

REVIVE: Creativity and Community in historic towns of Europe

Experiences, visions, and transformations in Cellino Attanasio
and beyond

Mauro Vanni
Alessandro Perfetti
ITACA Association

Graziano Di Crescenzo
Cristina Cerasi
Francesca Aliprandi
Silvia Scarafoni
Maddalena Muran
Giulia Montanaro
Angelica Nanni
Margherita Tacconelli
Federica Di Giambattista



Cover Illustration by Margherita Tacconelli

Layout by Federica Di Giambattista & Angelica Nanni

REVIVE: Creativity and Community in historic towns of Europe

Experiences, visions, and transformations in Cellino Attanasio
and beyond

Mauro Vanni
Alessandro Perfetti
ITACA Association

Graziano Di Crescenzo
Cristina Cerasi
Francesca Aliprandi
Silvia Scarafoni
Maddalena Muran
Giulia Montanaro
Angelica Nanni
Margherita Tacconelli
Federica Di Giambattista



Co-funded by
the European Union



Index

1	<i>Introduction</i>	
1.1	The importance of believing in participatory cultural projects <i>Mauro Vanni & Alessandro Perfetti - ITACA Association for Local Development</i>	8
2	<i>Italian experiences</i>	
2.1	The Cellino Attanasio project: co-creation and shared artistic vision <i>Graziano Di Crescenzo – Art Director</i>	14
2.2	Cultural Regeneration and Shared Identity in the REVIVE Project in Cellino Attanasio - the communication aspect <i>Cristina Cerasi – ITACA Coordinator</i>	29
2.3	The cultural value of Santo Spirito and the challenge of participatory promotion <i>Francesca Aliprandi – Cultural Heritage Management Specialist</i>	39
2.4	Involving schools and communities: strategies, obstacles, and surprises <i>Silvia Scarafoni – Sociologist</i>	46
2.5	Multifunctional design for a cultural hub: architecture at the service of people <i>Maddalena Muran – Landscape Architect</i>	54
2.6	Building Together as a Generative Act <i>Giulia Montanaro – Architect</i>	63
2.7	The Slovenia Experiment: how listening, hands, and heart built a shared vision for Tržič <i>Angelica Nanni – Architect</i>	73
2.8	From Places to Relationships: Two Experiences of Rebirth and Collaboration <i>Margherita Tacconelli – Visual Artist</i>	90
2.9	Between Cellino, Tržič, and Iași: a creative and professional journey <i>Federica Di Giambattista – Architect</i>	93

INTRODUCTION

1

The importance of believing in participatory cultural projects

Mauro Vanni & Alessandro Perfetti

ITACA Association for Local Development

There are moments in an organisation's life when you feel you can touch the profound meaning of your mission. For us at ITACA, who for twenty years have been working to reactivate dormant energies in marginal territories, that moment came with REVIVE—an ambitious project that proved transformative in practice.

The initial concept was almost disarmingly simple: bring young European creatives to struggling urban or rural centres and see what happens when youthful talent and creativity encounter ancient traditions, semi-abandoned heritage, and bureaucracy. All funded by the Creative Europe programme, coordinated by the Association of Historic Towns of Slovenia.

Four countries, four different realities: Tržič in Slovenia, Turku in Finland, Iași in Romania, and for Italy, Cellino Attanasio in Abruzzo. Four "live experiments" carried out by young people selected through international calls, to demonstrate that historic centres are not museums to be contemplated, but places to be lived.

When we proposed Cellino Attanasio, we knew we had the right place. This town of 2,300 inhabitants, with views spanning from the Adriatic Sea to Gran Sasso, offers beauty to be discovered, a community still alive, and buildings to be enhanced. In particular, the former Church of Santo Spirito had been there for centuries, owned by the municipality but little used and accessible only upon request. Our challenge? Return it to the people, transform it from a space "to visit" into a place "to live", following a concept of cultural enhancement based on full accessibility and active participation by residents.

We didn't arrive with ready-made solutions. We began in September 2024 with public meetings, questionnaires, and conversations in local bars. We wanted to understand what our community truly dreamed of for its future.

In parallel, we launched a call for young local volunteers with the idea of creating a bridge between the incoming European talents and the town's social fabric, with an eye towards the project's future. Without them, everything would have been much more difficult.

The school also joined in: students from the "Margherita Hack" Comprehensive Institute created a bilingual guide to the village and led the young Europeans on a discovery tour of the town. Because if you want a project to last, you

must involve those who will inherit the territory tomorrow.

From 30 March to 12 April 2025, Cellino was transformed. Fourteen young people from six European countries worked side by side with ITACA experts, volunteers, and the local community. Architects, designers, sociologists, communicators: each with their own cultural background, all united by a common mission.

The result? The “Santo Spirito Hub”, a cultural ecosystem that can live a life of its own. A modular space that becomes a conference hall, theatre, exhibition area, or meeting place according to need.

Carlo Ranalli, master carpenter from Cellino, opened his workshop to the young designers, sharing decades of artisan knowledge. From that encounter came not only intelligent and functional furnishings, but a bridge between generations worth more than any best practice manual.

But the real magic was seeing young Europeans, local volunteers, and residents exchange stories, cook together, and build something new starting from ancient roots. The final evening of 10 April, with dozens of people filling Santo Spirito and its external courtyard, sealed the pact: this place now truly belongs to the community.

The presence of the 14 European talents and the organising team generated direct economic impact for local accommodation facilities (B&Bs, farm stays, bars, restaurants), artisans, service and material suppliers. Other local operators certainly benefited from increased visitor numbers and media attention on the town.

But REVIVE has triggered development processes that, if nurtured, can generate value in the medium and long term: Santo Spirito Hub has the potential to regularly host events capable of attracting visitors from across the region, thus contributing to tourism flows; relationships with partners and some of the young European talents can open export channels and international partnerships for future projects; the digital visibility gained helps position Cellino Attanasio on the map of Abruzzese cultural tourism; some of the young local volunteers are acquiring skills, experience, and relationships that can be reinvested in the territory.

This publication stems from the desire not to waste the richness of an experience we believe to be replicable and scalable. The contributions collected in this volume represent a precious heritage for anyone interested in participatory cultural regeneration and seeking inspiration to replicate the REVIVE approach in other contexts. We have confirmed that local development cannot ignore the European dimension and that innovation emerges from the encounter between tradition and contemporaneity, between local roots and global visions.

We take home some fundamental lessons: the importance of a long and careful preparatory phase; the need to build trust relationships with the local community from the very beginning; the strategic value of involving schools and young volunteers; the effectiveness of multidisciplinary approaches; the importance of clear and continuous communication; the centrality of diversified and self-generating economic sustainability models.

The future of small towns like Cellino Attanasio is not written: it depends on our ability to imagine and build it together. One story at a time, one project at a time. With creativity, passion, and respect for who we are and who we want to become. This is the most precious lesson we carry with us, and which we want to share through the pages that follow.

The Europe we dream of is made of places like Cellino Attanasio: small, but open to the world; rooted in their own history, but capable of innovation; proud of their traditions, but welcoming towards diversity and change. Because small centres are not just guardians of heritage from the past, but laboratories of the future—places where we can experiment with new models of living, working, and social relationships.



ITALIAN EXPERIENCES

2

The Cellino Attanasio project: co-creation and shared artistic vision

Graziano Di Crescenzo – Art Director

Inside Revive: The Choice to Accept a Challenge

When I was offered the role of Art Director for the REVIVE project in Cellino Attanasio, I accepted with enthusiasm, but also with full awareness of the complexity of the task. This was not just about leading a creative group; it was about being a key reference point in an intricate process of cultural regeneration that involved an entire community, the tangible and intangible heritage of a historic village, and a transnational team of young talents.

Before even accepting, I felt the need to study the project in depth. I immersed myself in REVIVE's general and specific objectives to fully understand what it meant to activate a cultural experimentation process based on participation, sustainability, and inclusion.

REVIVE aimed to develop and test innovative solutions for the revival of declining historic centers, starting with four pilot sites, and with the active contribution of young creatives from six different countries. The goal was twofold: on one hand, to leverage cultural heritage as a means to foster a new way of living in small towns; on the other, to build skills and professional pathways for new generations in the field of artistic and intercultural co-creation.

Among its main purposes, the project sought to:

- promote intercultural dialogue through creative experimentation in local contexts;
- influence the perception of historic centers as sustainable and attractive places for new generations;
- strengthen the visibility of participatory practices in cultural regeneration;
- foster networking among young talents, local institutions, and European partners;
- sustain the generated results over time, facilitating their growth and adaptation in other contexts.

I immediately recognized the strength of this vision and decided to face the challenge with seriousness and a clear method. I considered every project phase—from studying the context and selecting participants to managing group dynamics and presenting the public outcome—as an opportunity to apply my skills, but also to learn, observe, and improve.

Being an Art Director in a project like REVIVE did not just mean “directing,” but also knowing how to listen, interpret, mediate, and propose. I sought to build a space where creativity was not an end in itself, but a concrete tool for collective activation. In this sense, every decision I made—whether aesthetic, organizational, or relational—was aimed at fostering an inclusive, conscious, and transformative experience for everyone involved.

Learning by Observing: A Look at the First Experiment in Slovenia

A fundamental aspect of my role as Art Director for the REVIVE project in Cellino Attanasio was my preparatory approach. I could not—and would not—arrive unprepared for the start of the Italian experiment. For this reason, even before beginning the operational work, I dedicated time and energy to analyzing the project’s first experiment, which took place in Tržič, Slovenia.

I had the opportunity to visit the site, speak with the Art Directors involved, with the museum’s director, and, most importantly, with the young talents who actively participated in the experience. This direct immersion allowed me to closely grasp the complexity, beauty, and even the critical issues of a process like REVIVE.

The work done in Slovenia was both intricate and ambitious. It resulted in physical installations within the museum site, a co-design pathway with local stakeholders, and the creation of a documentary that narrated the entire experience. One element that particularly struck me was the attention to context: the collaboration with local experts (such as Ms. Irma Lipovec for sustainable gardening), the activities in the museum garden, and the symbolic removal of a physical barrier to foster interaction between citizens and the cultural institution. Everything spoke of care, openness, and vision.

The final report from the experiment yielded fundamental lessons: the centrality of the preparatory phase, the need to involve stakeholders in a timely manner, the importance of providing clear and realistic tools to the young talents during the online vision phase, and also the need to leave room for informal gatherings, socialization, and spontaneity.

With Federica Di Giambattista and Angelica Nanni, I discussed at length the value of that experience and its outcomes. Tržič presented itself as a semi-rural context with a vibrant social fabric and a cooperative community. From there, we gained an important insight: for Cellino Attanasio, the challenge would be similar but with its own unique characteristics. A small town, with a strong identity, a dedicated school, and a population eager to be part of a cultural valorization project. We chose to highlight these elements with an approach that was less spectacular and more immersive and participatory.

All these reflections had very concrete repercussions on the design of the Italian experiment. With Mauro Vanni and Alessandro Perfetti, for example, we decided to carry out some logistical and infrastructural work before

the young talents arrived. We wanted to create the conditions for their contribution to have a real impact, building something stable and lasting over time. To that end, we committed to producing and providing them with clear and detailed documents: 3D models, 360° photographs, technical sheets, and useful data to help them familiarize themselves with the intervention area in advance.

Another inspiration from the Slovenian experience was the value of local festivals. The musical evening organized with local artists in Tržič showed how the convivial and festive aspect could be a driving force for relationships and community building. This is what gave rise to the idea of following a similar path in Cellino: not events “for the community,” but “with the community.”

Ultimately, observing, analyzing, and reflecting on the other experiments proved essential. My perspective on the Slovenian case strengthened the conviction that an Art Director, in a project like REVIVE, should not only be the director of a creative process but also a careful observer, a strategic analyst, and a bridge between different experiences. Only in this way is it possible to best prepare the ground for a transformative experience like the one that awaited us in Cellino Attanasio.

Listening Starts Here: The First Meeting in Cellino and the Blog Launch

One of the reflections that came to me immediately after analyzing the Slovenian experiment concerned the preparation time: the earlier we started, the more we could build a solid relationship with the local community and gather useful elements to design a coherent and shared path. It was from this conviction that the idea was born to organize a public presentation of the project as early as September 2024, a full seven months before the young talents were scheduled to arrive in Cellino Attanasio.

On Monday, September 2, 2024, at the former Church of Santo Spirito, the first public meeting of the REVIVE project took place. The event, conceived as an inaugural moment but also as a tool for listening, was an important opportunity to present the project to the citizens, actively involve local institutions, and kick off a community awareness campaign. It was also the moment chosen to officially launch the call for young Italian talents who would be part of the creative team.

Mayor Giuseppe Del Papa opened the meeting by highlighting the unique opportunity that REVIVE represented for Cellino Attanasio, not only for the recovery of the former Church but for the entire historic center. Mauro Vanni, President of the ITACA Association, explained the origin and international scope of the project, co-financed by Creative Europe and developed in collaboration with partners from Slovenia, Romania, Spain, Croatia, and Finland. Alessandro Perfetti, project manager for ITACA, detailed the operational goals and planned involvement mechanisms, while I presented

the curatorial concept, the three project phases, and the desire to build an authentic dialogue between artists and the community.

Providing a concrete perspective on the project's potential was Federica Di Giambattista, a young architect who had participated in the Slovenian experiment. She enthusiastically described how formative, engaging, and transformative that experience had been. Cristina Cerasi, ITACA's digital expert, then introduced the questionnaire aimed at the public to gather proposals and opinions on the future use of the former Church of Santo Spirito.

Coinciding with the event, we inaugurated the official blog for REVIVE Cellino (<https://revivecellinoattanasio.blogspot.com>): a digital space designed to document every phase of the project, give visibility to the participants, gather feedback, and archive the journey in an accessible and transparent manner. The entire evening was recorded and made available on YouTube, in line with the desire to open the process as much as possible.

The meeting concluded with an aperitivo in the garden adjacent to the church, where citizens, administrators, partners, and curious onlookers could informally chat. This first moment of dialogue laid the groundwork for a long and deep collaboration with the local community, which would accompany us for many months before the arrival of the international group of talents, scheduled for March 30, 2025.

This early start, compared to the Slovenian experience, proved to be a key element: it allowed us to build trust, gather valuable insights, and shape a project truly rooted in its context. Listening, from the very beginning, was the fundamental tool for giving meaning and direction to all the subsequent phases of the journey.



Turku and the Perfect Team: Selection and Reflections

The selection of the young talents for the Cellino Attanasio experiment took place during the European meeting in Turku, Finland, but it had already begun to take shape in the preceding weeks. In Italy, we dedicated ourselves with great care and rigor to analyzing all the applications: *résumés*, motivational letters, and portfolios. Personally, I wanted to delve deeper into each profile, contacting the Italian candidates for an informal interview to better understand their expectations, ambitions, and motivations. At the same time, I searched online for traces of their activities, publications, and past projects. It's a practice I often adopt when I need to build a team to work closely with: what a person reveals online says a lot about their approach, enthusiasm, and resilience.

Sometimes, the most valuable profiles are not those with the most linear academic background, but those who have put themselves on the line from a young age: by organizing events, collaborating, creating content, and showing a desire to build and participate. These signals are fundamental to me. For this reason, in Turku, I brought a team proposal that was already very structured and had been shared with our international partners. The discussion with them—who suggested other candidates and helped with the final evaluation—was crucial.

The goal was to build a diverse and complementary team that could integrate theoretical and practical skills in the fields of cultural heritage, communication, design, and artistic production. We had to design interventions that were innovative but profoundly respectful of the local context: the Church of Santo Spirito and the village of Cellino Attanasio.

During the meeting, we also participated in the Finnish partners' experiment, which was particularly close to my heart. It involved a video mapping installation on the facade of the former rope factory and shipyard in Turku, a decommissioned industrial area that had been repurposed for cultural use. The intervention was aesthetically effective: digital projections told the history of the building and the neighborhood, connecting past and present in an immersive way.

I was very familiar with that technology, having worked as a digital manager on the "Abbazie Jazz Festival" project in the summer of 2024, where video mapping had been a central element. For this reason, the Turku experience was also an opportunity for reflection: I carefully observed not only the artistic result but, above all, the promotional dynamics, the participation of the local public, and the narrative methods adopted by the young talents involved.

It was on this point that an important thought occurred to me: every young talent must be able to tell their own story in their own voice. There should not be spokespeople who talk on behalf of others. If we truly believe that every team member is important, then we must also value how they communicate

what they have accomplished. The presentation of the experiment is not just a showcase, but an act of recognition and a form of giving back to the community.

The Finnish experience left us with many valuable lessons. We understood how essential it is to prepare well in advance, to engage the local public with appropriate tools and languages, and to value every single participant. All of this allowed us, once we returned to Italy, to start our journey with our team with awareness, care, and a clear vision of what we wanted—and did not want—to replicate in Cellino Attanasio.

The Bootcamp and Its Challenges: Designing with Awareness, Participation, and Responsibility

The Cellino Attanasio bootcamp was a crucial phase of the REVIVE project, not only for the operational launch of the project activities, but especially for consolidating a working method based on awareness, openness, and shared responsibility.

In the preceding months, we had gathered some critical feedback from the bootcamps held in other partner countries. Several young talents had reported difficulties due to the lack of technical documentation, clear references, or preliminary project materials that could guide them in developing coherent and feasible proposals. For this reason, as Art Director, I chose to intervene by providing the Italian working group with a complete set of cognitive, urban, and historical tools to help them develop ideas that were well-rooted in the context.

Through the blog we had launched months earlier, we made a series of technical materials available online, which were provided by local professionals: planimetric and sectional surveys, detailed floor plans, detailed measurements, and 3D models of the entire village and the former Church of Santo Spirito. Along with these, we also published the first results of the participatory questionnaire (thanks to the fundamental work of Cristina Cerasi), updated demographic data, historical information, local traditions, descriptions of active local associations, and an overview of the stakeholders involved. All these materials were accessible to anyone at any time, in a spirit of transparency and inclusion. The blog was not only a resource for the designers but also an open channel for the community to follow the project's development step by step.

During the bootcamp, the young talents first began to collaborate remotely before meeting in person. My role was to facilitate the process: to stimulate reflection, provide technical and methodological tools, and also to allow for expressive freedom so that the design process remained truly participatory and creative. I maintained constant contact, especially with the Italian group, so they could guide the collective work while taking into account the local context's specificities, including from a regulatory standpoint. It was fundamental, for example, to clarify that the former Church of Santo Spirito is a historical asset subject to conservation restrictions. Proposals that were

too impactful, despite their originality, would have inevitably been rejected by the authorities responsible for safeguarding cultural heritage.

To strengthen the dialogue with the community, we organized the second public meeting with citizens, held on January 10, 2025, right inside the former Church of Santo Spirito. Unlike the first meeting, this time we chose to structure thematic working groups, where citizens and young talents could interact directly. The community reviewed some initial project ideas, offering suggestions, raising doubts, and sharing ideas that later proved decisive for the refinement and improvement of the final proposals. This meeting marked a decisive transition: the design was no longer just a creative exercise but progressively became a shared process, rooted in the needs and desires of the local community.

The work was further enriched by additional stimuli from the online seminar on February 17, 2025, which was dedicated to the sustainability of community spaces in historic sites and organized as part of the REVIVE project's Capacity Building activities. During this event, the inspiring principles of the New European Bauhaus (NEB) were presented, which promote an integrated vision of beauty, sustainability, and inclusion. The Cellino Attanasio experience was presented as a concrete case study: an example of participatory regeneration where the synergy between the local community and young designers gave life to an innovative vision for the future of the former Church.

