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A Second Life:

The adaptation of dying Italian towns to accommodate immigrants and refugees

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ABSTRACT

Despite its efforts in historic preservation, there is an abundance of culturally significant Italian vernacular towns dying due to dilapidation and depopulation. Simultaneously, Italy has faced an ongoing stream of immigrants and refugees seeking work, housing, and asylum within its borders—a crisis that has resulted in Italian fear and animosity aside immigrant maltreatment and hardship. My research, which is supplemented by first-hand experience in Italy, qualitative analysis, and text sources, proposes interventions into dying Italian towns to aid in the resettlement of immigrants and refugees—an effort meant to be mutually beneficial to both the town and the immigrant.

In my research, I consider and work to understand the social, political, and historical issues surrounding immigration in Italy. Understanding these issues along with the concepts of placemaking build a frame through which to assess whether a town may work for resettlement and how involved intervention should be. In the end, it can be determined which typologies of towns work better for resettlement because of topography and proximities. This research also expresses the importance of individuality in placemaking, placing ‘adaptability’ as an important value when creating unique frameworks suited to a myriad of cultures. Intervention must be just as adaptable to the individual’s needs as it must be adaptable to the varying built conditions it functions within.

INTRODUCTION

Italy has been at the forefront of migration from Africa and the Middle East, especially over the last decade or so. This great influx of people searching for safety and economic opportunity has placed a significant burden on European countries who are faced with housing and supporting a large new population. This strain has caused animosity between European cultures and immigrants, erupting in xenophobia, polarizing political debate, and unstable funding for refugees. One of the primary issues refugees and immigrants face when arriving is finding a place to live and work, especially while waiting for a permit of stay or for refugee status. Italy has numerous vernacular towns that are losing residents every year as their youths go to larger cities with greater opportunities for professional growth. These towns are often scenic beautiful places rooted in historical value that are at the risk of dying if there is no population in place preventing deterioration. Incorporating refugee and immigrant populations into certain vernacular Italian towns could provide a solution to both the issue of residency and the lack of economy (and therefore lack of maintenance) in the town. For this to work, certain frameworks and adjacencies must be in place for the town, and some incentive must be in place for funding this resettlement. My ability to travel to Italy and study first-hand the context as well as gather source information on the current state of migration has lent well to a greater understanding of how resettlement may be possible. After defining the Italian vernacular town typologies, noting the criteria necessary to make them suitable for revitalization, and characterizing the present state of immigration into Italy, my research will determine necessary program interventions, site sensitivity and

preservation requirements, and different formal strategies to repurpose different built conditions, taking into consideration ease of construction and physical proximities to foster cohabitation. In the end, it should be clear how adaptive reuse practices could repurpose vacant spaces to house and support immigrant populations, benefiting each the town, the immigrant, and the heritage of Italy.

BACKGROUND

Town Typology and Viability

Italian vernacular towns are important icons to the historical fabric and aesthetic of Italy. The often closely packed, freely organized stone buildings dotting the hills and valleys across Italy lend to the highly individualized character and beauty of each town.¹ Unfortunately, there are over two hundred dying towns in Italy and counting as residents dwindle. Older generations pass, and younger generations leave for new opportunities abroad. Depopulation advances as local governments are unable to sustain the economy or preserve the town's buildings as they deteriorate from time, natural disasters, and lack of use.² The Italian government places immense value on preserving its history and stringently regulates preservation in its city-centers. The preservation of these towns lies with developers entrusted by the government and local efforts.

Vernacular Italian towns can accommodate a refugee population for several reasons. The building units are extremely simple—boxes encapsulating basic cubes of space. Most often there are workspaces below with housing space above. This setup is beneficial as a major issue refugees face upon arrival in their new country is finding space to work and do business. The closely spaced town organization also takes advantage of the amount of spaces available quite efficiently, and the multifunctional nature of the boxy buildings makes them prime for adaptation for new programmatic needs. Vernacular plans consist of clusters of buildings connected by pedestrian walkways. Circulation through the towns require a passage through the main square in the town center. This community-facilitating space often includes the town's water

1 Carver Jr., Norman F. *Italian Hilltowns*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Document Press, Ltd., 1979

2 Needleman, Deborah. "Who Will Save These Dying Italian Towns?" *The New York Times*, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com>

source, a church, and simply space for socializing. These easily navigated networks can help refugees more easily integrate into the community comfortably. The towns' organization emphasizes the concept of community which is important to helping a new wave of people feel at home. While this is a standard reading of a variety of vernacular towns, there is actually more stratification. In central and southern Italy, the areas where most of the research has taken place, there are a few different typologies within the vernacular- the mountain town, the hill town, and the valley town.

The first typology could be exemplified by the town of Cervara di Roma. (Fig. 1) Cervara di Roma is under two hours from the city of Rome and just outside the somewhat larger town of Subiaco. It is what could be considered a mountain town as it has the highest-elevation historic center in the region of Rome.³ Its city center is the historic center demarcated by tall tower ruins jutting out of the mountain cliff. The piazza is at the base of the cliff and the church just around the other side. Cervara has a unique tradition of artistry—particularly sculpture. Artists would come from all around to carve directly into the mountainside. One experiences it climbing up into town from the vehicular road below leading to Subiaco, as well as the path up to the mountain peak holding the tower. Beautiful forms, from human to abstract dot the walls of rock. From the center the town spread out to one side along the main road near the top. The few people that seemed to appear would meet and talk to each other along this route. Some houses have spaces for private gardens and small animal pens, but most of the buildings were close and stacked. It was a truly complex urban landscape with streets tunneling under structures, sometimes ending in dead ends, eventually finding their way back to the main road or in the square. The 'mountain town' typology is characterized by the steepness of its topography. Houses are practically stacked on each other staggering upward towards the peak. While the piazza is connected to the main road through town, it is somewhat disjointed from other circulation through town due to the heavy terracing. Herding is a common historical practice at the high altitudes, but nowadays Cervara greets summer and winter tourism with hiking, skiing, and horseback riding nearby. This type of economy, which can be characteristic to many dying towns, is very temporal and results in great dips in stimulation the off-season. Despite the growing age of these dying towns' inhabitants, the

3 Municipality of Cervara di Roma. <https://www.cervaradiromaturismo.com/>

steep steps do not seem to be too bad of a deterrent, at least not in Cervara. Most notably, the mountain typology leaves little room for new construction due to the limited space on a peak. Its existing structures are extremely pointilated, each building rarely level with its neighbors.



