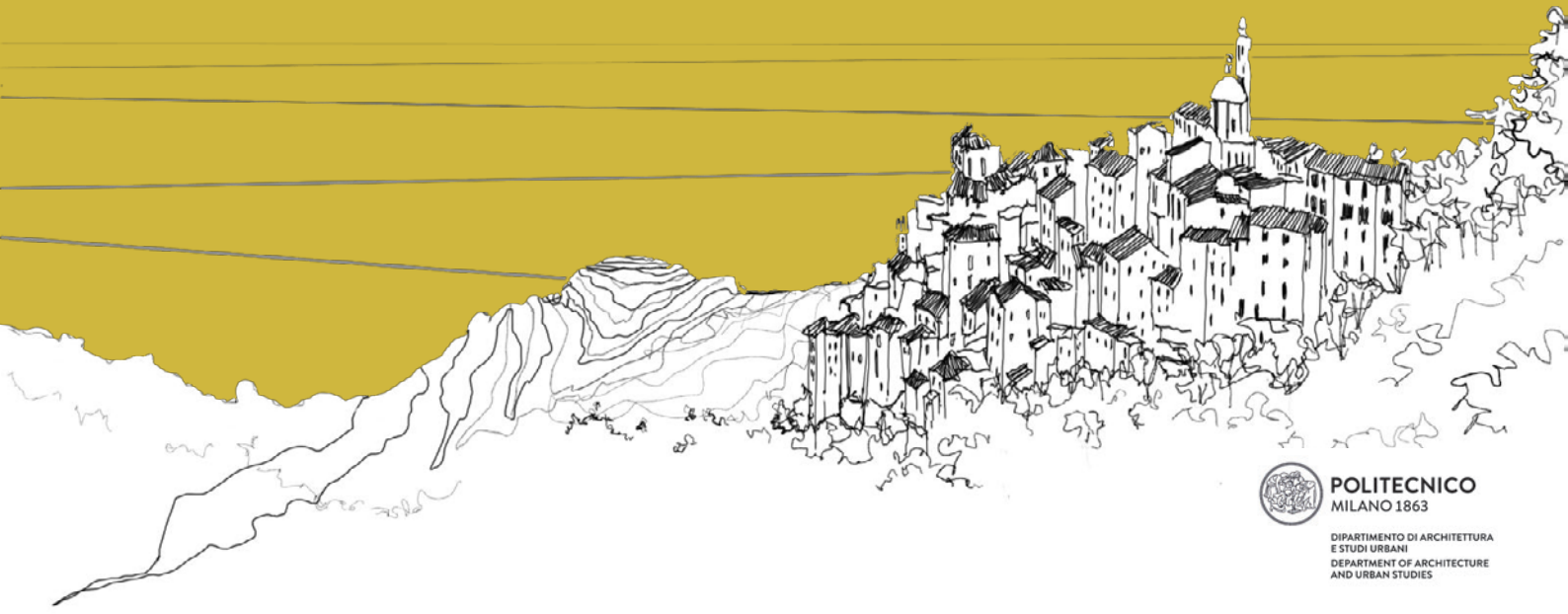


# PLACEMAKING & REBUILDING COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

## CASE OF BELMONTE CALABRO - ITALY

MSc. Sustainable Architecture and Landscape Design  
Reem Bou Hamdan | Jose David Heras Barros



**POLITECNICO**  
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DIPARTIMENTO DI ARCHITETTURA  
E STUDI URBANI  
DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE  
AND URBAN STUDIES

# PLACEMAKING & REBUILDING COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

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## Abstract:

The decreasing act 'Experience of the city' was the main motive to develop this thesis project. In this book we highlight on the importance of activating public spaces to create a platform for people to meet and exchange knowledge.

Understanding the concept and philosophy of Placemaking led us to define a process and a series of activities that engage the community in an active manner and can provide an environment of inclusion and accepting where the public space becomes home to everyone from different gender, age group, race and cultural background.

This study is divided into three main themes; research about placemaking and the importance of public participation in the integration and creation of a collective identity, case study in Belmonte Calabro - south Italy where we took part in a workshop working with the community and people from different professional backgrounds held by the organization of La Rivoluzione delle Seppie, and a design proposal of a system of public spaces that complete a network of activities within the village to help regenerate it and activate the people's eager to claim back their forgotten commons.

## Keywords:

Public space, Placemaking, collective identity, public participation, diversity, inclusion, community driven design, integration, regeneration, sustainability, urban acupuncture, landscape architecture, Belmonte Calabro.

# Acknowledgement

“When we believed we had all the answers, all of a sudden the questions changed” M. Benedetti

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Grazie mille | Muchas gracias | شكراً | Yupaychani

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## Hypothesis:

Placemaking methods can regenerate a city/region and create a platform for people to strengthen their social cohesion and express their cultural backgrounds.

## General Objective:

To regenerate a place, taking into account its historical, urban and landscape value, and activate the community interaction with their environment, through the concept of placemaking and community participation.

## Specific Objectives:

1. Understand the principles and methodologies of placemaking in order to intervene in under-used public spaces.
2. Design an inclusive public space that embraces the different cultures and allows the integration and creation of a collective identity.
3. Apply placemaking learnings in a practice-based workshop to engage the community through public participation and involvement in the designing process of spaces for the society.

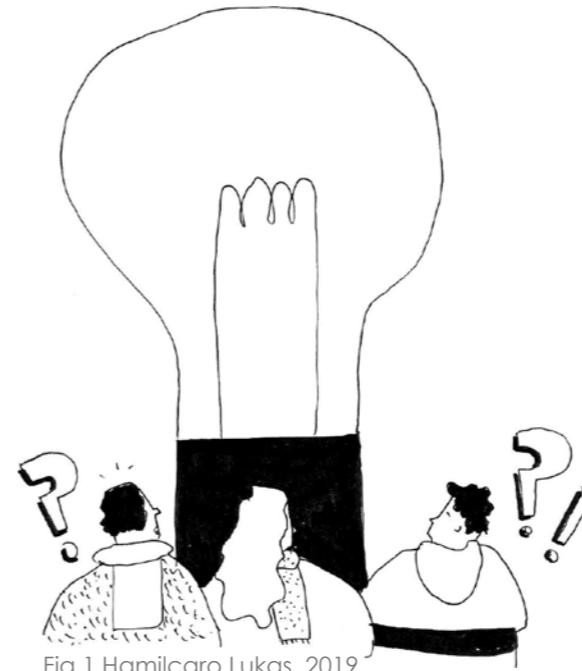


Fig.1 Hamilcaro Lukas, 2019

As defined in the Charter of Public Space in 2013 "Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive. Each public space has its own spatial, historic, environmental, social and economic features" (Biennale Spazio Pubblico, 2013) (Charter of public space). Here, it is important to denote the emphasis made in the concepts of accessible and enjoyable by all, assumed as crucial principles in order to achieve a true idea of public space. Nonetheless, this fundamental characteristics are not always achieved, in fact, we can see that currently economical, political, social, cultural factors and -in the last decades- the inclusion of technology are prominent to affect the relation between people and the use of public space (Bishop and Marshall, 2017). As Jane Jacobs expressed in her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, the policies th-

at created detachment of different uses like residences, businesses and industries in the period of 1960's in urban planning, led to a continuous degradation of the communities by creating isolated and unnatural urban spaces, rejecting or diminishing the "experience of the city" ( Jacobs, 1961, as cited in Bishop and Marshall, 2017). While this traditional way of planning cities continues, more spaces not used or underused will keep appearing and creating a sense of no community in the urban realities.

This has led to a growing interest for investing in public spaces in the cities for creation of new typologies of public spaces and the resurrection and modification of old public spaces to be adapted to contemporary needs around the world (Mehta, 2007).

Putting the focus on providing vibrant public spaces is a key element for disciplines like urban planning, urban design and landscape architecture, where for some time now it has been understood that the quality, nature and prevalence of urban public spaces are closely related with the dynamism of a city's life (Bishop and Marshall, 2017).

Understanding these problematics and the opportunities they offer, has led to the research question of what should be done in order to achieve an architectural intervention in a public space that add value for a specific community? It is clear that if we want to understand a problematic that is targeting a specific community, then the answers can be obtained if we study the direct actors involved (the community) as mentioned by Jane Jacobs, "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody" (Jacobs, 1961).

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If we are talking about understanding the needs of the users of a public space in order to tackle common demands, then inherently we are talking about the concept of Placemaking to strengthen people's connection with the places they share, and reinvent / reimagine the public spaces at the heart of the society (Placemaking, 2018), leading to achieve a strong Sense of Community to engage people's active participation, a sense of belonging and appropriation, safety and security, civic participation, recycling, volunteering and improved well-being (Francis et al, 2012). These two concepts will be developed furthermore in the next chapters of this document for they have a vital role in the development of the study subject.

"Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody."

Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

## Why is it important to consider and intervene in urban public spaces?

As mentioned by the organization Project for Public Spaces (PPS), a public space is the place where almost all of our life happens, it acts as the medium between our homes, workplace, study-place, businesses and the rest of the urban areas. "Public spaces is where nearly half of violent crimes happen. Public space is where policing ensures safety for some but not others. Public space is for buying and selling, or for meeting, playing, and bumping into one another... And when we let it, public space can be a medium for creativity, expression, and experimentation" (Placemaking, 2018) showing its multidimensional character, where various people with various purposes use it at different times of the day. First it is necessary to have a classification of the different typologies of public spaces.

In the Global Public Space Toolkit published by the United Nations UN HABITAT there are defined six main types of public spaces as it follows:

**Streets as Public Spaces:** these correspond to the most used typology of public space. Being able to host a variety of activities on it and permitting mobility, they are:

- Streets, avenues and boulevards
- Squares and plazas
- Pavements
- Passages and galleries
- Bicycle paths

**Public Open Spaces:** conform the common idea when we think of public spaces, are used on a daily basis.

- Parks
- Gardens
- Playgrounds
- Public beaches
- Riverbanks and waterfronts

**Public Urban Facilities:** in this group, also common facilities form part of, with a somehow limited access during operating hours.

- Public libraries
- Civic/community centres
- Municipal markets
- Public sports facilities

The list then is completed with other three “non physical categories” corresponding to the “Space of the Public”, The City itself and The Cyberspace. It is important to denote that the different interpretations of public spaces may vary due to regions and cultures (Global Public Space Toolkit, 2015).

For the purposes of this study, the focus will be on the category of the physical public spaces, and especially in the group of Streets as Public Spaces for the flexibility they offer and for the intensity of use presented.

Jan Gehl defined in his book *Life Between Buildings* three types of outdoor activities that happen in this typology of public spaces, that are: necessary activities are compulsory (going to school or work, shopping, bus stops, running errands, etc) , optional activities are with some degree of willing to do them if the place and time are adequate (talking, taking a walk for distraction, sitting just to observe or sunbathing) and social activities that are as the name suggests, dependent on the presence of other people in public spaces (kids playing, greetings and conversations, and passive contacts seeing and hearing others).

Each one of these types of activities require different physical characteristics, nonetheless, “when the quality of outdoor areas is good, optional activities occur with increasing frequency. Furthermore, as levels of optional activity rise, the number of social activities usually increases substantially” (Gehl, 2011 p 11). And this is understood as the ultimate goal of a public space; as mentioned “the presence of other people, activities, events, inspiration, and stimulation comprise one of the most important qualities of public spaces altogether” (Gehl, 2011 p 13).



Fig.2 Hamilcaro Lukas, 2019

Once understood the importance of the outdoor activities, it is important to define in a more specific way the benefits of public spaces, as clearly explained in the document generated as part of the community Future of Places there are defined six main assets that public spaces generate:

- Public space supports the economy: good design public spaces increase economic value, affecting the locals through employment opportunities, business investments, tourism, etc.
- Public space fosters social cohesion: help to construct the local identity of the place, form its character and provide a sense of place.
- Public Space enhances safety: with a good design of public space, integrating mixed activities (use, users, design, time, etc.), it is given the opportunity to develop vibrant and busy places, hence reducing the insecurity.
- Public space improves public health: attractive public spaces enhance outdoor physical activities, playing areas, resulting in the reduction of stress.
- Public space increases transportation efficiency: with a good design of streets and open spaces a reduce in the use of private vehicles and speeds happen, encouraging walking and the use of bicycles.
- Public space improves the environment: this is very much related with the previous point on enhancing eco friendly transportation means, as well as with the inclusion of green spaces, cooling the air and absorbing atmospheric pollutants.

• Public space in the Sustainable Development Goals, as an extra point, it has been considered important to include how the creation of good quality public spaces collaborate to achieve some of the goals established by the UN for a sustainable development, being of special importance for this study:

- By 2030, all city-regions achieve a tree canopy of at least 25% of land area and meet WHO's suggested minimum of 9 m2 open space per resident.
- Increase by one-third the amount of urban public space over total urban land area, with particular consideration of urban safety.
- Increase access to public space and services (Percentage of citizens living within 300 m of public open areas).



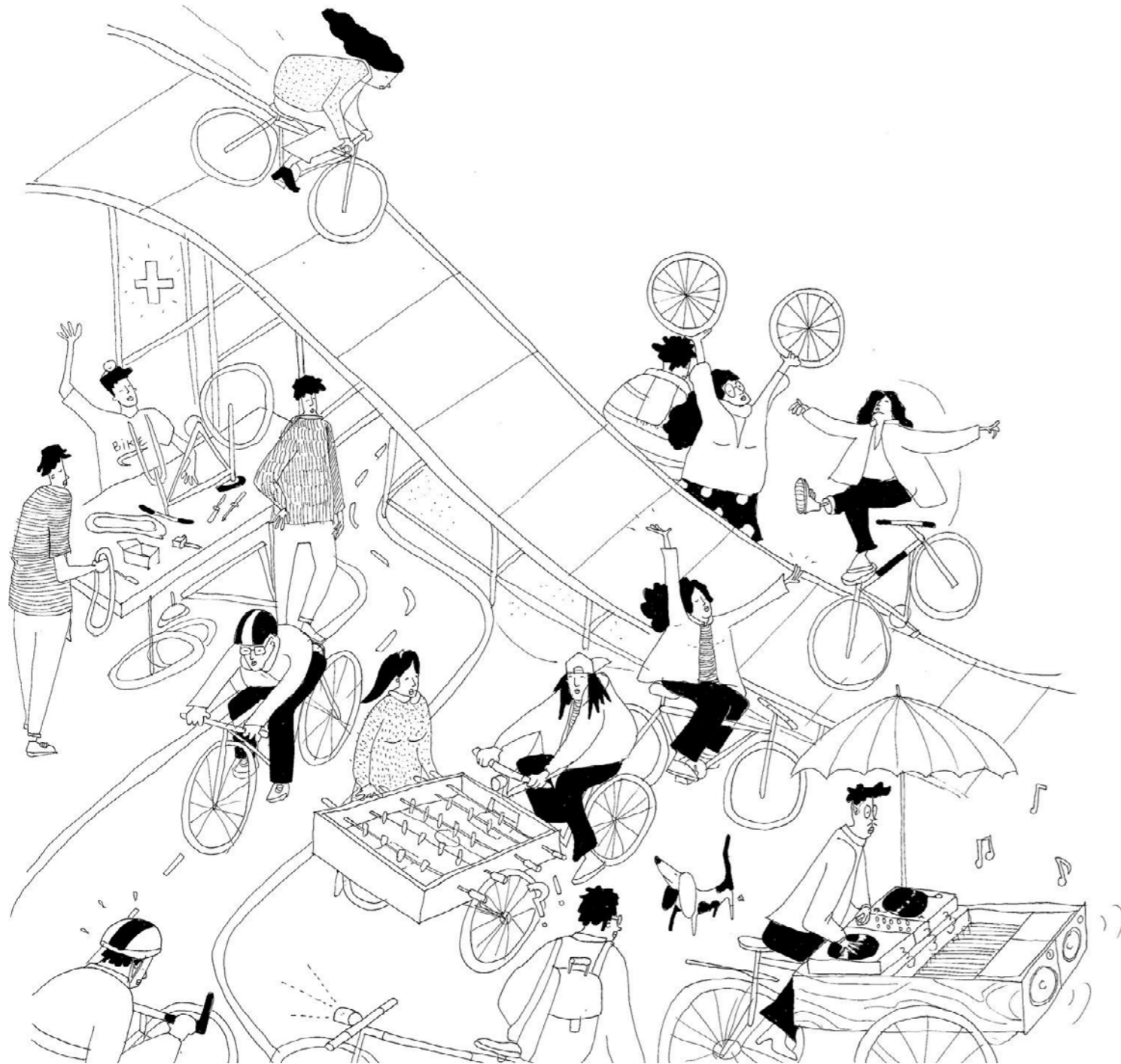


Fig.3 Hamilcaro Lukas, 2019

After defining the benefits and importance of having good quality public spaces, we can conclude that "public space plays a great role in defining segregation and bringing out the different obstacles that can limit different identity and a good life" (Sadeghi & Wang, 2016). Hence, it contributes to build a sense of community, defined as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, as cited in Francis et al, 2012).

The importance of this topic lies in the fact that, lately the sense of community feeling is dismissing in the western world, even though this is caused by multiple factors (suburbanisation, longer commutes, TV and social me-dia, etc.), it has been demonstrated that high quality public spaces help to solve problems of accessibility, feel safe, garbage, have a diversity of uses, green spaces, seating, and as the more important point, improve social interactions (Francis et al, 2012).

