In the voids of the territory in and around Belmonte, students can experiment with their speculative projects and try things out hypothetically and physically - a luxury compared to studying in the crowded city of London. On a more formal level, local artisans and craftspeople have offered their workshops to students. As such, the village has become a temporary and dispersed university, a research factory between education and practice, and a hybrid space for collaboration.

Common concerns

In her essay 'No-man's Land. The Pre-occupation of Belmonte Calabro'⁴², postgraduate student Rachel Buckley explains the importance of collaboration and how living in Belmonte means becoming part of a community rather than acting alone:

Methodologies of 'regeneration' being employed by a young generation... as a 'critique of existing models' emerges from an understanding of the strength of intangible relationships, which are expressed in gestures, trades and traditions, according to the dynamics of each community...⁴³

We observed the development of common concerns as a result of the collaborative work. The underlying theoretical framework for the pedagogy of this collaboration is situated learning and the creation of CoPs, established through Lave and Wenger⁴⁴. According to the theories of CoPs and Rachel's observation, knowledge is no longer the product of individual barter but of collective action, and itself a form of action. Knowledge is, therefore, intrinsically a driver of change. This insight questions traditional academic hierarchies, as the student-citizens, the university, Le Seppie and the local community are all called upon to actively collaborate in this pedagogical practice.

As CoPs are closely linked to the construction of identity, a sense of belonging and commitment⁴⁵, they serve both individual interests and common concerns. Our research underpins that by living and working together (Fig.12), the residencies encourage the development of common concerns through collaboration. To closer define this particular CoP, the term 'radical collaboration' coined by Howell and Brown Wilson might be useful. It describes 'an approach, often led by community-oriented non-governmental organizations, that seeks to transform the ways disadvantaged groups access the city'⁴⁶.

We argue that the residencies in Belmonte stimulate synergies between the different participants' interests and help create a common concern for marginalised territories, such as those classified by the Italian *area interne*. It is the collective effort that interprets the evolution of the place and can redesign a new social and territorial order. Using marginality as a lever, it repositions rural places as active players back into the territorial system of the region. Referencing Roberta Feldman et al., the close alignment to public interest design is evident since the students' common concern lies at 'a scale that is bigger than the individual project' and targets 'long-term societal problems'⁴⁷ for the area beyond Belmonte.

Importantly, the pedagogy of Studio South has allowed students to become protagonists. They have been given a voice and are actively involved in their learning journey. They have developed common concerns and as a result become agents of change for fragile territories, able to build confidence and pride during their education.



Figure 13:
Working with local craftspeople to improve the Casa during a field trip
(Domenique Guglielmo, 2021)

Collective Care

The organisations' care, awareness, and sensitivity is a vital dimension, especially when navigating through a complex field of influencers; or considering their own influence on the community.⁴⁸

The *care* expressed here by one student has been a common thread in how the permanent and temporary community members play out their roles. Actions of care have been essential for the success of the project and become contagious throughout. For example, during the residency Joe Douglas took care of the students and their initial connections with the local community; Gerardo Vespucci, a local musician and historian who became a landmark for the students, takes care of his dog Italo like his son; and Giuseppe Grant, architect of Orizzontale, has been caring for the architectural project of BelMondo since 2017.

The care for hands-on construction has played an essential role in creating collective spaces, both tangible and psychological. Not just *thinking* about building, but the act of *building* has constantly been redefined to direct the thinking toward collective care. The project's success stems from the shared commitment of all participants within this interdisciplinary group, who collectively developed the skills, knowledge, awareness, and intuition necessary to understand, engage with, and articulate the evolving social phenomena encompassed by BelMondo.

Hybrid roles

In the context of collective care we have observed the emergence of hybrid roles in several scenarios. In the creative process of living in the Casa, the role of the designer and of the builder merge. There is no clear distinction between the design process and construction, both are flexible and mutually

exchange meaning in the actual context. Similarly, research, construction and communication merge over time. This forms the speculative and incremental construction idea of non-constant but tangible spaces, which allows participants to play out hybrid roles.

Designing while constructing, learning while teaching creates and/or regenerates and/or strengthens a range of new/existing roles between the realm of education and practice. For students, merging different roles is foremost a pedagogical tool. They are invited to apply theoretical knowledge in a real situation for their own needs. As such, Giuseppe Grant from Orizzontale and the students jointly designed and built spaces in response to their need for privacy; a meaningful action as it flipped the traditional role of the profession.