During the meeting, we also had the opportunity to hear about best practices from other European contexts. Among the most significant presentations were those by Konstantina Douka from the University of Bologna, who illustrated the models of collaborative governance experimented with in the European project CrAFt—Creating Actionable Futures; and by Africa Rodriguez (Anceu Coliving), who presented an example of a small Spanish village revitalized through coliving and rural smart working experiences.

These discussions confirmed that the approach adopted in Cellino—based on objective data, genuine dialogue with the territory, and co-design—is not only effective but also replicable. The REVIVE project thus confirmed itself as a laboratory where culture, youth, and community work together to transform a place without distorting its identity.

All materials, proposals, questionnaire results, and detailed reports of the public meetings were regularly shared on the project's blog, which served a valuable function of documentation and transparency. In this way, even citizens who were not directly involved could follow the work's progress and feel part of a process that looks to the future without forgetting its roots.

The School as a Driver of the Territory: Involving Young People to Build the Future

In my professional career, I've learned that no territorial regeneration project can be considered fully successful unless it also involves the school. Students not only represent the future, but they also experience the territory in a daily, tangible way. More than anyone else, they are the ones who benefit from (or suffer from) the choices made by adults. This is precisely why their point of view is so valuable. Furthermore, through them, parents, family members, and entire segments of the population who often remain on the margins of civic participation are naturally activated.

From the very initial stages of the REVIVE project in Cellino Attanasio, I considered it essential to build a dialogue with the school community. This dialogue was made possible by the willingness of the "Margherita Hack" Comprehensive Institute of Castellalto, under the guidance of Principal Simona Piantieri, and with the active support of the ITACA Association, which facilitated the contact and accompanied the entire process.

The first operational meeting took place on February 12, 2025, at the Middle School in Cellino Attanasio, involving the second and third grade classes. It was an important morning where we presented the REVIVE project and launched a targeted educational pathway that would accompany the students until the arrival of the young European talents. The enthusiasm and participation shown by the students confirmed that this was the right choice. They immediately seized the opportunity to reflect on their territorial identity and to tell its story in a creative and personal way.

A decisive moment in the journey was the creation, together with the students and teachers, of two significant outputs:

- a theatrical guided tour to accompany the young talents in discovering the village;
- an illustrated, bilingual (Italian and English) paper guide, designed both to welcome the European guests and to serve as a lasting tool for territorial promotion.

These activities stimulated in the students a strong sense of belonging and curiosity towards their local area. The work was built with continuity and pedagogical attention, thanks also to the passionate collaboration of the teaching staff, particularly Professors Martina Di Massimo and Aida Astolfi, whom I want to thank for their availability and fundamental contribution to the project's success.

On March 31, 2025, the students welcomed the 15 young talents from six different European countries with a guided tour through the village streets, entirely in English, which they had prepared with great care and originality. They narrated not only the history and urban layout of the town,

but also personal anecdotes, beloved places, and future perspectives. It was a moving and deeply formative moment, both for them and for the international guests.

The dialogue with the school also continued during the two weeks of on-site experimentation. Some of the young European talents visited the school to involve the classes that had not participated in the initial work on the guide. This further extended the project's reach, transforming the school into a true hub of active connection with the project, and not just an educational space to be involved on a one-off basis.

The constant collaboration with the teachers proved to be one of the most effective elements of the entire journey. The REVIVE project was, in fact, integrated into the existing educational curricula, becoming a true formative experience capable of stimulating transversal skills: active citizenship, communication, creativity, historical awareness, and a sensitivity to the common good.

I am convinced that this model of collaboration between cultural design and schools should become more frequent, structured, and supported. It cannot be considered a simple "plus," but an essential component of every territorial transformation process that seeks to have a deep and lasting impact. In this sense, I am particularly proud to have also brought an integrated educational vision to REVIVE, one capable of involving the new generations not just as spectators, but as true protagonists of change.



Two Weeks of Transformation: Vision, Listening, and Care

From March 30 to April 10, 2025, Cellino Attanasio was transformed into an open-air laboratory where creativity, listening, and design intertwined daily. Fourteen young professionals from six European countries lived, worked, and shared an incredibly intense experience. As the Art Director of the Revive Cellino Attanasio project, I followed every phase of this journey with constant attention and an active physical presence, aware that no talent should ever feel alone, disoriented, or neglected within a collective creative process.

My role was not just to define a shared aesthetic and conceptual vision but, above all, to guide each participant in a process of enhancing their specific skills. From the very first official briefing, I wanted to emphasize how fundamental it was for everyone to feel that their contribution was important, heard, and recognized.

I personally handled some logistical aspects, such as the transfer of one of the participants from Roseto degli Abruzzi, a simple but symbolic gesture of my willingness to be present from the start, even in the practical details. During the first collective briefing, I wanted to create a climate of trust and sharing. Alessandro Perfetti from the Itaca association reinforced this sense of community, officially kicking off two weeks of intense work.

In the afternoon, the guided tour with the middle school students allowed us to discover Cellino through the eyes of the younger generation. It was a valuable moment of listening, which nurtured our design imagination and strengthened the bonds within the group. This participatory approach remained central throughout the entire experiment.

I guided the division of participants into fluid groups, organized by skills and affinities, but always ready to reorganize based on needs. The talents were free to choose the activities most aligned with their abilities, but my role was to ensure design coherence, coordination, and an overall perspective.

Every room in the operational office was transformed into a small workshop: architecture, graphics, communication, carpentry, and social and educational activities took shape in parallel, but in constant dialogue. I facilitated exchanges between groups, collective brainstorming sessions, sketch reviews, and discussions on the naming and visual identity of the Santo Spirito space. Nothing was left to chance.

The carpentry work with Carlo Ranalli took on a central role. I personally supervised the selection of materials, accompanying the designers to the paint store and even intervening in the review of the first design drafts for the multifunctional modules. The AMI8 project, designed to create transformable objects (tables, bookshelves, seats, and stage designs), represented a perfect example of participatory design, balancing functionality and poetry. I followed the architects involved with particular attention, valuing their ideas

and teamwork, and encouraging them to be bold and to experiment.

In parallel, the communication group worked on textual and visual content to tell the project's story. I personally curated the consistency of the narrative tone, offering continuous guidance and feedback, aware that the story itself is part of the transformation.

Some of the young participants chose not to stop, staying to work in Carlo's workshop even on the weekend. I saw this gesture as confirmation of the climate of trust and passion that had been created. In the evening, the concert organized by the "La Nuova Direzione" association was an informal but valuable moment to strengthen relationships and bring out new energies.

Even on the days off, I maintained a constant presence, following the communication team remotely and continuing to offer support and coordination.

The second week saw an acceleration of activities. The physical regeneration of the Santo Spirito space came to life: installation of flower beds, decoration of the furniture, restoration of the railing, and arrangement of the outdoor area. Every design gesture was executed with attention to detail, both functional and symbolic.

I personally accompanied some participants to the nursery to choose the plants to be placed along the embankment behind the church, also enhancing the environmental and landscape aspects. My goal was for every design element—even the most technical—to tell a story and a shared intention.

Meanwhile, I coordinated the finalization of the paper guide created by the middle school students, taking care of its layout and supervising its submission for printing. This output represents a concrete and lasting link between the project and the local community.

On the eve of the final event, I led a plenary meeting to redefine the last priorities, finalize the setup, and prepare the presentation schedule. I saw a new light in the faces of the participants, a result not only of satisfaction with the work done but of the awareness of having taken part in something meaningful.

In every moment—from the first to the last—I tried to be a reliable presence, ready to give clear directions, offer solutions, give a sincere compliment, or simply listen. Because every talent needs to feel part of a bigger process while also being valued in their uniqueness.

In these two weeks, we didn't just regenerate a physical space. We built relationships, trust, and possibilities. As Art Director, my task was to hold together all the souls of the project: the idea, the people, the places, the objects. And, most importantly, to never leave anyone behind.

Communicating to Engage: Communication Strategies and Tools for the REVIVE Project in Cellino Attanasio

Throughout the REVIVE experience in Cellino Attanasio, I considered communication to be one of the fundamental priorities, on par with the operational and workshop activities. Transparent and continuous communication about the work we were carrying out meant making what was happening accessible to the local community—and beyond: the ideas at play, the commitment of the people involved, the value of the participatory process, and the collective vision we were trying to build.

For this reason, as I mentioned in a previous chapter, from the very beginning, I felt it was necessary to activate an official project blog, which would allow us to constantly document the progress of the activities. The choice of platform was also intentional. We opted for Google Blogger, a simple but effective solution that could guarantee good search engine indexing, thus facilitating the project's online visibility. Other CMS platforms would have offered greater graphical freedom, but at the expense of immediacy and ease of use—criteria that were fundamental to us, especially given the involvement of the young women selected for the live experiment, who would need to update the blog independently without necessarily having prior web skills.

The choice proved to be correct: within the first few days of the experiment, two of the young participants began to publish updates on their own, demonstrating that the chosen platform was truly accessible and inclusive. This helped to strengthen the group's sense of active participation and project ownership.

At the same time, we felt the need to produce printed materials to distribute in the village. In a short time, we designed and printed informative flyers with a simple layout and essential but clear content. The goal was to reach segments of the population who were less active online, offering a direct and official information channel that could counteract the spread of approximate or distorted information that often circulates by word of mouth in small towns.

However, the heart of the communication strategy was our presence on social networks. Based on my analysis of previous projects—both Italian and international—I had noticed a recurring limitation: they had relied almost exclusively on the willingness and initiative of the young talents to produce original content. Initially, the enthusiasm would lead to a certain communicative vibrancy, but as the days went by, this trend tended to wane, due to fatigue, the intensity of the daily work, and—understandably—a certain difficulty in keeping the narrative of one's commitment active. The result was often discontinuous and incomplete communication that did not fully convey the complexity of the work done.

To avoid making the same mistake, we decided to entrust the social media communication to an external team to ensure a constant flow of professional

content. We involved the Itaca association, which allocated a small portion of the available budget to hire communication professionals from the Wide Open company. Their on-site presence—though discreet—was constant and attentive. They followed the daily activities of the REVIVE team, closely observing the work dynamics, interactions, challenges, and moments of growth.

The collaboration was positive and productive from the start. Wide Open immediately understood the project's objectives and the need to tell not only what was being done but also how and in what spirit it was being done. Their approach led to the daily production of short videos, shared on social media, that authentically and engagingly conveyed the project's progress. The content highlighted the individual personalities, specific skills, and cultural and professional backgrounds of the participants, as well as their creative approach, adaptability, sense of humor, and the lightheartedness with which they approached group work.

I believe this way of communicating, based on daily storytelling, accessible language, and valuing people, was one of the central elements in conveying the deep identity of the REVIVE project in Cellino Attanasio. Effective communication helped not only to inform but also to create connections, generate curiosity, engage the local community, and build—day by day—a shared sense of belonging to the journey we had undertaken.

In the next chapter, I will delve into this very aspect: the people, their talents, and the construction of a shared vision that was the foundation of the entire experiment.

A Plural, Coherent, and Profoundly Human Public Presentation

On April 10, the final event of the Revive Cellino Attanasio project took place. It was an intense, articulated, and deeply felt day, meticulously planned with extreme attention to detail and a rigorous focus on the quality of the content. I wanted it to be a truly collective moment, but not an undifferentiated one. In other experiences within the European network, I had observed presentations led by spokespeople who spoke on behalf of the group—an approach that risks erasing individual identities, flattening specificities, and hiding each person's journey within a single narrative. Instead, for this occasion, I wanted it to be clear who had done what, how, from what references or inspirations they had started, and how the relationships between group members had generated a unified yet composite project form.

The morning opened with a conference at the "Parco dei Poeti" restaurant, followed by a press conference for stakeholders and the public. Even in this first part of the day, I insisted that each participant be able to personally present their contribution, their idea of transformation, and their perspective. In this way, each presentation brought to the surface a multiplicity of sensibilities, skills, and languages. The result was a coherent mosaic, but one whose

individual fragments were still visible. The final presentation was therefore not just a showcase of the “product,” but a public act of responsibility and sharing, where each person could speak without mediation.

The afternoon public opening of the regenerated space marked another key moment. I explicitly asked that each talent personally guide visitors through their own intervention. This allowed the audience to connect with the designers, recognize their faces, and hear from their own voices about the journey, the choices, the challenges, and the connections between the local context and their international backgrounds. I perceived a genuine attention and a composed wonder in the visitors. To see that place transformed not only materially but also narratively was a way for them to re-read their own village through new words.

In the general event setup, I wanted to avoid any hierarchy between the different moments. The alternation with the music was also carefully calibrated with Carlo Michini to ensure it emerged as a harmonious and non-invasive gesture, in full coherence with the climate of the entire day. The balance between form and content, between project and narrative, between telling and showing, was constantly monitored. Nothing was left to chance.

I personally supervised the schedule for the entire day, coordinating with the talents to precisely manage timings and presentations. I made sure that each team member had the right amount of space to express themselves and talk about their work, and that they rehearsed their presentation at least once. This ensured that every word, gesture, object, and installation spoke to the audience coherently, giving a unified and polished image of the project. In this way, the presentation became a moment of collective awareness, where the connections between tradition and innovation, between local culture and international perspectives, and between found materials and designed solutions emerged clearly.

April 11 was a more relaxed day. Cristina Cerasi managed the collection of questionnaires and the closing of administrative procedures with precision. I joined the group in the evening to share one last convivial moment and gather the spontaneous reflections that had emerged a few hours after the public event. It was on that evening that I received the handwritten letter from the group of young talents: simple, heartfelt words that gave me an intimate reflection of what we had built together in the preceding days.

Thinking back on the entire journey, I feel I can state that the project reached full maturity. The preparatory phase, carried out in the preceding months, ensured that upon arriving on site, we were ready to operate immediately with a clear and shared vision. This allowed us to avoid long adaptation periods and start building with intensity and clarity right away. The relationship with the young professionals was based on mutual listening and a trust that grew stronger day by day.

As Art Director, I tried to exercise a directorial role that was never authoritarian, but always consistent. I maintained a transversal view, intervening where necessary, offering tools, correcting excesses, and valuing every interesting

proposal. Above all, I tried to protect the project from fragmentation and oversimplification. My task was to ensure that every detail spoke the same language as the initial concept, and that every intervention was part of a broader idea, without losing its specificity.

The quality of the work that emerged, from both an architectural and artistic standpoint as well as from a relational and human one, was the result of a collective, yet consciously directed, effort. No one felt left behind. No voice went unheard. The occasional absence of an additional operational support figure forced me to intervene in logistical aspects, partially taking time away from project development, but it also confirmed the strength and resilience of the group, which was able to adapt responsibly to different situations.

I believe the work conducted in Cellino Attanasio stood out for three essential elements: full coherence with the objectives of the Revive program; the high quality of the project proposals, which were always rooted in the local context but open to the world; and finally, the depth of the relationships built, both within the team and with the local community. It is not just a successful project. It is a promise kept.

REVIVE Cellino Attanasio

Il progetto di rigenerazione urbana REVIVE Celli...

cerca

Magazine

Home page

CELLINO ATTANASIO
INCONTRO CON LE ASSOCIAZIONI
LA CHIESA SANTO SPIRITO

MAY 10 Verso il futuro della ex Chiesa di Santo Spirito: si pensa a un Comitato di Gestione
Il progetto Revive prosegue il suo percorso a Cellino Attanasio, e lo fa entrando in una fase decisiva.

APR 10 Il Gran Finale
10 aprile 2025
Il giorno più atteso è finalmente arrivato.
Dopo giorni di lavoro intenso, di

APR 9 Gli ultimi ritocchi
9 aprile 2025
Domani è il grande giorno della presentazione finale e l'energia è tutta concentrata sugli ultimi ritocchi!

APR 8 Interni ed esterni
8 aprile 2025
La giornata è iniziata all'insegna della creatività e della cura degli spazi.

APR 7 Immaginazione e futuro
7 aprile 2025
Questa giornata del nostro esperimento è stata dedicata alla cura dei dettagli e all'immaginazione del futuro.
Lucia è stata accompagnata al mercato di Castelnuovo Vomano per scegliere con attenzione i materiali che serviranno alla realizzazione delle nuove tende per l'ex chiesa di Santo Spirito.

APR 6 Weekends are for rest and fun
International talents had a fantastic time adventuring Abruzzo
After a hard-working week, the young talents headed to spend Saturday in the nearby areas of Cellino Attanasio.
The group split into two – one group headed to L'Aquila with the best local guide Cristina. There, they enjoyed the stunning churches and interesting museums. After a delicious meal, gelato was the perfect dessert.
Before leaving, they strolled around the beautiful streets and did some shopping.

Cultural Regeneration and Shared Identity in the REVIVE Project in Cellino

Cristina Cerasi – ITACA Coordinator

Introduction

There are places that, despite their historical and aesthetic value, slowly slip to the margins of community life. The former Church of Santo Spirito in Cellino Attanasio was one of them—silent, underused, and not equipped for everyday activities. Then came REVIVE. A European project designed to breathe life, voice, and vision into disused or underutilized spaces, through the international collaboration of young creative talents.

REVIVE is not merely an urban regeneration program. It is a social and cultural experiment that weaves together architecture, design, art, memory, and the future. The experience in Cellino Attanasio—one of four pilot sites along with locations in Slovenia, Finland, and Croatia—was an open-air laboratory where past and present met to imagine a shared tomorrow.

Among the most fascinating aspects was the collective work on every detail: from furniture to textiles, from visual identity to promotional materials. This is where my role comes in: I had the privilege of leading the visual design team—responsible for furniture decoration, brand identity, and all visual and artistic communication choices related to the project.

What follows is both a personal and collective account of a creative and human journey. A journey that transformed not only a building but also those who had the fortune to be part of it.

The site and local context

When I first stepped into the former Church of Santo Spirito, I immediately felt a dense silence, full of untold stories. The walls spoke of a liturgical and social past, but were darkened by time and neglect. The dusty floor, lack of furniture, and underuse told the story of a place that was once central to the community but had since been pretty forgotten.

Cellino Attanasio, a small village in the Abruzzo hinterland, lives through memory and landscape. Its streets, the scenic overlook toward the hills and the Gran Sasso, the main square where faces and dialects cross—everything suggests discreet beauty, a quiet resistance to modern haste. The church, though nearly forgotten, sat at the heart of this emotional geography.

The building had great potential—architectural, symbolic, urban. Its location in the historic center made it ideal to become a cultural landmark. But first, it needed to be brought back to life—accessible, visible, and alive again.

From the beginning, I understood that working on the visual communication of such a meaningful place required a careful and respectful eye. It wasn't about imposing an aesthetic but revealing one already present—latent, stored in time and in the memories of the locals. Regeneration had to start there: from a new way of telling and showing the value of what was already present, though hidden.

In the dialogue between ancient beauty and contemporary visual languages, the young talents and I began to imagine the future of the church not as a museum or relic, but as a vibrant space full of possibilities. A cultural hub for workshops, exhibitions, events, encounters and also a coworking space. A place where even design and communication could help build meaning and a sense of belonging.

Project methodology and participatory approach

The strength of REVIVE has always been its method: a delicate balance between European vision and local rootedness. From the very start, we knew the transformation of the space couldn't happen without a deep understanding of the community inhabiting it. For this reason, the project began with a long preparatory phase: a six-month digital bootcamp during which we regularly met with young talents from all over Europe.

During these virtual meetings, we studied the history, culture, and needs of Cellino Attanasio. Through workshops, sociological analysis, and public meetings, we gathered the desires of residents, listened to their memories, and noted their expectations. Everything took shape in a project that was not imposed from above but emerged from the ground up. It was the community setting priorities; we were facilitators of a shared vision.

When we finally arrived on site at the end of March 2025, we already knew each other as a group. We were ready to act. We divided into thematic teams based on competencies: architecture, sociology, restoration, communication, design. I took charge of the visual component and immediately felt the weight and privilege of telling the identity of the project through form, color, and symbol.