FIGURE 1 Cervara di Roma

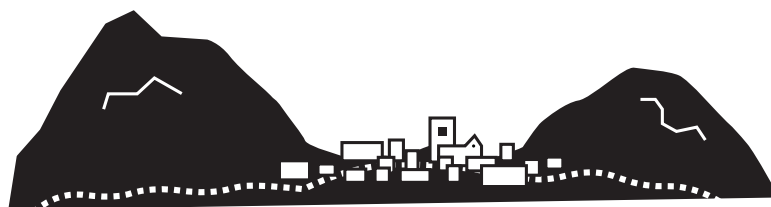
The typical hilltown, is perhaps easy to imagine as the most typical Italian vernacular typology. It has many of the same characteristics as the mountain typology, just less steep, perhaps with the ability to climb down the hillside away from the historic center over time. Matera in southern Italy is an interesting example in which the hill is made of such soft volcanic rock, the Paleolithic people that are believed to have first settled there had carved cave dwellings to live in. The mixture of subtractive and additive building created this terraced effect with road upon the roofs of the dwellings below. Because it built into the side of a hill, the main road sits at the top while the city trickles down. New development continues top of the hill that the residents mostly live in while they renovate and reuse the historic dwelling mostly for bed-and-breakfasts. Civita di Bagnoregio, in central Italy, known as the ‘dying city,’ also has the typical hilltown layout characterized by a main road running through the primary piazza.



MOUNTAIN TOWN



HILLTOWN



VALLEY TOWN

FIGURE 2 Vernacular Town Typologies

The ability to navigate multiple axes off that main road is more characteristic of the hilltown than the staggered mountain town beforementioned.

Exemplifying the third typology, Alfedena sits in the valley between two hills that the town originally cropped up on. Its historic fabric is no longer intact due to bombing in WWII. The historic center was never rebuilt with only a few ruins remaining. The primary piazza still is at the base of what was the historic center. Rather than rebuilding, the town built outward because of the available space, so this town is more spread out in nature. Multiple other towns are around and easy for the migrant workers to get to, and the nearest train station is less than 30 minutes away by car. Alfedena faces the same reduction of population that other vernacular towns face. This is resulting in the abandonment of buildings just the same. However, due to its ability to spread out, larger abandoned buildings are present in the town such as a school and a large palazzo.

The different typologies (Fig. 2) are all potentially capable of housing incoming populations, while some may be more conducive to it than others. For a town to be ideal for resettlement it first needs to have valid, safe infrastructure to work within (whether that exists currently, or an intervention needs to be made). Civita di Bagnoregio, for example, would be difficult in this regard as the sides of its hill continuously crumble. A major intervention would be necessary to stabilize it in the first place. This type of intervention has proven to be possible, but expensive, as seen in the nearby town of Orvieto. Limited funds from the government for immigrant and refugee accommodation would make a intervention of that size for this purpose excessively controversial. The ideal town would have a center gathering space for people to interact to counteract social isolation. The town would ideally have some historic, cultural, or activity-related draw to attract interest from visitors or tourists. The region around Alfedena, for instance, has people going there in the summer to stay cool, so there is money in the hospitality industry. It would have space for a possible new religious institution (most likely a mosque), and if not then a grouping of spaces that can be altered to house a religious institution. Refugees need other services as well, so the possibility for a space to be converted or carved out for a refugee center that could host those activities would be preferable. People coming already with farming and agriculture skills would benefit those sorts of activities being nearby the town. Importantly, the ideal town would have some proximity to a larger town and an ease of access out of the town. Without

proximity to a nearby city with work opportunities, the town becomes overly isolated, and the goal is not to strand a community of people on a landlocked island. Cervara di Roma, for example, was a quick bus to Subiaco, which in turn is a quick bus to Rome.

Status of Immigrants and Refugees

Migration has been an institution throughout all human history. People have always tended to move, temporarily or permanently. Some migrate for economic opportunity, some for tourism, and some to escape an unsafe or uninhabitable situation back home. There are different classifications for immigrants depending on intention of travel. The UN Convention on Refugees (1951) defines the term 'refugee' as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion."⁴ People who are granted refugee status cannot go back, visit home, or be sent back until it is declared safe for their return, and, often it is their intention to go home once that safety is secured. Refugees begin as Asylum Seekers. Asylum Seekers have a claim to deserve refugee status but have not yet been evaluated and approved.⁵ Italy is obligated under the Dublin Treaty to entertain claims for asylum as long as they file for refugee status upon arrival. If one migrates to Italy but does not report themselves to the government, they are undocumented. Undocumented immigrants cannot legally acquire a job, and there is no way to make an undocumented immigrant legal. Without abundant funds, however, Italy does not have the resources to send many back.

Thomas Nail, in "The Figure of the Migrant," refers to migration as either opportunistic or dangerous due to the resultant level of social expulsion.⁶ He defines a series of 'migrant' archetypes including the 'tourist,' the 'vagabond,' and the 'refugee.' The term 'tourist' can be attributed to travelling

4 Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. UNHCR. 1951

5 Habitat for Humanity. "Refugees, Asylum Seekers & Migrants: A Crucial Difference." 2017. <https://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/blog/2016/09/refugees-asylum-seekers-migrants-crucial-difference/>

6 Nail, Thomas. "The Figure of the Migrant." Stanford University Press: 2015.

businessmen, students studying abroad, vacationers...people in search of opportunity, be it capital or experience. Nail describes 'vagrants' as the "other side of the same coin," as they also are in search of economic or social opportunity. However, the difference between the two archetypes lies in the sacrifices made in migration. The tourist does not need to worry about social consequences, while the vagrant is met with possibly social ostracization due to the circumstances surrounding their migration. In this, he also attempts to destigmatize the connotation relating to the term 'migrant' by referring it to a "mobile social position or spectrum that people move into or out of under certain social conditions" rather than a permanent identity. Obviously, the case of the refugee is different, as it is a forced migration due to a dangerous situation. The risks of social, political, and economic expulsion are heavily outweighed by the risk of just staying in their home country.

Much of the stigma surrounding the term "immigrant" in recent years is due to the refugee crisis in Europe over the last decade which peaked in late 2015 at over 1 million immigrant arrivals that year.⁷ Due to Italy's geographic location, it is a very easy place to enter Europe. It is relatively easy for immigrants to travel through Africa from many different countries to reach Tunisia or Libya which are a short boat ride away from the southernmost Italian island of Lampedusa and be officially in Europe (Fig. 3). Immigrants move both voluntarily and involuntarily due to the increase of complications and human trafficking that may come out of being smuggled overseas. Many must give up all they have to access a ride across the Mediterranean, arriving in Italy with nothing (Fig. 4). The trip is quite dangerous and in 2018 over 1,300 new sea arrivals were reported dead or missing.⁸ Many immigrants run the risk of losing their passport and falling into a trap of human trafficking. Women and children can be forced into sex slavery and strong men into hard labor. The origin of the immigrants is directly correlated to the world political/economic climate and conflicts which is why most of the arrivals in Europe in 2019 have been from Afghanistan (20.1%), Syria (16.5%), and Morocco (8.7%).⁹ The beginning of 2020, however, has shown increased immigration from Bangladesh (16.3%), Algeria