The educational model of the residencies triggers a dialogue between theory and practice, which also supports the collaboration between professionals and laymen (Fig.13). As a result, local craftspeople helped the renovation of the Casa with local resources and the local community has received a place to meet.

Essential for re-evaluating the role and structure of the hosting NPO, the study helped gain a clearer understanding of the hybrid relationship between the students and Le Seppie. It is crucial to note that students become part of the LRDS movement as soon as they arrive on the residency. Only few, such as Joe Douglas, evolve over time to attain official NPO membership. Although students recognize the distinct responsibilities of both realms and acknowledge that, as a result, they are 'less aware of the longer-term tasks and concerns of the NPO which are not related to the immediate residency'⁴⁹, the locals don't make such a distinction. In an interview, Nunzio, the son of a local farmer who has left Belmonte, offered insightful observations in support of this merged perception.

The study found that most of the locals amalgamate the students and Le Seppie into one group. For example, one local explained that 'the activity of the students seems an extension of the aims of Le Seppie' and that the students' 'engagements and enquiries'⁵⁰ help locals to understand more of the overall ambition of Le Seppie. Another local stated that the students' initial interest in the family's confectionary business helped her to approach and engage with Le Seppie and suggested that students act as agents for the NPO.

For Joe this is a result of the students and Le Seppie living and working closely together and jointly 'understanding and appreciating the territory'. Importantly, Joe contemplates on these hybrid roles and the potential benefits. In his words, the positive result of the blurred boundaries between the students and the NPO is that 'the shared ambition and therefore the productive partnership is blurred'⁵¹.

Figure 14:
Traditional basket weaving in the
Casa with local craftsladies,
(Giulia Rosco, 2022)



The hybrid roles described above help reframe the 'Third Mission' of architecture schools and their potential contribution to the communities and territories where their work is located⁵². They highlight 'the potential role of the designer-researcher who ... serves as a mediator, translator and builder'⁵³.

Conclusion - Towards A New Pedagogy and Practice Model

This paper has aimed to explore how the Studio South model supports the co-production of architectural education and practice through the residencies in Belmonte Calabro. The scope of the analysis has focused on the role of the Casa, student experience, and the relationship between academia, the hosting NPO and the local community. Insights drawn from the collaborative activities, field observations, student and local feedback remain somewhat limited due to the experimental nature of the residencies and the specific social and logistical conditions in Belmonte. To conclude, we consider the longer-term potential of this approach and the challenges of adapting it to other contexts.

Hybrid spaces

If students from all over Europe could come and live in Belmonte at different periods over the year this could become an international design studio. The knowledge and culture exchange would be quite [a] unique new form of teaching and learning. It allows students a chance to learn what it is like to work in the real world⁵⁴.

In this statement, a postgraduate student stresses the importance of the Casa for the success of the 2022 residency, hosting the 'international design studio' and enacting the 'new form of teaching and learning'. As a social and physical space, it exhibits testimonies for local culture in the form of physical, cultural and social assets. For instance, a basket weaving workshop

by local craftsladies invited the students to join (Fig.14). Promoting moments of encounter between local and temporary communities, the Casa plays a significant part in allowing all involved to take on different roles and contribute to cross-cultural exchange and understanding.

Furthermore, the Casa facilitates educational and practical experimentation, events, and seminars in the village context beyond the residencies. The coming and going of international students and young professionals has given the area of Belmonte a new visibility, as well as the locals a fresh perspective on their region. The action-research which takes place in and from the Casa has enabled the creation of an active and practical pedagogy and played a significant role in initiating territorial reactivation.

Collective Care

The Calabria residencies play a key role in co-productive practice, highlighting alternative career pathways. In Belmonte, students can apply their learning through immersive, real-world projects that benefit society. Several graduates have returned to collaborate with Le Seppie and its wider network, and a few have become active members of the NPO. This demonstrates that the residencies, and close-working relationship with Le Seppie and other organisations, can support students' transition into the professional world, particularly through entrepreneurship, and as such are worth of repeating and extending.