The fieldwork was intense and all-encompassing. From early morning until late at night, we immersed ourselves in practical activities: surveying, cleaning, setting up, meeting. Every action carried meaning. Every decision was born of dialogue. Community participation wasn't symbolic—it was concrete: children became guides, elders became storytellers, families brought us desserts and advice. The entire town embraced the project.

In this climate of exchange and trust, visual communication was no longer just about aesthetics—it became a shared language, a bridge between generations, a tool to make visible what was happening. And I, with the team, had the responsibility to translate all this into coherent, warm, and authentic images.

Design and implementation: the field experiment

As the project came to life, everything we had imagined during the preparatory months began to take physical form. Our goal was ambitious: to transform an abandoned building into a functional, beautiful, living space. But it wasn't enough to make it usable—we wanted it to tell a story, to stir emotion, to welcome.

The former Church of Santo Spirito was re-equipped with mobile, lightweight, flexible elements. Eight modular tables, designed to host various cultural activities, were decorated with motifs inspired by the ceramic tradition of Castelli—a symbolic and emotional choice. Decorating the furniture was one of the most intense and rewarding tasks for the young talents: each item was not just functional, but narrative, a fragment of visual identity.

The talents also restored some antique furniture from the parish house—unique pieces marked by time that we chose to integrate into the new space to connect past and present in a tangible way. Alongside these, a newly built wooden mezzanine structure provided technical and scenic support for events. Everything was designed with reversibility and sustainability in mind.

From a visual standpoint, the most extensive intervention was the creation of the space's brand identity: a clear, welcoming, modern yet respectful visual identity. The logo, color palette, typography, and communication materials were developed as an organic system. Each color, line, and texture referred to elements of the landscape, history, or local materials.

We also designed a multimedia campaign to document and promote the project: videos, photos, social media content, and a website (www.santospiritohub.it) conceived as a dynamic platform for the future. The site narrates the project, its contributors, and announces upcoming events, projecting our work toward concrete continuity.

Every detail—from theater curtains to exhibition panel materials—was discussed, tested, debated. Our team, united and motivated, brought to life an imaginary that spoke the language of the place, but with a European accent.

What happened in Cellino Attanasio over those two weeks was more than a renovation—it was co-creation, a collective act of care. And the visual work curated by our team was the key tool to make the deeper meaning of that work visible and accessible.



Communication and visual identity: aesthetic and meaning

Throughout the project, I had the opportunity to reflect on how visual communication is not merely a matter of aesthetics, but a profound form of relationship. In Cellino Attanasio, every visual element we introduced had to dialogue with the place, with its history, and with its people. It needed to feel familiar, but also spark curiosity. It needed to be welcoming, yet surprising.

For the furniture decorations, the talents worked with a color palette inspired by the earth tones of the Abruzzo region and by Castelli traditional ceramic. For the communication materials, we chose a soft yet sturdy font—one that evoked the artisanal quality of craftsmanship without sacrificing contemporary readability. As for the logo, we synthesized decorative forms from the church's architecture, reinterpreting the expressive faces from the facade as symbols of an open, welcoming, ever-evolving space.

Our communication approach targeted various levels of engagement: from printed materials (posters, brochures, interior and exterior signage) to digital content. Each output had to align with the overall identity while being adaptable to specific contexts of use.

One of the most touching moments was seeing local school children helping us create informative and touristic materials for the former Church of Santo Spirito. Once again, our work wasn't just decoration—it was a tool for education, storytelling, and playful engagement.

The website www.santospiritohub.it is designed to house this entire vision: not just a digital showcase, but a platform for content, stories, calendars, and registrations. We wanted it to have a clean, intuitive interface, accessible on mobile devices, to truly be within everyone's reach. To tell the story of the project, we also integrated a section with images and direct testimonials.

Translating such a complex process into visual form was a challenge that required sensitivity, discipline, and deep listening. But it was also one of the most enriching experiences of my career. Because when images manage to convey the real transformation of a community, communication ceases to be self-referential and truly becomes a tool of citizenship.

Impact on the territory and the community

What we experienced in Cellino Attanasio was far more than a renovation project—it was a transformational experience. Not just for the space, but for the people. For us professionals, of course, but especially for the local community. The active involvement of citizens was a key factor, a compass that guided every one of our decisions.

From the very first days, we sensed genuine enthusiasm: curiosity, willingness to participate, a desire to contribute. School children took part in creative workshops and guided tours, becoming true young ambassadors

of the project. Elders shared stories, memories, and vintage photos that became part of the final exhibition. Local merchants and artisans supported us with materials, spaces, and expertise.

Each day, the former church filled with life: people entering the transformed space for the first time, families curiously observing the worksite, passing tourists discovering a place full of energy. The final event—a true collective celebration—brought together the whole town. Live music, installations, projections, guided tours: everything contributed to transforming the building into a cultural hub.

But the impact was not only emotional or symbolic. The project laid the foundation for a stable and continuous use of the space, now renamed Santo Spirito Hub.

My personal contribution was to facilitate this process of community re-appropriation through visual means: making the place recognizable, telling its story accessibly, and creating communication tools that would continue to live on beyond the project's completion. The greatest satisfaction has been seeing how visual design can foster belonging, inspire pride, and generate care.

Critical reflection on teamwork and creative leadership

Looking back, one of the most complex and rewarding aspects of the project was the teamwork. REVIVE brought together young professionals from across Europe, with diverse cultural and professional backgrounds: architects, sociologists, designers, restorers, communication experts—each with their own language, habits, timing, and culture.

It wasn't easy at first. The daily collaboration pushed us out of our comfort zones. There were brilliant ideas, yes, but also misunderstandings, different communication styles, and conflicting work methods. And yet, it was in this complexity that we found our strength. We learned to listen, to translate, to find creative compromises.

In my role as coordinator of the visual and communication aspects, I had to learn to mediate. To lead without imposing, to motivate without pressuring. I aimed to create a space where every contribution was welcomed and valued. It wasn't always easy: sometimes I had to make quick decisions, other times I had to wait, observe, or reframe.

Leadership in such a context is not a vertical role, but a horizontal, dynamic process. It's an art refined through listening and uncertainty—and above all, through recognizing others. This project taught me that the best outcome doesn't stem from a single vision, but from the synthesis of many visions that meet, challenge, and transform each other.

This experience strengthened my belief that communication—and creativity more broadly—can be a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy. Working together

on a table to decorate, a wall to arrange, a palette to select becomes a tangible way to negotiate meanings, overcome barriers, and build alliances.

I will carry this collective practice with me into every future project. And with it, the understanding that creative leadership is not just about aesthetics or strategy—it is, above all, about care, relationship, and responsibility.

Conclusions and future perspectives

REVIVE in Cellino Attanasio was not just a project—it was a seed. Planted in a terrain many would have considered barren, it flourished thanks to care, creativity, and community involvement. An experience in urban and cultural regeneration that proved how even small, often overlooked villages can become epicenters of innovation, beauty, and connection.

Personally, I walk away with much more than an enriched portfolio. I take with me a lesson in humanity. I've learned that communication is never just form—it's dialogue. That visual work can be a tool for listening, for valuing difference, for building collective meaning. I've learned that leading a team means creating conditions where everyone can give their best without feeling invisible. But most importantly, there is a new awareness: that every place has value, if someone is willing to see it with new eyes.

Thank you, team. You will always have a place in my heart

The REVIVE project began in November 2023 with the goal of revitalizing 4 culturally significant sites in Europe located in Tržič in Slovenia, Turku in Finland, Cellino Attanasio in Italy, and Iași in Romania.

Months of preparations, research, online meetings—and doubts. When it's Italy's turn, will we make it? Will this project really become something concrete? Will the team of young talents we selected be a real asset for the area? And will we, the local team, be able to give an adequate contribution?

Between March 30 and April 12 of this year, 14 people from six different European countries—Italy, Spain, Romania, Finland, Croatia, and Slovenia—arrived in Cellino Attanasio for REVIVE.

Six different cultures and Six different languages. 14 skill sets, 14 unique personalities and life stories. Plus us from the local team. THE ANXIETY! Before arriving in Cellino Attanasio, I was pretty scared. Really scared. I was afraid we wouldn't pull it off. Someone who knows me well told me—prophetically—"Right now you feel this way, but in the end, you'll cry, and you'll miss the people you meet so much. Everything will be fine!" That person was right.

On March 31, just a few hours after meeting the 14 talents we selected for Cellino Attanasio, the doubts started to melt away. "They all seem like fun people—thank goodness!" On April 1, work began at the office... great

organization from everyone, professionalism, top-notch skills, creativity, and resourcefulness. Another doubt gone.

By the first aperitivo after the first day of work, we were already a team. No borders, no language barriers between us. Fabrizio D'Ignazio's bar became a second home after those endless days of planning and working.

In the end, there's nothing a Campari can't fix.

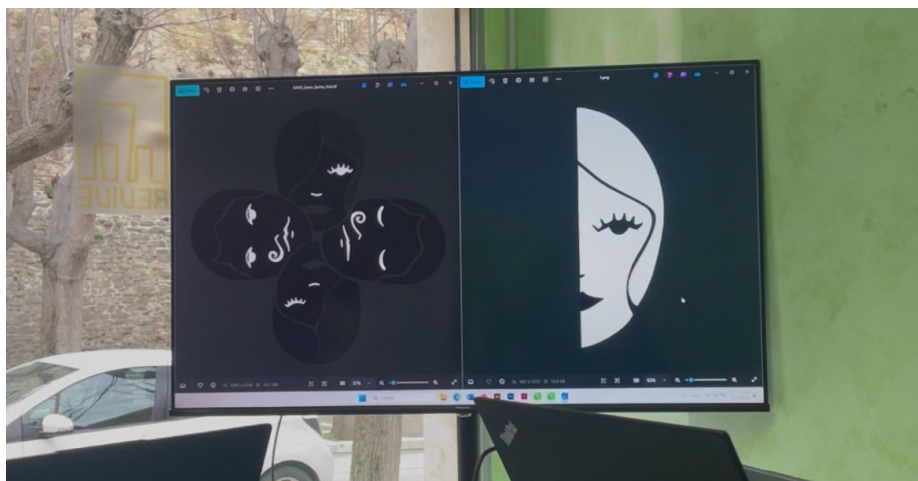
Every morning, over coffee, we shared stories of sleepless nights spent thinking about the next day, the project, all the details. Each morning we were more tired—but also more proud of the progress we were making together.

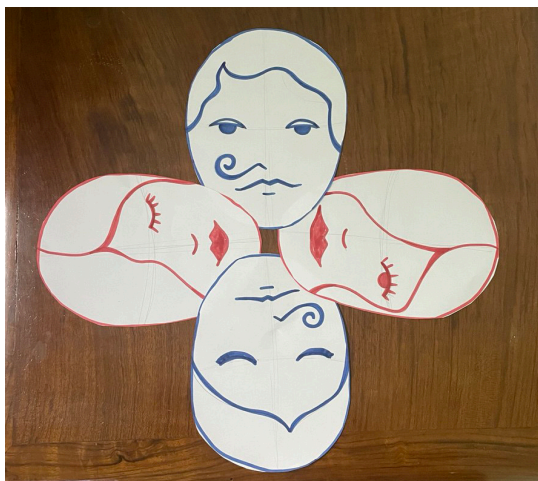
Two incredibly intense weeks. Two weeks spent with people I shared so much with:

- Graziano Di Crescenzo, a great friend and one of the best professionals in Abruzzo.
- Alfonso Topitti and Stefano Palazzese, who gave voice to our work every day through social media.
- Stefano Brandolini (the King of Cellino), Anastasia Angelozzi ("ubrica"),
- Agnese Del Papa (dolce Agnese, cit.), Margherita Tacconelli (collasso), Gabriele Del Papa (who grilled the rostelle).
- Lucia Eşanu, my teary-eyed sister
- Paula Srdanović, my Negroni SLAY QUEEN sister
- Sonja Anna Emilia, NOT a party girl
- Anni Kämäräinen, gentle and incredibly strong
- Aja Onuk, with her sparkling, bright eyes
- Raffaele Pistilli, the coordinatOre
- Rosario Contreras Vicente "Chari", always full of energy and positivity
- Giulia Montanaro and our deep conversations
- Maddalena Muran, tireless and with "surprise liqueur"
- María Martínez-Artero Peñalver, a burning, shining flame
- Mirela Hreniuc, sensitive, creative, an Artist
- Matea Križanović, elegant and full of grit (...in a good way)
- Silvia Scarafoni, a huge support from day one
- Francesca Aliprandi, a true powerhouse, with the tenacity and calm of a stream.

Thanks to everyone and thanks to ITACA for this opportunity.

Thanks to REVIVE historic towns, to the citizens of Cellino Attanasio, to Pierino and Antonio —the legendary drivers, to the Pro Loco Cellino Attanasio for the evening, to the Comune di Cellino Attanasio, to architect Roberta Giammarino, TO THE ENTIRE STAFF OF BAR BELVEDERE (we'll see each other again soon), and to all those I've surely forgotten (forgive me!).





The cultural value of Santo Spirito and the challenge of participatory promotion

Francesca Aliprandi – Cultural Heritage Specialist

Introduction

When I applied to take part in the project in Cellino Attanasio, I hoped I could finally put into practice everything I had studied at university: cultural heritage not as a static object to be preserved simply because it is “beautiful”, but as a witness of a history, a community—a living opportunity for relationship and transformation. The idea of doing this in a place not far from my home, and at the same time within a European context alongside people from other countries, seemed like a unique opportunity. I come from Abruzzo, but I studied in another region, so most of my experiences have been elsewhere. This was a chance to work with the local community, not for the community, a difference that changes everything.

Tracing the Historical and Artistic Identity

Cellino Attanasio is a village nestled on a ridge that looks, on one side, toward the Adriatic Sea and, on the other, toward the Gran Sasso massif. A strategic position that, over the centuries, has made this small town a place of exchange, passage, and mediation. Its history is closely tied to the Benedictine presence and to the power of the Acquaviva family, Dukes of Atri, who in the 14th century structured its fortified urban layout. Even today, despite transformations, the town still preserves remains of the ancient walls, towers, brick portals, and hanging loggias. A fragmented but eloquent heritage that tells of a simple yet refined everyday life, made of devotion and craftsmanship, of landscapes carved into stone and brick.

Within this context stands the former church of Santo Spirito, once the heart of religious and social life. Its origins date between the late 15th and early 16th century, with significant alterations in the early 18th century. The sober yet elegant façade features a brick portal with metopes and triglyphs recalling a classicist taste—perhaps the result of cultivated architectural knowledge transmitted through local craftsmen. The interior, a single rectangular nave, displays exposed local stone walls, a gabled roof, and remnants of side altars, now without their paintings but still able to evoke the original decorative richness. Some elements, such as terracotta moldings and ceramic fragments, suggest patronage linked to local confraternities or artisan groups.

Oral and archival sources describe a flexible use of the building over time. After its deconsecration, probably already in the early 20th century,

Santo Spirito went through phases of abandonment and partial reuse as a warehouse, eventually becoming municipal property. From the 1950s on, it was used by the community for theater performances, parish plays exhibitions, and more. Yet it maintains its ambiguous identity as a place suspended between memory and transformation. And it is precisely this hybrid, interrupted nature that makes it so valuable for reflecting on the fate of small heritage sites in fragile contexts.



The Value of Community Involvement: What Faro and the European Commission Say

The former church of Santo Spirito is listed in the General Catalogue of Cultural Heritage (ICCD record no. 1300300863). This official recognition confirms its historical-artistic value but above all its identity significance for the local population. Speaking of “cultural value” today means going beyond aesthetics: it means considering heritage as a reservoir of memory and a driver of the future.

In recent years, European cultural institutions have increasingly emphasized the importance of an integrated and participatory approach to heritage management.

This is the paradigm promoted by the Faro Convention (Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, 2005), which proposes a vision where cultural heritage is not just a collection of material assets to be preserved, but a right of citizens. Every person has the right to recognize, access, and contribute to the cultural heritage of their choice. Heritage communities are identified as groups that assign value to specific tangible or intangible assets (places, practices, knowledge) in relation to their history and identity, and actively safeguard them. Protection becomes synonymous with participation—with the ability to make heritage useful, accessible, and alive. Participation is thus not an optional element but a fundamental component.

The European Commission reinforces this vision. Documents like *Towards an Integrated Approach to Cultural Heritage for Europe* (2014) and *Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage* (2018) encourage models that promote co-creation, shared management, and the inclusion of local communities in decision-making processes: inclusive decisions, shared budgets, temporary use experimentation. European studies show that projects with strong civic engagement are 60% more likely to be self-sustaining five years after public funding ends.

The core idea is that heritage does not belong to experts, but to everyone. A disused building like Santo Spirito can come back to life not only through structural restorations, but through the reactivation of social bonds, memories, and creative practices.

For Santo Spirito HUB, this means rethinking the church as a covered square: a multipurpose hall during the day, a civic and musical space in the evening. Redevelopment is just the first step; what ensures its long-term viability are the social ties reactivated and the sense—shared by every citizen—of being part of a living story.

This approach is not only ethically right—it is also effective. When people identify with places, they are more motivated to care for them, use them, and pass them on. In this sense, participation is not an end but a means to make heritage sustainable over time.

Shared Narrative: Between Past and Future

The heart of my contribution focused on designing and creating a participatory exhibition, planned together with Silvia Scarafoni and Aja Onuk, to offer the community a new perspective on the former church of Santo Spirito. We worked on building a narrative journey titled “Between Past and Future”, which put vintage photos in dialogue with contemporary dreams, collecting photographic testimonies, family memories, and visions of tomorrow. The contribution of younger generations, especially local students, took shape in drawings themed “My Cellino of the Future”, in which they imagined new shops, hobbies, and possibilities for the town. Alongside these, we exhibited historic images of residents, creating a bridge between generations, a shared storytelling space that made the church feel alive, meaningful, and collectively owned. In particular, we displayed photographs and drawings on one of the church walls, using only a piece of string in the same shade as the stone masonry, in order to highlight the wall itself and avoid being too intrusive in the space. We tried to pair each drawing with a specific photograph; for example, a colorful drawing of a new football and volleyball field was placed next to a vintage photo showing some boys from Cellino playing football in a field.

During the meeting with the middle school, I remember a student said: “I can’t imagine the future, I’ll leave, because there’s nothing here.” A sentence that struck us with the force of truth. But also a challenge: perhaps the meaning of Revive was precisely this: to bring hope back to young people, to activate a sense of community that would reignite bottom-up processes, starting from the cultural and social sphere and, why not, reaching the economic one.

At the end of the exhibition route, we wanted to leave a large blank poster, empty—as a white sheet for visitors to continue the exhibition with a thought, a sentence, or a drawing. It may have been the simplest element, but it was also the most powerful: visitors began leaving thoughts, proposals, drawings, wishes, and messages of thanks for what we had done during the experiment. That poster slowly filled with personal traces that gave meaning to the entire work. Through this gesture of openness, we wanted to reaffirm that the future of the former church cannot be decided by a few, but must be built together, line by line, day by day.

Another key part of this experience was collaborating with the brand identity team, a multidisciplinary group with whom it was stimulating to reflect on how to visually communicate the new role of the building. Together, we thought about what the soul of the new Santo Spirito could be: a meeting space, a lab of ideas, a threshold between memory and possibility. This led to a simple but evocative logo, accompanied by a tagline that summarized the rediscovered identity of the place. Discussing graphic signs, colors, and words with people from different countries—each with their academic background, professional experience, and sensitivity—was truly enriching and inspiring.





Challenges Faced

One of the main lessons learned was the importance of direct, on-site knowledge. Designing remotely, based on images and floor plans, has many limitations.