7 "Figures at a Glance." Unhcr.org

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

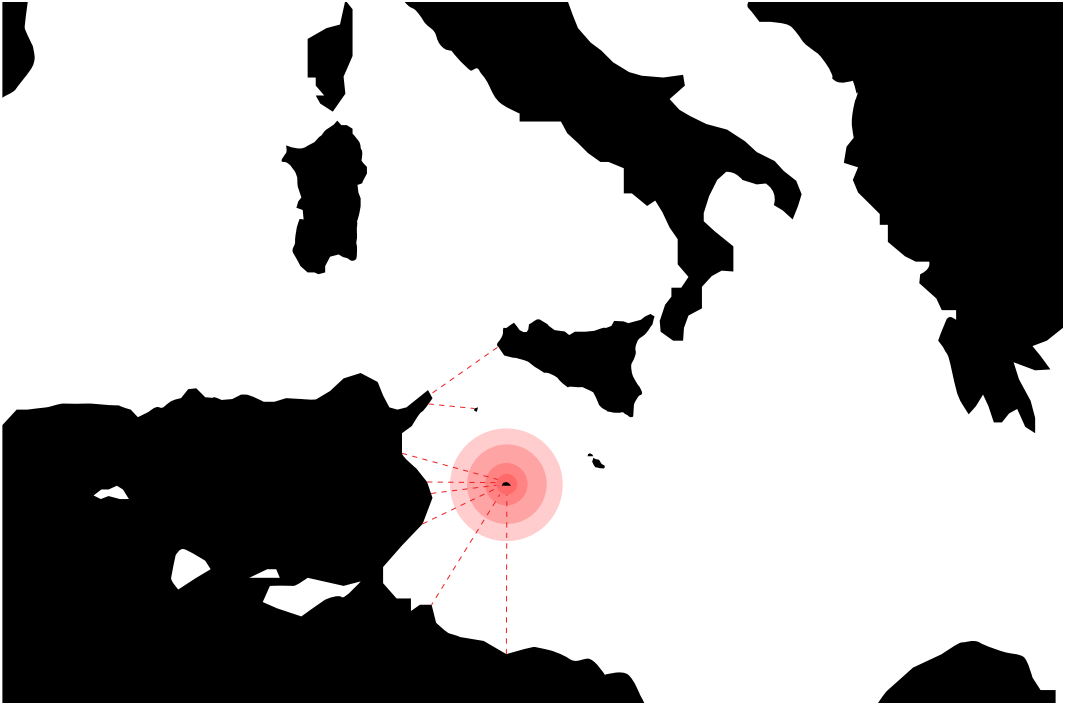


FIGURE 3 Immigration into Italy through Lampedusa



FIGURE 4 Immigrants traveling by sea

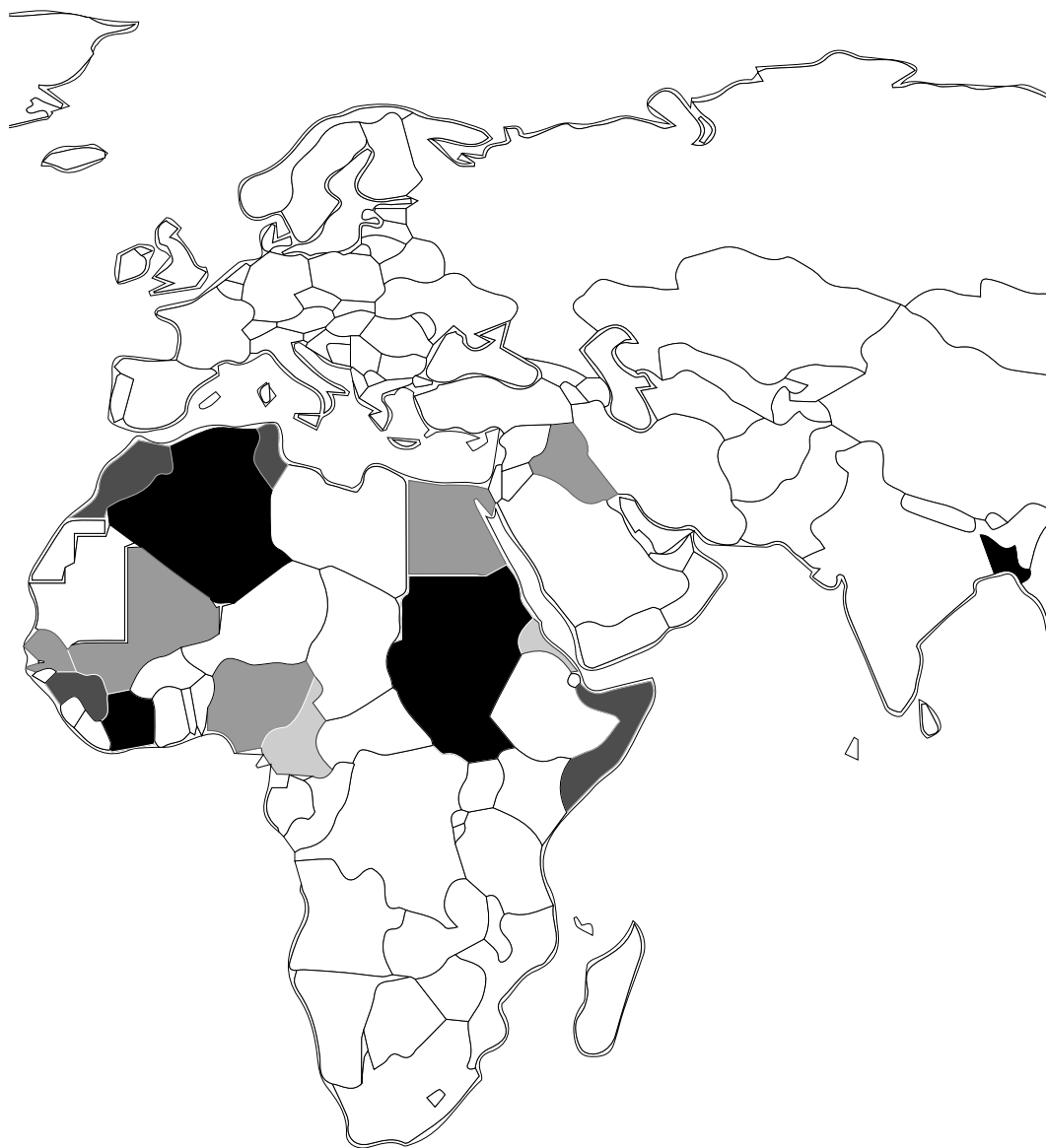


FIGURE 5 Most common countries of origin

(11.2%), Cote d'Ivoire (11.1%), and Sudan (8.9%) (Fig. 5).¹⁰ With Italy being the port of entry, and the resistance from the rest of Europe and the EU to resettle refugees, Italy accumulated and continues to accumulate much of the migrating population. Most of the immigrants are men (72% in 2018) who are either sending their earnings home to support their families or are creating a stable situation to bring their family to after some time.¹¹