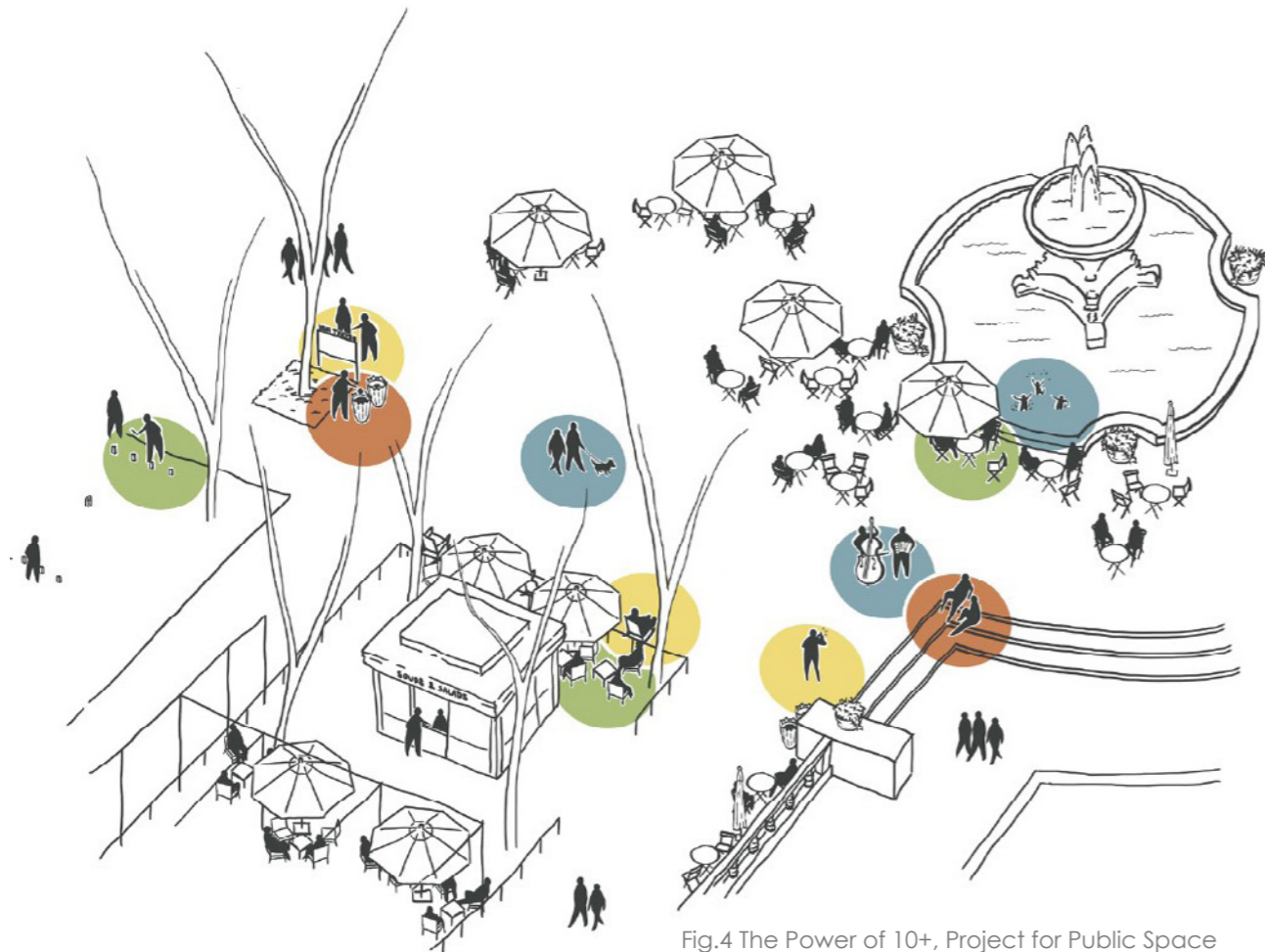


Fig.4 The Power of 10+, Project for Public Space



Fig.5 The Power of 10+, Project for Public Space

## Placemaking

The nonprofit organization Project for Public Spaces (PPS) founded in 1975 in New York City, based on the work of William Whyte (author of *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*), dedicated to guide people in the creation and sustain of public spaces that build strong communities. PPS acts as a central hub for the placemaking movement, with an approach of *It Takes a Place to Create a Community and a Community to Create a Place* (Project for Public Spaces, 2019). For this reason, our topic of study will follow recommendations, methodologies and strategies developed by the expertise of PPS, but first it is important to define some key concepts.

**What is placemaking?** “Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape define

our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that a place and support its ongoing evolution”.(Placemaking, 2018)

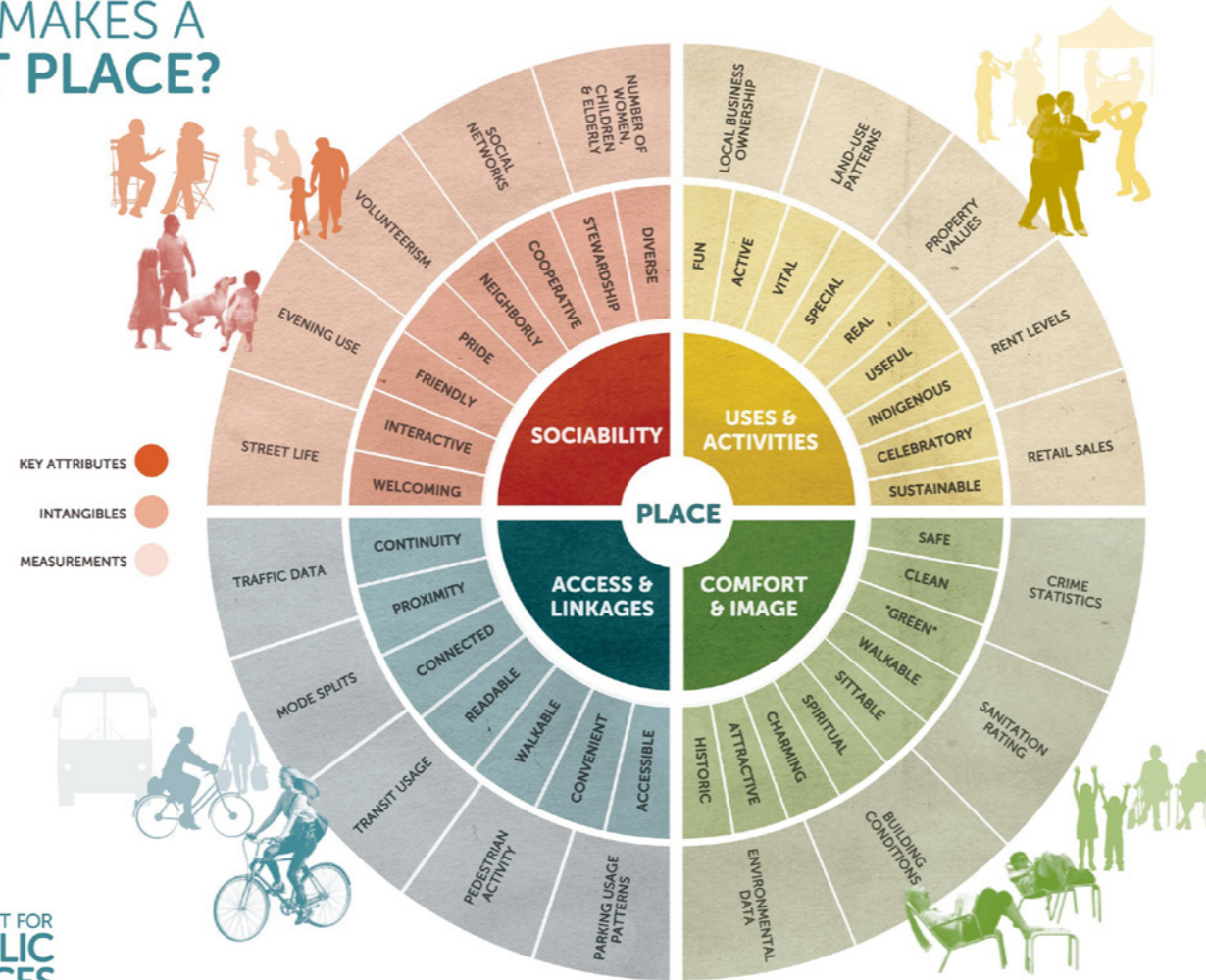
**Power of 10+.** Throughout the development of this research, it has been established the importance of how the success of a public space depends on the community involvement, and how it can provide and identity and image for it. Ultimately, good public spaces collaborate to create good cities and villages. PPS has developed a concept based on the variety of uses of spaces, where at different scales levels (Regions, cities, places) they established that “within each of the places, there should be at least 10 things to do. Cumulatively, these activities, places and destinations are what make a great city” (Placemaking, 2018).

# WHAT MAKES A GREAT PLACE?

## What makes a great place?

PPS have defined four essential characteristics great places share.

- They are accessible and well connected to other important places in the area.
- They are comfortable and project a good image
- They attract people to participate in activities present
- They are sociable environments in which people want to gather and visit again and again



Based on the main points developed in graphic # is it provided a short description of each one of them.

- **Access & Linkages:** it refers to the ease of visibility and mobility in a place, where from any distance it should permit a complete observable panorama.

- **Comfort & Image:** this point not only refers to the climatic conditions, but also about perception of safety, garbage presence and availability of seatings (shaded and non shaded locations).

- **Use and Activities:** emphasis on the variety of activities to do in the space, this helps to give people options to return, and also to secure a constant use throughout the day.

- **Sociability:** the main aim is to provide a place where people feel comfortable to meet other people and create a favorite spot to enhance this type of connections. (Placemaking, 2018)

Fig.6 What makes a great place?, Project for Public Space

## METHODOLOGY FOR INTERVENTION IN PUBLIC SPACES.

After the analysis and study of different interventions applied in public spaces, PPS has defined in a summarized way, 11 Principles for Transforming Public Spaces into Vibrant Community Places, which are as follows:

. **THE COMMUNITY IS THE EXPERT.** The initial point for an intervention in a public space will be to ask the community, they can provide historical data, insights on how the spaces function, needs and critical points to consider. The importance of this step lies in the fact that it helps to create a sense of community, people understand their voices are being heard.

. **CREATE A PLACE NOT A DESIGN.** The idea is to create a place with a pleasant image, that is comfortable, favours sense of community, as well as provide different options of uses and activities that collectively mean more than each one of the parts.

. **LOOK FOR PARTNERS.** It is understandable that to propose an intervention in a public space diverse points of views will enrich the final result. As part of these groups; institutions, museums, schools and others can be part of it.

. **THEY ALWAYS SAY "IT CAN'T BE DONE".** As a society we are used to a system where each professional (engineers, transit operators, urban planners and architects) has a defined task within the city development, however, none of these tasks compromises the creation of a "place". Because of this reason, when a new concept is introduced like placemaking, the immediate answer will be

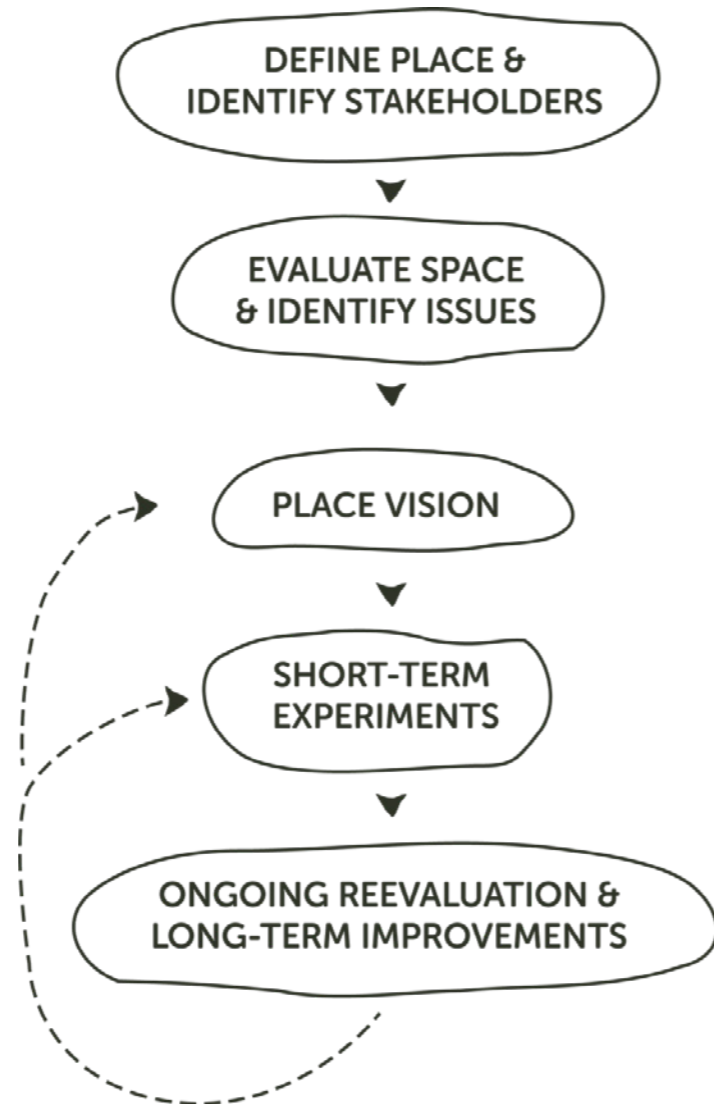


Fig.7 The placemaking process, Project for Public Space

NO, but starting with small scale projects involving the community can serve as models to overcome difficulties.

. **YOU CAN SEE A LOT JUST BY OBSERVING.** Studying how people use or not use a public space, will be the most useful tool to understand an approach to a proposal, and know what activities could be incorporated into the space.

. **HAVE A VISION.** The community will define what type of space is the desired one, nonetheless, it is important to have an idea of what type of activities can happen in the place, and that it should express a sense of pride within the people that use it.

. **FORM SUPPORTS FUNCTION.** Experimentation, understanding how the spaces will function according to the community, will provide the "shape" necessary to achieve this goal

. **TRIANGULATE.** It refers to the process in which the disposition of the different elements that compose the space are correlated in order to enhance interaction between users. A correct rect triangulation will emphasize in a proper arrangement of elements, for example if a sport space is close to shaded benches and a space to drink water, then this disposition will promote user interactions.

. **EXPERIMENT: LIGHTER, QUICKER, CHEAPER.** As part of the process to propose an adequate public space, because of the complexity of the topic, experimentation will play an important role, to achieve this, short term experimentations provide a field to test different approaches. Examples of this approach are outdoor cafes, public art, community gardens, etc.

. **MONEY IS NOT THE ISSUE.** This point can be addressed in different ways, for example, if the community gets involved in the process, costs can be reduced. What the ultimate goal tries to show is how with this type of interventions, the overall cost will be no significant compared to the benefits it produces.

. **YOU ARE NEVER FINISHED.** It is important to understand that within time, needs and opinions might change about the urban environment. Here lies the importance of making a proposal considering flexibility to be able to adapt to these adjustments. (Placemaking, 2018)

### THE PLACEMAKING PROCESS:

"Placemaking is both a process and a philosophy. It is centered around observing, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work, and play in a particular space in order to understand their needs and aspirations for that space and for their community as a whole". (Placemaking, 2018)

## Re-building Collective Identities.

### How can an intervention in a public space re-build collective identities?

The identity of a space is directly related to the people interaction in the space, and the set of behaviours they develop within an urban context and under certain conditions. Rose (1995, p. 88) refers to place as being 'infused with meaning and feeling' that can ultimately shape the identity of a place. This is also regarded as 'sense of place' by Ali in 2012, a term often used when describing urban identity that significantly supports theoretical values of spatial quality and society's well-being. (Ali Cheshmehzangi, 2012)

"Urban Identity is becoming a thriving theme in policies and design regulations and for many researchers and urbanists (Bentley and Watson, 2007; Hague and Jenkins, 2005; Norberg-Schulz, 1980; Urry, 1995), it is described as a 'place-identity', which is explicitly referring to the concept of 'placeness' ". (Ali Cheshmehzangi, 2012). Thus, when people starts developing emotions towards a place through a series of activities and memories, it develops into a form of place attachment where they express themselves and in turn define an identity that is built upon the interaction of these social behaviours within the public space.