A short site visit early on would have allowed us to better calibrate each phase—from graphic design to the layout of temporary furnishings. One or two in-person days before the design phase would also have helped in forming a real working team, as it would have allowed the Young Talents to get to know and understand each other better, even during remote phases. In my opinion, during the remote months we worked as individuals in dialogue; only in person (from day one) did we become a real team.

Finally, I understood the importance of communication: a project like Revive can be misunderstood if the community is not clearly informed about what we are doing, and if they are not given the right tools to participate. You cannot expect to redevelop a site and then present it to the town saying, “We did this for you, we restored this place, now manage it.” The work must be shared—it must be a co-creation to be understood, accepted, and supported, and to truly create something necessary and useful for the community.

In Cellino Attanasio, meetings were held before, during, and after the experiment. Before the design phase, surveys were conducted; during the two weeks of the experiment, I believe our social media communication was crucial. Our social media manager created humorous, engaging reels and stories to involve the public, to explain what we were doing, and to show moments of daily life and joy. I believe this played a key role in making ourselves known to the residents (we were 15 strangers from across Europe working on one of their heritage sites!). Thanks to this content and to the fact that we lived in local homes, ate in local restaurants, and chatted with people in the street, we were gradually accepted and appreciated.

Conclusions

This project gave me much more than I expected and much more than I gave to it. It was wonderful to be part of the team and to meet the other Young Talents and our mentors. On a professional level, I was often amazed by the expertise and talent of others. We weren’t just people from different countries, but professionals with diverse backgrounds and experiences and that was truly enriching for me. Each and every person taught me something valuable, but even more so on a human level, I really hope to continue nurturing these relationships.

To borrow a keyword from our experiment, it was a multipurpose project, full of infinite and beautiful nuances that enriched me both personally and professionally.

To conclude, I can say that this project made me bond with a place that now feels a little bit like mine.

Involving schools and communities: strategies, obstacles, and surprises

Silvia Scarafoni – Sociologist

Introduction

As part of the European project REVIVE Historic Towns, my contribution focused on the active involvement of the local community of Cellino Attanasio, a small town in the inner region of Abruzzo. My decision to take part in this initiative stemmed not only from an academic interest in participatory processes and territorial storytelling, but also from personal motivations. Over the past few years, I've been gradually reconnecting with the places of my region: Abruzzo, with its often-overlooked inland areas rich in memory and relationships, has come to represent a space of rediscovery and growing belonging. Working in Cellino, in this sense, was also a way for me to deepen that bond—a chance to walk among stories, houses, faces, and voices with the intention to listen, collect, and give something back. The different actions implemented—each complementary to the other—shared a common thread: the idea that territory is truly understood only by weaving together the life stories of those who inhabit it. It is a relational, situated knowledge that grows through dialogue, care, and shared reflection.

Participation as Process: spaces, stories and collective imagination

The first phase of the project was rooted in direct listening and participatory mapping, carried out through semi-structured interviews, field questionnaires, and the facilitation of public dialogue. These initial tools allowed us to gather a range of perspectives on local life—perceptions, needs, memories, and desires—which later served as a foundation for shaping shared visions of Cellino Attanasio's future.

A significant moment in this phase was my participation in the second public meeting with local residents, held on January 10, 2025, inside the symbolic space of the former Church of Santo Spirito. The event was structured around thematic working tables, where citizens and young professionals—some originally from Cellino—were invited to engage in a horizontal dialogue. This format fostered a constructive and open exchange: participants were able to review early drafts of project proposals, offer suggestions, express concerns, and share ideas that ultimately proved decisive in revising and strengthening the final plans.

This phase of the project confirmed how participatory practices, when thoughtfully designed and meaningfully facilitated, can become transformative tools—especially in contexts of spatial and social regeneration. The act of involving citizens not merely as “beneficiaries” but as active contributors

helped to unlock new imaginaries and increased collective ownership over the project. The fact that this gathering took place in a space like Santo Spirito—itself the object of possible future reuse—added a powerful symbolic dimension: the dialogue about regeneration was hosted within the very place it might transform. In this sense, the process demonstrated that participation is not a decorative phase, but a generative method capable of producing knowledge, trust, and vision—three essential ingredients for the sustainable reactivation of places.

The Future in their hands: reimagining Cellino through children's eyes

In parallel with the work involving adults, a dedicated participatory workshop was held with the first-year students of the middle school in Cellino Attanasio. We arrived at the school on a bright winter morning, carrying with us both materials and questions—but above all, the intention to listen. We began by presenting the Revive project, explaining its goals and the role of the community within it.

Some of the children were already familiar with it, having heard about it from their parents or local events. We then invited them to embark on a small act of civic imagination: to picture the Cellino of the future. What would they like to see? What would make them feel proud of their town? What would help them enjoy it more, or even want to stay?

The responses were as vivid and diverse as their personalities. The classroom quickly transformed into a space of dreams, debates, and coloured pencils. Some children envisioned car dealerships, racing tracks, record shops, and—above all—shopping malls, which dominated their imagined maps with striking frequency. Others spoke with a striking sense of place and belonging. A few declared decisively, “I will never leave Cellino, I want to live here forever.” While others, with equal conviction, said they would never stay. This diversity of voices offered a valuable glimpse into how young people experience and project their relationship to place—oscillating between desire for novelty and attachment to the familiar.

The children showed remarkable creativity, curiosity, and engagement throughout the session. Their drawings—some whimsical, others visionary—captured not only individual fantasies but also collective needs and longings. These artworks later became part of the ethnographic exhibition, displayed alongside archival photographs and interviews, offering a generational counterpoint and a forward-looking gaze within the wider community narrative.

The workshop highlighted how even the youngest residents hold powerful perspectives on place, and how including their voices can enrich broader community processes. Through imagination and play, they revealed deeper questions about identity, change, and what it means to belong to a place—reminding us that territorial futures are not only technical or political, but also deeply emotional and intergenerational.



Affective geographies: life stories and beloved places

A central element of the project was the collection of life stories, personal interviews, and reflections centered on the places that residents of Cellino Attanasio hold dear. Throughout the project, numerous interviews were conducted with community members of different ages and backgrounds, inviting them to share not only their favourite places within the town but also their experiences, memories, and feelings connected to those spaces. This process aimed to reveal the affective geographies of Cellino—maps not drawn in ink or pixels, but traced through emotion, memory, and identity.

A series of interviews were conducted throughout the duration of the project, asking residents key questions such as: What is your favourite place in Cellino? What made you stay? What are the main difficulties and opportunities of living here? These conversations revealed a layered and sincere portrait of the town—its beauty, challenges, contradictions, and potential. The responses varied widely but shared a common thread of deep attachment to place, underscoring how geography and biography are intertwined in the lived experience of community. The responses varied widely but shared a common thread of deep attachment to place, underscoring how geography and biography are intertwined in the lived experience of community.

What stood out most was the community's willingness to open up to the group of young talents involved in the project. The dialogue between generations was rich and mutual, characterized by curiosity, respect, and the shared desire to imagine new futures together.

One of the outcomes of this process was a short video titled "Il mio posto preferito di Cellino e perché" ("My favorite place in Cellino and why"), created from selected interview excerpts. The video was screened during the inauguration of the Santo Spirito Hub, offering a collective and emotional moment of recognition. It gave visibility to local voices and memories, reinforcing the idea that places are made not only of stones and streets, but of stories and affections. This video serves both as a document of collective memory and a resource for future community-driven initiatives. The process revealed how such affective geographies play a crucial role in strengthening community identity and fostering a sense of care and responsibility toward the territory.

Bridges of memory: weaving past and future through photographs

Alongside collecting life stories, a visual archive gradually took shape through the gathering of analog photographs—intimate fragments of memory preserved in the family albums of Cellino Attanasio's residents. To invite these memories back into the public eye, posters were placed around the village, encouraging people to share photographs of the town's past: images of streets long changed, celebrations now distant, and everyday moments that quietly tell the story of the community.

Many responded with generosity and trust, lending photos rich with personal meaning and memories. These images were never just static pictures—they were windows into lives lived, carriers of stories about grandparents,

places transformed by time, and moments both joyful and tender. As these photographs were shared, so were the memories they held, sparking connections between generations and weaving together individual stories into a shared narrative. Every photo was carefully documented and digitized, then returned to its owners, honoring the deep relationship between memory and place.

This collection of images found its fullest expression in an ethnographic exhibition at the heart of Cellino. Here, old photographs were displayed alongside the drawings and visions of the village's youth, created during the "La Cellino che vorrei" workshop. The exhibition was designed as more than a display—it was a journey, inviting visitors to move through time, witnessing the delicate conversation between past and future.

By placing fading photographs side by side with the hopeful creativity of children, the exhibition created a dialogue—a way to remember what was, while imagining what could be. It became a space where the community saw itself reflected in stories and images, a moment of collective recognition and belonging. This act of remembering together became a source of strength, reminding everyone that the past is not simply behind us but lives on, shaping how we care for and imagine our place in the world.

Far from a static archive, the exhibition was a living gathering—a ritual of memory and hope. It revealed how the stories we hold and the images we share become threads that connect us across time, helping a community to grow, renew, and imagine its future.

In this interplay of memory and imagination, the project affirmed a simple truth: places are made not only by geography but by the memories and dreams of those who inhabit them. The past, gently held in photographs and stories, is a living resource that nourishes the present and inspires what lies ahead.

Looking ahead: shared governance and new paths for community engagement

One of the most promising outcomes of this process is the emergence of a local desire to continue and expand the work initiated through the project. The community of Cellino Attanasio is currently mobilizing around a specific and symbolic space: the former Church of Santo Spirito, now informally renamed Santo Spirito Hub. This building—once a religious site and now a potential civic space—is becoming a focal point for collective imagination, cultural activities, and long-term stewardship.

The ongoing citizen engagement around Santo Spirito reveals an opportunity to move from informal participation toward more institutionalized forms of shared governance. In this context, it would be particularly meaningful to collaborate with the local administration in adopting a Regulation for the Shared Care of Common Goods (*Regolamento per la cura condivisa dei beni comuni*), a legal tool already implemented in many Italian municipalities. Through this framework, it would be possible to co-design and formalize a Complex Collaboration Pact (*Patto di collaborazione complesso*)—a legal agreement between citizens and the local authority that defines mutual roles, responsibilities, and goals in the management of a public asset.

Such a pact would not only ensure the long-term sustainability of the community's efforts but also represent a significant step toward democratic innovation at the local level. It would recognize the community not simply as a recipient of services, but as an active and capable partner in the co-production of social, cultural, and spatial value. This model—rooted in trust, transparency, and mutual care—could serve as a replicable blueprint for other small towns exploring new forms of civic regeneration, where memory, participation, and the commons intersect.

Lessons Learned: reflections on process, challenges and emerging Opportunities

Working closely with a small community like Cellino Attanasio allowed for a deep, relational approach, but also revealed a number of complex dynamics that shaped the process. One of the main challenges was managing time and expectations.

Participatory practices require slowness, trust-building, and a strong presence in the field—elements sometimes in tension with the timeframes and outputs expected by institutional projects. Reaching certain groups—such as younger adults, recent residents, or individuals who felt marginal to community life—was also not always easy, and required creative strategies and extra effort to ensure inclusivity.

Another critical aspect involved the management of emotional labor. Collecting stories, memories, and personal photographs—especially in a context marked by rural depopulation and socio-economic fragility—meant navigating silences, loss, and vulnerability. As a researcher, I had to maintain both empathy and ethical responsibility, balancing the richness of intimate testimonies with the need to respect boundaries.

Despite these difficulties, the project also brought to light significant positive outcomes. Among them, the most powerful was the community's willingness to engage—not just as participants, but as co-creators of meaning. The desire to be seen, heard, and represented emerged clearly, revealing a strong collective identity, even in a context where disconnection or disillusionment might have been expected. The intergenerational dialogue—especially between older residents and school-age children—proved particularly fruitful, reinforcing continuity across memory and imagination.

From these experiences arise meaningful opportunities. One is the potential to design long-term, community-led projects that build on the groundwork laid by this first phase: cultural mapping, oral archives, and educational initiatives that evolve organically with local participation. Another is the recognition of storytelling, in all its forms, as a form of care: for the place, for the people, and for the collective memory that sustains them. Finally, the project reaffirmed the importance of small-scale, grounded interventions as laboratories for rethinking how we relate to territory—not just through planning or preservation, but through affection, listening, and co-authorship.



Conclusion: weaving memory into living territory through participation

Through interviews, workshops, photography, and storytelling, an emotional geography of Cellino Attanasio gradually took shape—a landscape made not only of roads and houses, but of memories, biographies, and dreams. The community narrated itself in fragments, and those fragments formed a living mosaic of place and people. Personal stories merged into a shared fabric, revealing the territory as a living, dynamic space—one shaped not only by its physical contours, but by its affective and symbolic depth.

At the heart of this process lay community participation, not merely as a tool or method, but as a fundamental and transformative force. The active involvement of residents—young and old, long-term and newly arrived—was the engine that breathed life into memory, making it a shared and generative experience. Participation fostered a sense of belonging and collective authorship, enabling individuals to see themselves as co-creators of their community's narrative and future.

From an anthropological perspective, this experience reaffirms the central role of participation in the regeneration of places: it is through dialogue, encounter, and exchange that memory becomes a living thread, connecting past and future, individual and collective, roots and imagination. In Cellino, memory is not a static archive or a nostalgic retreat, but an active, vibrant force—woven daily into the fabric of community life through the ongoing engagement and care of its people.

This project thus highlights the profound potential of participatory practices to transform territory into a shared home—where memories inspire dialogue, dreams shape possibilities, and the community's collective voice guides its path forward.



Multifunctional design for a cultural hub: architecture at service of people

Maddalena Muran – Landscape Architect

Introduction

Between March and April 2025, I had the opportunity to take part in a two-week European project held in the small village of Cellino Attanasio, in the province of Teramo, Abruzzo, Italy. The REVIVE project had an objective that was both tangible and symbolic: to reactivate a deconsecrated church, the Church of Santo Spirito, located in the heart of the village, transforming it into a vibrant and shared space, with and for the local community.

Through a participatory approach, the project involved residents of various ages, artisans, designers, and students from several European countries. The collective work led to the transformation of a space that had been difficult to use or left unused into a versatile place, open to new cultural, social, and recreational activities.

Cellino Attanasio: A Space to Rediscover

Cellino Attanasio is a town that preserves a strong sense of identity, tied to its history and architecture. The deconsecrated church, although no longer active on a religious level, remains an emotional point of reference for many inhabitants. However, for years, the space had been closed and unused, except for very rare occasions upon request for access, as it was normally closed to the public. Coming into contact with this place meant listening to its silences, perceiving its unexpressed potential. It was clear from the very beginning that the value of the intervention did not lie only in the physical reactivation of the building, but in the possibility of reactivating relationships, imagining new shared uses, and restoring centrality to a place that had been forgotten or, in any case, full of memories. Although chaotic and intense, the months preceding the two weeks of on-site work were of considerable importance. Given the European-level organization of the REVIVE project, through predetermined methods, there was a period of getting to know one another, introducing the design approaches and the project site, through online collaboration among all those who had been selected and involved. Through workshops, lessons, the use of platforms, shared spreadsheets, and given the division into groups that changed from meeting to meeting, participants enjoyed freedom of expression. An expressiveness of opinion regarding the future design proposal. Initially, many ideas emerged with the aim of selecting those most suitable, feasible, and functional according to the participants themselves. These evaluations were useful for forming an idea of what we might actually find once in Cellino Attanasio. With personal honesty, I would like to say that yes, the period of online collaboration was

useful. Still, in fact, once we arrived on site, we found a situation somewhat different, or perhaps better said, out of sync with what we had expected. This means that, in actual practice, the facts on the ground differ from those at a distance. As a result, there was still a need to dedicate the first day and a half to revising and redesigning the space.



Listening and Participation: Between Collaborative Groups and Dialogues with the Inhabitants

A fundamental aspect of the project was the involvement of everyone present before and during the two weeks of design practice. Involvement at 360 degrees: from us “selected talents,” divided into groups according to expressed interest in specific phases of the project or according to practical-disciplinary skills, but also, directly, there was participation from the local community. Even the help of some young people from the town, who mainly contributed to the daily organization, was of significant importance. Through informal moments, public meetings, exploratory walks, and daily exchanges, we listened to the stories, desires, and memories connected to the church and its context, involving people from different generations, from the youngest to the oldest. Many inhabitants expressed the need for a space to come together, host small events, workshops, or even simple moments of socializing. This active listening made it possible to build a shared vision of what the town used to offer in the past and of what is useful today, giving value to everyday needs rather than to spectacular or invasive interventions. Through the study carried out before the two weeks in Cellino Attanasio, we were able to analyze the place and, consequently, the ideas and needs of those who live there. During the months preceding the two “action” weeks, we arrived at an ideal proposal for the Church of Santo Spirito: a solution that envisioned a place arranged for multifunctionality within the available space. A situation that would allow the space to be used by different generations and for related activities, one could say a “malleable” space.

Designing Together: Solutions for Reuse

Starting from the ideas that emerged, a light but functional intervention was developed, capable of adapting to different uses over time. The interior furnishings were conceived as modular and mobile elements, easily reconfigurable according to needs: seating, tables, raised platforms for events, and display surfaces. Small actions to redevelop the garden adjacent to the church were also initiated outside: caring for the greenery, adding seating, and creating pathways encouraged new accessibility and everyday use of the space. Designing together during this period was extremely productive and motivating. In terms of active organizational-design participation, not only were the selected “talents” from various European nations involved, but also key figures within the macro-organization of ITACA, the association leading this project with Mauro, who was always present and available when needed. The association was available for the entire period, involving local associations, village businesses, citizens, nearby schools, and the essential local artisans who, by contributing practically to the project, made the concrete realization of the previously envisioned ideas possible. For me, Graziano was a point of reference from the moment of selection for the project, and he continued to be so throughout the collaborative period. I would also name Francesca as an important figure from a relational and group-unifying perspective, and Alfonso, the video maker, who was more or less constantly present in order to capture as many useful scenes as

possible. Given the contextual conditions of the place, and therefore what emerged once we arrived in Cellino, it was a shared decision to create a project that would have a positive impact on the community while aiming for a design that was “simple” and sustainable to implement. This explains the choice to reuse materials, furnishings, and, in general, previously used/old elements, giving them a renewed purpose whenever possible.



Personal Contribution along the way: From Design to Implementation

As a landscape architect and territorial planner, during the course of the project, I actively participated in the design and construction of the multifunctional furnishings, working in a team with all the “talents” from different disciplines and countries, but in particular and in close collaboration with three architects: Chari and Maria from Spain and Giulia from Italy. This team, in the division of tasks necessary to complete the project within two weeks, had the great opportunity to work alongside architect Roberta and Carlo, a woodworking craftsman from Asti with extensive experience and great availability. We used simple materials, accessible techniques, and shared tools, maintaining particular attention to the modular versatility of use. These modular elements—certainly—would not have been possible to create so quickly and with such detailed design without the help of an expert carpenter.



The choice of modularity for the furnishing elements was made largely in response to the citizens’ need for a useful space for different activities, but multifunctionality is by no means a given in a narrow space like the one we had available. It is a small space when one considers the simultaneous presence of a large number of people for any type of event—musical, community gathering, town meeting, etc. For this reason, the choice to produce structures capable of adapting to different uses—or rather, capable of transforming the space according to the needs of the moment—was essential. For such purposes, the design required thorough consideration of functionality, to the point where it became possible to decide whether to use the elements as furniture or as partitions between zones. A concept we

liked from the very beginning and which, certainly, required a great deal of collaboration and focus from us.

The days spent working as a team—sometimes with the arrival and involvement of other local people, such as Carlo's family and friends, the iron craftsman, Alfonso the video maker, and the group of talents dedicated to the artistic vision and restoration of some furniture—made this project a truly unique experience. For me personally, they were days of life lessons and of learning new and very interesting knowledge. It was a satisfaction for all of us to succeed in creating the "AMI8" modules.