In recent years, the crisis has been slowly lifting as the number of arrivals in Europe has gone down from over 1 million in 2015 to under 120,000 in 2019, 10% of which are arriving in Italy.¹² The arrivals have only decreased due to the new closed-sea policy in Italy which is a Deterrence Policy against sea rescue.¹³ Despite the decrease in the number of arrivals, many of the symptoms of the crisis remain. Upon arrival, most immigrants and refugees do not speak the language or have required skillsets for adequately paying jobs, nor working permits or visas. Italy's declining population and youth's lack of interest in low-paying jobs has caused capitalists to exploit the surplus of immigrant workers coming into the country, preying on their temporality and disposability.¹⁴ This of course leads into a racially charged narrative about immigrant population stealing Italian jobs. Immigrants are often going from job to job with little ability for professional growth within any one field. This leaves much of them with temporary work at markets, gas stations, as cleaners, and unfortunately even in illegal selling of goods or substances. Many jobs will not hire without proof of residence, yet it is difficult to find residence without proof of employment. Larger cities often have more available jobs, but rent is much greater and even unobtainable. Immigrants also cannot sign a lease without their legal papers. Depending on the political climate, funds available to refugee centers and services can fluctuate. Each refugee is granted 35 euros a day, but only 2.50 euros is given directly to the refugee to live on.¹⁵

Financial hardship and social isolation can lead one to become prey to

10 "Operational Portal: Refugee Situations." Unhcr.org

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Villa, Matteo. "Sea Arrivals to Italy: The Cost of Deterrence Policies." October 2018.

14 Merrill, Heather. "Migration and Surplus Populations: Race and Deindustrialization in Northern Italy." 2011

15 Genova, Francesca Romana. "Refugees: 4 common places to deny." Unhcr.org

criminal organizations or activities, furthering the stigma people have against migration into their country. To make matters worse, because many immigrants send much of the money they make in Italy home to their families, they do not pay taxes on that money, which is a primary conflict in people's perception of migration. Designated places for refugee living can become overcrowded and problematic, and impromptu settlements can pop up with a hovering risk of being cleared out by the authorities. Integration into society economically and socially is one of the greatest challenges facing immigrants and refugees.

Heather Merrill attributes the inadequate treatment of immigrants to the Italian collective identity which has long been "shaped by racialized understandings."¹⁶ Within Italy, there are strong regional identities, and an intertwined racial narrative that has, over history, resulted in discrimination against the darker skinned, southern Italians. Merrill relates this racial basis of understanding to many Italians readiness toward discrimination of African immigrants who are from "south of south." African immigrants face being lumped together and written off in the xenophobic viewpoint, despite being an extremely diverse continent containing many ideas and cultures. People fear what is 'other,' a sentiment increased by the Italian societal perception of national homogeneity. It is important to note this is not the opinion of all Italians, but it is an opinion that is stirring up extreme right-wing politics and fascist ideals in the government that only further the damaging effects of this narrative. The government has taken an increasingly conservative stance on immigration, despite the seemingly opposing values in economy. The economic structure supports a large influx and rotation of immigrants making up more and more of the Italian labor force. The expulsion of these immigrants would leave the country crippled in its current deindustrialized state.¹⁷ Although integral to the Italian economy at this point, immigrants are exploited greatly. To enter legally, a formal work contract must be extended, which biases the educated even for simple jobs. Migrants with steady jobs can be legalized, but many employers opt for an endless rotation of temporary workers instead of paying the necessary taxes, providing any benefits, or following labor laws. Employers failure to register

16 Merrill, Heather. "Migration and Surplus Populations: Race and Deindustrialization in Northern Italy." 2011.

17 Merrill, Heather. "Migration and Surplus Populations: Race and Deindustrialization in Northern Italy." 2011.

their own workers, leaves immigrants undocumented and subject for expulsion.

Placemaking and Culture: An Anthropological Approach

To understand how to make a place inhabitable by different cultures of people, one must first understand how place is constructed. Social construction of space revolves around how peoples' "social interactions, memories, feelings, imaginings and daily use," are synthesized into an understanding of place.¹⁸ There is a disconnect between the understanding of human rights and the need to accommodate the individual. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights argues that 'we are all just people,' regardless of race or gender, which appears as an altruistic, well-intentioned, and equal way to approach human rights. However, this inadvertently suggests that "all refugees will be handled in the same manner when there are noteworthy variations in treatment based on gender biases and racism."¹⁹ To synthesize, all humans deserve their basic human rights, but that does not mean that a single blanket solution is the answer for all socially repressed people in giving them a new sense of safety and inclusion in place. Due to different background experiences and cultural differences, groups construct different meanings of place for themselves. Therefore, every culture, and even every individual, comes to reach a sense of inclusion and spatial appropriation under different circumstances or values. Through this, one can understand that under negative social circumstances surrounding an immigrant's space, they would have more difficulty reaching a sense of inclusion. When going about placemaking, different peoples' constructed realities will be unique as they are "made up of all the social constructions of spatial meanings enacted and embedded at the site."²⁰ Anthropologist John Gray believes that personal design for habitation of domestic architecture symbolically represents the "ideal life." This speaks to the concept of making one's self at home. People modify and construct their surrounding to serve their individual purposes and needs. An example of this modification is Selam Palace, an abandoned high-rise office building on the southeastern edge of Rome (Fig. 6 & 7) . Since its abandonment, refugees from different ethnic

18 Low, Setha. *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*. Routledge: New York. 2017.

19 Merrill, Heather. *Black Spaces: African Diaspora in Italy*. Routledge: New York. 2018.

20 Low, Setha. *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*. Routledge: New York. 2017. 73



FIGURE 6 Selam Palace Exterior



FIGURE 7 Selam Palace Interior



FIGURE 8 Ex-MOI Olympic Residences Exterior



FIGURE 9 Ex-MOI Olympic Residences Interior

and religious backgrounds in Africa have made use of its floors by setting up living quarters, common spaces, showers, restaurants, and even some religious spaces. While the two sides have been divided primarily into a Muslim wing and a Christian wing, a provisional government has been created in this micro-society in which all groups are represented in order to resolve disputes. Despite its faults and poor conditions, Selam Palace demonstrates the creation of place and community in a completely non-residential structure. It may not be conventional housing, but it is space and it is “place.” Other examples of these informal settlements can be seen in deteriorating structures all over Italy including the Ex-MOI Olympic residences in Turin, which were abandoned apartments originally constructed in haste to house athletes in the 2006 Winter Games (Fig. 8&9).²¹ Inside you can see rooms improvised by plywood partitions and African graffiti art expressing contempt for the “normalization of a racial frontier that seeks to erase their centrality to Western history, politics, economy, and culture.”²²