Hybrid roles

For students seeking a new practice model outside the densely populated cities where little is left to be done, the Calabria residencies offer a new land of opportunity built on collaboration. Drawing on reflections by Vannelli on the 'new architect' in the context of the SS. Trinita delle Monache project in Naples, the new architect navigates 'between the top-down and bottom-up'..., and might see their future 'less oriented toward object-building than orchestrating process'⁵⁵.

A student's reflection on the 2022 residency evidences the significance of process and collaboration to them:

...individual soft skills...when applied naturally (socialising, organisational and logistical help, occasionally language translation) ... are contributing to the forms of activity we consider 'work' and are just as highly tangible⁵⁶.

Common concerns

What this could mean for the next generation of architects is reflected in the perspective of Nunzio, the son of a farmer who moved to Switzerland and now only returns to Belmonte twice a year. Offering both an insider's and outsider's view, he suggests that 'the assets of Le Seppie could be shared with other

young groups operating nearby within the region. Working with other towns [would be] a good way to expand...⁵⁷. If sustainability and social cohesion depend on global action, we believe that the future lies in building cooperative relationships that foster trust and extend across a wider geographical area.

Reflecting on the long-term potential of the Studio South Residencies

Reflecting on areas for future improvement, students' feedback and our observations identified issues that often stem from the hybrid nature of the residencies and where boundaries between communal and personal realms sometimes blur to students' discomfort. Here, we want to stress that living in a temporary community is an essential aspect of students' learning. As universities rarely engage at this level in the domestic life of their students, it is important that universities clearly define and communicate their responsibilities and duty of care.

As a way forward, student feedback highlighted how the next group could organise their daily lives in the Casa – not just as university students but also as flatmates – to help navigate the challenges of communal living. They suggested 'a system for sharing money, car sharing/car drivers, for cleaning/food sharing and maybe rotas for doing these tasks'⁵⁸. As the village lacks public transport, mobility away, from and around Belmonte is an important logistical issue. A car-sharing program with locals has been proposed as a sustainable way of getting around, yet to be tested.

While advocating that this pedagogical model developed in Belmonte is transferable to other locations, we emphasise that the dynamics between students and the hosting NPO have been fundamental to its success. However, entering the next phase of the project would benefit from further interrogation, for example, how to include students as official members of Le Seppie and how to structure this new form of practice. Becoming a member of the NPO would need a definition of responsibilities and privileges, including a source of income. A sustainable financial model, supporting the collaboration between academia and practice, could be developed through research funding and/or knowledge exchange in partnership with industry. This is yet to be achieved.

While the NPO has been highly successful in increasing visibility and developing strategies for community practices, the project's long-term goal for the village should be to build greater autonomy. This could be supported by developing a governance framework grounded in the experiences and CoPs established so far. Such a framework would empower residents through peer learning and capacity-building, helping to move the project into its next stage. To achieve this, all stakeholders would need to collaborate in establishing a shared governance model, with clearly defined common resources and agreed strategies for their protection.

To conclude, Studio South promotes a non-commercial, non-professional approach to architecture and the development of projects, where the student-researchers act as a 'critical mass' driving the initiative forward. In a conversation about the benefits the residencies had for the students, Adamo noted, 'they collect so much information, particularly during the residency, which has a powerful potential not only for their individual academic architectural projects but also for real life'⁵⁹.

By living and learning as (temporary) members of the community, students can experiment with design solutions for contemporary societal challenges in a real-world setting. However, this also raises important questions about the role of architects today: How can they sustain themselves in a professional landscape that often values economic viability over social engagement? And whose project is it in the end? While students bring fresh perspectives, the individual students' involvement is mostly experimental, and the responsibility for long-term outcomes remains unclear.

A long-term study could offer deeper insights into how the residencies shape graduates' careers and whether they have a lasting impact on the communities involved. More critically, it would help assess whether such exchanges genuinely foster collaboration with the communities they seek to engage with, or if they inadvertently reproduce existing imbalances where students, however well-intentioned, remain the primary beneficiaries of this initiative. We believe that if cultural and social exchanges between students and local communities continue to evolve as truly reciprocal collaborations, where locals increasingly shape both the process and outcomes, the residencies could provide a model for supporting marginal areas through shared learning and the formation of lasting relationships.

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