In parallel, I worked on some actions to enhance the outdoor space, proposing small interventions in the garden, or rather, an outdoor courtyard paved with local stone, with one side offering a particularly striking view of distant mountains, cultivated hills, and, far away, the sea.

A small, attractive corner with great potential for use by both inhabitants and tourists. At the design level, here we planned the installation of some iron slats as an extension of the existing railing along the viewpoint, to form a frame around the characteristic view of the place. This structure was intended not only as a frame for the landscape but also as pillars for climbing plants to grow, thus greening and making the frame more welcoming and aesthetically pleasing. In addition to this installation, we planned the planting of certain species around the flowerbeds hosting two trees already present on site.

Furthermore, beneath the viewpoint described above, there is a rather steep and poorly maintained slope. We planned an intervention there that could not be completed within the project's timeframe, as it was difficult to execute without the proper time and machinery. For this purpose, the slope work was scheduled for a later stage thanks to collaboration with Filippo's "Giardino Officinale," which supplied us with the plants and materials needed

for greening the church courtyard. These details also contributed to making the environment more welcoming, encouraging people to linger and interact. Of great influence, precisely in terms of creating a welcoming and attractive environment, was the artistic input that later took shape in the church through paintings that echoed historic Abruzzese patterns on some sides of the modular components.



A Shared Future: Reflections and Perspectives

The project concluded with a day open to the public, during which the results were presented and new ideas gathered. It was an inauguration event for the “new Santo Spirito,” a true celebration that featured a street band performance, food, wine, many members of the community, and the main participants of the project itself. The positive energy generated in just a few weeks was evident: the church came back to life, being experienced, observed, and crossed through with great enthusiasm and interest in what took place during the talent period in Cellino Attanasio.

This experience confirmed to me how important it is to work with communities, not just for them. It is now evident how useful this work has been for the community, as numerous activities are now taking place in the church, but also in terms of the network created between the talents and all those involved in the project. Whether more or less involved, we were all warmly welcomed for what we could contribute and participate in. This shows how unity creates strength and makes possible things that would otherwise be more complicated, through a journey that, when shared with others, feels lighter and sometimes even fun.

Design certainly serves as an encouragement and support for management, but the space was reactivated not because it was aesthetically transformed, but because it was inhabited by relationships, gestures, and shared ideas. I hope this action can be the seed for new similar initiatives, capable of regenerating territories without erasing their memory.

Cellino Attanasio has taught that even the smallest places can host great ideas if you listen to those who live there. Given the chance to express itself, such a small town with such welcoming people offers the possibility to experience traditional life, appreciating the place and what happens between people, spaces, and local activities. Experiences and ways of life that today are increasingly rare, given the unstoppable force of globalization.

Acknowledgments

For the intense and very pleasant experience with the REVIVE–Cellino Attanasio project, I thank the overall organization of the entire European project, and in particular the ITACA association and all those who took part in the project, as well as the inhabitants of the town.

Sincerely, I send my greetings to all the talents I had the opportunity to meet and with whom I was able to collaborate and share multiple visions. Most of all, I wish to send my affection to Maria, Chari, and Giulia, with whom I spent almost 24 hours a day during the two weeks in Cellino A. Consequently, an indispensable thanks goes to Carlo, the carpenter who, with availability and dedication to the project, was always present in the creation of the multifunctional “AMI8” modules, as well as to his family. Even aware of the difficulty, I look forward to the moment I can see again all the people I met on this occasion!



Building Together as a Generative Act

Giulia Montanaro – Architect

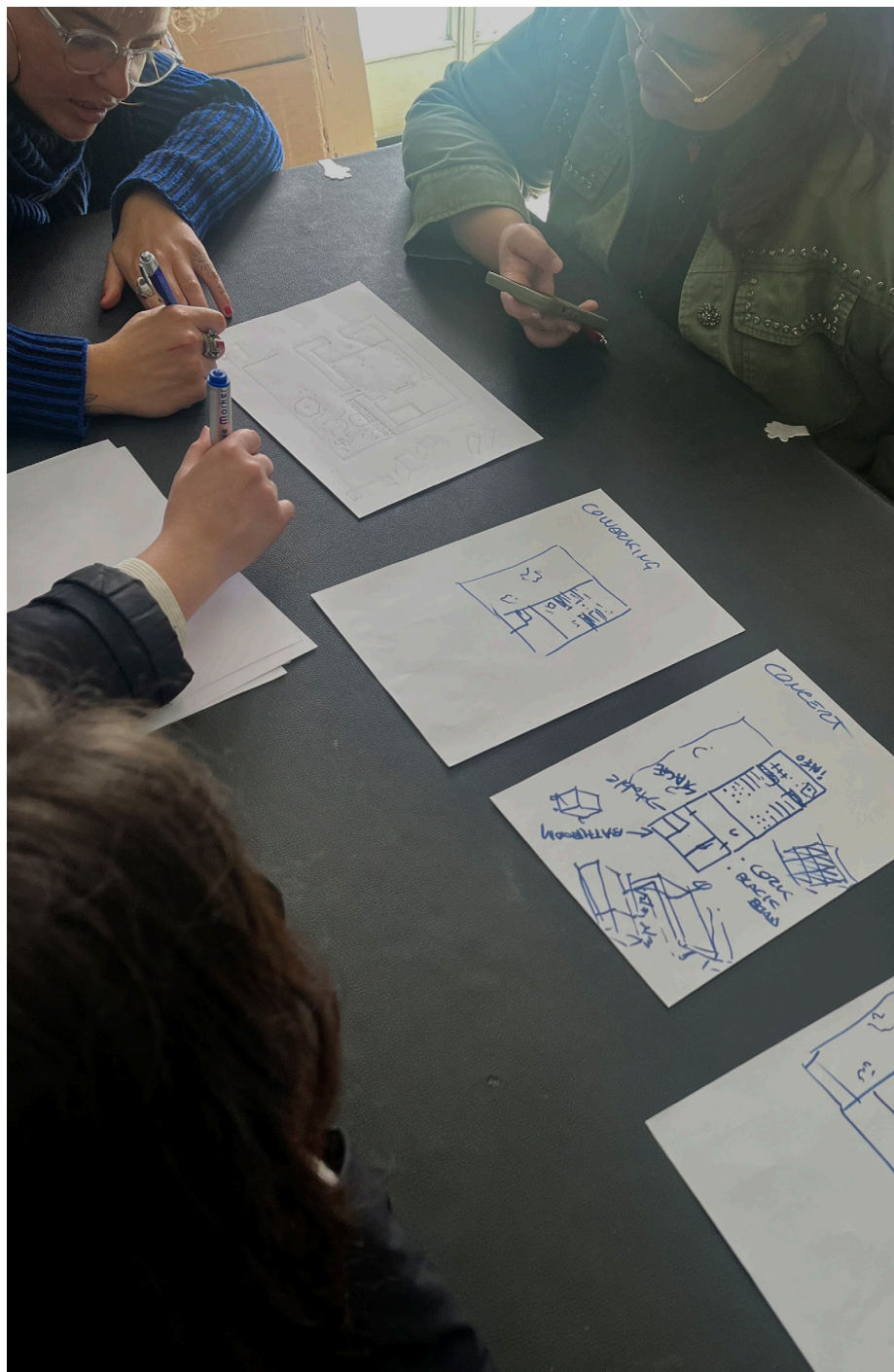
Introduction: The Changing of Collective Habits

There are borghi that seem to live suspended between memory and the present, places where time flows more slowly but never stops, where small actions carry greater weight, and where the future exists in the steps of everyday life. Cellino Attanasio lies on the hills of Abruzzo. Its stone streets, its narrow and silent alleys, the profile outlined against the clear sky, and the view of the clay gullies all seem to hold a sense of expectation. At the heart of this weave of lanes and little squares stands the Church of Santo Spirito. It is a place that has seen generations come and go, that has hosted celebrations, community gatherings, everyday encounters and, over the years, also long periods of inactivity. Once one of the community's central spaces, it slowly drifted away from daily life as individual and collective habits changed.

Entering with Questions and Collective Action, Not Answers

When we arrived in Cellino, we “young talents” brought with us more questions than answers. We had no ready-made project, but rather an empty notebook, waiting to be filled with ideas, memories, needs, and dreams. The intention was not to impose an external vision, but to build something with the community, step by step. In the first days, our work was mostly about listening. Walking through the village, we stopped whenever someone wanted to tell us how things once were, how they are now, and what they hoped for. We searched for references in everything around us.

When the REVIVE experience arrived here, the goal was clear: to bring life and meaning back to this space, to return it to the community. But the chosen way was not that of a technical, detached restoration. The choice was to do things together: to make construction itself a form of dialogue, for the process to already be community in action, and for the group of four architects to shape furniture that would become an opportunity for encounters. Maria and Chari (from Spain), Maddalena (from Trieste) and me (Giulia, from Turin) formed a small international group. It is rare to see such a natural understanding between people who have just met, full of energy and complicity. Each of us found a spontaneous role during the process: together, these roles created a balanced ecosystem in which every talent intertwined with the others, allowing the group to move as a living organism.



Carlo's Workshop: A Local Institution with a Beating Heart

After the first two days of the project—during which we had our first meeting with Carlo—conversations multiplied, inspirations were welcomed, and directions emerged. Carlo Ranalli is the village carpenter, and he soon revealed himself to be a key figure in this adventure. An experienced craftsman, his knowledge lives in precise gestures. The Ranalli carpentry workshop, a local institution founded by Felice Ranalli about forty years ago in Contrada Stampigliano, a district of Cellino Attanasio, is now run by his son Carlo. Their creations can be found throughout the Borgo and in many homes. His instruments offer a glimpse into everyday life. He welcomed us into his workshop with initial skepticism, but also with the discreet calm of someone who knows the patience required to make good things grow. His shop quickly became the beating heart of the project: not only a place of work, but an open space where young architects, friends, and residents could gather around a workbench and let ideas grow together. From the following day, and for many more, we moved there to work. Between a cut and a sanding, ideas took shape, prototypes were born, and discussions became tangible material.





Discovering Potential in the Existing

During our breaks, wandering through the village, we found ourselves in Fabrizio's bar for coffee and beer, chatting at the market amidst the smell of tomatoes and porchetta. We also stumbled upon some discarded furniture: old pieces from the parish house, which was being renovated at the time. They were worn by time but still full of potential. We salvaged them and, with patience and care, restored them, giving them a new function and a new place within the project. In that gesture lay the same logic that guided the entire journey: not to discard what exists, but to transform it into something alive and useful for the community. From the very first online calls, the shared vision among us "talents" was that the church could once again become a home. And in this imagination, a chest of drawers and a low cupboard would embody the sense of domesticity we sought to bring back.





AMI8: Building Communities Through Making

From these days of shared work and unexpected discoveries, the idea of AMI8 was born: multifunctional modules able to adapt to many different uses, and probably even to some we could not yet imagine. Not a static piece of furniture, but movable elements, ready to change form and function—work tables, display stands, small stages for events, or simply points of support. As work intensified, Carlo's workshop transformed into an atypical construction site. There were not only tools and materials, but also complicity, continuous exchange, mutual help and inspiration. Thermoses of hot coffee were prepared for everyone, homemade cakes arrived unasked, and the atmosphere became ever more familiar. Every manual gesture was accompanied by words and laughter, to which Carlo's children also added their voices. The sound of the saw blended with discussions on how to make AMI8 more useful, what colors to use, how to ensure even the children had their space. What had begun with Carlo's doubts and diffidence became days filled with energy. By Saturday—which for many might mean rest—the workshop in Contrada Stampigliano was instead alive with activity: the team chose to keep working alongside master carpenter Carlo and members of his family, including Matteo, who at first just watched, then offered help, and finally took up drills and putty knives. Carlo guided us with the omniscience of experience, showing how to plane properly, how to feel with one's fingertips whether joints and gluing were perfect, and how to fix mistakes that grew more frequent with fatigue.



Once the first elements were completed, we brought them to the church. There, the volunteers—initially curious spectators—began to take brushes in hand, discovering the pleasure of creating something together. Some young locals, who until recently passed by the church without a glance, now found themselves working alongside peers from other European countries.

The process was not linear, and it was never meant to be. There were moments of discussion, and others where things took unexpected turns. Even those who did not participate directly in construction contributed in other ways. We wanted an object that could tell the story of its making, shaped by many hands and interwoven stories.

When AMI8 finally took its definitive form, it was already much more than a piece of furniture. It had become a container of shared moments as well as objects, a tangible symbol of how collective work can transform not only a space but also the relationships between people.

What makes experiences like this valuable is not only the making of an object, but the opportunity to facilitate the formation of circular communities, where residents and local actors interact and activate osmotic practices of mutual nourishment. Building spaces thus becomes an opportunity to strengthen social bonds and promote collective well-being, making every intervention both material and relational. In this perspective, the construction site takes on the shape of an open laboratory where design, active participation, and sustainability intertwine in a virtuous balance.

The approach does not require physical strength or special technical skills, but encourages collaboration, listening, and the contribution of each participant. This makes it possible—and indeed essential—for everyone to be involved, from the youngest to the oldest, each carrying practical knowledge, memories, and manual skills that prove invaluable. The richness of such experiences lies in the diversity of roles and backgrounds: each person brings a unique piece, and only together can the full mosaic emerge.

It is a horizontal, non-hierarchical process in which those who imagine and those who build are not separate figures but parts of a single collective action. The design grows out of the analysis of the physical, social, and cultural context, drawing on local and sustainable materials, prioritizing reuse and low environmental impact. Construction, in turn, is conceived as an accessible and replicable practice, based on simple techniques and basic tools, capable of including anyone who wishes to participate.

From this weave emerge spaces that are not only functional but also full of quality. Spaces that are beautiful because they are shared, sustainable because they are rooted in local resources, inclusive because they are built by many hands. The aesthetic dimension of what is created is never an end in itself, but a vehicle to strengthen social life, to stimulate transformative processes, and to generate belonging.

In this framework, the experience of Cellino Attanasio fits into a broader movement: that of design becoming community action, of construction becoming a social, cultural, and relational gesture. AMI8 is not just a piece of furniture, but the concrete expression of this approach: an object carrying the echo of shared work, of recovered materials, of the many voices that shaped it.



Spaces That Carry Processes

On the day of the inauguration, it was there, ready for use, placed by Maria and Chari after multiple attempts. At that moment, we understood that the success of the project did not lie in the object itself, but in what had happened during its creation. AMI8 was only the visible point of an invisible network of relationships and cooperation built in those days. Thanks to this journey, the Church of Santo Spirito was no longer only a physical place: at least for the time of the experiment, it had become once again a living space, capable of welcoming and transforming.

What remains with us, the young talents, from the REVIVE experience in Cellino Attanasio is simple and powerful: doing things together is not only a means to reach a goal, but an end in itself—made of human connections, shared knowledge, and the awareness that it is possible to build something common. AMI8 will continue to move and transform, just like the community that generated it. And even if one day it wears out or ceases to be functional, its greatest value will remain, preserved in the hands of those who built it.



The Slovenia Experiment: how listening, hands, and heart built a shared vision for Tržič

Angelica Nanni – Architect

Introduction

Taking part in the first experiment of the European REVIVE project, held in Tržič, Slovenia, in June 2024, has been the most valuable learning experience of my ten-year academic journey. I started with the degree course in Construction Engineering in 2015 and, once I obtained my bachelor's degree, I could not help but continue in 2018 with the degree course that I had always wanted to follow: Architecture. While I loved puzzles, logic, geometric solutions, and mathematical formulas, I was missing the soul of things. Philosophy, literature, and culture are essential to any project that aims to be more than numbers. Above all, architecture is about people. "Architecture is a political act, by nature. It has to do with the relationships between people and how they decide to change their conditions of living" (Lebbeus Woods, 1992). Moreover, sustainability and inclusivity are at the heart of my PhD in Science and Technology for Sustainable Development at the University "G. d'Annunzio" of Chieti-Pescara. These motivations, along with my passion for both hand and digital drawing, as well as art in general, drove me to apply for this experience – and it couldn't have been a better choice.

Preparation phase: getting to know each other remotely

Fourteen young talents from six European countries (Croatia, Finland, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, Spain), each with different academic backgrounds, were selected for the project. Together, we formed a diverse yet complementary team. The preparation involved a series of online meetings aimed at building mutual understanding, engaging with the artistic directors and stakeholders, familiarizing ourselves with the project site, and receiving training on the topics we would be addressing.

This first experiment aimed to revitalize the historic city of Tržič. The intervention area encompassed the outdoor space belonging to the City Museum, which included a large garden with a small shed, and an adjacent semi-abandoned building known as the Sun House. Specific objectives included renovating existing structures, envisioning new uses for the area, and involving local residents in a participatory process for regenerating the city centre. Achieving these goals required a dual approach – addressing both spatial and social aspects, in the short and long term. This meant working towards a final exhibition at the end of the experiment while also developing a more structured legacy project for the city through prototyping. Our preliminary discussions led to a shared vision for the site: creating

a social space connecting the museum to local residents, enhancing the garden's appeal with structured activities for all age groups, improving visual relationships between the site and the historic centre, and facilitating maintenance to avoid future neglect. Specifically, the garden was to serve multiple functions, such as hosting exhibitions, performances, and cultural events, with special attention to lighting and reconnecting it to the surrounding context by addressing level differences that hindered accessibility near the Sun House. One of the biggest challenges was the fence/no-fence debate: we needed a hybrid solution that ensured safety while maintaining an open, inviting frontage for the community. As for the Sun House, its potential was vast: it could provide additional space for the museum, host interactive activities for various target groups, or even have its facade used as an outdoor cinema screen.

Despite the productive virtual meetings and bootcamps, underlying tensions surfaced. Although the pandemic had accustomed us to working remotely, it was evident that collaborating from a distance wasn't enough to foster a real connection. The fast-paced lives we were leading, balancing work, exams, and other commitments, made it difficult to fully immerse ourselves in a project that required deep exploration and teamwork. Not knowing each other's working methods further complicated things. As architects, we often clash repeatedly before finding common ground for a shared vision. This initial sense of disconnection from both the place and the group inevitably triggered fears, as it often happens with new beginnings. But step by step, these barriers were broken down, giving way to something far beyond my expectations.

Arriving in Slovenia: discovering the project site

Our preparation had equipped us with floorplans, 3D reconstructions, photographs, and a wealth of historical narratives waiting to be heard. But, as urban planner Bernardo Secchi said, "urban planning is done on foot" (1989). We needed to physically experience the site to truly understand how best to intervene. Being all together, under one roof from the very first evening, helped us gradually connect, put faces to names, and start weaving the relationships necessary to become a team. Conversations flowed naturally as we shared our personal stories and opened ourselves to dialogue – spontaneous interactions no one could have planned, yet were essential for our success.

The warm welcome we received immediately touched us, and a daily routine of collaborative work with our mentors, alongside intense but rewarding efforts, sparked our creativity. Having breakfast in the museum's most beautiful room, lunching under the garden's large trees, and brainstorming under the June sun were among the simple pleasures of those days. Visiting the museum allowed us to absorb the values preserved within, particularly the fine craftsmanship traditions that were not to be lost. Walking through the garden made us realize that some of the transformations we had imagined weren't feasible due to terrain elevation differences and site morphology that rendered certain preliminary ideas impractical. At the same time, new challenges arose, exciting us even more, and we knew the local workforce

would help us bring to life whatever was within reach.