In studies of gendered space, ethnographers “illuminate how patterns of everyday behaviors, symbolic representations and spatial allocations distinguish gendered places.”²³ Gendered spaces are important in understanding the social construction of space as well, especially as Islamic culture upholds conservative gender roles and traditions. Traditional Muslim housing is highly segregated so that women are kept away from the public quarters of the housing, not to be seen by any male visitors that may come by (Fig. 10 & 11). Women consider this important for their own privacy and safety, as well as obey it due to cultural tradition. However, what do they do when this housing type is not commonplace in the nation in which they live? There are examples of Islamic placemaking within westernized domiciles, where the removal and construction of walls and screens create segregated interiors to serve the occupants’ needs. These interiors would be completely different than what one would expect looking at the outside of these houses.

The ways different people and cultures perceive space can also be looked at through the lenses of “embodied space,” which addresses both expe-

21 Merrill, Heather. *Black Spaces: African Diaspora in Italy*. Routledge: New York. 2018. 131

22 Idib. 145

23 Low, Setha. *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*. Routledge: New York. 2017. 79



FIGURE 10 Screen Between Public and Private in Islamic Home

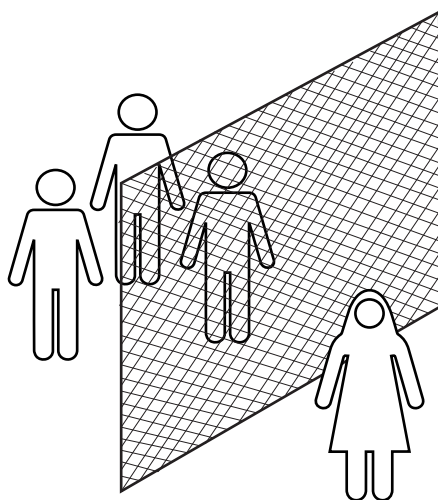


FIGURE 11 Screen to Facilitate Gendered Space

ritional and material attributes.²⁴ Most pertinent are the theories of proxemics, phenomenology, and sensorium. Proxemics relates to how different peoples have different values of personal proximities. Personal space range depends on relationships as well as cultural norms. In the small vernacular towns this research focuses on, there is inherent closeness of spaces built into the typology. This is fine for Italians, who are generally happy with closer personal proximities, but it will be an important factor when spacing out living quarters for people not as comfortable with close proximities (Fig. 12). Not only can discomfort for closeness be inherent in immigrants' cultures, it can also be a result of traumatic experiences in the travel and arrival into Italy or unsureness about new neighbors. Phenomenology and sensorium are similar as they depend on experiential analysis to perceive space, sensorium putting extra emphasis on the senses. This approach of thought is taken often in studies of healing as well as perceiving a sense of belonging as the senses can bring about nostalgia in a place away from home.

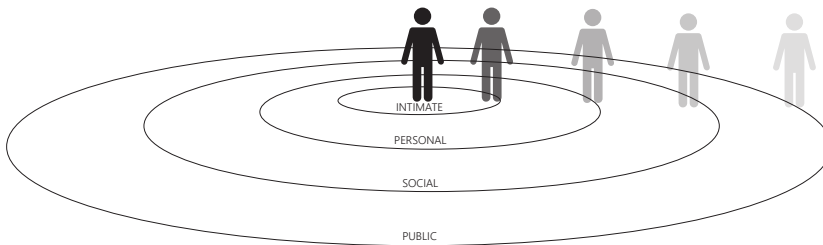


FIGURE 12 Proxemic Zones

These places away from home can also be defined as “translocal spaces.”²⁵ Refugees and immigrants are translocal in that they construct places in two different locals. Their places are separated by often great distance, but they are theirs all at once. Translocal spaces are “inflected with the ideas, speech, smells, sounds, and feelings of each place.” Regarding ‘place’ as being more than just ‘space’ because of its inherent sense of inclusion, is key to understanding translocal placemaking. Having their own constructed place or

24 Low, Setha. *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*. Routledge: New York. 2017. 94

25 Ibid. 174-203

places in an unfamiliar nation allows refugees and immigrants to regain some agency in their lives, increasing a level of comfort and acceptance. Esquilino Market is an example of translocal space in Rome. It is a multicultural microcosm where Italian foods are sold next to a myriad of ethnic foods sold by immigrant vendors from many different parts of the world. The diversity and shared experiences between many vendors, as well as familiar smells, foods, and languages creates a place for immigrants, making transnational ties to home. The strong diversity of shoppers and vendors implies inclusion in place. It can be perceived that anyone is welcome because so many people are expressing their culture in one place. Esquilino market also exemplifies an act of integration between immigrants and the Italian population who shop side by side. Thinking of the habitation of immigrants and refugees as 'translocal' implies that place is a mobile idea. It exists in multiplicity and goes with them wherever they go, "disengaging the experience of locality."²⁶ This process is interesting in that it deters the idea of permanent displacement, the idea that once displaced from their home, immigrants are essentially placeless until they return. The feeling of being placeless is a horrible experience to anyone forced out of their home. Through careful placemaking strategies, however, the hope is that design can foster inclusive, translocal space.

26 Low, Setha. *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*. Routledge: New York. 2017.

DEVELOPMENT

Design Approach

A primary hurdle in the repurposing of Italian vernacular town for resettlement is money. Funding for the renovation of these towns is hard to come by, and funding for housing refugees or immigrants is even harder to find. If immigrants could be part of the work force renovating the towns themselves, it would incentivize the government to invest in renovation materials. Most people coming from rural cultures in North and West Africa and the Middle East grow up learning simple construction methods in their vernacular style, as many are expected to build their own domicile to be a full, contributing member of their town or village.¹ This official work provided at the time of arrival also solidifies the legitimacy of their immigration for long enough to find possible other employment for the following years, as they must have proof of both employment and residence. Residence could be granted as long as upkeep is maintained. Knowing cultural heritage is being preserved, which has already been shown to be a goal of the government, would reduce the destructive view that housing immigrants is too big a burden. The same would go for the remaining residents. Seeing a new population bringing renewal to your dying city would perhaps reshape the 'fear of the different.'