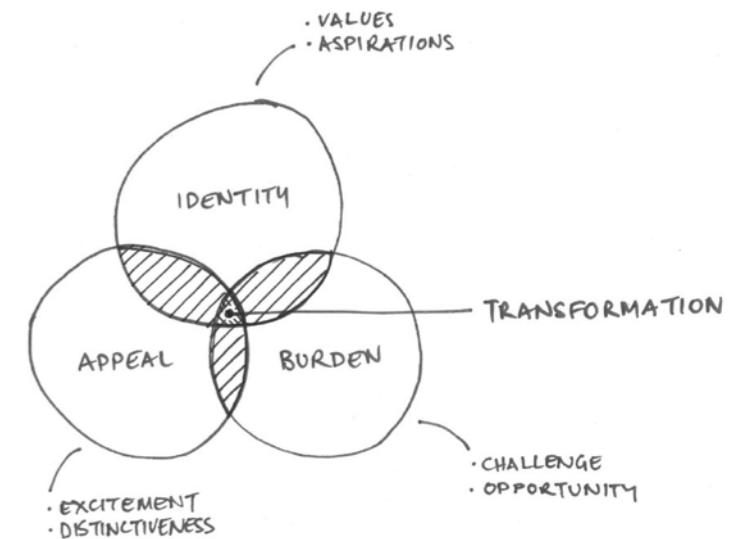
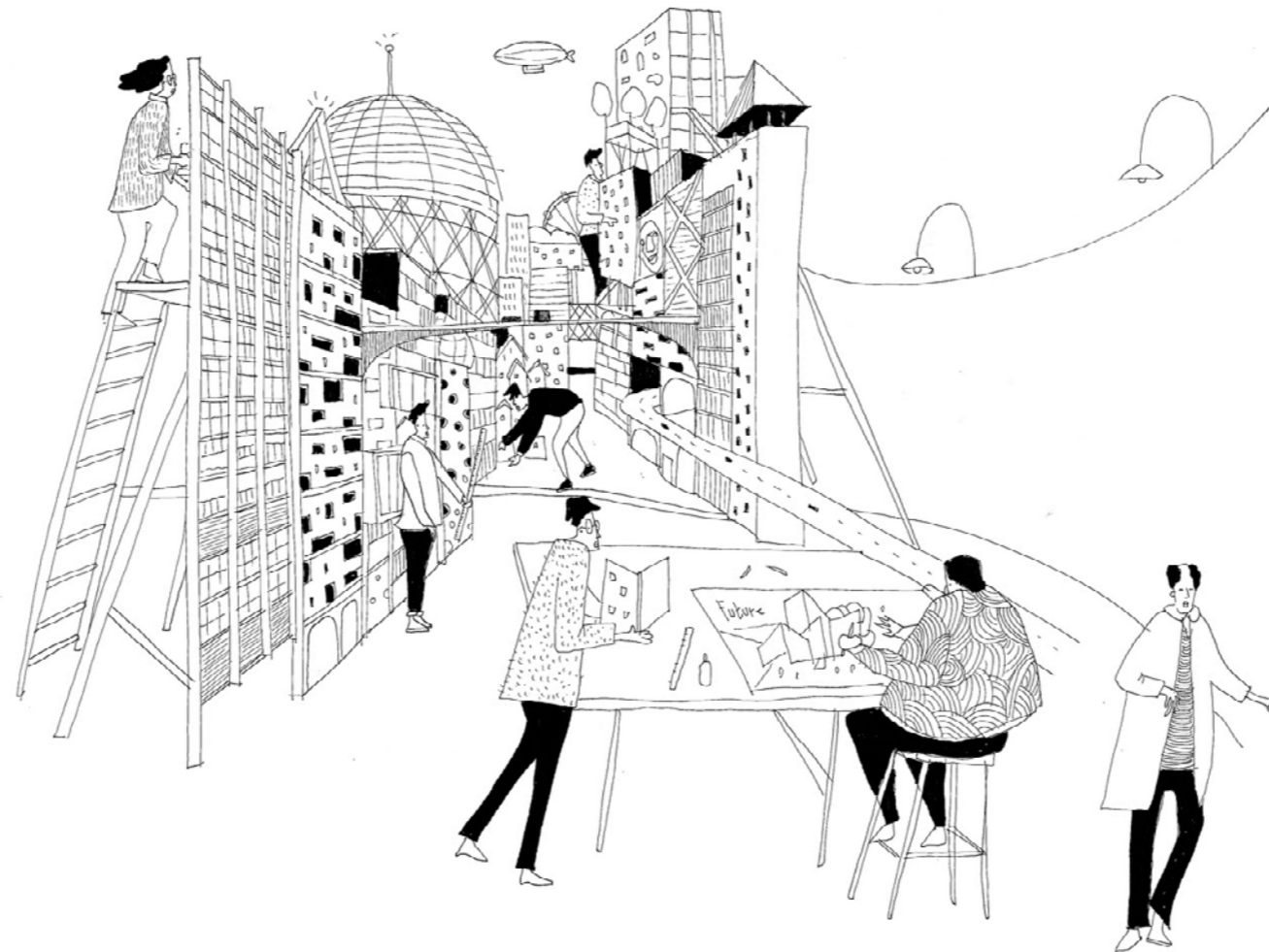


Fig.8 CCA transformation, 2016

Public space is where people can interact, learn and spend time together in spite of their differences. "Despite the changing nature of modern neighbourhoods and communities,

public spaces are still an essential part of life because they provide opportunities for different people - young, old etc, to experience a variety of human encounters". (Maimunah 2015, cited from Sangar 2007:10)

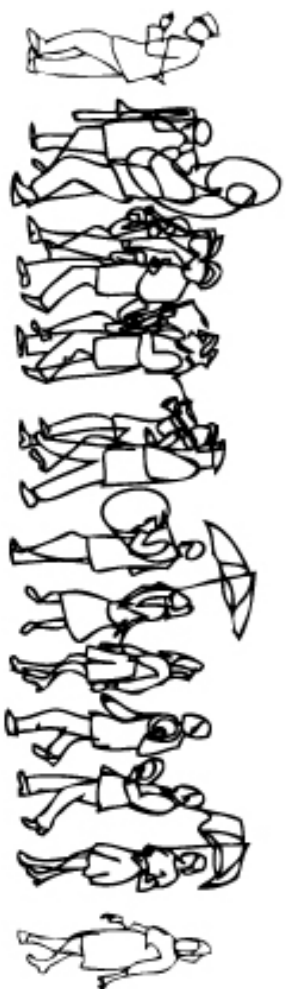
As Lucca mentioned in *Identities and the cities*, 2017, changes in urban visual identities unfold as a form of public art feeding from the immense potential of social imaginary significations accommodated by a time's perception of stability, structure and continuity. Urban change is itself a production of meaning, interpretation and identity making practices. So the question that arouses now is, how can this identity be made and re-made? Since within time life is changing and with it the needs of people are changing as well, affecting their interaction in public spaces and how they perceive and experience it. Hence, the collective identity of a space will react within time to the specific local context and the new emerging needs of its users. In addition to that, Yuan Wang in 2016 argues that good public spaces are seen to be those who can comfortably allow the mixture of culture, social gatherings, celebrations, and economic exchanges. These are the key aspects of our public involvements.



It has also been a big debate that in order to achieve people's sense of identity and belonging to a certain place, some measures should be taken like increasing the quality of the urban environment, encourage people interaction and revive the urban and cultural value of the urban context. "Public spaces are a vital ingredient of successful cities. They help build a sense of community, civic identity and culture." (Garau et al, 2016)

Garau stresses on the fact that the civilized behaviour and the quality of public spaces are two characteristics that cannot be separated and each one affects the other directly, so if the quality of a public space is good, the community behaviour will be good and vice versa. "The community recognizes itself in its public places and pursues the improvement of their spatial quality". (Charter of Public Space, para. 7).

Fig.9 Hamilcaro Lukas, 2019



In *Public Space and Its Role to transforming the Community*, Kolcunova et al (2016) argues that the essence of community cohesion lies in the spontaneous interaction between adults and children of different ages, which happens in informal places, or how Jane Jacobs notes-children are not educated by playground facilities, but by the other people.

This cohesion between the multiple social categories can arise a new understanding of the space, and transform it from an 'object' into a 'place' of common interests, and thus an authentic place that reflects the local context through the collective identities it bears within.

Moreover, Knap describes some key factors that bridge the differences between cultures and bring people together in a process of engagement, learning and enjoying. (Knap, 2007)

These learnings that promote diversity in a public space are:

**1. Creating safe spaces**, that not only works on the engagement of the general community but also the sub communities that exist within a certain local context.

**2. Representing cultural symbols**, that can transform the public space into a familiar place that embraces the community's history.

**3. Engaging the community**, to include the community in the decision-making process and empower them to participate effectively.

**4. Designing to stop discrimination**, for providing positive and welcoming spaces that encourage diversity.

**5. Integrating different uses**, this fosters flexibility in accommodating to the diverse values and preferences of the different cultural groups.

**6. Locating public spaces to serve multiple communities**, and this is not a matter of proximity, however, it is a matter of understanding the social issues like safety, cultural representation etc...

**7. Focusing on neighborhoods**, to promote social diversity and support cooperation between the community.

**8. Programming educational and cultural activities**, to share the experience of knowledge and dissolve the social divisions.

## Public Participation

### How can public participation play a role in re-building collective identities?

In regard to the understanding that it exists a collective identity within a community appropriating a public space, we encounter a new problematic; which is how to reach to the community and to understand their behavioural patterns and needs. From here, arises the importance of Public Participation and its vitality in the process of intervening in a public space.

Residents identify to the place they live in, which makes them the experts in their community, they comprehend the context and have seen successful and unsuccessful methodologies implemented in their 'commons', hence they acquired a certain understanding of the situation. However, the challenge lies in connecting the human behaviour, knowledge and experiences to the physical environment.

In the Global Public Space toolkit, Garau speaks about public spaces as opportunities for generating citizen involvement. He claims that public space creation, management and enjoyment are ideal opportunities for the involvement of citizens, both at the city-wide and at the community level. (Garau, 2016)

"The management of public space is a prevalent responsibility of local authorities. In order to be discharged successfully, this role requires the active collaboration of citizens, civil society and the private sector." (Garau, 2016 as cited in Charter of Public Space, pag.32).



Fig.11 Hamilcaro Lukas, 2019

Garau argues that a well-designed and well-managed public space bring communities together. Making use of the knowledge and resources they have, community groups can become more involved and active in revitalizing and maintaining underused or neglected spaces.

Effective community participation is an essential step in creating a 'place' not a 'design', and that is achieved by recognizing the assets that the community can provide through their valuable thoughts of how the area function and a their historical background information. This is not only helpful to create a place, but also to strengthen the sense of belonging of the people when they feel empowered by the system and thus acquire a sense of ownership and attachment to the place.



In The Techniques of Participatory Design for Inclusive Public Space Provision in Kampung Kota of Surakarta, (Kusumaningdyah, 2018) speaks of the importance of staging the roles of citizens in the process of approaching an underused public space. These stages are:

**Stage 1: Mapping and Focus Group Discussion (FGD)**

Participatory mapping of the existing public space and its conditions, and identifying local perceptions and aspirations toward the studied public space

**Stage 2: Design Collaboration**

Recognizing potential spot for public space place-making, and sketching ideas and inspirations

**Stage 3: Technical Collaboration**

Translating the citizens sketches and ideas into an applicable design and creating an inclusive public space for everyone

Therefore, in order to reach this smart cluster of people who are aware of their potential in adding value to their local community, they should be included in top bottom and bottom up participation for creating more inclusive strategies. In this regard, Sherry Arnstein in 1969 in USA developed the ladder of participation to organize the role of citizens throughout the process of consultation, participation and involvement. ("Community involvement - what sort?", 2014)

This ladder of public participation include:

. **Supporting** community-based actions and clarifying the exact limit of the support provided.

. **Acting together** through temporary or permanent collaborations.

. **Deciding together** by empowering people to be part of the design process.

. **Consultation** by proposing several solutions and letting people engage by assessing the presented solutions.

. **Information-giving** which suppress public participation and just inform the citizens with the plan without any involvement.

As for the public participation typology that will be implemented for the study area, corresponds to the stage of Deciding Together. It will be applied through a temporary collaboration where we start analyzing the site along with the community, to collect all the soft data from them and turn their local knowledge into a collective wisdom that can help develop a proposal based on the needs of the community.

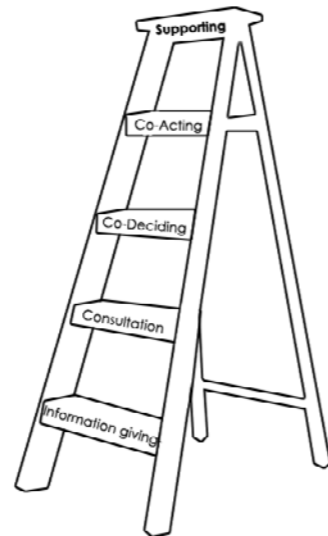


Fig.12 Ladder of Participation, Bou Hamdan Reem,2019



Fig.13 Quality Criteria Assessment, Project for Public Space

**Quality Criteria Assessment**

The first step in understanding the local context and the general needs of the public space, a quality assessment should be done. This quality assessment can direct the public participation into a focused direction to collect as much information needed for the characteristics present in the under-used public space. In Seattle - Public Space Public Life, Gehl architects mention that the analysis of successful public spaces around the world share common characteristics that has been categorized in four main categories that are protection, comfort, delight and place.

These main categories has three subcategories each, making it a total of fifteen characteristics that can be tested to assess the quality of the public space. "In the following analysis these quality criteria have been the tool and method used to categorize the quality of the public spaces". (Gehl Architects, 2009)

A 'ticking off' of the 15 characteristics identifies the measure and thus the relevant quality: 1-5 is poor quality, 6-11 is average quality and 11-15 is a good quality.

## Case Study

### Crossings 2019 - Belmonte Calabro

La Rivoluzione delle Seppie is a non profit cultural association, that looks through research, design, technology and education to improve the cultural fabric of the community of Belmonte Calabro located in the south of Italy, by promoting social integration and the development of the territory, working with stakeholders from local institutions (Municipality), academia (London Metropolitan University, Università degli Studi di Reggio Calabria, Accademia Belli Arti Catania) and local and national associations (Orizzontale, Belmonte in Rete, ProLoco Belmonte Calabro).

The project started in 2016 founded by Rita Elvira Adamo, Florian Siegel, Eleonora Lenaro and Matteo Blandford, with the aim "to create a better understanding and thus a more adapted approach to the societal challenges met by Calabria" (Le Seppie, 2019). This is achieved through intensive workshops happening three times per year (February, July, November) with the participation of multidisciplinary students, immigrants, professionals and local community to experiment temporary and permanent interventions to improve and regenerate the current local situation. This project aims to raise awareness and be a model that can be followed by rural areas to develop their context.

"The end of industrialisation, the drastic changes in the agricultural sector, the lack of public investment and its troubled history with the local mafia have left Calabria in a difficult situation entering the 21st century".



**La Rivoluzione  
delle Seppie**

This has created a scenario where increasingly people living in the rural areas have left into urban zones, and as immediate consequence more than 50% of the buildings in Belmonte Calabro are currently in an abandoned status. Nonetheless, this phenomenon in recent years has encountered with another global situation, displacement of people from Africa and Asia, with around 68.5 million people living in this condition. (Le Seppie, 2019)

All of these facts, have led the association Le Seppie to address this problematic and turn them into opportunities, understanding that the migration phenomenon can be seen as a chance to repopulate these areas and regain and transmit their culture and traditions. Creating a new society, a new identity formed from locals, immigrants and ephemeral communities.



Fig.14 Crossings, Blandford Matteo, 2019

A question was raised then by La Rivoluzione Delle Seppie:

**How can research, design and architecture be used to improve the cultural and social fabric of rural areas?**

This has been answered by four key ideas:

- . Enlarge the spectrum of educational opportunities, for local and migrants by providing working space, tools, one to one mentoring program.
- . Create global-local academic collaborations, connecting Calabria and generating deep interest in the region.
- . Facilitate business incubation
- . Enhance social cohesion and cultural life

If we focus specifically on the architecture field, we can understand the main objective through the next quote:

“A living architecture, that manages to welcome the unexpected, to offer free spaces, to integrate unprogrammed uses and allow for popular appropriation thanks to a collective energy and common desires” (Constructing Buildings or Places, 2018, as cited in Le Seppie, 2019).

Therefore, we can understand how these ideals of adaptability, common work and community involvement, are closely related to the Placemaking concept.

**An overlook to Belmonte Calabro:**

The village is located in the province of Cosenza in Calabria with around 2000 inhabitants according to data from population of January 2017. The small town is located at 262 masl, with astonishing views to the sea in the east and to the west the Calabrian mountains. Filled with intertwined corridors and unexpected open spaces that create a comfortable environment during the hot summer months.

(<https://www.calabriaportal.com/belmonte-calabro/1185-belmonte-calabro.html>)

As mentioned before, the demography of Belmonte Calabro has been changing with an increasing depopulation, leaving a vast percentage of elderly as the main inhabitants of Belmonte. Nevertheless, some collectives recognized the potential of this place to be more active and productive and they are working on agricultural, environmental, gastronomy and touristic initiative to promote local products and environment. Some of these groups are “Belmonte in Rete” that work on urban regeneration by raising awareness through lectures, exhibitions and workshops, “Belmonte Vivere” that develop cultural activities to promote local talents and products, “Ex-convento” that hosts cultural activities like arts, theatre and yoga to enhance the liveability of Belmonte and “Living Nature” who’s main aim is to make people see the rich natural environment Belmonte has from the mountains to the sea, through sport activities and tours like hiking in the wild mountains and tours in the glass boat in the sea.

In the same matter, when you walk through Belmonte, it is clearly recognizable a main axis that

crosses the whole village from east to west, with key nodes like the Municipality, Cathedral, Public library, Church of the purgatory, Ex convento delle Monache, Piazza Belvedere, and sea views located within this main corridor.