The Sun House's condition was worse than we anticipated and would require significant work within a few short days to make it accessible to the public for the final exhibition. There were many aspects we could only truly grasp by being physically present. Firstly, the relationship with water: a stream bordered the garden, calling for a new crossing element, while other water features accompanied visitors to the museum entrance with a gentle, evocative sound. Secondly, the path adjacent to the green area linked the city centre to a wooded area that provided a perfect scenic backdrop for the existing buildings, offering a glimpse of the landscape that deserved to be highlighted. Moreover, the historic centre was just a stone's throw away, further reinforcing the idea of starting the regeneration from this pivotal space.

The beauty of the process: becoming a team

Day by day, the 14 of us transformed into a single unit. Half of the group were designers – some, including myself, focusing on the vision for the garden area under the guidance of our mentor Vid, and others working on the Sun House renovation led by Mercedes. The other half formed the socio-artistic soul of the group, directed by Andreja. Daily briefings at 8:30 am and debriefings at 6:00 pm ensured our complete cooperation and complementarity. We had to work in parallel, but we did so by intersecting our paths continuously, rather than moving as separate lines. I believe this was the key to our success.

Balancing a short-term project and a long-term vision meant that each of us had to extend our thinking across both timelines. Our days unfolded in a constant crescendo: while half the team engaged with local residents to understand their needs and aspirations, we, the designers, worked on translating those needs into tangible solutions that would create a welcoming space designed by minds external to their everyday reality. The cultural richness of Tržič deeply inspired us, amplified by nature walks to discover local plant species and culinary traditions, continuous discussions with the mayor and municipal administration, as well as with the museum staff and stakeholders interviewed by the socio-artistic team.

While many project elements had been outlined during the preparatory phase, being on-site allowed us to refine strategies and showcase the results in a large physical model presented at the final event. But the most crucial goal was to convince visitors that this space had untapped potential, that it could become a vibrant, lived-in place, an attractor, and a bearer of the town's values. To bring this vision to life, we brainstormed endlessly, both in the museum and at our bed & breakfast, letting our creativity flow. Demonstrating the site's possibilities required working with local materials, local people, and embracing the simplicity of small gestures: the urgency of creating installations became undeniable. Each of us was becoming a maker, shaped by the unique facets of our skills, aspirations, professions, and personal backgrounds.





Final preparations: working with a dream team

Time was running out, and we were about to become the protagonists of an incredible process that would allow us, in just ten days, to shape our ideas into reality. For me, this was the most extraordinary aspect of the entire experience: I had never before been part of a project aimed at physically building a space, and it is hard to convey in words the emotional impact it had. It was astonishing to see how, step by step, 14 different minds converged into a successful exhibition, filled with the joy and hope that only teamwork can bring.

The final days were the most intense. Guided by Vid, we started “getting our hands dirty” alongside local craftsmen, breaking down into small tasks everything that would transform the garden: taking measurements, marking out areas for earthwork, assembling a makeshift staircase from available pallets, considering lighting solutions, rolling out fabrics, cutting wood, and slowly composing the final layout.

I feel a rush of emotion as I recall those moments. The small structure at the garden’s edge aligned perfectly with the access path leading to the museum from the opposite side. It was essential to direct the viewer’s gaze towards it through an architectural promenade. For this reason, we laid out a vivid fuchsia fabric along the path, highlighting the importance of its passage, punctuated by lights and wooden totems showcasing photographs taken by one of our team’s talents.

We documented every component with precise dimensions and quantities, assembling a large toolbox of ideas. The fence/no-fence dilemma was another challenge we managed to resolve: we convinced the site managers to adopt a hybrid solution by cutting sections of the existing fence and replacing them with a series of wooden elements interspersed with greenery, creating a permeable yet secure border that invited the community’s gaze inward.

This “playful fence” also included seating areas designed to encourage both movement and rest, featuring benches built around central trees that would grow without interfering with the structure, providing shade and comfort.

Some fence sections near the shed were replaced with bicycle racks, promoting slow mobility and encouraging visitors to explore the museum on foot or by bike. One of our proudest achievements was the creation of an acoustic fence, forming the scenic backdrop for a small stage. This was one of the most challenging elements: it required digging, cutting tall wooden panels, reinforcing the structure with triangular supports, and stabilizing it with earth weight.

The result, once we set the stage in front of it, was thrilling. To accommodate the audience, we also built additional seating, simulating the semi-circular arrangement of an amphitheatre envisioned in the long-term plan.

The elevation difference between the garden and its surroundings was resolved with a pallet structure that combined steps and seating, backlit to create a striking effect. The standout artistic feature was a colourful fabric installation conceived by one of the artists in the group, with pieces cut and assembled by all of us at every hour of the day.

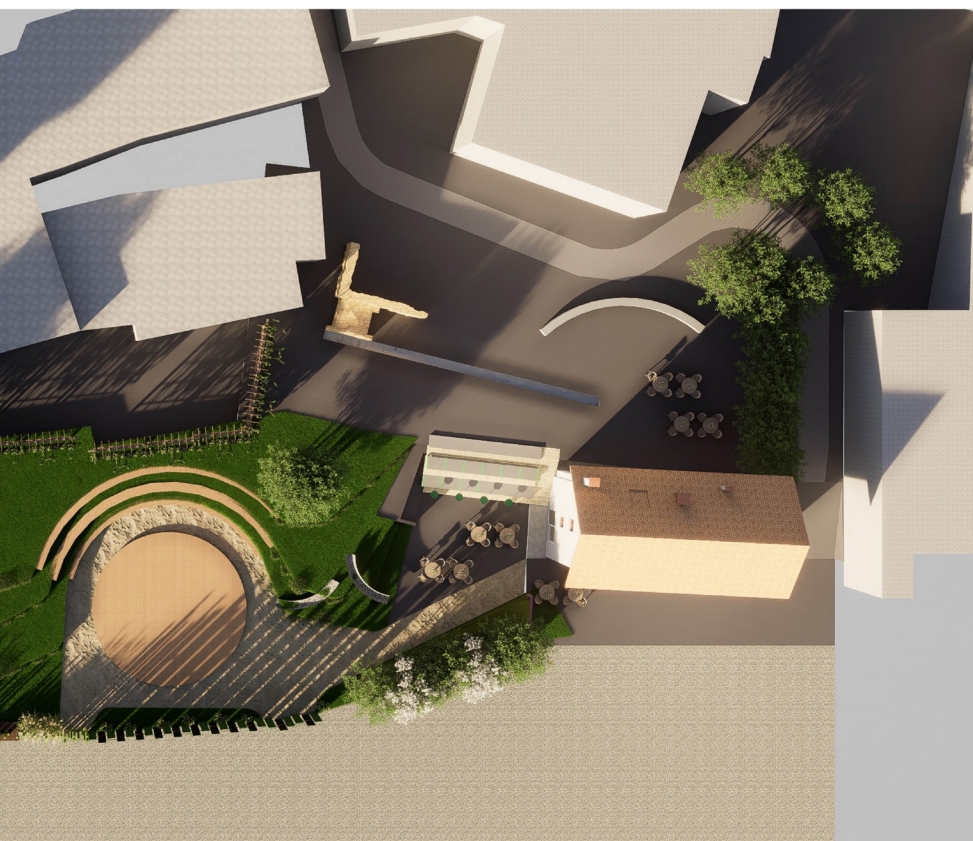
This “fabric river” was positioned precisely over one of the ancient buried streams, marking a historical trace and symbolizing the community’s enduring relationship with water.

As for the Sun House, after a thorough cleaning, we envisioned it as a community café and public gathering space for residents. We displayed project drawings inside, while projecting a sectional rendering of its future transformation onto the external facade.

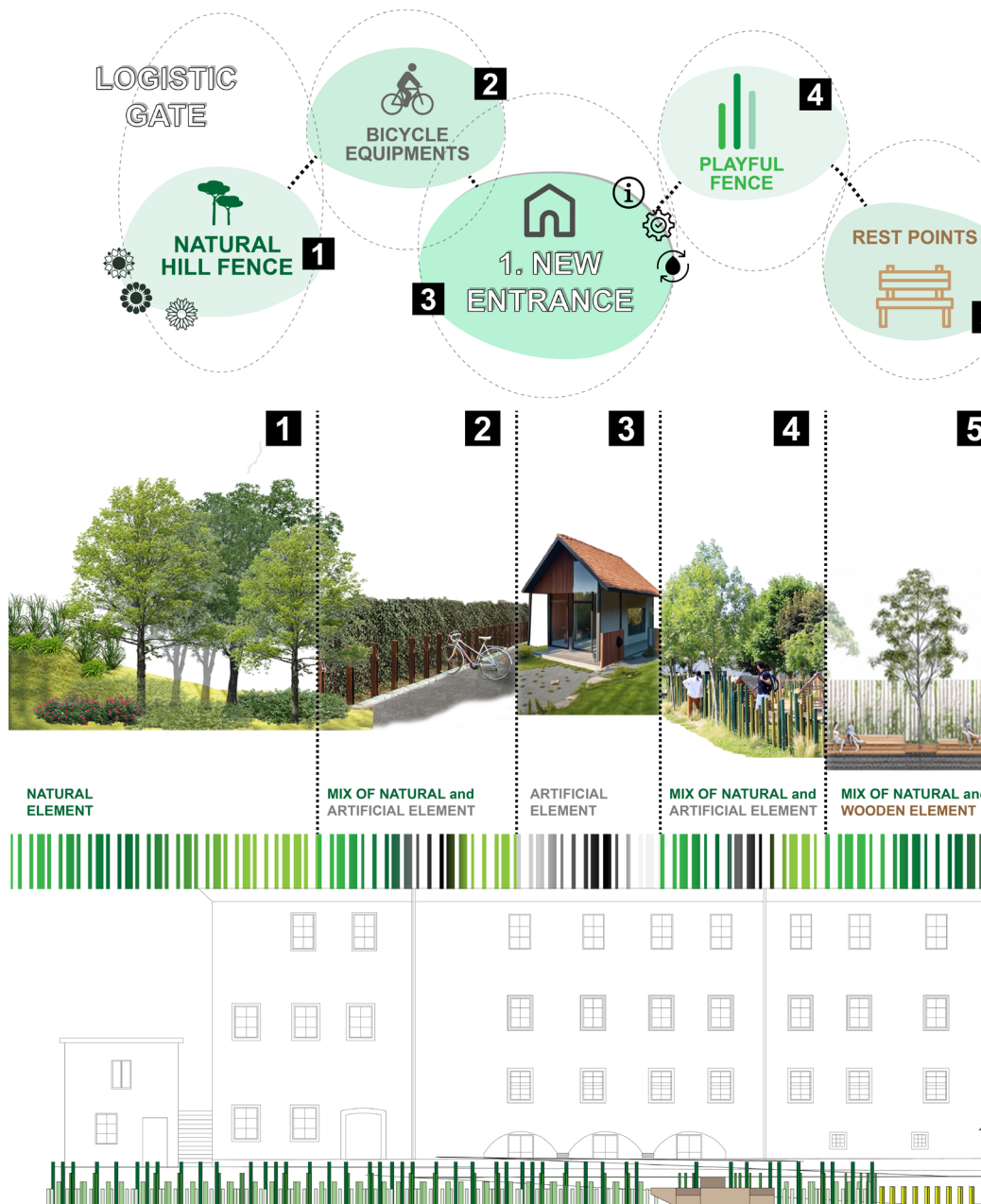
This projection served two purposes: illustrating the building’s potential and demonstrating the facade’s suitability as an outdoor cinema screen. The Sun House became our beacon of light, hosting a photo exhibition documenting the coordinated, creative work of the previous days, and above all, reflecting the deep friendships formed during this participatory process.

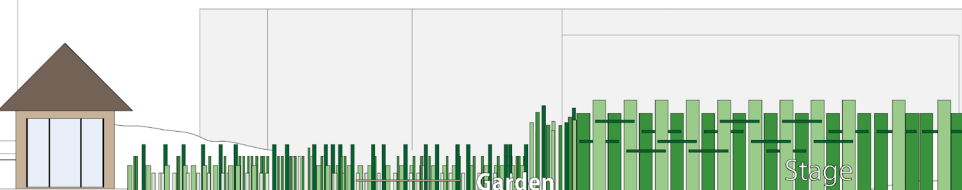
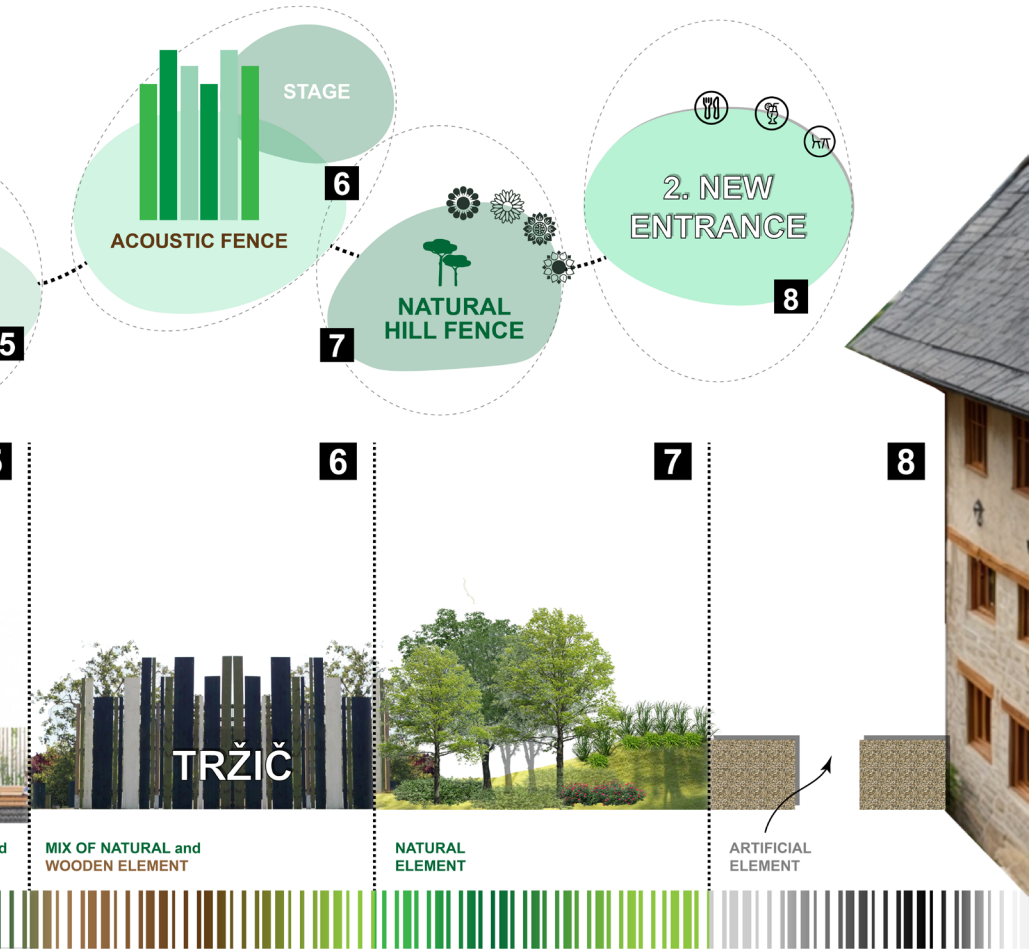
1. Masterplan





2. New border





2

BICYCLE EQUIPMENTS

DETAILS

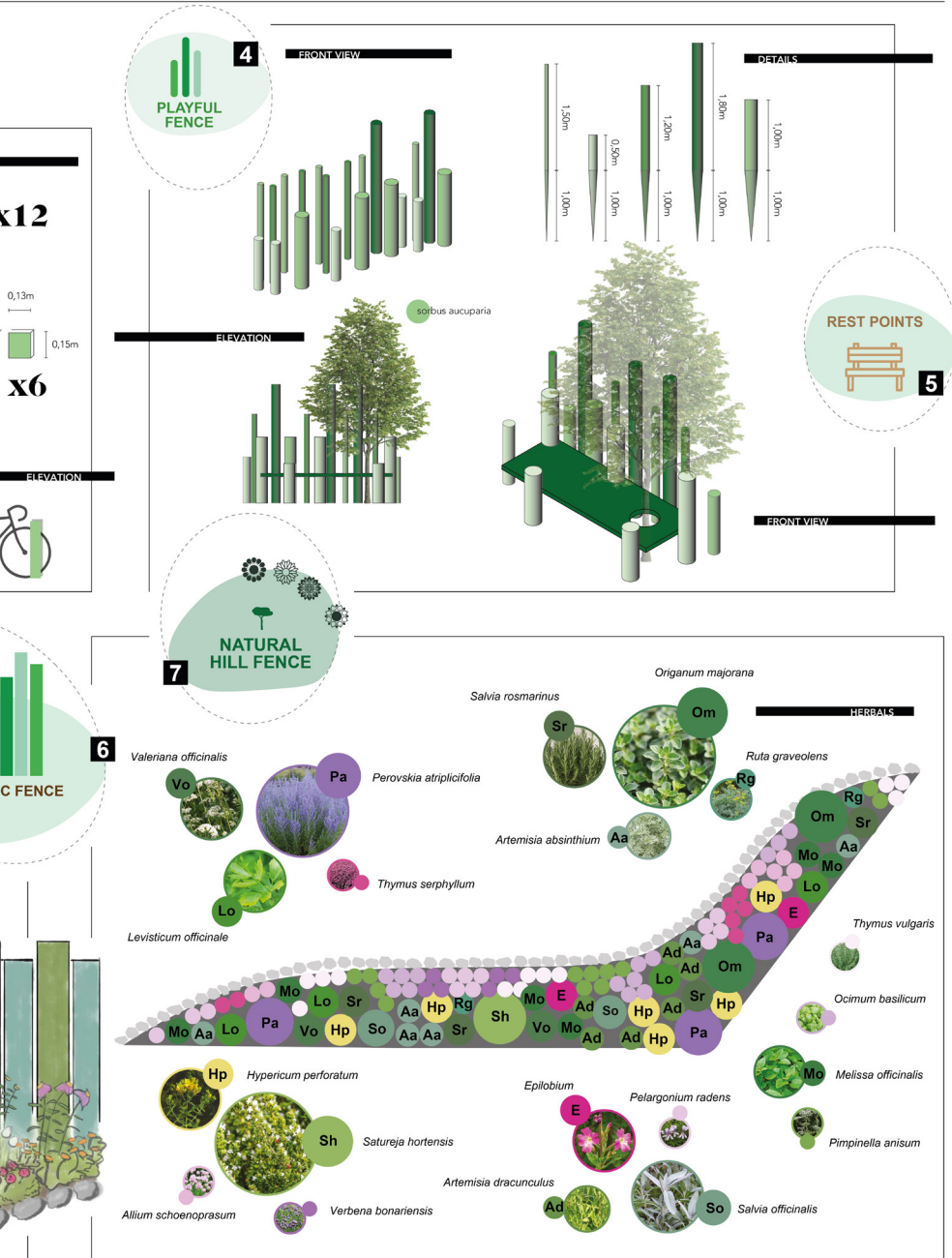
0,15m

0,80m

1,00m

FRONT VIEW





Conclusion

The day of the final exhibition was unforgettable. Photos and videos captured the event and are now part of the project's website and social media channels. The turnout was immense, with stakeholders and residents filling the space. We had the opportunity to present our project, giving a tangible preview through the installations we had created – it was a resounding success. The socio-artistic team showcased their documentary, moving the audience by capturing and preserving local traditions, enriching the entire narrative. While visitors explored the newly transformed space, a local youth rock band performed on the stage we had built for them, gifting us a moment of pure joy. What we experienced was just the first step in the area's regeneration, yet it all felt so natural that it gave us hope for future transformations. We were all deeply happy. Our teary eyes revealed the joy of the outcome, the satisfaction of the process, and the looming nostalgia of an imminent farewell. These immersive experiences are difficult to rationalize; we tried to process it the next day during our final lunch together. A closing meeting with the project leaders from the various participating countries allowed us to consolidate our achievements and formalize a report on the objectives reached.

