

# COLUCCIO SALUTATI ESSAY

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## A SURPLUS OF ADJECTIVES

I am a European-educated American college student from Turkey studying architecture in Italy, talking to an expatriate British-Italian about possible ways a Corleonese Mayor can carry out architectural interventions that will revitalize his socioeconomically depressed Sicilian town by clearly defining its contemporary identity.

Never mind the fact that the definition and boundaries of *identity* have been indefinitely blurred in this fascinatingly bizarre motley of cultures, but I am also confident that this Mayor is the same man who had just a night earlier dressed as a carnival clown, can-can danced with men dressed in female attire in front of a parade float and introduced on stage my visiting group of Syracuse friends and classmates to his animated townspeople as “the American students who have come to do an architectural workshop in our town” – a brief announcement followed by much local interest and applause, as well as conga dancing with more jesters and demons on our part.

The intensive one-week workshop that ensued after all the last remains of confetti had been purged from our hair and clothes, and the subsequent presentation we made to municipal representatives as well as groups of students and locals was equally extraordinary. We had been assigned the job of objectively attempting to discover, re-evaluate and re-contextualize concepts of character and identity of a city on behalf of its own inhabitants – a city who wished to reinvent itself, awash with people keen to shed all negative associations brought on by its infamous past.

We were having a discourse about what it meant to be Corleonese, to be Sicilian, to be Italian, yet on paper we were none of those labels. During the course of that one week, however, we had integrated ourselves into this small society through mutual consultation and dialogue so that we were incontestably representing their interests, ideals and character. We had merged our professional capabilities and individual culture with their lifestyle and values. We were presenting our case for the creation of local identity with the energetic support of students from the School of Architecture at the University of Palermo, despite having met them that very same day. We all brought to the table our individual selves, minds, upbringing and cultural legacies, yet were engaged in a united endeavor that made us re-evaluate not merely the identity of the town, as the project required, but ultimately our individual identities and global outlook as well.

The great success of the workshop can be readily observed in the recent announcement of the Mayor to execute to a certain degree some of our proposed schemes. In personal retrospect, however, it has become evident that the indication of its success has not simply been limited to the well-reception of a design proposal, but was also clearly reflected in the way it has impacted my experience at SU Florence. A mere week had motivated me to actively seek and sustain further engagement with the Florentine community for the rest of the semester, whether through working with Italian schoolchildren as part of the SUF volunteering program or through something as straightforward as talking about last night's game with my local Pizzeria as I wait for my Quattro Stagioni. I may thus joke about the surplus of adjectives that have come to describe who I am and what I do, but I am, in fact, grateful and indebted to this society that has given me the chance to add several more.