**DO IT OURSELF**  
A NEW ARCHITECTURE FOR PUBLIC ACTION

larivoluzione delle seppie.org

Fig.15 Do it Ourselves, Blandford Matteo, 2019

## Crossings | Past Editions | Learnings

The first edition of La Rivoluzione delle Seppie, was developed in July 2016, with a workshop that conformed part of an architecture module for the London Metropolitan University, with the main idea of working together with students, local community, refugees and professionals. In the editions for the year 2017, a wider integration can be recognized with the inclusion of more professionals in the areas of visual arts and fashion tailors, as well as architecture collectives, and the presentation of the projects developed during the previous seasons, as well as a site work with the construction of furniture, and one of the key activities done during this edition was the participation on a parade of a traditional carnival.

For the 2018 edition, the approach was through research and proposals made in physical models and digital presentations, as well as the on-site manufacture of a textile to tell stories about new



and local communities. Also, the construction of a movable structure that can adapt to different uses as an experiment to bring together separated social groups by skill and culture sharings happening during the common construction and development of different activities during the workshop. These furniture were used for theater shows, exhibitions, talks and community gatherings. It is important to mention that for this edition the inclusion of the public library as main working space was a key factor in including people in the use of their public buildings.

In 2019, the progress consisted of the development of three simultaneous workshops:

Design and self-building, consisting of an intervention in an abandoned building donated by Belmonte the ex Casa Delle Monache. The main idea of this activity is to provide the community with a multi use physical space that can be used by everybody according to their needs. The intervention consisted in the reproposal of the flooring of three spaces (main living area, dining and kitchen) along with the design and construction of furniture (chairs, tables, bookshelves). The main objective of this intervention is to serve as an "example" space in order to show the community how this dynamic can be lived and in the future expanded with new interventions in the next editions of the workshop. This part of the workshop was managed by the Italian architecture collective Orizzontale.

Visual communication, with the production of a digital image for Belmonte Calabro through interviews made to the local people, migrants and visiting community, answering the questions:

What moves you to act in Belmonte Calabro?

What is the first word that comes to your mind when you think of Belmonte?

To whom do you want to communicate your message?

Creative marketing, art and theatre, held by the visual artist Barbara Cammarata, that worked with local community and local fabrics to recognise common symbols and to create together a "flag" for Belmonte, which besides telling stories from locals and migrants works as an identification for the people, since the production of this workshop is going to be constantly exposed in the ex Casa delle Monache.

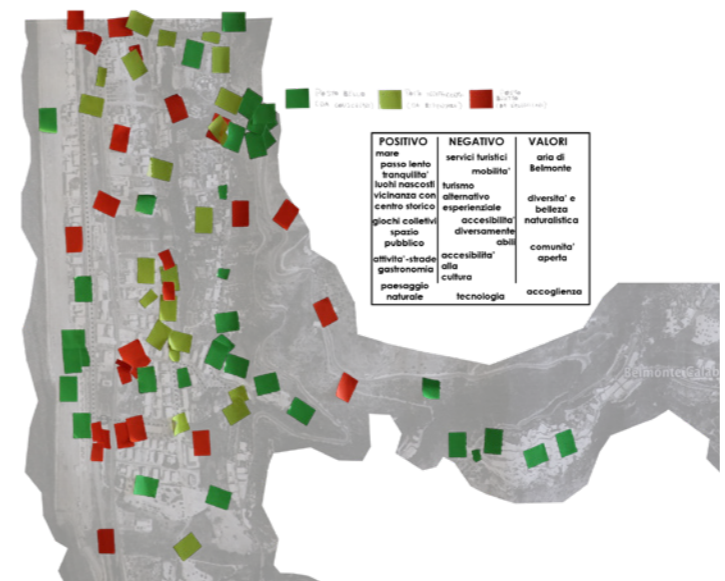


Fig.16 Survey, La Rivoluzione delle Seppie, 2018

The objective was to try to collect the answers in the least amount of words possible and then translate them into images, with the final aim to create a "fanzine" collecting all the work developed during the week, and print it to deliver to the local community. This part of the workshop was held by a graphic designer Matteo Blandford and a visual communicator Francesca Bova.

## LEARNINGS

After the observations on the local people reaction to the result of 2018 workshop and the temporary structures built and stored in the Public Library, it was clear that the local community respected the project and were happy to have it, however, they did not interact with it. Since the structure of seatings are moveable, the local inhabitants are majority old and taking into account the topography of Belmonte, it wasn't very useful for the local community itself throughout the whole year unless in case of an organized event. Also, getting the old people to participate is never an easy task and it is always an uncontrolled situation where you can not assume a precise behaviour or outcome for people participation.

Hence, a new strategy had to be done to adapt to the needs of the community and to inspire them to develop their own environment. For the 2019 edition, it was clear that the community of Belmonte is consisted not only by locals who live there, but also by the immigrants who commute between Belmonte and nearby villages and the participants of the workshop editions as ephemeral community that comes constantly for short periods throughout the year, thus to answer the

needs of everyone and find a common ground to work on, a permanent solution had to be proposed.

Thinking about a long term view for the regeneration of Belmonte and increasing the quality of life of its permanent and temporary inhabitants, the process transforms from activating the local community to enrich the experience of the ephemeral one into the other way around by initiating activities and development projects by the ephemeral community that became a total of 75 people in July 2019 in order to inspire the local community to change and make use of the potential Belmonte presents. The aim of this permanent place is to foster social cohesion through community gatherings, cultural activities and leisure.

In this regard, the municipality was of great support by offering the space of the public library, the school and medical center, and with a private donation of the building to host these activities which is the Ex Casa delle Monache. Since it was a process of learning even for the directors, the help from local constructors was crucial to understand alternative and cheap techniques for construction. As mentioned before, the restoration of the ex-convent resulted in three main spaces; a communal living room, a multi use space and a kitchen. The concept was to create a space where its function can adapt to the changing needs of the users, so it can be for expositions, gatherings, gastronomy events etc..

The strength of this strategy lies in the intercultural exchange that happens everyday during this workshop period where you learn from local professionals, entrepreneurs, professors, artists, students, old people, young people, everyone from all over the world in Belmonte. For this reason in

the workshop Raj, an immigrant from Bangladesh called it Belmondo, because it is truly a small vil lage but it embraces the world.

And when we asked Rita Alvira Adamo about the learnings she had throughout these 4 years she answered;

. Be more **conscious** about the processes  
When you approach the people, you become more confident and sure about the plan

. **Appreciate** the “small” **outcomes** and the engagement of the people because it will lead you to the holistic solution

. All of this is part of **creating Places not spaces**, a place for people to be and strengthen their human relations.

. These **Placemaking strategies** are like acupuncture where each intervention is part of a system that work in coherence in order to succeed and serve its purpose.



### How are the principles of placemaking applied in Belmonte Calabro?

When we think about the concept of Placemaking and the two main concepts of the Power of 10+ and What makes a great place, then it is clearly identifiable some of the characteristics as follows:

If we think about the dynamic happening and constantly changing since 3 years in Belmonte we can define main activities going on both in the fixed spaces (public library and Cultural Hub) and within the village itself: community kitchen and dining, multi use space, theater, library, exposition area and movable multi purpose public furniture. Then we understand how Belmonte is developing towards the Power of 10+ ideal.

Focusing specifically on the notion of Great place, Belmonte achieves a certain quality to be a great place, nonetheless because of physical and intangible characteristics it is understandable that it cannot accomplish fully the characteristics presented before, nonetheless, it can adapt them to its own character.





Fig.17 Belmondo, La Rivoluzione delle Seppie, 2019

# BELMONDO - NETWORK

Belmonte as a network and part of a bigger network

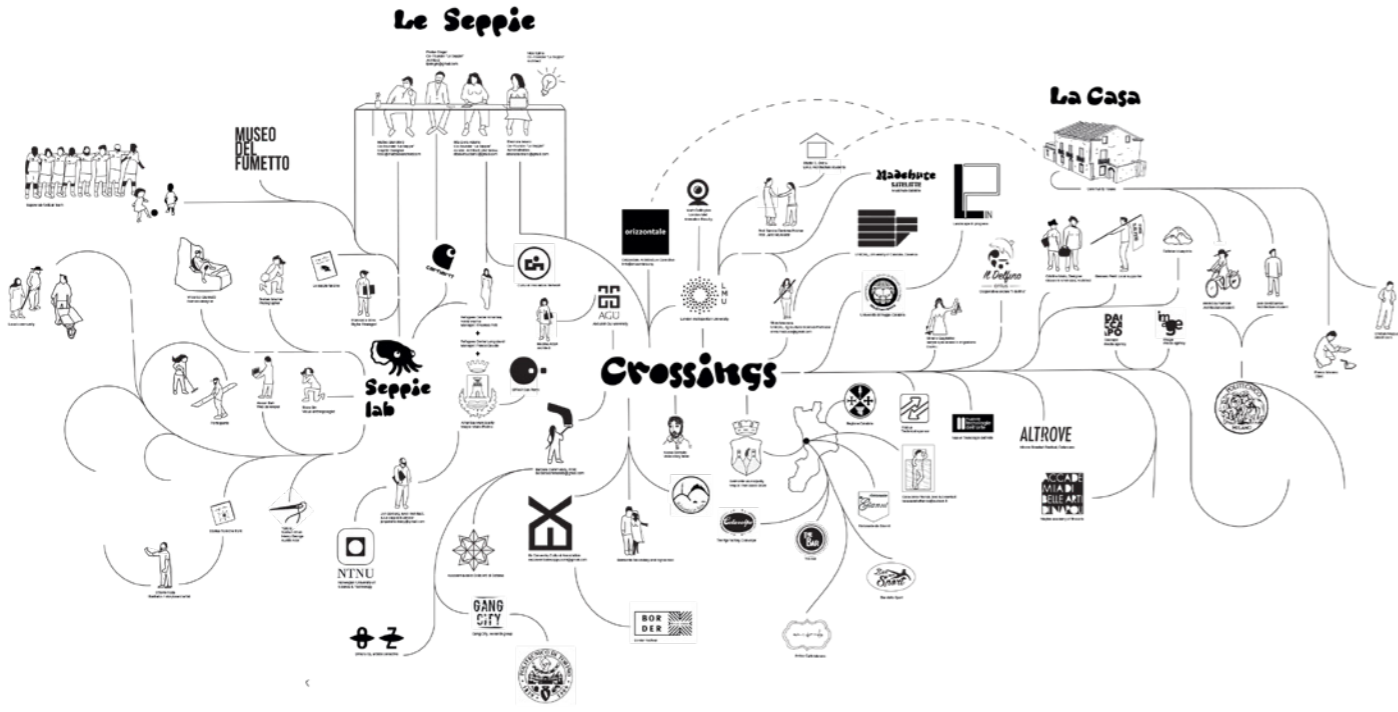
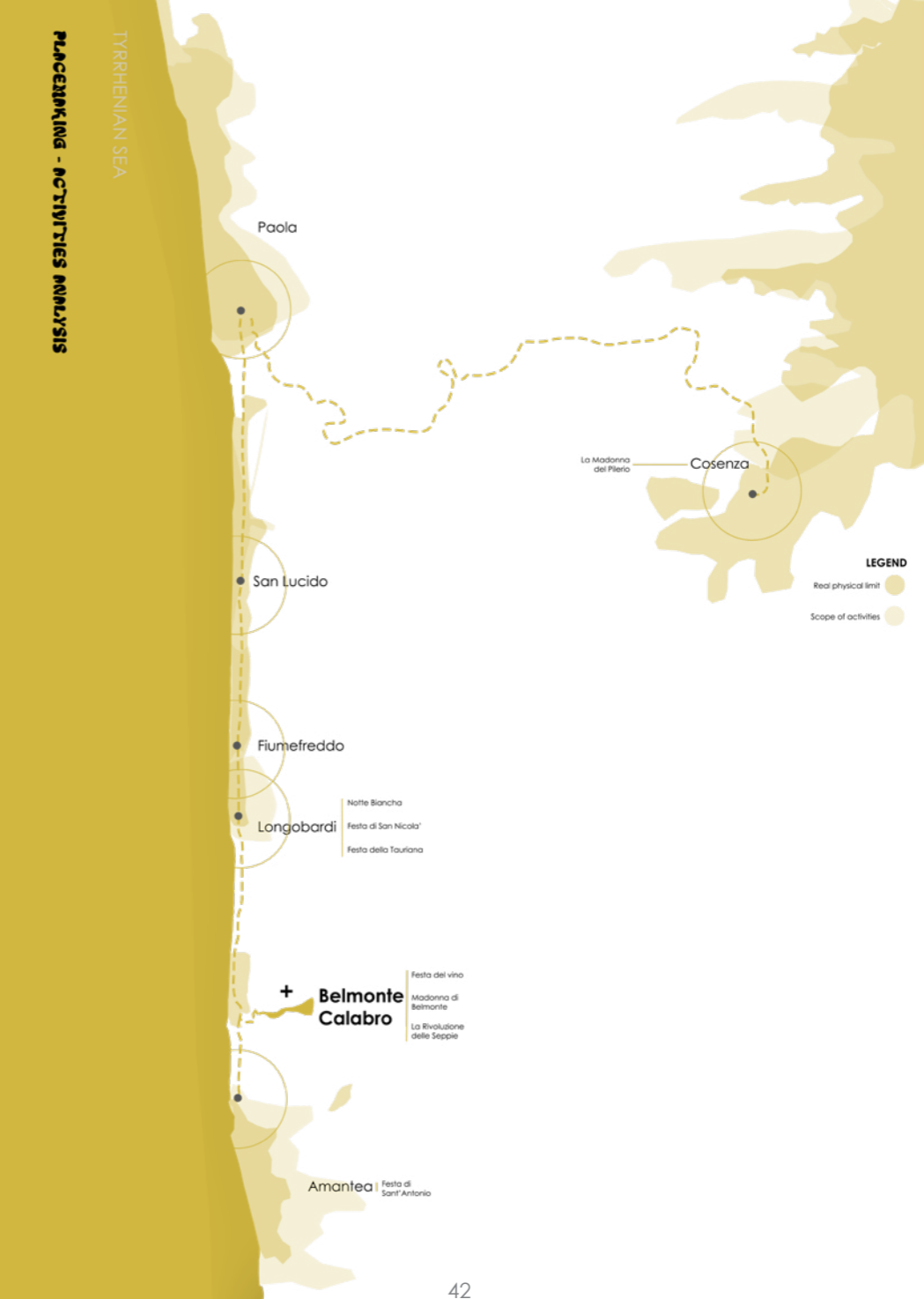