A major focus needs to be placed on affordable housing practices. Simple, reproducible, and customizable design would be its premise. Design would revolve around easy transportability of prefabricated parts to difficult to reach, often hilly locations. They could not require long trucks for transport on the winding roads or large, heavy equipment for construction on the uneven

¹ Oliver, Paul. *Dwellings: The House Across the World*. University of Texas Press: Austin. 1987

terrain. A kit of parts not only lends itself to an ease of construction but allows for variability at the hands of the resident constructing their home. Translating construction knowledge from their homes to adapt to more modern materials or more available materials in Italy could prepare immigrants to continue using those skills afterward. Much exterior design would correlate to the Italian vernacular, and interior design to the individual and their culture. With the concept of ‘choice’ being stripped away from immigrants upon arrival in living conditions, working conditions, communication, and status, the ability to create a domicile in one’s image can give back some authority and be reparative in nature.

The character of the Italian vernacular cannot be lost in the transformation of the towns, as it would generate opposition from remaining residents and Italians in general who are extremely protective of their history and heritage (for better or for worse). It could also detract from existing seasonal tourism in the town as people come to expect a certain romantic ambiance when visiting a remote Italian village, like it is a moment of history frozen in time. Of course, good design practices can be used to add to the experience rather than detract. On the other hand, a complete disallowance of exterior intervention can take away the agency of the immigrant in their own placemaking. Informal settlements, such as Selam Palace in Rome or the Ex-MOI Olympic residences in Turin, indicate a widespread need amongst the immigrant and refugee population to assert their belongingness in a historically exclusive country, defiantly building “a space within a space,” actively not participating in an social system aimed at “normaliz[ing] their own erasure”.² The incoming residents should not feel their presence in the vernacular town being hidden behind closed doors. Therefore, a healthy balance between outward expression and preservation is necessary to create a just compromise. Deciding what not to touch can be as important as the interventions.

Although the interventions will be reactive to the cultures of the immigrants and refugees, there must be care taken in regards to complete preservation of important religious and monumental structures/ruins in the town (only intervening in the staggered box-like residential/commercial structures), limited adaptation to the exterior appearance of the renovated structures, and the maintenance of the iconic view of the Italian vernacular town (while not necessarily the roofline). Religious structures and historically significant

2 Merrill, Heather. *Black Spaces: African Diaspora in Italy*. Routledge: New York. 2018.

medieval ruins and structures are core to the town identity. The connection to those structures is part of being from the town and interfering with a religious or historical institution would cause animosity and social strain. Preservation is the best route for these places in the towns. This leaves the classic, boxy vernacular structures for intervention. Their simple forms make them adaptable to residential, commercial, religious, and community programs. The exterior character of these boxes is materially reactive to the landscape it sits in, linking it directly to place. It is important not to completely cover the exterior material, divorcing it from its place. Small punched window openings are also part of the Italian vernacular style. Stress will be placed on preserving those, with exception to cultural embellishments. The roofs of structures, as they most likely need replacement anyways, can be an opportunity to introduce more light. Intervention in the roofs of the buildings will also add indication from a distance of new inhabitation, in some cases reflective of another culture. Small notations like this in the view of the town upon approach can represent a beacon of 'home' to the immigrants so they can see a piece of themselves as they are returning. In most cases, as in the 'mountain town' or 'hilltown' typologies, the structures stagger up the hill, defining the iconic views of the towns. However, this staggering also puts the structures at increased risk of collapse as erosion and earthquakes continue to plague these towns (Fig. 13). Therefore, the first exterior interventions will result from stabilizing interventions that give safety to the structures, and, more importantly, to the inhabitants.



FIGURE 13 Civita di Bagnoregio

Interior interventions are to be the immigrant or refugees own 'place,' giving them complete free reign in expression. As the interior can be customizable by each person, it can reflect their cultural heritage. With an extremely wide set of vernacular building techniques and styles throughout Africa and the Middle East, there needs to be a range of adaptability as a major criticism of affordable housing is the lack of consideration of individuals and their culture through universal application of design.³

Paul Oliver in Dwellings: The House Across the World provides an excellent stratification of dwelling types, construction methods, styles, and decorations across the world, especially for African and Middle Eastern rural cultures. Some important key points to pull from this research for our purposes, are the oppositional concepts of tectonic/homogeneity, compound/divided space, and public/private.

Most refugees and immigrants are arriving from North and West Africa. Within those areas are greatly different cultures with different religions, gender norms, and of course housing typologies. However, most of the cultures Oliver described in Africa, traditionally take a homogenous approach to building construction (in large part due to climatic response). This means after the construction of a dwelling, women plaster the walls with a homogenous material leaving smooth white or earth-tone surfaces (Fig. 14). In the Middle East, most of the construction described takes on a more tectonic logic, as well as a textile logic. The appearance of Middle Eastern rural dwelling reveals the details of how all the pieces come together. Of course, there is overlap of these design languages in cases in both Africa and the Middle East, and can be sourced to the individual place an immigrant is from. Modern materials that respond to Italian climate and existing conditions can be thought of in these two terms. Constituting a familiar design language in the adaptation of interiors to make the buildings fit for inhabitation is a way to reference tactile memories of 'home.'⁴

Arrangement and proximity of domestic spaces vary as well. Many African rural towns take on a compound arrangement. This means different functions are allocated to different structures within a small cluster. They often

