

(RE)CONSTRUCTING LOCAL TRADITIONS

ECO-NOMADIC SCHOOL / CIVIC SEMINAR

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Report from Eco-Nomadic School Partner: Agency

Author: Sam Brown

Organiser: Fundatia de Dezvoltare Locala Brezoi (FCDL) – partner of the Eco-Nomadic School with...

Participants and Contributors:

Incredible Edible - Nick Green / Michael Grey

AAA - Constantin Pectou / Léonard Nguyen Van Thé / Sarah Carlini / Frederique Sarkis/ Catherine Bernard

Myvillages.org - Kathrin Böhm / Fabio Franz / Fanny Farkas / Rami Al Dhini (myvillages.org)

Pensuinea Vuluresa - Andrea / George

FCDL - Theo Teiosanu / Mircea Onica / Bogdan / Mihaela / Gigi Onica / Alex

Agency / SSoA - Sam Brown / Eirini Christofidou / Doina Petrescu / Kim Trogal / Martha Shields

Agency and the Eco Nomadic School

Agency's interest in participation in the Eco-Nomadic School lies primarily with the transformative potential of pedagogy - teaching and learning - particularly for those involved in 'bottom-up' cultural activism and socio-ecological practices.

(Re)Constructing Local Traditions - hosted by the FCDL - is the second in a series of workshops in the Eco-Nomadic School project, following on from Growing (in) Todmorden, hosted by Agency, the SSoA and Incredible Edible. The workshop focused on the reinvigoration of a cultural asset known as the 'Odaia' - a hillside property closely related to traditional subsistence existence of rural Romanian families and tied to the concept of the natural landscape as a resource of the 'commons'. In recent times, the Odaia have experienced a decline in use and care linked to changing lifestyles, particularly amongst a younger generation of Romanians.

Agency and (Re)Constructing Local Traditions

Kathrin Böhm has written a comprehensive and insightful piece¹ that summarises the experience of the workshop, the nature and character of the Odaia as its subject and their relation to the informal economies and historic development of Brezoi; and so it is not repeated here. Rather, the specific experience of Agency is related with regard to perhaps the most important question noted in Kathrin's report:

*Why Should [The Odaia] Be Saved? ... Why to rebuild and re-activate something that is almost in ruins? How to avoid pure preservation and where to implement development and new uses and functions?*²

¹ Refer to BÖHM, K. (forthcoming) *Without Your Own Wine - Eco Nomadic School Visit to Brezoi, Romania, January 2012.*

² Ibid.

It is perhaps on this point that the contribution of Agency - and the students from the SSoA - to the discussion was most effective. In considering future 'visions' and scenarios, and broadening the discussion surrounding what Odaia could be, the experience and knowledge of transformative spatial practices of 'designers' were put to best use. Agency was able to actively broaden the discussion of sustainability across different timescales, geographic scales and groups of actors, helping to discuss solutions applicable across multiple locations rather than limiting it to one specific place; rather than passively accepting a given task. However, with this expansion of possibilities came a lack of clarity in the resulting strategic recommendations. Whilst it is a good thing that we didn't remain within the rigid framework of the workshop, and that we could utilise our skills to assemble a greater picture, there was not a clear strategy or theme that emerged from the discussions. FCDL would perhaps have benefitted more if the discussions expanded over two days: on the first discussing all the possibilities and on the second brainstorming and making it more specific.

As trainers, we were helping others to imagine possibilities, employing a range of conceptual and visual tools to do so, including drawing and diagramming.

As learners, we experienced the legacy of the *Growing (in) Todmorden* workshop as applied to another subject. The common workshop 'model' of a walk, followed by discussions, brainstorming, visualisation and presentation allowed us to gain an insight into another culture and the parallels that can be drawn to our own experiences. A guided walk was again used to orientate us and prompt discussion, and the workshop activity format of brainstorming and discussion was also continued.

Participants from Incredible Edible were able to continue to draw parallels between their own experiences of community and cultural activism in a small post-industrial town in the UK, and a similar town in Romania. Their experience of 'joining up' local will from a variety of civic sources seemed to be of particular benefit. Nick Green has written a comprehensive account of the Incredible Edible experience, available on the Incredible Edible blog³.

As with *Growing (in) Todmorden*, we again had the privilege to hear - and to contribute to - talks about other projects elsewhere, including Alex's studies of informal and 'coded' space in Bucharest and Fanny and Rami's work with traditional Roma craftspeople in Hungary. Students from the SSoA were able to deliver presentations about their on-going practice and research, including academic-based studio design work, dissertation research, participatory design practice and - in the case of Sam's presentation about Hill Holt Wood - rehabilitation of an ecological resource through new spatial and economic use. In this sense, we were both trainers and learners, contributing to a wider discussion about ecological practices that may, or may not have broadened the ensuing discussion; learning as we went.

Both in presenting this material - and in our participation in the workshop discussion groups - students from the SSoA and members of Agency were able to facilitate the use of highly visual material, recognising the potential difficulty of working across multiple languages (Romanian,

³ Refer to GREEN, N. (2012) *Romanian Ramblings* [WWW] Available at: <http://www.incredible-edible-todmorden.co.uk/blogs/romanian-ramblings>. [Accessed 10/03/2012].

French, German, English, Italian, Hungarian, Greek ...). In recording conversations graphically, a visual database could be produced that included representations of difficult-to-grasp concepts such as strategic moves over time. Graphic communication skills were also put to use in the production of a set of postcards that serve as a pedagogical record of the workshop and potential resource for future projects.

Students from the SSoA were able to assume an additional training role, building upon their experience from *Growing (in) Todmorden* - and other 'live' situations experienced during their own learning at the SSoA - to offer care, moral support and advice to the facilitator(s) from FCDL. All parties here continued to develop an understanding of participative methodologies for conceiving strategies for development and of how to operate in a diversified social context characterized by different languages, ages, experience and points of view.

However, given that we have retained the experience of hosting and facilitating discussions, we were also able to spot the flaws of the system. Some important questions are beginning to form in our minds as participants in the *Eco Nomadic School* as a wider research project. Was the workshop a success? And if so, according to whom? Is this a network for purely educational and research purposes, or a platform for exchanging ideas and experiences? Does it matter then, if a clear solution is not produced at the end of a particular workshop? Should certain themes be continued from workshop to workshop, as has been suggested with the specific case of a plan for FCDL and the Odaia?

In conclusion, the students from SSoA and members of Agency were able to contribute and gain a huge amount from participation in the *(Re)Constructing Local Traditions* workshop in Brezoi. They would also like to acknowledge the generous hospitality shown throughout the workshop by members of FCDL, not only in the provision of food and invitations into their homes but also in taking the time to show us places, answer our questions and look after us.

Summary of pedagogical outcomes:

- A further mutual awareness of the issues concerning eco-practices in different European localities (e.g. youth migration, ageing population, landscape, de-industrialisation etc.), building on knowledge produced at *Growing (in) Todmorden*, and highlighting the similarities in challenges facing a small post-industrial town in the UK and a similar town in Romania.
- An appreciation of the historic cultural significance of the Odaia, and the reasons for its modern decline; in particular, the relationship with economic migrancy and changing expectations of lifestyle amongst younger Romanians.
- A retention of the experience of facilitating a workshop; those that had previously been 'facilitators' were able to support those currently 'facilitating', thus contributing to the formation of an on-going, lifelong educational network.
- Continuing development of communication skills in a multi lingual environment, in which communication was facilitated through visual materials and drawings.

SB
(for and on behalf of Agency)