"The REVIVE experiment in Tržič has not only provided innovative solutions for the town's public spaces but has also set a benchmark for future urban development inspired by the New European Bauhaus initiative. The project has successfully demonstrated how young, unencumbered perspectives can create sustainable, inclusive living spaces that serve the community's needs." (<https://www.revive-project.com/trzic-experiment-final>).

But this experience gave us even more: it strengthened our interpersonal, collaborative, and cooperative skills. It taught us the value of listening and engaging in dialogue, which is essential for achieving quality outcomes. We learned that trans-disciplinarity is fundamental – it's not enough for different professionals to sit at the same table; real solutions for the community arise only when that table fosters shared visions. We all became friends. We still keep in touch, and the Slovenian team members update us on the project's progress. Many of us have applied to participate in the next REVIVE experiments in Finland, Italy, and Romania, simply to have the chance to work together again.

I will carry this experience in my heart and recall it with every new project I undertake, because I now know this is the right methodology to approach them. I wish to thank everyone who contributed to making this experience possible, as each person shared a part of themselves that enriched the rest of us.

I have always believed that our professions reflect our personal inclinations. I think architects need to work with space to find their own place in the world. I found mine alongside wonderful people and learned that every place can become home if I always look at it through the lens of sharing and inclusivity as the main perspectives guiding my vision.



REVIVE

EXPERIMENT V TRŽIČU



11.07.2024
TRŽIŠKI MUZEJ



19:30
PREDSTAVITEV
ZASNOVE VRTA

20:30
KONCERT SKUPINE
SMETNAKI



REVIVE
revive-project.com







From Places to Relationships: Two Experiences of Rebirth and Collaboration

Margherita Tacconelli – Visual Artist

Introduction

I am Margherita Tacconelli, a visual artist. I live and work in Cellino Attanasio, a small village in the Abruzzo hinterland, and my creative imagination is deeply rooted in the environment where I grew up. The places around me, the people who inhabit them, the stories handed down, and those at risk of being forgotten are the real raw materials of my work.

When I chose to volunteer for the Revive experiment promoted by the Itaca Association in Cellino Attanasio, I never imagined how much it would impact my view of the territory and the transformative power of art and human connection.

Cellino Attanasio: Awakening a Community

The Revive initiative had a deep impact on my community. For a small village like ours, where time often seems frozen and the population is mostly elderly, the arrival of young talents from across Europe felt like a breath of fresh air. In just two weeks, we witnessed a tangible change: from initial apprehension to genuine enthusiasm.

The presence of these young talents sparked new bonds, affection, and inspiration. The village's youth found themselves observing international young professionals at work, discovering models and possibilities that rarely reach our hills. In a region often marked by brain drain, Revive represented, albeit temporarily, the arrival of brilliant minds.

We local volunteers, played a fundamental role in building bridges between the artists and the community. We mediated, translated, explained, welcomed. We literally brought the participants into our lives, our memories, through the alleys and the hills, allowing them to connect with the human fabric of the place. By doing so, the community responded with openness and generosity, overcoming prejudice and distrust.

One of the most concrete results of the project is the birth of the Santo Spirito Hub, a cultural center inside the former Santo Spirito church, long a historic symbol of the village but inaccessible for decades. Today, that building has been reborn: concerts, exhibitions, book presentations, film screenings, and workshops for all ages now take place there throughout the summer.

"I hadn't set foot in this church since my elementary school play, fifty years ago."

Among the most moving events was the screening of a documentary made by students from the University of Teramo about the school in Cellino Attanasio, from the Fascist era to today. It stirred memories, emotions, and intergenerational reflections.

This process reactivated a sense of belonging, brought back those who had drifted away, and unearthed forgotten stories and hidden talents. Our community rediscovered itself.

Iași, Romania: Synergy

Different, but equally valuable, was my experience as a young talent during the Revive experiment in Iași, Romania. There, I had the opportunity to collaborate with the Palatul Culturii, a major institution steeped in history.

During the first week, we explored the city, discovering its cultural and human dimensions, transforming what had previously been research material into direct experience. Contact with those working inside the Palace of Culture was fundamental: many of them, beyond being cultural professionals, are also artists and knew how to transmit their passion.

The group work turned out to be surprisingly fluid. As the days passed, we built an environment of trust, mutual respect, and sincere collaboration. Our brainstorming sessions became more and more effective: everyone contributed ideas, energy, and skills. Some participants, experienced from previous editions of the project, helped us balance enthusiasm and realism, grounding us when ideas became too ambitious, but also encouraging us to take risks when we felt stuck.

Working on a collective project with such diverse yet harmoniously integrated people was a beautiful experience. I had never felt so at ease within a working group. Each individual was seen and valued for who they were. No hierarchy, just collaboration.

I, for example, was working on a mural. It was a large and demanding piece, but I wasn't alone: my peers would come over, pick up a brush, and fill in the colors within the outlines I had drawn. They helped me without overshadowing my vision. When I apologized for "stealing" their time, they replied that painting was the relaxing moment they needed. No one took anyone's contribution for granted, and precisely because of that, every gesture held meaning.

Although I was aware that working inside an institution like the Palace of Culture could feel "colder" than the more familiar setting of Cellino, I discovered the opposite. The people who bring that institution to life are vibrant, curious, and generous. And many of them chose to share their stories through their own art.

Conclusion: A Fertile Present

Revive was not just a cultural project. It was a human experiment, a catalyst for trust, a space where imagining, and realizing, a different future became possible. In Cellino Attanasio, Revive showed that even a small community can renew itself without losing its identity, instead opening up to dialogue, memory, and creativity. In Iași, I experienced the power of international cooperation, of art as a common language, and the value each person brings when they are free to express themselves. In both places, the common thread was the same: relationship. With the land, with people, with oneself. And from these relationships, great things are born.



Between Tržič, Cellino Attanasio and Iași: a creative and professional journey

Federica Di Giambattista – Architect

Introduction

My name is Federica Di Giambattista, and I have been working as an Italian architect since 2020. The historical moment in which I graduated was deeply influenced by the cultural changes brought about by the Coronavirus pandemic. I clearly felt that, from that point on, architectural design would undergo a drastic transformation. The design approach, already evolving during my university years, was shifting, and with it the collective needs related to public space. Creativity was gaining a new meaning: a tool to face difficult times, placing people, relationships, and the spaces they inhabit at the center.

Throughout my academic and professional journey, I have experienced how creativity must always be accompanied by continuous study and by experiences that enrich both personally and professionally. The more we know, the more we can do; if we ignore, we reduce ourselves to the smallest expression of our potential and to the minimum contribution we can give to the community, whether local or global.

I have a professional inclination towards architectural restoration projects, and I strongly believe that architecture is not only a technical discipline but also one that embraces multiple dimensions: environmental sustainability, the function and meaning of a place, its identity, and its belonging to a community.

We cannot design a space without understanding who will use it, where it is located, and which materials are the most appropriate and sustainable. The design process always involves many challenges, both conceptual and operational. Through research and experimentation, it is possible to achieve results that give meaning to space, allowing people to live it fully and to feel part of something beautiful. Actively observing people, their relationships, and the context in which they live is essential to provide a concrete design response. This is also a great responsibility, requiring a high level of study and sensitivity.

I have already had the opportunity to take part in a project in the city of Pescara, publishing an article for Colibrì Newsletter within the U-RISE Master's program at IUAV University of Venice. The project focused on the experience carried out by several associations, coordinated by the Department of Architecture of Pescara, as part of the MIUR Piano Scuola

Estate 2021 program in the problematic suburbs of the city. The theme was the creative reinvention of open spaces inside schools (school courtyards) and their integration into the network of public spaces and urban commons, using recycled materials—such as pallets—to create temporary installations. The research explored the activities and the tools, both material and immaterial, that were employed in the realization of the “collaborative workshops” carried out with the children and parents of the educational community of Comprensivo Pescara 1.

My passion for creative disciplines, combined with the desire to explore new cultural perspectives, drives me to apply for the REVIVE project—through the 2024 call in Slovenia and the 2025 call in Romania. The opportunity to be part of multidisciplinary teams and to actively contribute to the revitalization of cultural heritage in places such as Tržič and Iași deeply inspires me. Both applications were positively evaluated for my profile, and from the very beginning I felt grateful to take part in these experiments and to give a meaningful and tangible contribution.

Collaborating in such a diverse project, whose primary goal was the revitalization of a space without identity, was also an opportunity to learn new processes. I was, of course, curious to discover how the newly transformed space would influence the users’ experience. Moreover, the exchange with young creatives from all over Europe offered the chance to confront different points of view and to gather valuable design insights.

As for the Cellino Attanasio experiment in 2025, I wanted to participate as a volunteer because it is a town located near my hometown, and I wished to contribute by also bringing the Slovenian experience I had gained.

My contribution was different in each of these experiences, and in the following chapters I will try to give an overview of the common and distinctive aspects of each experiment. In general, my work focused on the architectural and design dimension of public spaces and green areas, with particular attention to the use of local materials and construction techniques that embrace reusability and adaptability, so that the works can be transferred to new urban contexts and adapted to new uses according to emerging needs.



Reflections on cities

“The city is the beginning of history” and “the city begins in its public places, in the nodes where new centralities can be created, new accumulations of relations and sensations” (1): two statements that remind us how the city is the place of knowledge and innovation, where social communities are formed and live, and where the agorà is at the same time a private and public space, a metaphorical place where private and collective issues can meet, and where shared ideas and values can take shape.

For this reason, humanity has always felt the need to protect the city—first with defensive works, later with tools to regulate its development, and in modern times with the urban planning project.

Today, cities are at the center of the major global challenges—climate change, social inequalities, urban degradation. In Italy, as in Europe, there emerges an urgent need for a program that promotes integrated policies, capable of affecting the multiple dimensions of urban quality: environmental, social, economic, technological, and institutional.

The European programming for 2021–2027, through instruments such as Next Generation EU, PNRR, React-EU, and the New European Bauhaus, has introduced an innovative approach to planning and governance: environmental sustainability, social cohesion, gender and generational equality, but also beauty, quality, and a culture of design are becoming essential criteria. In this framework, architects take on a strategic and transformative role—not only as technical designers, but as key actors in territorial development, capable of contributing to the construction of medium-to-long term visions, to the definition of integrated urban strategies, and to the promotion of participatory processes.

In contemporary cities, two forms seem to coexist: the “planned” city and the “spontaneous” city—two entities that overlap and stratify over time. The “spontaneous” city can be recognized by the strong individuality of its actions, whether it is the self-managed use of a space or the organization of unprogrammed events. It begins where the planned city ends, where the latter has failed to respond to social demands. The fertile ground for the coexistence of projects of self-construction and appropriation lies in those places where spontaneous interventions in the transformation of buildings and public spaces are legitimized by the absence of public planning. The presence of a considerable number of abandoned places in cities raises several questions that are difficult to answer univocally: the quality of these abandoned artifacts, their meaning, and the reasons why they should be preserved. How, then, should we intervene in places of “abandonment”? How can we restore a role, a meaning, a form compatible with present reality to these places?

Today more than ever, due to the different forms of abandonment affecting cities and the limited resources available, it appears necessary to intervene through the practice of reuse as a tool of contemporary design for the

recovery of abandoned heritage. The reuse project can, in fact, represent an opportunity—through the recovery of disused buildings and spaces—to transform and improve the cities we inhabit.

“Heritage is everything that is space, with its sedimentation over time, a palimpsest of history drawn by human beings,” writes the landscape architect M. Corajoud.

Studying public heritage and its qualities, with a view to design, means intercepting the micro-histories that reveal the complex scenario of the public city.

Three projects for three places

My professional and personal journey within the European project REVIVE developed across three significant territories: Cellino Attanasio (Italy), Tržič (Slovenia), and Iași (Romania). Three completely different contexts, yet all sharing a common condition: the lack of identity of the places and a strong social demand for reactivation, accessibility, and sense of belonging.

Each stage represented a laboratory where architecture, art, heritage, and human relations intertwined to build new possibilities of use, meaning, and shared vision of the places. Implicit, visible, possible are the three key words that unite these three sites, and also the three main phases that I experienced and observed in each experiment.

- Implicit

Refers to something necessarily included or deducible, even if not explicitly stated or manifested. It is implicit that these three places have potential for redevelopment, and this aspect strongly emerged during the online meetings, together with the collective will to revitalize them.

- Visible

because the new space can be imagined, it is easily visualized. Its functional destination is immediately perceivable. Even small actions can give identity back to these spaces.

- Possible

because each experiment was carried out. This was made possible by using design methods and tools consistent with the context, with the community's requests, with functional programs for both the short and long term, and above all with the help of professionals and young creatives from all over Europe who, thanks to their knowledge, ambitions, and insights, created both a climate and a scenario of possibility.

(1) Notes

Opening with two quotations: the first, very well-known, by Carlo Cattaneo; the second, from the declaration of the CIAM Congress held in Bergamo in 1959.

Tržič

In Tržič, my participation focused on the redevelopment of the garden of the Tržič Museum and the adjacent abandoned building. The REVIVE experiment in the Museum Garden of Tržič identified five main challenges:

- Garden design (including a long-term vision)

The social role of the garden (including neighborhood and citizens' involvement)

- Garden fence

- The small garden house

- The Sun House

Visioning

The REVIVE experiment in Tržič aims to use a co-creation process to visualize and, in part, experimentally implement a proposal for the revitalization of the open space surrounding the Tržič Museum, namely the museum garden. This will enable the area to host both museum and community activities.

The new green area is envisioned as part of the city's cultural and tourist infrastructure, offering opportunities for the development of social, cultural, tourist, and educational activities and interactions between residents and visitors.

Team Young Creative Talents

COUNTRY	NAME	AREA OF KNOWLEDGE
ROMANIA	Dana Lupan	Architecture
ROMANIA	Petra Carina Stadoleanu	Museography
CROATIA	Ela Leko	Textile design
CROATIA	Blanka Ložić	Anthropology, Ethnology, History, Branding
SLOVENIA	Aja Onuk	History & sociology
SLOVENIA	Neža Livk	Landscape architect
SLOVENIA	Anton Jakob Bonča	Architecture
SLOVENIA	Žana Korenjak	Architecture
FINLAND	Christian Lausund	Photography
FINLAND	Petriina Kiiskinen	Fine arts
ITALY	Federica Di Giambattista	Urban planning
ITALY	Angelica Nanni	Urban planning
SPAIN	Angela Mazamoren	Architecture
SPAIN	Victor Pérez	Architecture

Architectural Installations

- The new fence

In agreement with the municipality, the fence surrounding the garden was removed to make way for a new concept of enclosure. If the main goal of the project was community engagement, what purpose would a physical barrier delimiting the space serve? None!

The new fence was therefore designed using wooden materials and consists of pillars of different sizes and heights, seemingly arranged at random to allow visual access to the garden and, in a way, invite people to enter. A fence that does not set limits but encourages stopping and entering.

Additionally, some wooden pillars were designed to serve as bike racks. In this way, the fence assumes both a functional role and a role that encourages lingering in the garden. Aesthetically, it revitalizes the area and gives a new image to the museum's façade.

- The new stage

Continuing with the concept of having a functional fence, at a certain point the fence gives way to a new wooden stage intended for temporary exhibitions and evening shows. Wooden panels are placed behind the stage to create a backdrop, to absorb sound from music, and to shield the view of surrounding houses. Once again, the materials and furnishings serve a functional purpose, not just an aesthetic one. The stage was built using pallets so that it can be expanded or moved in the future depending on its use.

- A staircase for resting

Connecting structures have often been associated with transit areas, places intended solely for passage, but in reality good design can give these transit zones an atmosphere of rest. Indeed, the garden staircase project aims to connect two strategic points with a pallet staircase. The staircase was conceived out of the need to "cover" a retaining wall and connect two levels, instead of creating a long stretch of walking path. Thanks to the characteristics of the material used, it was possible to create a very wide tread that allows seating. With appropriate lighting, the stairs have become a place to pause, to enjoy the surrounding landscape, and an intimate spot to relax, away from areas of the garden dedicated to artistic installations and shows.

- Sun House and Small Garden House

The revitalization of buildings requires more time and resources. The work of the architectural team focused on finding new functional purposes for these two buildings. To communicate the ideas developed during the weeks of the workshop, a projection of the future project was displayed on the façade of the Sun House: a community kitchen available to the town. As for the small garden house, a new use was proposed as an info point, serving as an access gateway between the public pedestrian street and the museum garden. Through sketches, drawings, and renderings, the ideation process, concepts, and future developments of these two buildings were illustrated. To enhance the visitor experience, a suggestive pathway made of pink fabric was installed, symbolizing the future route of access to the garden and its exhibition area.



Planning as Much as Possible While Remaining Flexible

The approach was based on active listening to the community, sensitive study of the context, and the co-production of urban furniture solutions. The urban furnishings were designed not only as aesthetic objects but as multifunctional devices fostering relationships and inclusion.

An alternative fence invites people to enter and park their bikes; benches host plants; a large staircase connects two important points while also serving as a resting place; and a new stage setup for the platform harmoniously screens the view for the houses behind. The materials used are simple and easily reusable, as they are modular and have very regular shapes.

The design goals were not purely aesthetic but also functional in both the short and long term. Collaboration among young artists, the local construction company, the community, and artistic directors facilitated the processes of collaborative self-construction. The dedication of all involved is a key ingredient for the experiment's effectiveness. Ambition and commitment were extremely high.



Iași

In Iași, the focus shifted to the underground spaces of the Palace of Culture, largely unused. The core of the project is the underground “Machine Hall” of the Palace of Culture, a former power plant still marked by elements of its industrial past. This raw and evocative space is intended to become a center for exhibitions, workshops, performances, and collaborative intercultural storytelling. The site holds symbolic importance that goes beyond its historical value: the industrial machines represent a past to be preserved but also to be enhanced.

This scenario is very different from Slovenia, as the space is indoors rather than outdoors. Iași is a flat city, while Tržič is a small mountain town, yet both projects share the same goal of revitalizing an unused place.

The Slovenian experiment differed greatly in content compared to the Romanian one. Although both interventions took place in public spaces dedicated to culture (museums), the difference between open and enclosed spaces was a major challenge.

It is often thought that designing in open spaces is more difficult, but this is not always true. Open spaces already have a landscape framework that enclosed spaces lack. In an indoor space, nothing can be left to chance; otherwise, it feels incomplete.

Every element in an enclosed space must have a meaning and a precise placement. In open spaces, small errors or omissions are compensated by the landscape, and design is often approached in a more urbanistic and large-scale manner rather than focusing on detail and design, as is necessary in enclosed spaces.

Additionally, underground spaces are not agile because they lack windows and natural light. Therefore, spatial, acoustic, and lighting arrangements play a fundamental role in ensuring a pleasant experience for visitors.

The two-week REVIVE experiment in Iași provided an opportunity for intense interactions with representatives of both historical and recent minority groups, as well as between young artists and established professionals, allowing for the transmission of knowledge and the training of tomorrow’s specialists.

Visioning

The REVIVE experiment in Iași was focused on imagining reuse scenarios also through digital tools. The project’s focus was to convey the cultural and social mitigation of the city of Iași. The narrative dimension holds a very deep significance in the design process. The project aims to highlight the potential of the basement spaces and transform them into venues for alternative cultural experiences, while respecting the context and historical value of the site.

