

NEWS

PROJECT

CAPACITyES - Children  
Against Poverty Awake  
the CItY Education  
System

📍 Bergamo, Italy

TOPIC

Urban poverty

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## Participate, prepare, accompany and carry out

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Implementing projects accepted by local communities and, consequently, characterized by different types of sustainability, requires a long and methodical work of preparation, but above all the involvement of key local actors and the opening of interdisciplinary and interinstitutional dialogue. Participating, listening, but also accompanying the involved families through this process is a necessary and long step, which, however repay through the success of the public investment.

The CAPACITyES project is working to provide sustainable solutions to problems that have a considerable level of complexity. Cohousing in itself is not an easy choice even when families spontaneously choose this way of living. Sharing a public good is understandable, and we are used to it, sharing some dimensions of living, which concern the private sphere, are not so obvious. Initiating a cohousing experiment starting from the same cultural assets, on a voluntary basis, is the normality of this type of experience. In the CAPACITyES project this cohousing experience presents several unknowns. The project is not spontaneous, but promoted by the public administration, by the Municipality of Bergamo. The families involved are in precarious economic conditions. Most of the families selected, the target group of the project, do not have a long-lasting link with Italian culture. Finally, the families of the target group belong to different cultures, distant in terms of customs, traditions and religious beliefs. Keeping this group together requires a great professionalism that the CAPACITyES project is proving to be able to put in place every day. There are some open questions, like:

- **How to keep this group together?**
- **How to keep them motivated to experiment with this innovative path?**
- **How can we respond to the primary needs of these families at a time when the pandemic has aggravated their already precarious economic situation even more?**

The project path is innovative and therefore the answers are somewhat found in the previous experience and knowledge of the project partners, but many answers are found by acting, through a learning by doing path: innovation requires risk-taking and also exploring off the beaten path.

The great help to families, and the daily work with families, is carried out by the intercultural mediators in collaboration with the local system of social services of the Municipality of Bergamo.



Intercultural mediators meet the target families of the CAPACITYES project.

A series of continuous actions that strengthen families day after day and prepare them to the experience of Cohousing, but also to consolidate the ability of these families to become economically stable and to fit into the local social, cultural and productive context:

- Implementation of individual educational support: families follow-up through individual meetings with educators and intercultural mediators
- Organization of [monthly group meetings with women from the families](#) involved
- Implementation of a course preparing for the labor market and addressed to unemployed family members ([especially women](#))



Training the target families, women are easily achievable and more available to understand how to improve their skills for the local labor market

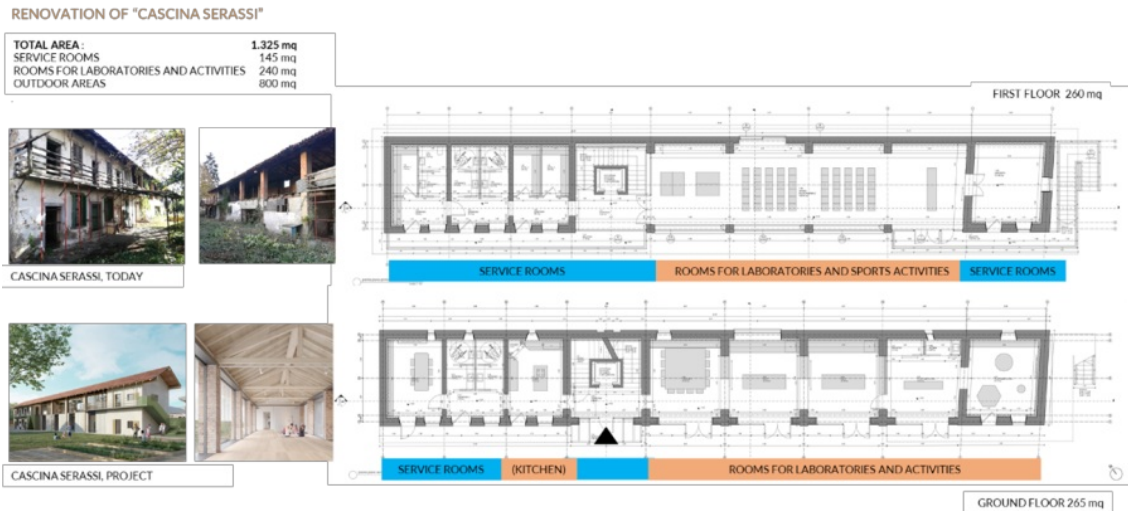
These actions prepare families to get to know each other and to strengthen their community spirit, when they find themselves living together, they must be ready and [able to manage the various problems to be faced related to cohousing.](#)

Finally, it is not forgotten that behind an action of urban regeneration there is also the work of technical design and the reconversion of spaces. The cohousing project will take place inside a building that has remained abandoned and is being rehabilitated to accommodate this new housing function. The first group of families selected, the architects selected by the MUA and the co-design experts reflected on the Executive Project related to the co-housing facility. Architects and planners in charge, [started to work on the executive design](#) under the supervision of the Public Work Department of MUA. With respect to this point, there are several fundamental issues that must be addressed for a successful regenerative action:

1. The dialogue between technicians and families, to understand how to organize spaces (details for the executive

project)

2. The dialogue with local communities. The project must not descend like a UFO in the context of the civic fabric but must be explained to the residents of the neighbourhoods affected by this innovative and transformative urban action.
3. Discussion with families to understand what / how to share in common spaces
4. Findings on the external verification and revision of the Executive Project
5. Start of refurbishment activities



Plans for the redevelopment of the former hospital in Borgo Palazzo, sketching cohousing functions.

As anticipated, an important aspect of participation is linked to the contextualization of this cohousing action within the reference neighborhood (Borgo Palazzo) and the close neighbourhoods (Boccaleone and Celadina). In this sense, [the participatory evaluation meetings](#) of the project actions help a lot to bring the initiative within the neighbourhoods and the city.

The evaluation groups bring out many interesting ideas about the needs present in the neighbourhoods, but also numerous new ideas aimed at better integration between the project interventions and the local community.

In the first evaluation meeting a specific question was asked to the participants, the stakeholders, of the neighbourhoods involved:

**How do you evaluate the temporary cohousing proposed by the CAPACITYES project, as a solution aimed at favouring housing autonomy for families in difficulty?**



Participatory evaluation meetings, discussing with the neighbourhoods' stakeholders the proposed solutions (Borgo Palazzo I)

From this first meeting the following considerations were shared:

- The project responds to an important and urgent educational and housing need

- The temporary solution aspect of the cohousing experience appears as a sensible action (living, but also training families to stay in the local labor and housing market).
- It is hoped that this experience will not remain limited to this district, but can be replicated, both in Bergamo, but also elsewhere.
- It is proposed to deliver to the families who go through this process a sort of “certification” that can help them to easily place themselves in a new housing and working situation at the end of the cohousing period.



Participatory evaluation meetings, discussing with the neighbourhoods' stakeholders the proposed solutions (Borgo Palazzo II)

Dialogue and participation are at the foundation of:

- the process of preparing families for the cohousing experience (design, use and sharing of living spaces),
- the families' empowerment path (for the working context, but also to manage coexistence in a multicultural context)
- the constructive path of the spaces and the contextualization of this innovative experience in the concerned neighbourhoods.

Work in progress!

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