Fig.18 Crossings, La Rivoluzione delle Seppie, 2019







**SOCIABILITY**

Diverse, Welcoming, Friendly, Pride, Neighbourly, Cooperative

**USES AND ACTIVITIES**

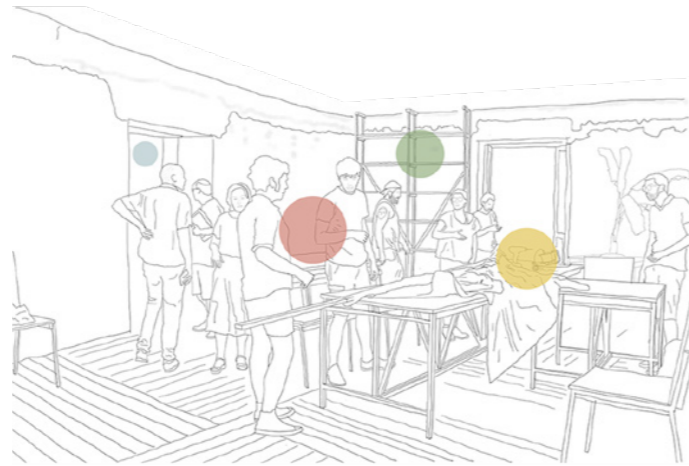
Fun, Active, Special

**COMFORT AND IMAGE**

Safe, Clean, Walkable, Historic, Attractive, Charming

**ACCESS AND LINKAGES**

Proximity, Walkable, Accessible, Connected, Convenient



**SOCIABILITY**

Diverse, Cooperative, Friendly, Interactive

**USES AND ACTIVITIES**

Sustainable, Useful, Real, Active

**COMFORT AND IMAGE**

Historic, Attractive, Sittable, Safe

**ACCESS AND LINKAGES**

Accesible, Convenient, Walkable



**ACCESS AND LINKAGES**

Connected, Walkable, Convenient, Accessible

**SOCIABILITY**

Welcoming, Interactive, Friendly, Pride, Cooperative, Neighbourly, Diverse

**COMFORT AND IMAGE**

Attractive, Walkable, Clean, Safe

**USES AND ACTIVITIES**

Fun, Active, Vital, Useful, Celebratory, Sustainable, Real



Fig.19 Crossings workshop, Heras Jose David, 2019

**SOCIABILITY**

Welcoming, Friendly, Pride, Neighbourly, Cooperative

**USES AND ACTIVITIES**

Active, Special, Celebratory

**COMFORT AND IMAGE**

Safe, Clean, Green, Walkable, Spiritual, Historic

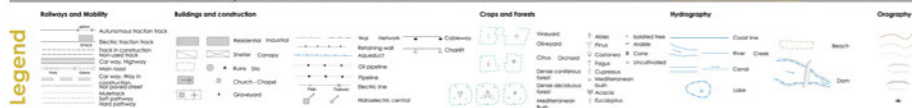
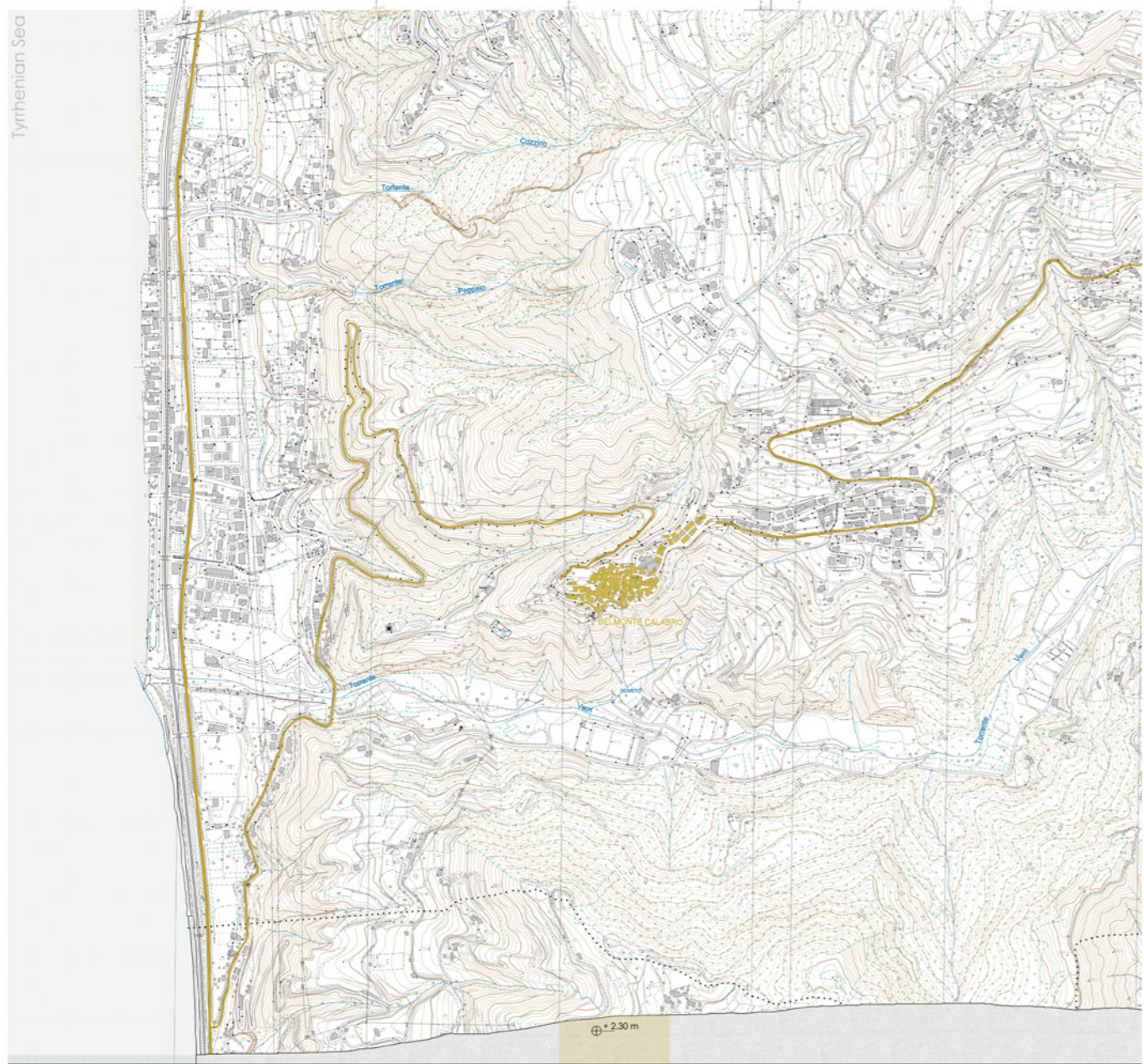
**ACCESS AND LINKAGES**

Walkable, Accesible

# Belmonte Calabro

SCL 1:5000

Tyrrhenian Sea

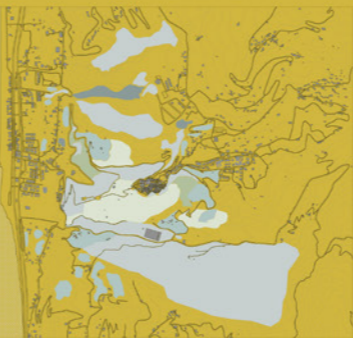


CONNECT



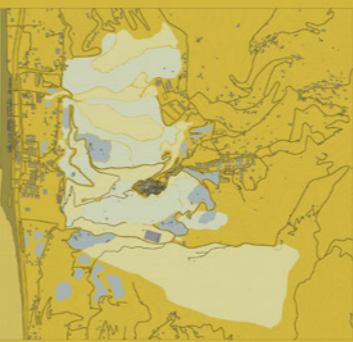
Main connection

VEGETATION



- Dense deciduous forest
- Dense cone forest
- Uncultivated bushes
- Mediterranean bush
- Olive Grove

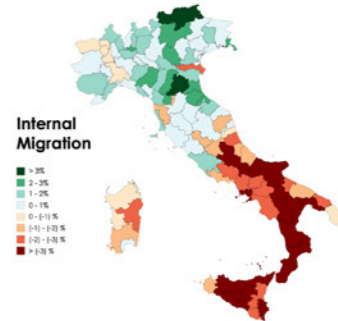
LAND USE



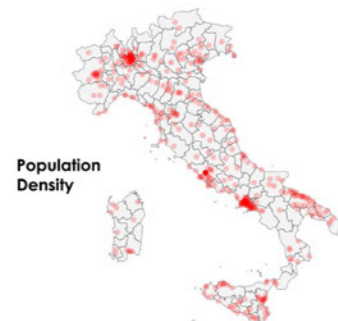
- Settlements
- Forest
- Cultivated Land
- Uncultivated Land
- Sea Front



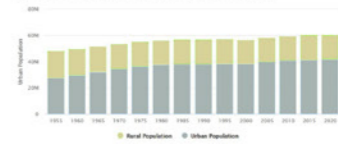
- 30-35 Thousand Euro
- 25-30 Th. Euro
- 20-25 Th. Euro
- 15-20 Th. Euro



- > 2%
- 2-2%
- 1-2%
- 0-1%
- 0-0.1%
- 0.1-0.2%
- 0.2-0.3%
- > 0.3%



**Urban vs. Rural Population in Italy**



# HISTORICAL

## Analysis

1270



Belmonte is born from a fortified complex, composed by the castle constructed in 1270 by Carlo d'Angio. During this time it was dominated by landowners (feudatori)

1338



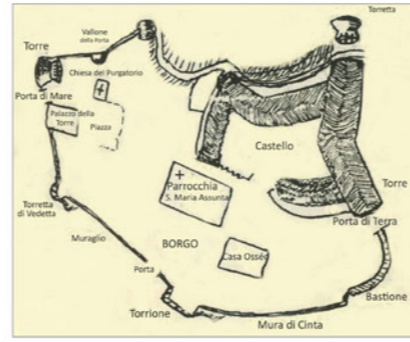
The period for Counts (conti) goes from 1338 until 1366

1367



Lords (signori) of Belmonte from 1367 until 1442. Barons (baroni) of Belmonte from 1443 until 1625

1626



Princes (principi) **Ravaschieri** of Belmonte from 1626 until 1806. Being this the most prosperous time for the village with the construction of the fortification and the expansion of the territory to what is now Amantea, as well as with the construction of the Ravaschieri Palace.

1807



In February 1807 Belmonte surrender to the french troops when the castle was burned, causing the destruction of the fortification and of the palaces Pignatelli and Rivellino. From 1815 to 1860 the Bourbon government was reinstated and some goods are returned to the church.

1860



From 1860 - 1915. At the end of the century, Belmonte, like many other southern villages experiments the emigration phenomenon, with a continous decrease in population.



### Torre

In the perimeter of Belmonte there were at least five towers, the one in the front has been readapted into a plaza sightseeing and is the most notorious tower in the village. Here was located one of the doors that gave access to Belmonte called Porta di Mare.



### Palazzo della Torre (Ravaschieri)

The palace was constructed in a space over the tower south of the fortification, ordered from the prince Orazio Giovan Battista Ravaschieri after the 1638 earthquake.

The garden underneath its limited by balustrades and by a niched wall that used to be the space for statues, as well as arched openings to enjoy the view to the sea.

### Remaining fortification walls



### Palazzo Barone del Giudice

Constructed in the S. XVIII by the Barone family, it was acquired by the Giudice family in the 19th century and restored following a classical umbertino architectural style with a clock in its front facade that still remains displayed.

### Castle

It is constructed in the highest point of the historical center of Belmonte Calabria, from where it can be admitted the sea flat land and the Veri river



### Porta di Terra

Close to this location is was present the Porta di Terra, from where it began the fortification of Belmonte. It was destroyed with the expansion of the village in the 19th century.

### S. Maria Assunta Church



The main church, it was constructed in 1585 by the Count Carlo Ravaschieri orders. Its current aspect was modified after the 1908 earthquake, where the bell tower was reconstructed, conserving just some blocks from the original structure.

The interior preserves artworks from the 700 in baroque style

### Palazzo Pignatelli

Dates from the S. XVIII and constructed with long stairs that take to the first floor, it is conformed by various rooms that still preserves frescoes from the '700. As many other goods in Belmonte, the palace was required by the French troops and later acquired by the Giudice family.

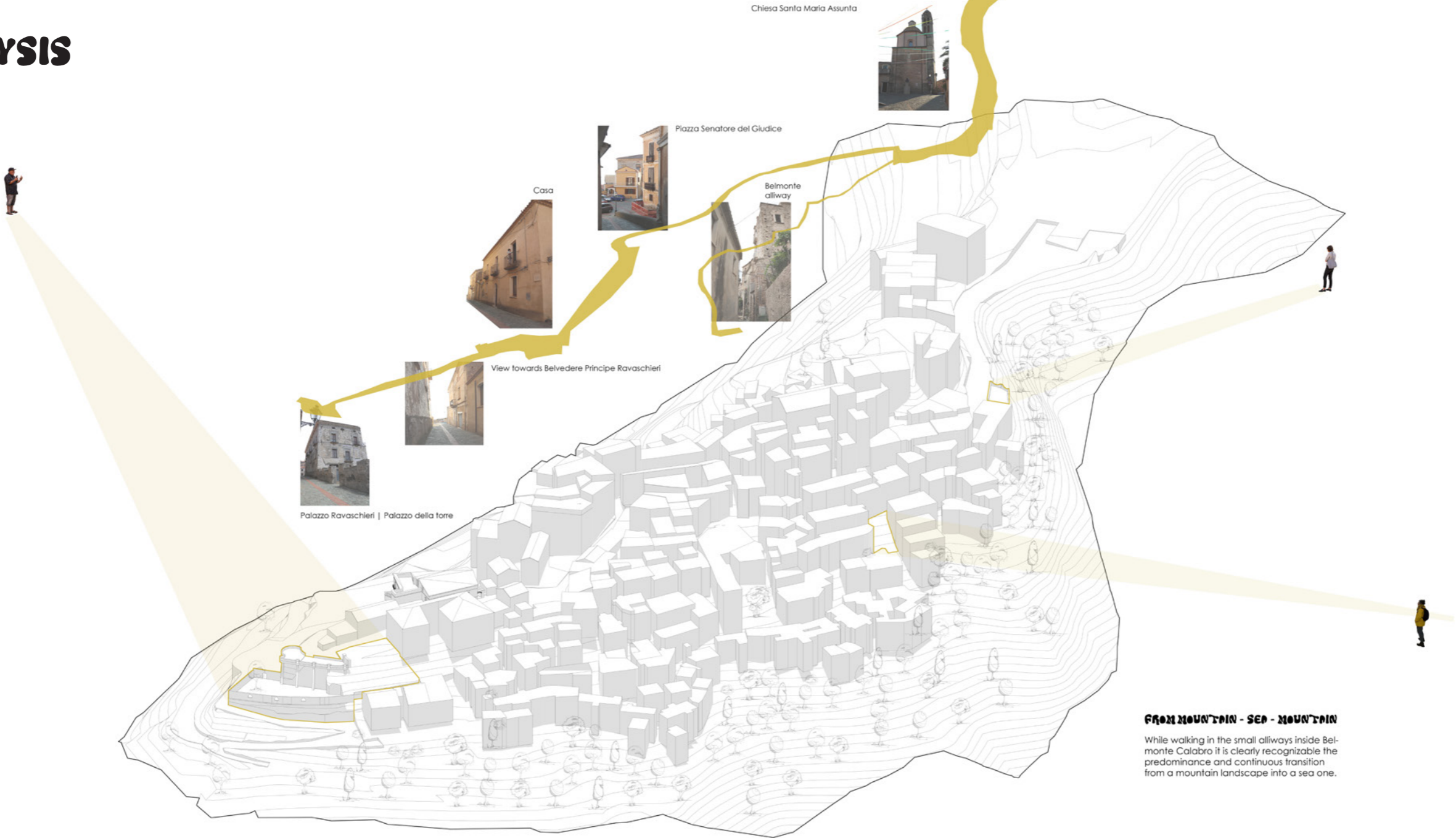


### Purgatory Church

It was Belmonte's first church built at the same time as the castle and the main one until 1585, it is located in the zone currently denominated "burgu" on what is thought to be the first central area of Belmonte



# VIEWS ANALYSIS



**FROM MOUNTAIN - SEA - MOUNTAIN**

While walking in the small allways inside Belmonte Calabro it is clearly recognizable the predominance and continuous transition from a mountain landscape into a sea one.



### Belvedere Principe Ravaschieri

The belvedere is characterised for being the entrance point for Belmonte, from where is admirable the dominant landscape of the Tyrrhenian sea and how it slowly merges with the mountain landscape.

On the other side of the belvedere, the limit is conformed by the Palazzo Ravaschieri, while in the lower part it can be seen the remaining historical walls that used to be the limits of the village.



### Space as a result of time

The dense urban fabric and the deterioration of occupancy rate in Belmonte resulted in this informal space in-between buildings with the remains of some historical walls.

Nature has taken over this space creating an interesting integration between playfulness and rigidity, old and new.

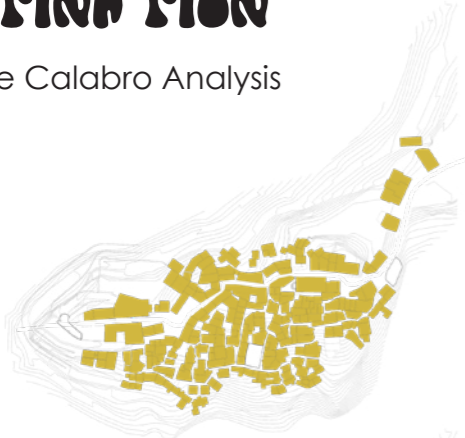


### Belvedere Pietro Veltri

The belvedere is in the center of the main activated axe along the village. It is surrounded by the library, main church and the main bar, making it a vital node to regain the value of lost public space and to regain the connection with its surrounding landscape due to the strong connection to the mountains.