3 Davis, Sam. *The Architecture of Affordable Housing*. University of California Press: London. 1995

4 Oliver, Paul. *Dwellings: The House Across the World*. University of Texas Press: Austin. 1987

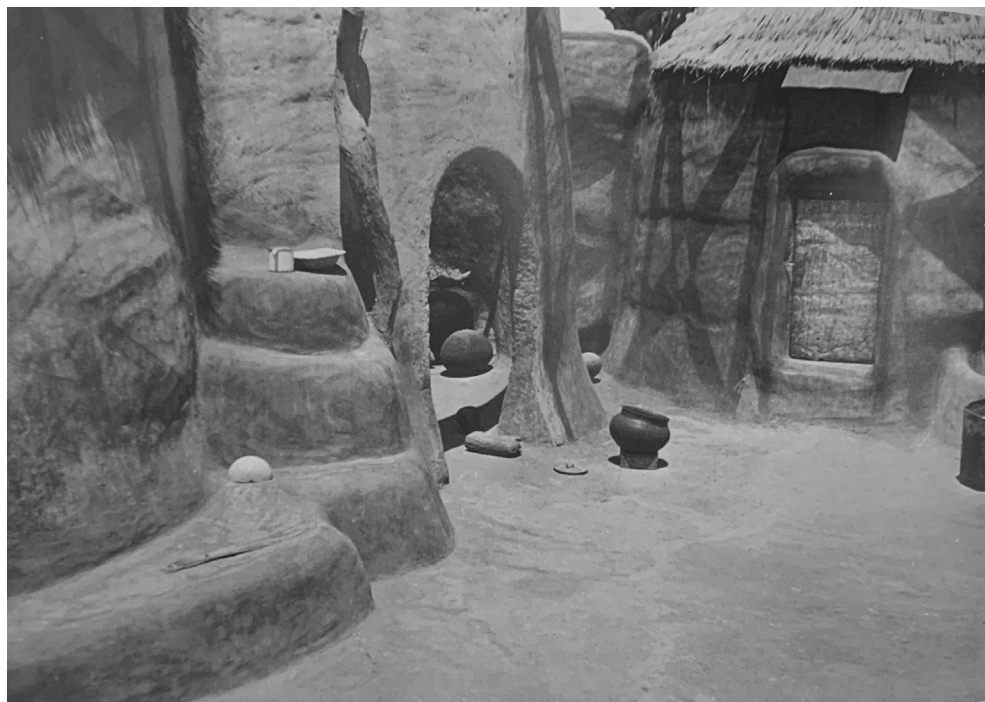


FIGURE 14 Plastered Vernacular African Huts

prefer a separation between space for enterprise, kitchen space, male quarters, and female quarters.⁵ This is not accomplished through the subdividing of a single structure as is more common in Middle Eastern culture. The courtyard typology is a common example of this. It is extremely responsive to climate but demonstrates the strict division of space within one structure. Compound settlements tend to be more molecular and dispersed while settlements of single structures can be more 'nucleated' or along a linear path.⁶ Understanding the organization of a people's home can dictate the spacing of program within different structures or the necessity to link multiple structures to allow for desired division of spaces throughout a single unit.

Different cultures demand more or less of their homes, relating most

5 Oliver, Paul. *Dwellings: The House Across the World*. University of Texas Press: Austin. 1987

6 *Idib*.

to public and private relations.⁷ Public versus private space is most a function of religion. In regard to the majority of immigrants and refugees, this means Christianity and Islam. Christian cultures place less value on gendered spaces, requiring less subdivision and separation within the volume. However, Islamic cultures demand strict public and private relationships. Upon entering a door that would commonly face Mecca, there is clear delineation between the public entry space of a house to the semi-private family space (only the invited may enter) to the extremely private female quarters of the house where women are able to avoid and male gaze. These boundaries are accomplished with walls and obscuring screens. Aside from their functionality, screens are also an important stylistic icon of Islamic culture.

Decoration is typically avoided in the practice of architecture today, but it is important to consider when imagining what these interventions can be. Color and texture of materials used can take on qualities reminiscent of the styles of immigrants' homes. Some cultures are comfortable with earth tones decorating their interiors, others decorate with bright, lively colors, and others leave walls textured and un-plastered. As mentioned, screens are meant to be functional and beautiful in Islamic culture. Some cultures display individual success and skill to other through carving around doors and windows. In their homes, exterior interventions in key places could provide a tasteful canvas for that type of expression without greatly interfering with the vernacular Italian facade. Without fully designing decoration per culture, how can parameters be crafted to lay the foundation for these customizations to happen?

Material Considerations

Because material needs to be easily transported and constructed, prefabricated elements and dimension lumber combined with consolidated service elements is the best option. The vernacular buildings, made simply of stone or earth, are not suited to modern day human comfort. Interventions would have to be self-contained, nested within existing structure, perforating the shell only in necessary moments for light or visual connections. This would lend to a sandwiching system containing the necessary insulation. Unlike the steadily hot cli-

⁷ Oliver, Paul. *Dwellings: The House Across the World*. University of Texas Press: Austin. 1987

mates many refugees come from, Italian towns must resist both a hot summer and a cold, windy winter.

Approaching the concept of affordability in material choice, also leads to another concept of recyclability of building materials. Recycled materials are inexpensive and often destined to be waste if not collected. Italy is constantly completing restoration projects of buildings in its cities that result in demolition waste and old scaffolding materials. Stone, concrete, bricks, aggregate, and wood could be re-purposed to be implemented in new ways in the vernacular town. Italy has already seen this practice in the waste accumulated in natural disasters, particularly earthquakes. Reusing materials is considered more sensitive to a place than rebuilding anew in those situations.

Weight is another important factor. While structural retrofitting will make the structures safer to inhabit on the long term, it would be beneficial to not add a significant dead load to some of the structures. In some towns, perhaps ones that are not delicately perched on a hilltop, a sturdier interior structure could project the building against earthquake forces. In others, however, a heavier intervention could prove to be too much for the soft or unstable soil. This informs the choice between, say, a prefabricated concrete sandwich panel/masonry construction and a stick frame system (Fig. 15).

Each system has their benefits. Prefabricated concrete could be completed off site, and easily tilted into place by someone with less construction experience. It could also have an easy autonomy from the existing structure and

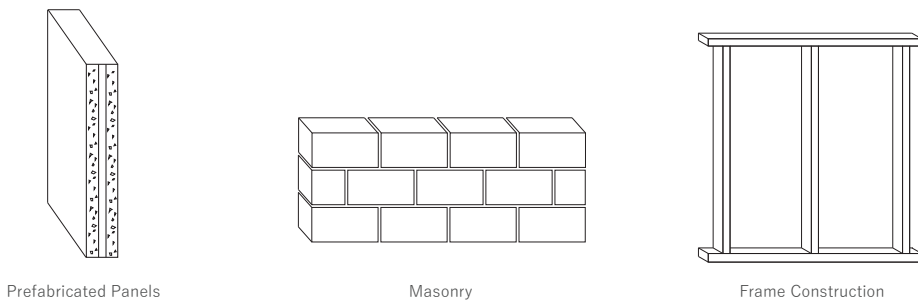


FIGURE 15 Material Considerations

provide stability in many cases. Recycled aggregate can be used in the process of creating the material. Concrete also has the monolithic nature many immigrants would find in their own vernacular architecture. However, it would require forethought in design to make it customized to the intended structure. As beforementioned, it is heavy which is not acceptable in every instance. Also, to customize the interior with personal interventions, an additional surface would need to be added anyway. There is low adaptability if a different cultural need was to need to be met in the future.

Brick can be easily transported, and many cultures already have experience working with it as a building material. It is also a material that can be easily recycled from demolitions in other parts of Italy. Also, it can be used as an easy material for nonstructural partitions with the ability to create varying textures and visual screens. Again, however, is the issue of weight and thickness after layering in insulation. It may feel less like a volumetric insert into the existing, and more like a thick applied layer of some redundancy. There is also the question of whether it would contrast the existing material enough. A similar issue with adaptability as concrete also exists.

Frame construction is easy to transport and modify on site for any specific building. It can be easily cut and connected with fasteners. Wood is lightweight and construction can be thin even once exterior and interior surfaces are applied. This type of system can also be easily deconstructed and adapted to different people or buildings. The downside of this system, however, is that there would be a learning curve in construction for many immigrants. While many cultures are taught to use tectonic methods, they differ from the standard methods frame systems revolve around. It would also read as tectonic unless visually adapted to hide its construction method. If concerned with designing with the immigrant's original vernacular style in mind, this may read as a problem.