Team Young Creative Talents

COUNTRY	NAME	AREA OF KNOWLEDGE
ROMANIA	Mars Chirilă	Architecture
ROMANIA	Oana Arhip	Architecture
ROMANIA	Tudor Boicu	Graphic design & 3D modeling
ROMANIA	Andreea Ursache	Architecture
ROMANIA	Petra Carina Stadoleanu	Communication
ROMANIA	Radu Neacșu	Visual arts & photography
CROATIA	Ela Leko	Textile design
CROATIA	Lucija Furač	Art history & film studies
SLOVENIA	Aja Onuk	History & sociology
SLOVENIA	Lana Mihoci	Conservation & restoration of art
FINLAND	Elina Kilappa	Media studies & film
FINLAND	Linda Keränen	Fine arts & photography
ITALY	Federica Di Giambattista	Architecture
ITALY	Margherita Tacconelli	Cartoonist
SPAIN	Mariant Jiménez Cadet	Architecture
SPAIN	Victor Pérez	Architecture

Design Installations

The team of architects designed the furniture for the multicultural center, custom-made for the REVIVE experiment in Iași in a local workshop. They also coordinated all the artists in setting up the exhibition, providing technical support for the installations.

- A place to be

A place to be is more than just a seat — it's an invitation to pause, reflect, and connect with the space around you.

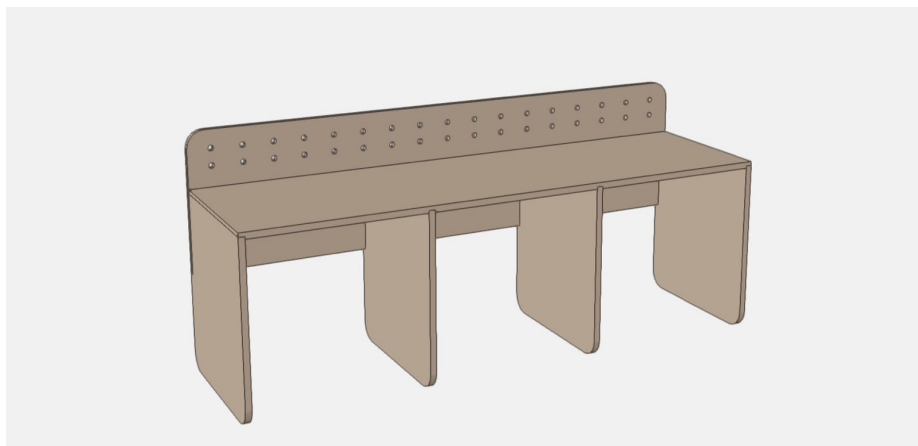
The seating was designed as a modular structure with a dual function. On one hand, it serves as a bench, allowing people to sit and watch the documentary in the dedicated room. On the other hand, the empty spaces within the structure have been fitted with tables and additional seats, which can be used as needed or stored away depending on the number of people in the room. This solution ensures flexibility and efficient use of space, providing both comfort and functionality in a single structure.

- A different step

It does not just lead into another space but it opens new possibilities. An invitation to pause and see things from another perspective.

Stairs are functional and transitional spaces, but through design, these areas can be transformed into places to pause, opening up different scenarios.

During the experiment, we observed that users' experience of this staircase was closely related to resting and sitting. It was decided to create a very wide step to allow people to sit and admire the fabric installation in front of them. Moreover, this otherwise anonymous place became a true observation space. These steps are not fixed to the floor, as the idea is to be able to move them according to spatial needs and future installations.



Artistic Installations

- Va, respira

The wall painting was proposed by one of the young artists, Margherita Tacconelli. The work was carried out as a team, since the surface to be covered was quite large. The composition illustrates the interaction between humans and the built environment, the city itself, while the colors also evoke the burning of coal inside the boilers at the far end of the hall, which produced heat for the entire building.

Below is the caption of the artwork:

"While somewhat changed throughout time, Iași's skyline continues to overlook its neighborhoods with quiet familiarity. The city unfolds in layers — streets, courtyards, and squares form a living fabric for the people to inhabit and frequent.

History does not sit still but moves, opening space for the future. Young generations reach out for its possibilities, curious for what they offer. Their paths wind through streets with enduring presence, yet their gaze is lifted toward what has not yet been built. Their aspirations bring together memory and desire, with the city as both ground and guide. As long as the city is in motion, the community is in becoming, reinventing itself continuously.

The title plays on a bilingual wordplay: in Italian, it sounds like a gentle invitation — "Go, breathe" — while in Romanian it becomes a silent promise: "he/she/it will breathe." Two languages, one breath shared between present and future."

- Camera Natura

Beneath the Palace of Culture lies its original power plant, operational since 1925. This underground layer once provided electricity and heating to the entire building. Today, it retains remnants of its industrial past. This is not a neutral space but one shaped by its history. Three large boilers dominate this relatively narrow space. The heat they produced circulated through a network of pipes, warming the Administrative Palace above. Now silent and cold, the boilers stand as monuments to the palace's industrial heritage. In this context, the boilers themselves are not the focus of the exhibition but rather a medium for artistic intervention. The micro-exhibition inside them intentionally stands in contrast with the industrial setting. Curated to evoke warmth and nature, it occupies a space where once heat was generated. The works are presented in a small, intimate format, measuring only eight and eleven centimeters in diameter. They are illuminated with a spotlight, which results in a concentrated yet diffused visual experience, only in close proximity and with careful observation. You are invited to approach closely and immerse yourself.



- Heart

The installation “Heart,” made with textile materials of different textures, was the concept worked on by several young talents, coordinated by the Croatian artist Ela Leko. The sculpture/installation is evocative because it represents both the social layers of a community and the human heart that pumps life through the body, just as the old machines in the room once provided heat and electricity to the building, thus ensuring its functionality. The technical aspects of the work were also overseen by the architects of the group. A metal framework was created, fixed to the wall and pillars, on which the fabrics were installed according to the design and effect intended by the artist.

Below is the caption of the artwork:

“A community is not simply a sum of individual parts, nor a group in which each part loses its individuality. When multiple perspectives and efforts find themselves in one space, interdependence occurs naturally and produces more than it takes away—it enriches everyone’s knowledge, capacity, and efficiency.

The heart installation represents the layered community of Iasi, the beating heart of the city. Its layers are the people and their skills coming together like growing hemp, where each participant retains uniqueness and room for unrestricted movement.

The warmth of the installation’s colors makes it reminiscent of a hearth, the fire of a home that invites both family members and guests to get together in pleasant company. The museum visitor is encouraged to come closer just the same.”

- Building Blocks

The documentary videos offer a glimpse into the many layers of the rich multicultural city of Iași. The footage captures intersections – moments where our understanding of the city and its diverse cultural heritage meets and connects. Our work does not claim to present a complete picture; rather, it reflects our encounters and conversations with individuals who form part of various cultural tapestries – each one a piece of the city’s society and history. The title “Building Blocks” speaks about the quiet architecture of belonging. Each person and each community add a distinct shape, a different texture — like stones in a living wall. These blocks are fitted through shared stories, daily gestures, routines and connections.

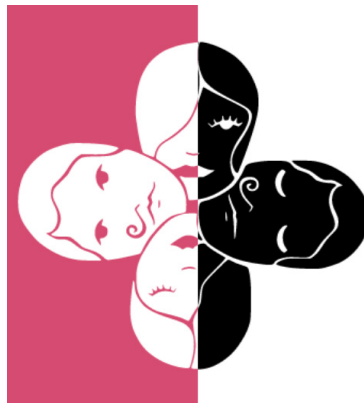


Cellino Attanasio

In Cellino Attanasio, the project ultimately acquired a strongly integrated dimension between participatory practice and architectural design. The work focused on the former Church of Santo Spirito, a decommissioned asset yet rich in identity value. I was primarily involved in the operational phases of the process. The recovery project is oriented toward the creation of a multifunctional civic and cultural center, through the design of multifunctional objects such as wooden boxes that serve as both seating and tables. Additionally, the concept of rebranding was explored, with the creation of a logo. This further defined the identity and character of the new space: a cultural hub open to the community, and it opened up potential future scenarios for local associations. Engagement with local institutions and stakeholders strengthened my skills in translating community needs into sustainable, flexible, and accessible design guidelines.

Visioning

REVIVE focused on the redevelopment of the former Church of Santo Spirito in Cellino Attanasio (Teramo), transforming it into a multifunctional space. Fourteen talented young people (aged 18 to 30, from across Europe), with diverse skills and backgrounds, proposed ideas to improve the use of the former Church of Santo Spirito. The young people and the local community created a synergy and utilized all resources to redevelop the site. One of the main goals of the REVIVE project was to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration through teamwork. Working together required overcoming language barriers, adapting to new contexts, and developing a shared vision. Each group was challenged to co-design and implement solutions aligned with the community's needs. The process fostered mutual learning and creative synergy, transforming the site's limitations into opportunities for cultural and functional reactivation.



Team Young Creative Talents

COUNTRY	NAME	AREA OF KNOWLEDGE
ROMANIA	Lucia Esanu	Cultural tourism
CROATIA	Paula Srdanović	Multimedia & UX design
CROATIA	Matea Križanović	Fine Arts
CROATIA	Mirela Hreniuc	Restoration and conservation
SLOVENIA	Aja Onuk	History & sociology
SLOVENIA	Tajda Hladnik	Visual communication
FINLAND	Sonja Parisaari	Media
FINLAND	Anni Kämäräinen	Media studies & advertising design
ITALY	Raffaele Pistilli	Sociology
ITALY	Giulia Montanaro	Engineer, PhD student in architecture
ITALY	Maddalena Muran	Landscape architect and urban planning
ITALY	Silvia Scarafoni	Sociology
ITALY	Francesca Aliprandi	Cultural heritage
SPAIN	Rosario Vicente	Architecture
SPAIN	María Martínez-Artero Peñalver	Architecture

Installations

- Wooden mezzanine

The mezzanine represents one of the most significant interventions of the REVIVE project. Built with wood, it integrates with respect and harmony into the back wall of the space, enhancing the existing architecture without altering its historical value. Designed to accommodate audio and video technicians during events, concerts, and performances, the mezzanine was conceived as a lightweight yet functional structure, capable of offering a strategic and well-integrated position for the technical management of shows. This intervention is the result of collaborative work between young international professionals and local experts, with particular attention to aesthetics, material sustainability, and the reversibility of the structure, respecting the characteristics of the historic building. Its presence makes the space more versatile, allowing the former church to be used contemporarily as a cultural and creative venue, without compromising its symbolic and architectural value.

- Modular tables

Drawing from the rich heritage of Abruzzese ceramics, we translated the traditional motifs into hand-painted expressions on wood. These pieces not only echo tradition but also breathe life into the modular forms of our special made modular furniture, creating a dialogue between past and present. The process began with priming the wood, followed by sketching the pattern outlines, and carefully painting them with specialized wood paint. To ensure durability and functionality, we finished each piece with a protective varnish. The concept of multipurpose modular furniture is functional for this location and it can be adapted to any event and to support a variety of uses. These pieces are not merely furniture; they are the soul of the project. They are at the core of the project, as they allow the space to be transformed according to the needs of the people.

- Rebranding Cellino

The logo was Inspired by the distinctive clay masks on the church's façade. These masks in the logo serve as a bridge between past and future – connecting the rich heritage of the space with its newly envisioned purpose.

- Outside area

The outdoor area next to the former Church has been revitalized through small interventions: lighting, new plants, cleaning, creating a space where people can enjoy the viewpoint and host events, especially during the summer.



Similarities and Differences with Other Experiments

The main differences among the various experiments emerge through key elements that inevitably intertwine to shape the overall process.

First, the place itself, with its historical, cultural, and territorial specificities, offers different frameworks of meaning and conditions the very nature of the practices.

Next is the concept of space, understood not only as a physical location but also as a symbolic and functional context, which influences the nature and evolution of the practices.

The community plays a decisive role—the network of people involved, with their characteristics, needs, and forms of participation, capable of determining the rooting and social recognition of each experiment.

Another element is the working team, its composition, the skills involved, and its ability to cooperate in generating shared visions.

This is directly linked to the vision: the cultural and strategic horizon guiding choices and giving direction to the process.

Finally, the issue of continuity is crucial, i.e., the possibility of transforming the experiment into a lasting process, capable of consolidating itself and leaving a mark beyond its initial phase.

My participation in the Cellino experiment was voluntary, whereas in the other experiments I was selected to participate. This allowed me to observe both similarities and differences with the other projects. Cellino is a historic village with few inhabitants, which favored effective engagement both in managing ideas and in creating objects. The community's collaboration was strong and heartfelt. For the residents of Cellino, this experiment represented a significant event of revitalization, sharing, and change. The community reacted positively to the changes, which I believe is a strong sign of resurgence for historic villages that over time have faced depopulation and a consequent lack of services and cultural or recreational spaces.

In such contexts, initiating change is often difficult, especially in places deeply rooted in tradition. There are unwritten rules: some residents do not believe in change and reject innovation, while others want change but lack the means and knowledge to achieve it due to limited initiatives and few people willing and able to act. REVIVE in Cellino was a successful experiment that continues to have an impact. The Santo Spirito Hub has become a central village space where cultural events, children's workshops, guided tours, and social gatherings take place. With a few targeted actions, much has been achieved for a community eager to grow and write a new story while preserving traditions.

In Tržič, the context was similar to Cellino: the community participated in generating ideas but less in co-creation, as a professional construction company handled the implementation. The community was more present in expressing wishes for the use of spaces and in general participation in the REVIVE event, including during the stay of young talents in the village.

Another important factor was the space itself. Tržič and Cellino had both public outdoor spaces and more private indoor areas. Outdoor design is more effective in this type of experiment because it offers tangible results and immediately demonstrates the potential of the places. In Iași, the space

was indoors, making it harder to shape ideas into projects; nothing could be left to chance, and everything required precise definition. Being a city, it was also more difficult to engage the community. The experiment focused on showcasing the different minority groups present, but there was not real community involvement—perhaps because in larger cities it is harder to feel part of small social and architectural changes. Still, the revitalization in Iași succeeded despite indoor challenges, as the change was concrete and effectively reflected the social character of the city. The place and space strongly influenced people's engagement and the experiment's outcomes. Participation and sharing of proposals for the revitalization of public spaces can go beyond the constraints of established regulations, which are often insufficient to ensure quality and efficiency. Discussion and potential collaboration among various institutional and non-institutional actors, through new public and private "work platforms," can become the engine for new configurations and conceptualizations of collective urban space. In this way, opportunities arise to reconstruct urban voids, fill them with meaning, and provide responses to public life needs using new forms and materials. The working team was cohesive in all experiments. Cultural differences were seen as an added value rather than a limitation. One might think that young people from different social and cultural backgrounds could not contribute to change, but this diversity was actually key to the experiments' success. Moreover, in Cellino and Tržič, coordinators helped maintain a cohesive and linear process, whereas in Iași, working in a public museum with many stakeholders, finding a common guideline was a significant challenge. Regarding continuity, I visited Cellino after the experiment, and indeed, the Santo Spirito Hub remains a renewed space, recognized by the community and used for events and initiatives.

Architecture as a Relational and Transformative Tool

The experiences shared common factors despite typological, cultural, social, and spatial differences. These experiences shaped my vision of architecture as a situated practice, based on relational processes rather than formal results. Intervention in the built environment cannot ignore collective memories, future expectations, and latent conflicts inhabiting the spaces. Architecture, in this sense, is not only a technical response but a social activation tool, capable of generating new forms of cohesion, shared responsibility, and care. Transforming a building or abandoned place gains meaning when done together with the community that inhabits it: only then can it become truly lived space with new significance. Designing, therefore, also means creating new relationships, enabling mutual learning, and restoring trust in local territories and imaginaries. The architect assumes the role of facilitator: not only a designer of forms but an interpreter of desires and mediator of possibilities.

Only through active involvement can the transformation of a building or urban space generate real social impact, becoming an occasion for care, belonging, and renewal.



Reflections

- Improving the Methodology

The overall methodological framework is logically structured. Areas requiring attention for future experiments include:

Phase 1 – ONLINE CONTEXT STUDY

The preliminary study and design took place mainly online, involving only the young talents and project partners, not the community or directly interested parties. Whenever possible, a site visit for local young talents could foster direct understanding and engagement. Questionnaires should address not only the current state but also the community's aspirations, creating a more defined vision and concept.

Phase 2 – ON-SITE EXPERIMENTATION

A dedicated and qualified figure is necessary for both architectural and social aspects. Daily reflection sessions can help assess the project's progress and overall direction. At the experiment's closure, participants should share observations on team growth and the perceived value of their work for residents and other stakeholders. Engagement with local enterprises also facilitated broader participation and success.

- Guidelines and Future Developments

Documenting the REVIVE experiment, its activities, and lessons learned is crucial. Guidelines should be shareable so that all actors contribute to maintaining and extending the work, even in provisional solutions. Young talents could draft a basic methodology—a site-specific manual that

is partially replicable for general methods in other locations—and act as promoters for future revitalization initiatives.

Future developments could address contemporary challenges, such as:

- Assessing barriers (economic, environmental, cultural, social, regulatory) to market adoption of the solutions compared to conventional renovation processes, and proposing ways to overcome them.

- Quantifying environmental, economic, social, cultural, financial, and regulatory impacts of processes, methods, and techniques, considering the local context.

- Designing using sustainable materials.

- Sharing REVIVE concepts and solutions with professionals during experimentation (roundtables, site visits, participation in final events).

- Creating a shareable, online-accessible manual, replicable on-site in various formats (e.g., REVIVE Festival).

Conclusions

I firmly believe that art, architecture, and culture, in their many forms, are tools for reflection, critique, and imagining better futures. Participatory design experiences add value to formal design. Aesthetics can be combined with belonging, community, care, and empathy. Historic villages can become attractive cultural hubs. Participatory design is a tool for tangible change and improvement in our cities and places. No change is impossible when you can imagine it.

Building Memories

Creating both spatial and interpersonal memory has been key in these experiments. Without help, talent, and sharing, none of this would have been possible. I have a personal motto: "REVIVE IS A STATE OF MIND"—beyond talent and creativity, it is a passionate, immersive approach. It has taught me to see potential in anonymous places and people from different countries and backgrounds. Cultural exchange is fundamental; diversity is not a limitation but a strength, fostering sharing. For this reason, I have built a memory with each participant and wish to thank everyone who contributed to my personal growth—you will remain deeply in my heart.

- Coordinators

Graziano Di Crescenzo - Mercedes Galiana Agulló - Vid Ratajc - Andreja Rauch - Coralia Costas - Mauro Vanni - Alessandro Perfetti - Cristina Cerasi

- Young Talents

Dana Lupan - Petra Carina Stadoleanu - Ela Leko - Aja Onuk - Neža Livk - Christian Lausund - Petriina Kiiskinen - Angelica Nanni - Angela Mazamoren - Victor Pérez - Lucia Esanu - Mariant Jiménez Cadet - Mars Chirilă - Oana Arhip - Tudor Boicu - Andreea Ursache - Radu Neacșu - Lucija Furač - Lana Mihoci - Elina Kilappa - Linda Keränen - Margherita Tacconelli - Silvia Scarafoni - Francesca Aliprandi - Rosario Vicente - María Martínez-Artero Peñalver - Anton Jakob Bonča - Žana Korenjak.



The European project REVIVE has represented both a challenge and an opportunity for Itaca Association: to regenerate a historic place through the power of youth creativity and community participation. This volume was created to bear witness to the energies put into play, the learnings, the human and professional relationships, and the transformations—whether small or significant—that took place in Cellino Attanasio and in the places involved in the project. It is not a simple report, but a collective narrative that intertwines the voices of those who made this experience possible. The idea came directly from the participants and directors, driven by the desire to leave a record of the experiences they lived and the lessons they learned along the way. Our hope is that these pages may serve as both inspiration and support for anyone who chooses to engage, with curiosity and passion, in exploring intercultural themes and approaches. In other words, that they may become a kind of “toolbox” for those who work with dedication and sensitivity to bring to life places that strengthen the identity of the local community while fostering inclusion and civic coexistence.



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