# DESTINATION

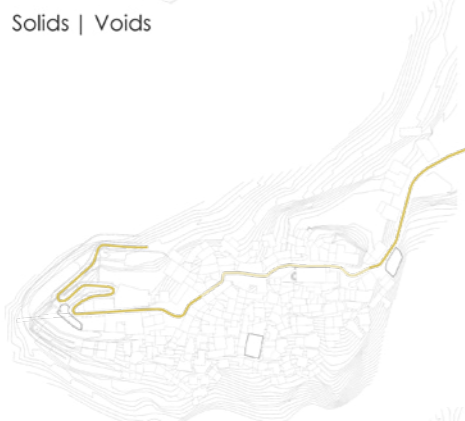
## Belmonte Calabro Analysis



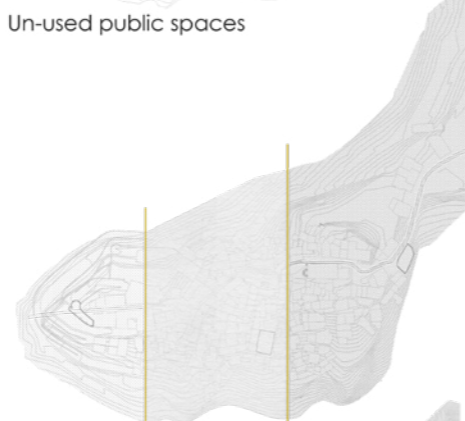
Solids | Voids



Un-used public spaces



Fast | Slow mobility



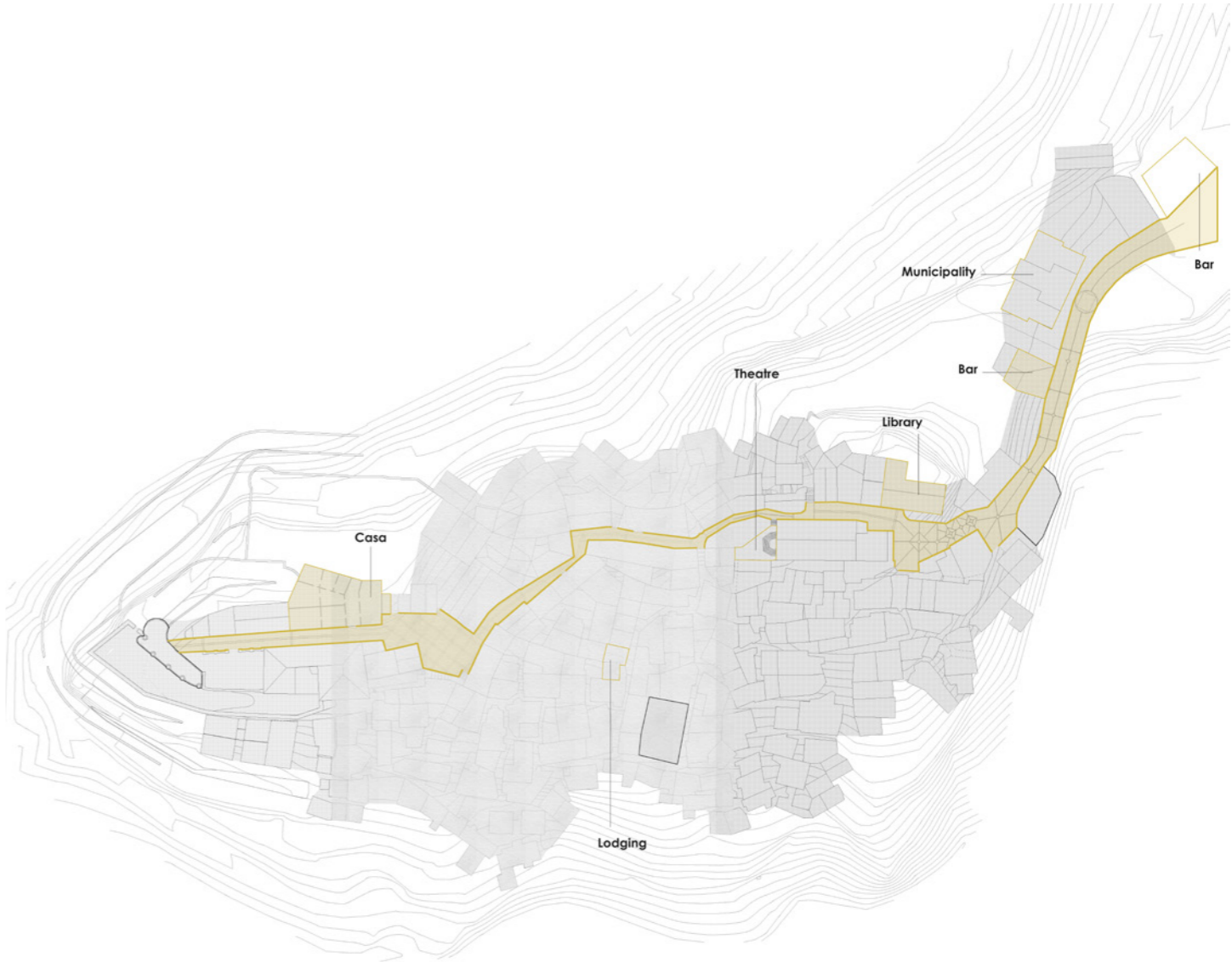
3 Lansdscapes



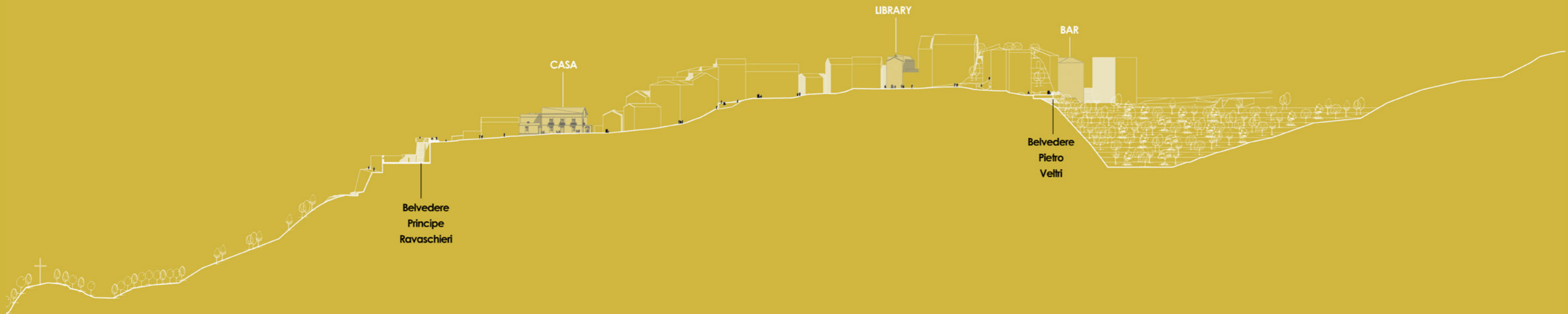
Axe | Carpet of the public



Belmonte as an 'object' in the landscape



- Sea connection
- Dense Urban Fabric
- Mountain connection



Belvedere  
Principe  
Rivaschieri

CASA

LIBRARY

BAR

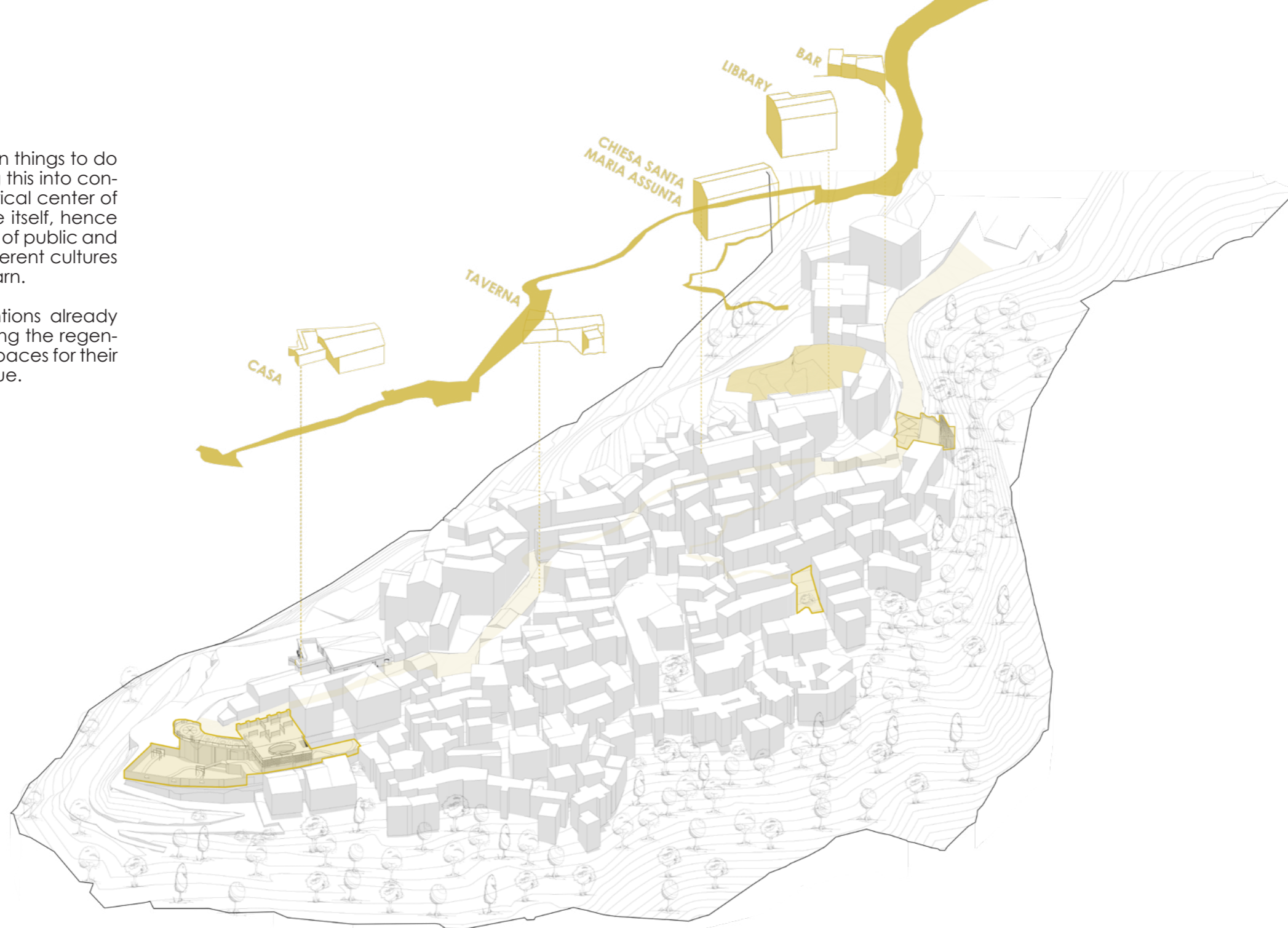
Belvedere  
Pietro  
Veltri

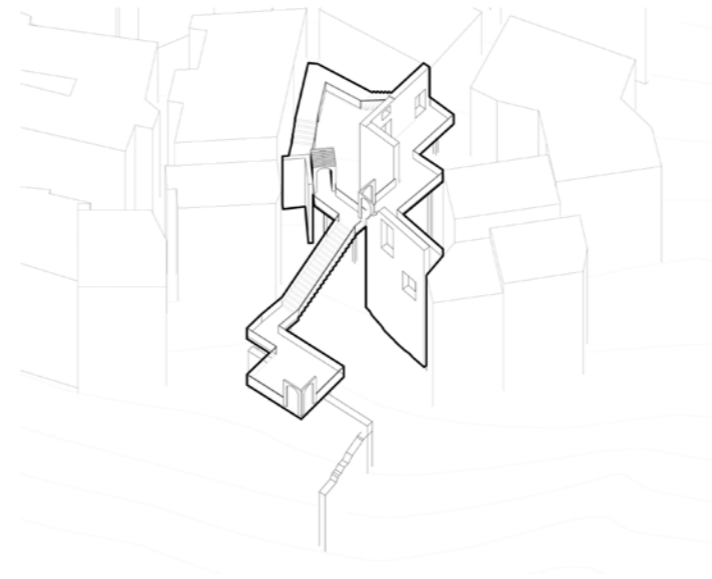
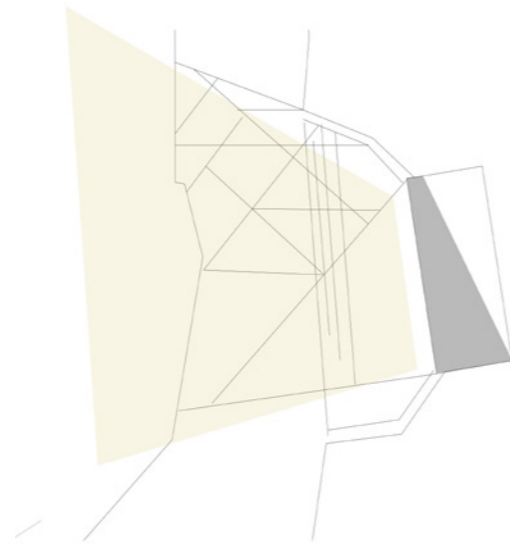


## POWER OF 10+

Every place needs an amount of ten things to do in order to be an active one. Taking this into consideration, we understand the historical center of BelmonteCalabro as a whole place itself, hence the main idea is to create a network of public and semi-public areas for people from different cultures and backgrounds to gather and learn.

As part of this network of interventions already present in the area, we are proposing the regeneration of three under-used public spaces for their social, historical and landscape value.





## PORTA A MARE

The intervention takes as a starting point the regeneration of the Belvedere Principe Rivaschieri, a node both historically and socially important.

As part of the historical research it was determined the importance of the tower and the remaining surrounding wall that use to protect Belmonte Calabro. In the same matter, due to historical value present in the surrounding area of the belvedere with the Rivaschieri Palace and its garden, the project aim to create a dynamic environment for the public space and expand it as a learning area with information displayed throughout it and connecting different levels to finish in a secret garden rehabilitated and productive for its users.

## PORTA TERRA

The design purpose for this public space is to regain the lost connection to the surrounding mountain landscape through a frame or "porta" to it, making people aware of the natural characteristics present on the site.

Also, surpassing the limits, and make it accesible to everybody, as well as playing with colors and levels as a playground for children due to its proximity with the public library.

## TIMELESS

This intervention represents the intersection between nature and dense urban fabric. History plays a key role in identifying a trajectory of new experiences to connect pre-existence and natural landscape.

Adapting with the strong existing topography of Belmonte Calabro, resulted in a playful approach to discover hidden spaces within the interlaced urban morphology.

## LIGHTER, QUICKER & CHEAPER

Based on the principles of Placemaking, and together with the collective La Rivoluzione Delle Seppie, movable furnitures were constructed during summer and winter workshops, where with the involment of local people, immigrants, teachers and students the public areas where reactivated as momentaneous scenarios for public participation.

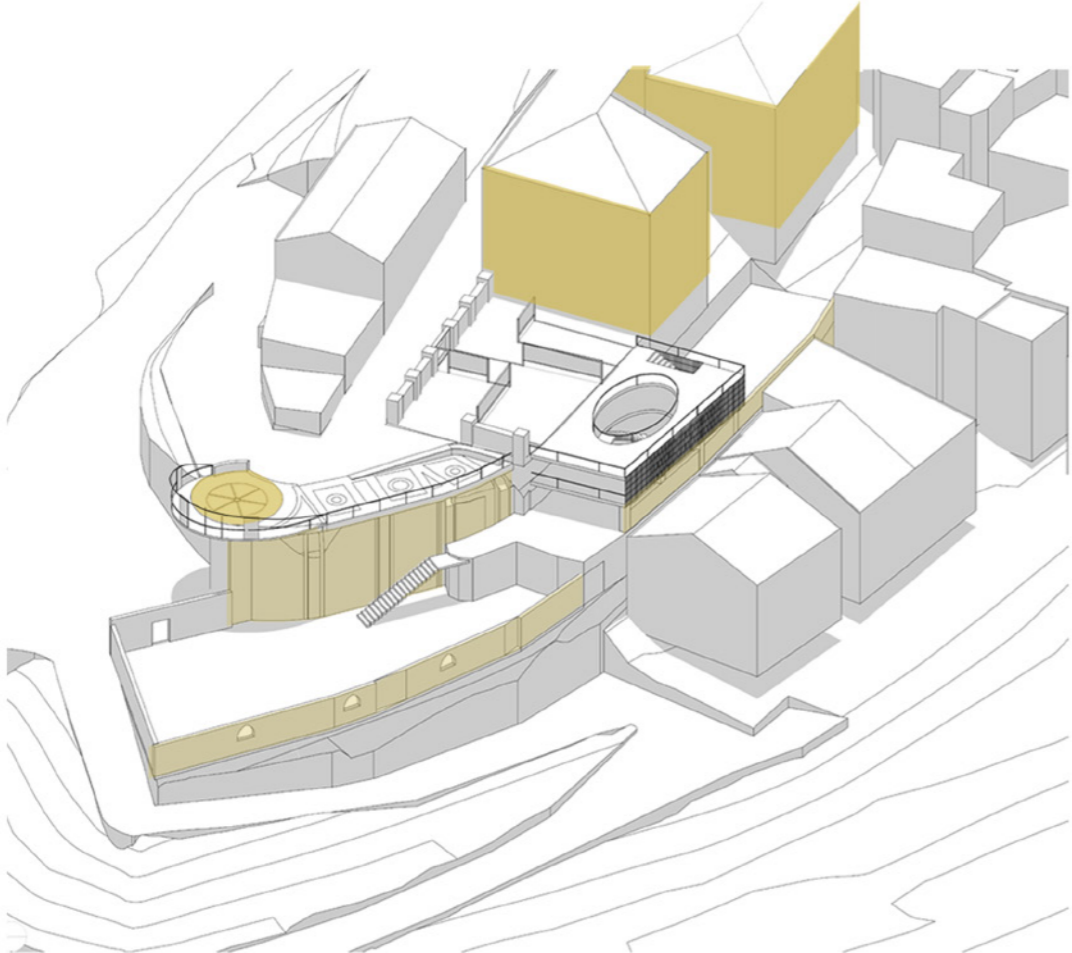
We propose the use of this movable and foldable elements as the furniture to be used in the spaces intervened, as well as the distribution of said furniture along the main axis in the village, working as a connecting element throughout the network.