CONCLUSIONS

Taking into consideration the historic, political, and anthropological research, Italian vernacular towns can serve as an empowering new home, temporary or permanent, to African and Middle Eastern refugees and immigrants. These efforts will provide a safe space for living and working to people that face much adversity gaining those simple human conditions. This, again, comes with the added benefit of revitalizing deteriorating structures in historically significant towns, calling for structural retrofitting and maintenance as the initial primary investment and base-level requirements. Existing residents may thus maintain their own structures and should experience how an influx of new people can benefit the integrity of their town.

People moving into the towns would build their own residence within a typical cubic vernacular structure under a standard set of guidelines of building practices, initially overseen by a local architect familiar with the region's unique characteristics. The immigrant, however, will have final say in how their culture is expressed in their home, and those interventions will continue to develop over time. New commercial activity will occur in the vernacular structures as well, appropriate to the historical fabric of the towns. The existing religious structures and significant monuments will be preserved; spaces for all religious practices, especially Islam, can create their own worship spaces in the town. In a hilltown, space can be made through the interconnection of spaces in a cluster of structures (Fig. 16). In a valley town, there is more room for a new structure or the adaptation of larger abandoned structures, such as schoolhouses or palazzos (both of which can be seen abandoned in the town of Alfadena).

While there are many towns that could benefit from an influx of population, the most mutually beneficial towns for this intervention would be valley towns and moderate hilltowns rather than the extreme mountain towns. The

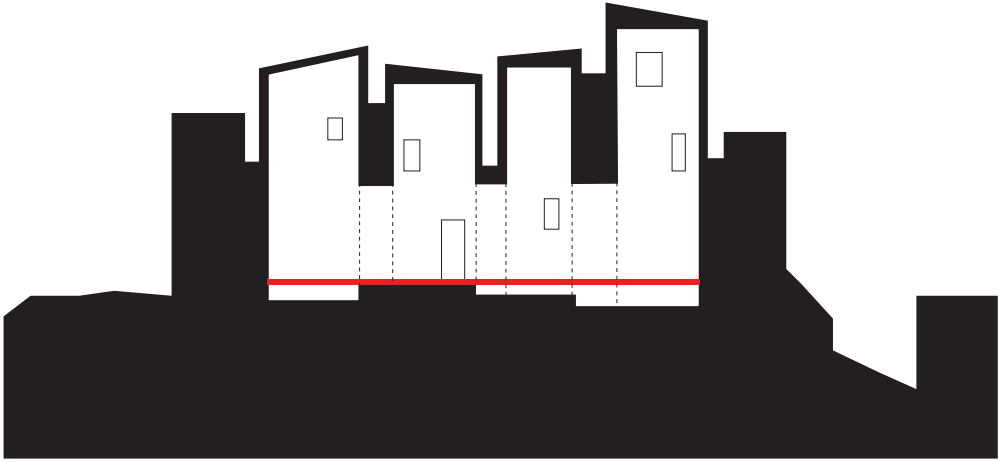


FIGURE 16 Connection of Structures for Larger Programs

mountain town type provides too many obstacles in transportation for materials and work commute, as well as exhibits more precarious building conditions. This is not to say this typology is not worth preserving. In fact, these towns are some of the most historically significant (as is the case in Cervara di Roma). The goals of these interventions simply demand a level of practicality that can meet a healthy balance in a hilltown or valley town. Hilltowns, especially common in central Italy, are often surrounded by arid farmland that can provide work to immigrants and refugees. Valley towns also have the added benefit of more room and ease of access.

After considering options for building materials and strategies, wood frame building would be most effective. Scaled lumber can easily be transported to more difficult sites. This is especially important in sites that don't have automobile routes through the town. Wood is light and easily transported by few people. The lightness of the wood does not overly burden an existing structure. It can be easily adapted on site to fit the always irregular structures. Wood framing is thin, and would not take up too much of the interior space with blocky materials, and it can have services and insulation run through easily. Wood can be structure, screen, or partition. Recycled wood from scaffolding in demolition and restoration projects can supplement the necessary supply of wood the new residents would need.

Many cultures in Africa and the Middle East already have tectonic

building practices in which they leave the layered (or bundled) parts exposed, exhibiting the skeletal frame,. Many other cultures are used to a very homogenous language in their vernacular architecture despite initially constructing the structures in a very tectonic way. The homogenous appearance is only due to finishing the structure with plaster or mud. This practice can also work with the typical wood frame structures. Interior finishes are a choice given to the individual constructing the domicile. It should be noted that one's country of origin does not necessarily determine the character of the spaces they are assigned. Having alternate options is meant to give back the concept of choice to the new resident, not generalize them to one idiom or another based on an outside reading of their home culture. All humans will have individual tastes and choice based on a myriad of reasons, one of which may be home culture, but most of all has to do with their individual making of 'place' in an unfamiliar country.

The roof of the building is another opportunity for placemaking. The type of roof, whether domed, pitched, or flat can be indicative of home culture. Moreover, a new intervention rising above the existing walls of the structure, perhaps translucent, is a beacon on the skyline indicating "home"(Fig 17). It's a mark on the place, proof of existence, proof of new life. It speaks against the social invisibility forced upon refugees and immigrants. Yet such interventions do not overshadow the existing image of the vernacular town. Moments of exterior expression will add a new layer of fabric on the town creating a fresh layer of intricacy and detail, a long tradition in each town.

The mixing of cultural ideals has long been a fertile contributor to the condition of coexistence, such as at Esquilino Market in Rome, a melting pot of foreign and local goods, or the Sewing Cooperative (also in Rome), a group



FIGURE 17 Intervention on the Skyline

that hybridizes African and Western clothing styles. In the past, towns, such as Riace, have taken in refugee population with success and acceptance from local residents. New residents began to replenish the diminished economy, and breath life back into the town. Although, Riace's success was undermined due to a shift to more conservative politics in Italy's government, it exemplifies a new level of acceptance and compassion for newcomers. Alfedena, in Abruzzo, also has seen an increase in immigrant population in recent years. It is now almost 10 percent immigrant, with African and Middle Eastern children in school with local children, and immigrants taking classes and working in its strong hospitality environment. While there was fear of newcomers at first, the people of Alfedena soon realized a shared humanity, rising to support the refugees entering the town. With successful examples already in precedent, the integration of immigrants in refugees into local vernacular economies can begin to appeal to more points of view, displaying mutual benefit.

The coexistence of the Italian town and the immigrant, two entities that Italian society continually sees as problems in search of solutions, can be a step in mending cultural and racial animosity—a step of healing. By allowing these types of interventions to take place, both the dying Italian town and the alienated refugee can see a new life.

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