# PORTA A MARE

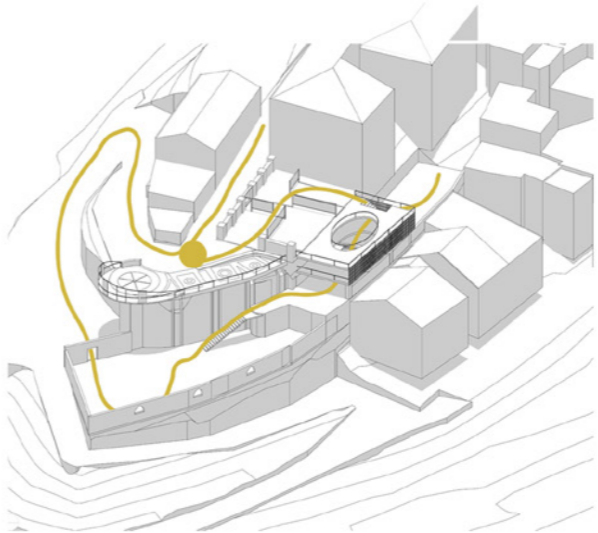
Place 1



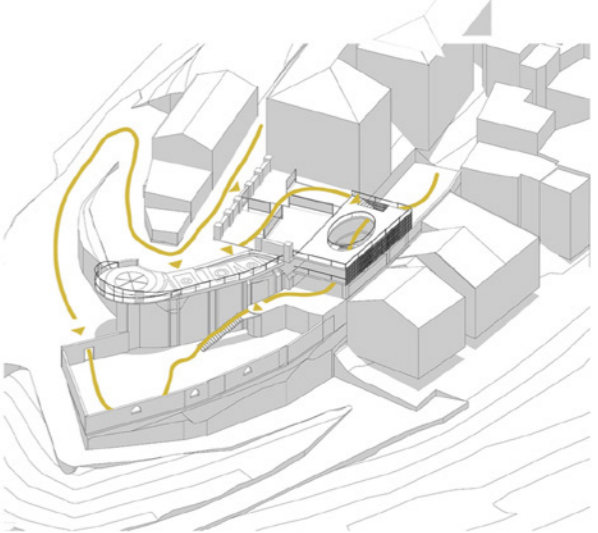
Concept Ideas



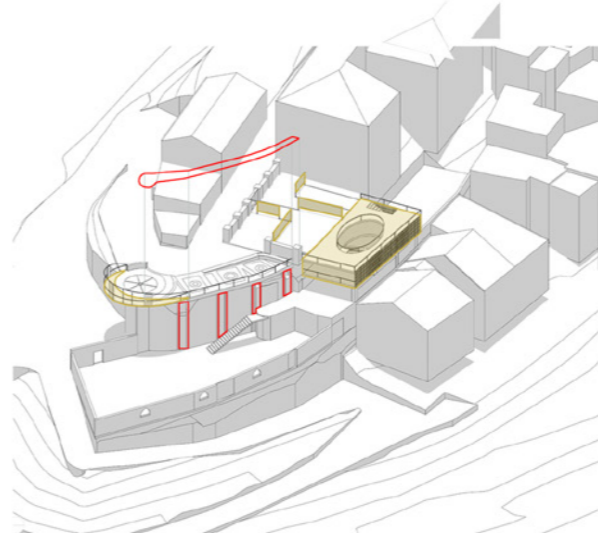
Existing historical elements



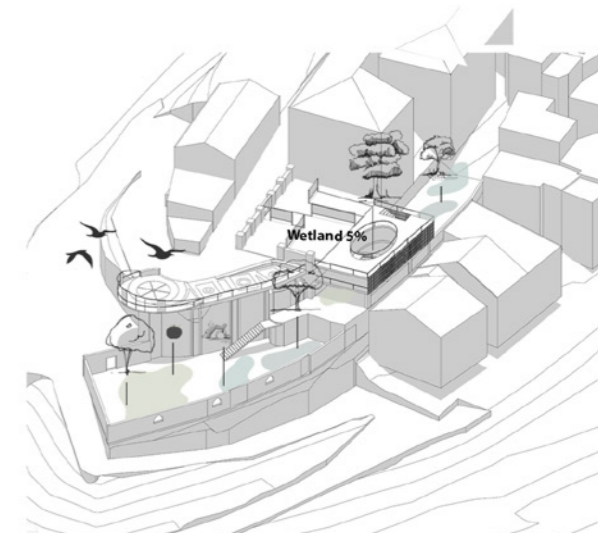
Linkage



Access points



Status of elements

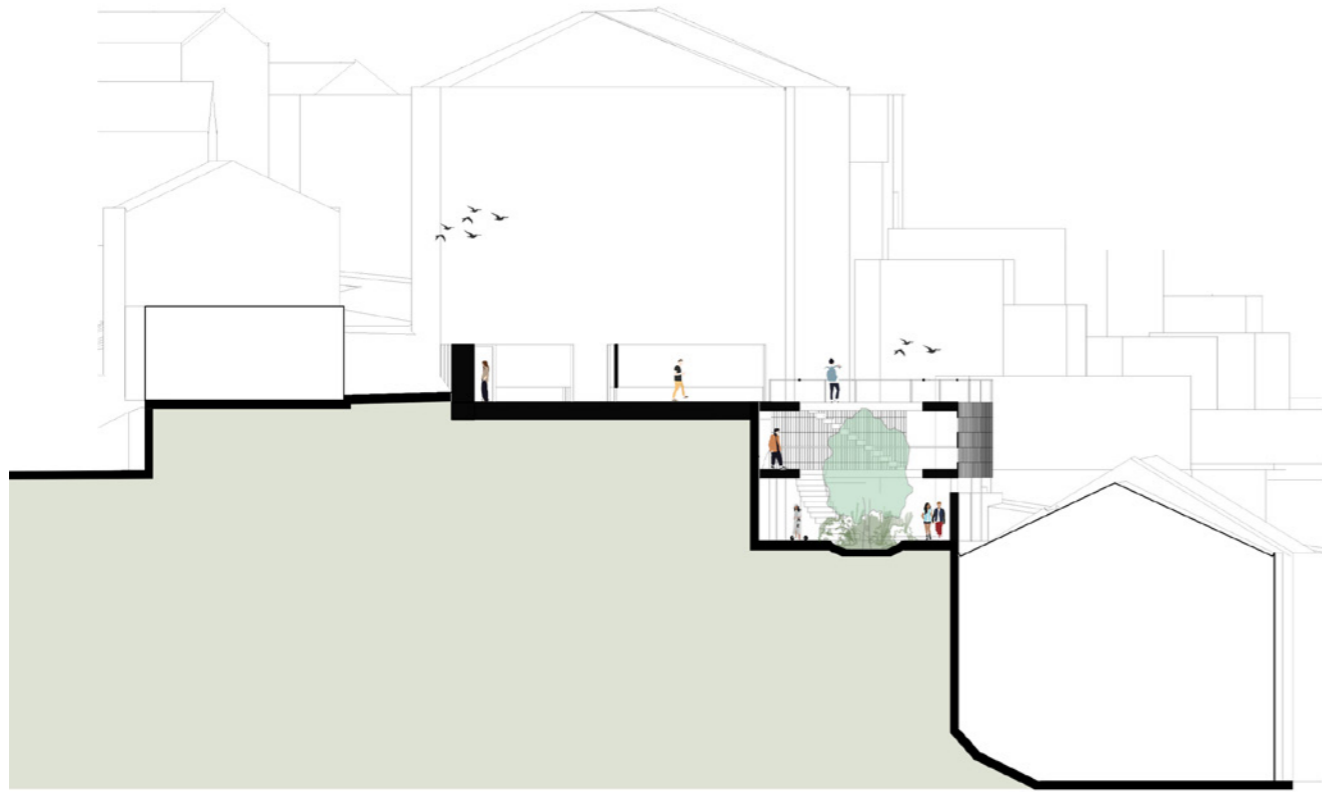


Biodiversity

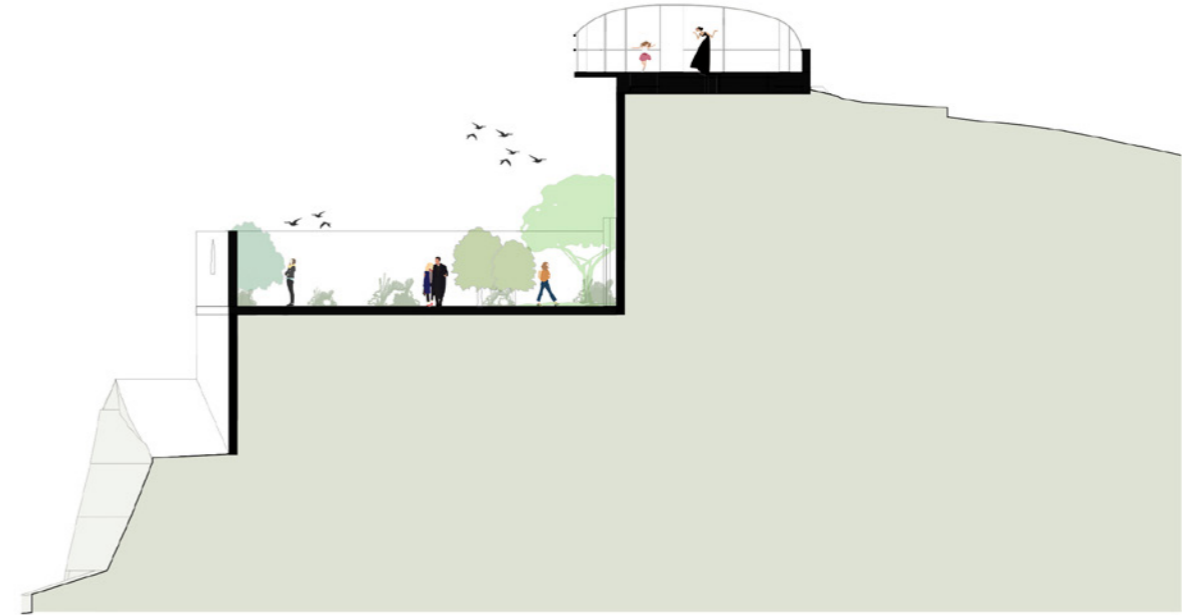


**Plan**

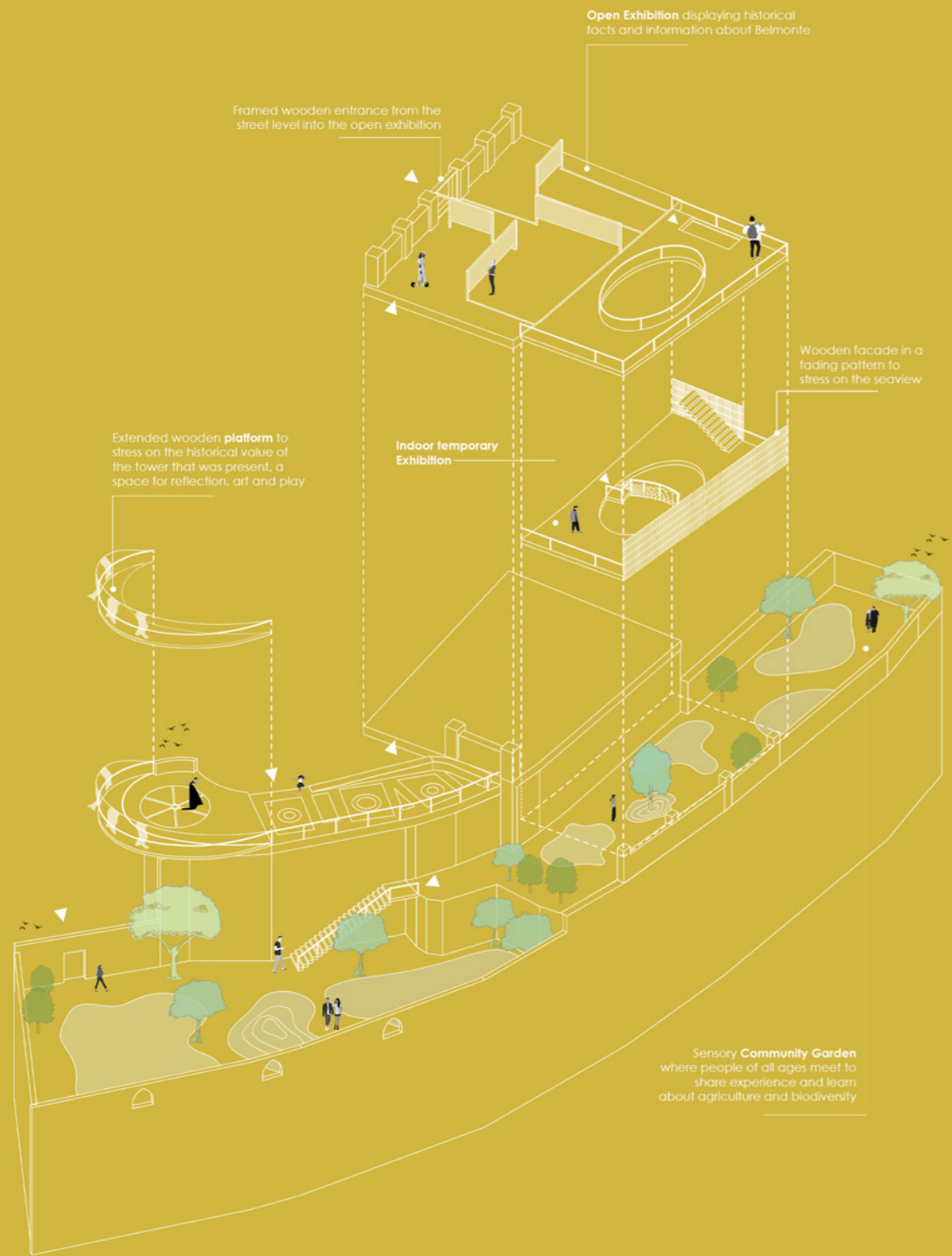
- Wild vegetation
- Tomatoes
- Vegetables
- Almond Tree
- Olive Tree
- Citrus Tree
- Figs Tree



Section AA



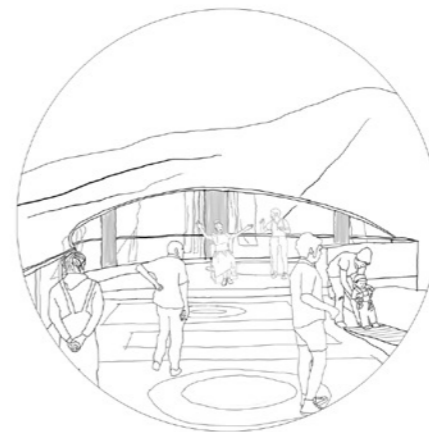
Section BB



## Imagined Dynamic of Spaces



Reflection



Theatre



Public market



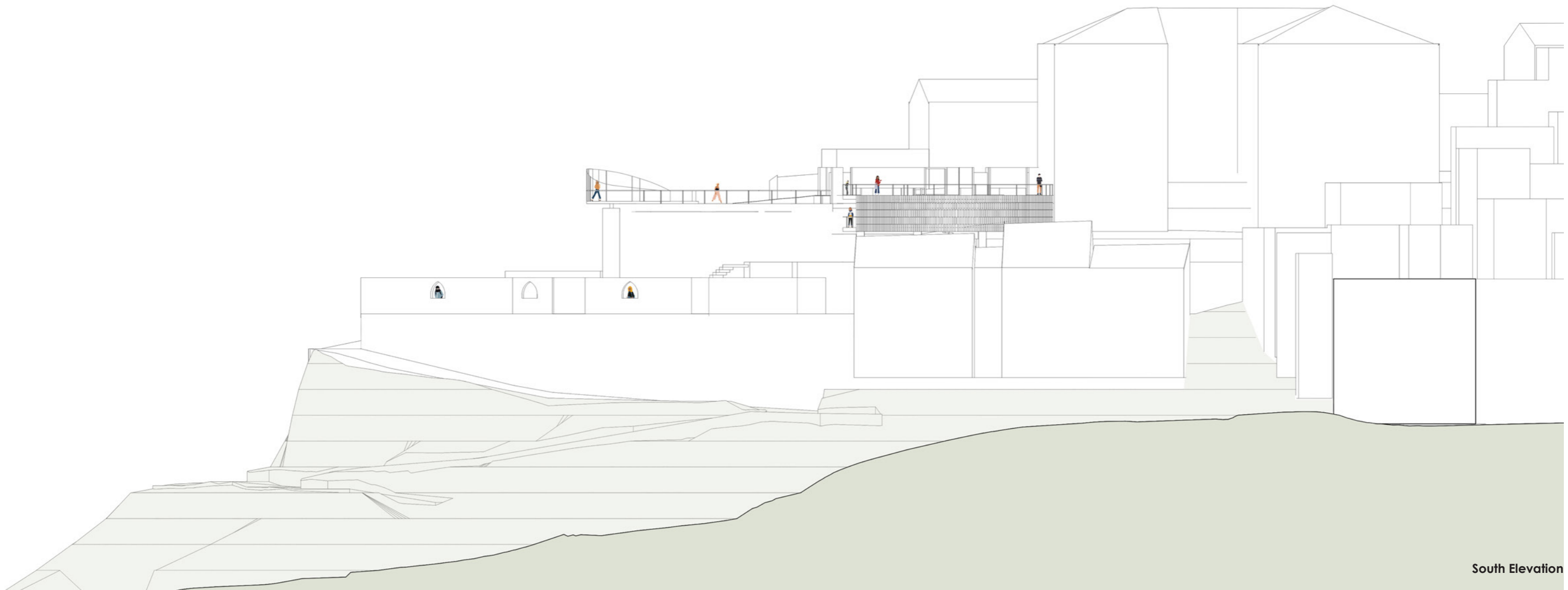
Indoor Exhibition



Community garden







South Elevation











# PORTA TERRA

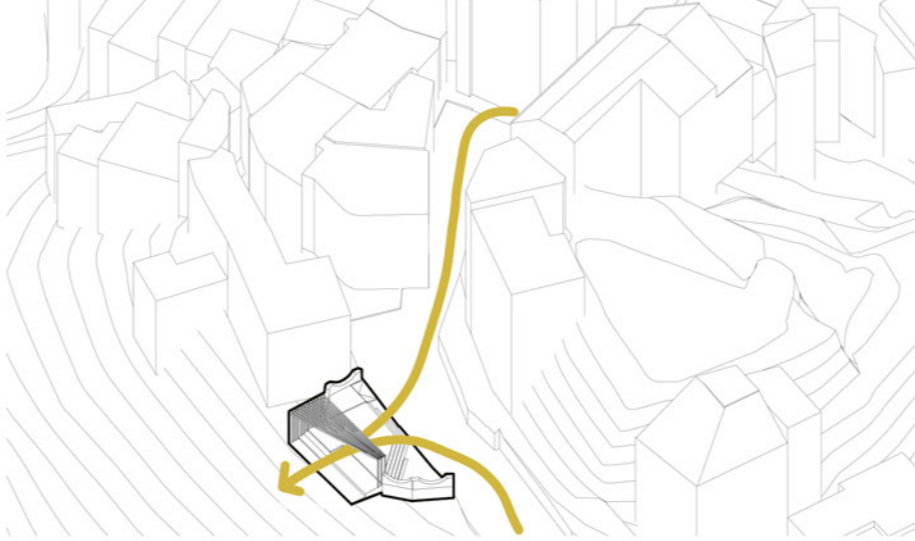
Place 2



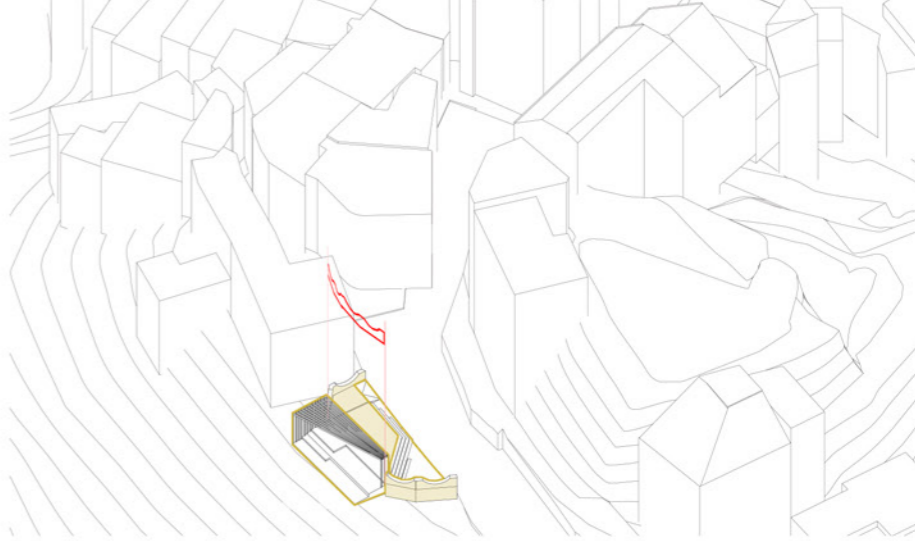
**Concept Ideas**



**Carpet of the Public**



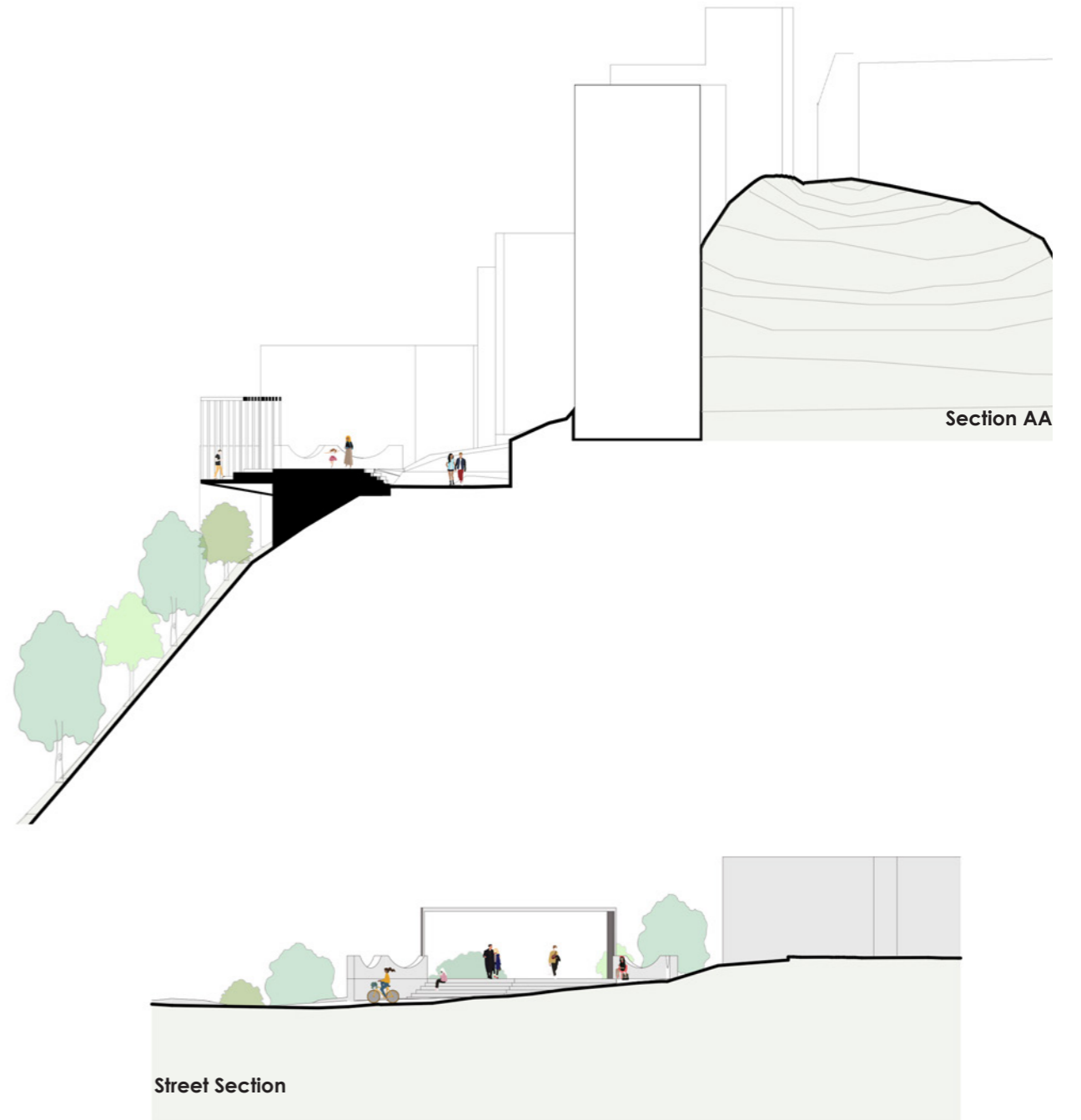
**Breaking the Limit**



**Status of Elements**













# TIMELESS

Place 3



Concept Ideas

APPEARING



disappearing



Convex and Concave  
M.C. Escher  
1955

Escher turns everything inside out: top becomes bottom, and outside becomes inside

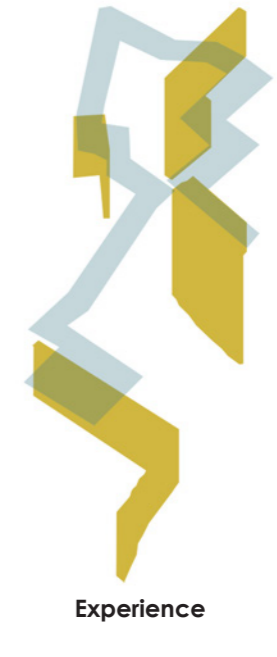
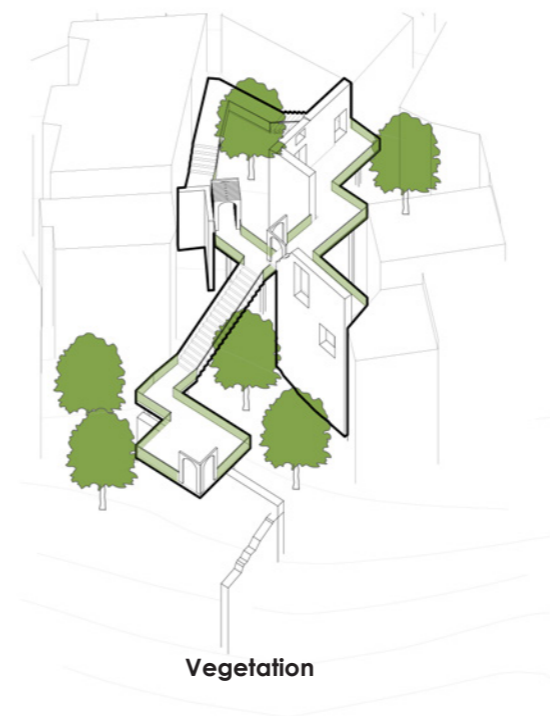
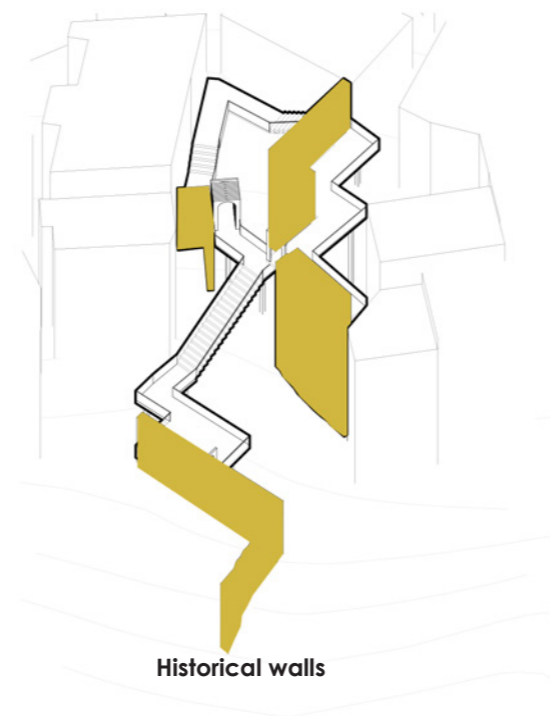
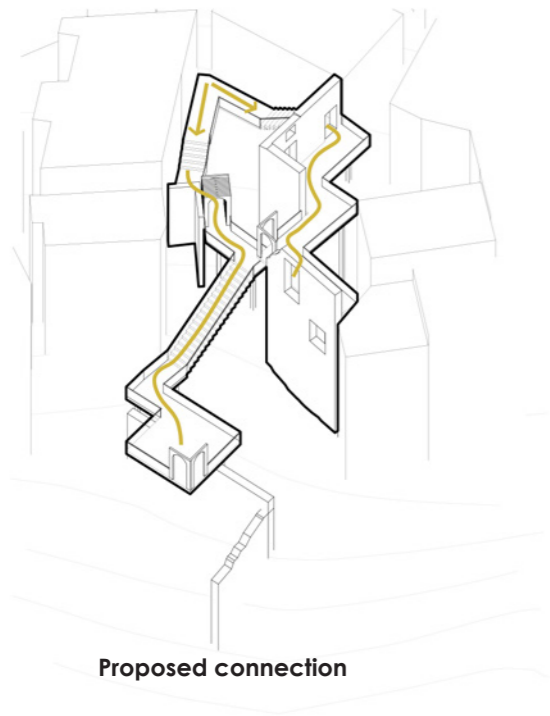


Vigna di Leonardo Da Vinci  
Edoardo Tresoldi  
2015

"The Absent Matter is the representation of a mental projection, filter and shape through which places, instants and beings are narrated.

It triggers uninterrupted dialogues with space and history, and projects the object's substance into an unknown temporal dimension: what has disappeared, or never existed, lives again in a different time."



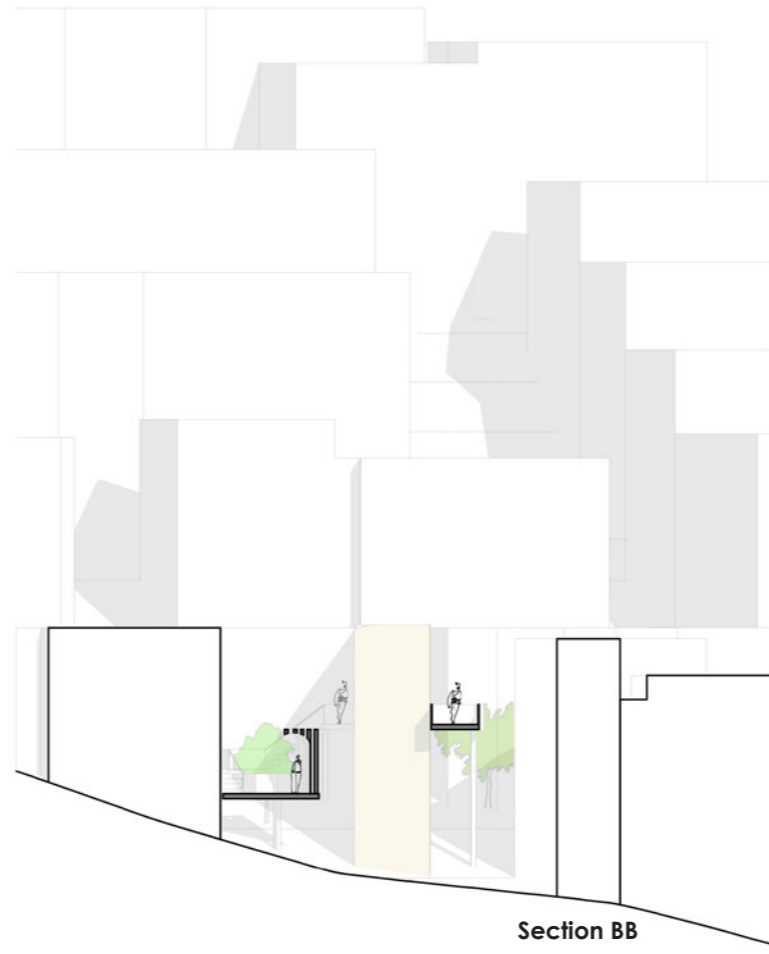






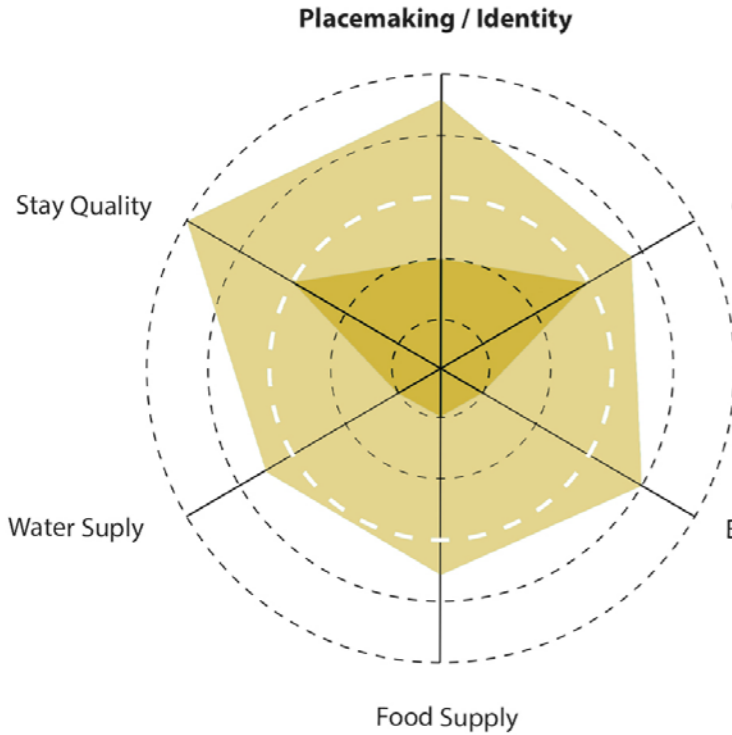
- Green Area
- Almond Tree
- Figs Tree
- Existing Trees
- Historical Walls

Plan





Expected results from interventions in public spaces



After the development of this thesis project, we can derive the following conclusions:

1. The principles of placemaking understood through the work developed by the movement 'Project for Public Space' (PPS) are of extreme value for the preparation and planning for interventions in public spaces.
2. For a public space to be inclusive, it should respond to the changing needs of its users. Hence, adaptability plays a key role to be considered while designing such spaces. The more people feel accepted in a public space, the stronger the collective identity will be.
3. The best way to understand whether placemaking methods work is through a trial and error process, where observation and direct interaction with the people involved can shape more assertive decisions.
4. The global pandemic of COVID-19 we are living now in 2020 has shown that public spaces should not be considered as a luxury, but as a vital element that ensures our mental and physical health. Therefore, we strongly believe current and future efforts should focus and guarantee access to quality public spaces that welcome and reach everybody.

## Observations:

1. It is important to denote that the principles cited by PPS should be considered as general guidelines, which can adapt within time to the changes and needs of specific communities. From here arises the essential value of 'Learning by doing' process.
2. Think globally and act locally.
3. For the specific case of the community of Belmonte Calabro, while working with the organization 'La Rivoluzione delle Seppie' in application of 'Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper' methods, it was denoted a series of challenges with the senior age group. The outcomes were not as expected after the workshop ended, highlighting the need of a more permanent approach to regenerate the village.
4. The outcomes from this thesis project should be presented to the community and adapted responding to the community outcomes. Due to the pandemic COVID-19, it is not possible to expose the results directly. Nonetheless, it will be presented soon.

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## Figures:

Fig 1,2,3,9,11 Reprinted from *A Festival of Creative Urban Living*, by L. Hamilkaro, Retrieved June 2019, from <https://afcul.org/>

Fig 4,5,6,7,8,10,12,13, Reprinted from *Project for Public Spaces*, n.d., Retrieved June 2019, from <https://www.pps.org/>

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