

JOURNAL

PROJECT

CAPACITyES - Children
Against Poverty Awake
the CItY Education
System

📍 Bergamo, Italy

TOPIC

Urban poverty

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"Hey, teacher, leave them kids alone"

See on UIA
website



The CAPACITyES project focuses on the fight against urban poverty. The added value of this approach lies in the fact that the project puts on the table different ingredients to find the right balance and combination, to address the problems induced by poverty in disadvantaged families. Most of these families are foreigners and are part of the latest migratory waves that have affected Europe. Furthermore, the project works together with children making them protagonists of the urban regeneration process and through it involves them in an inter-cultural dialogue.

Executive summary

Urban poverty is one the most crucial problem affecting Italian cities, particularly since the economic crisis of 2008 resulting in a drastic reduction of resources. Bergamo, with its 121,000 inhabitants, is not excluded from this situation, showing an average of 11,4% of families living in poverty condition, a percentage that skyrockets to 57% when considering foreigner families.

From this scenario comes CAPACITyES project which addresses urban poverty mainly focusing on children educational poverty.

The challenge is to disrupt the mechanisms underlying urban poverty and the resulting inequalities through an innovative approach focused on children perspective. Studies indeed show that children are the most vulnerable age group when considering the at-risk-of-poverty-and-social-exclusion rate. CAPACITyES will work on the children helping to break the cycle of poverty tackling disadvantage in early years in order to reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion in the future.

The CAPACITyES project intends to address urban educational poverty in a multiple perspective, taking into account different dimensions: housing, education, art, sport and culture, through active participation and inclusion of the citizens.

The interconnected solutions are as follow:

- A Co-Housing facility for families with children with personal and shared spaces to live in. Their presence will be temporary and aimed at supporting them in dealing with housing difficulties, staying on the labor market and exercising full autonomy;
- a creative HubForKids that will be focused on improving children's cognitive and non-cognitive skills, proposing artistic, sport, music and cultural activities, and performances targeted for different age groups. Children will also benefit from scholarships, as an economic help;

- site specific Artistic Installations to be located inside the Co-Housing building, the HubforKids and in different city spots becoming a single huge site-specific installation aimed at connecting the centre and the suburbs, by facilitating their cross-contamination.

The project aims to achieve the following results:

- Sustainable temporary co-housing solutions, mitigating the situation of fragility and segregation of parts of the families waiting for social housing;
- Empowerment and social inclusion through participative and active involvement of beneficiaries;
- Enhanced vulnerable families future income capacity and job opportunities through courses and professional training;
- New recreational spaces dedicated to children and young people, where different cultural, sports, musical and artistic offers can be lever to their full exercise of the right to culture;
- Reshaped urban landscape of selected deprived areas using art for a new idea of relationship with public space.

The project partnership is made up of these territorial actors:

- Municipality of Bergamo
- Social Cooperative RUAH - cooperative
- Social Cooperative Patronato San Vincenzo - cooperative
- Generations FA Cooperative - cooperative
- Professional Training Association PSV
- BEST Institut - private training centre
- ISMU - Foundation for Initiatives and Studies on multi ethnicity - private organisation
- CSI - Italian Sporting Center of Bergamo - private organisation
- PURELAB - private enterprise

Children protagonists between lockdown and freedom

In previous publications relating to the CAPACITYES project, we noted how complex it was, but still possible, within certain limits, to involve the first protagonists of the project: the children. The children who have the task of awakening, in the context of this project, the city and proposing new and innovative solutions to combat the many forms of poverty. The project continues to be characterized by a rhythm that could be defined as “stop & go”, where the stop is called every time the infections start to rise again. **Despite this alternating rhythm, in the last year, especially in the summer and autumn months, many meetings with school children and teenagers have been held.** Their contribution was transversal, they contributed to all the different regeneration actions triggered by CAPACITYES, but their role was extremely relevant in the project of the cultural corridor of murals (see in this regard the zoom in number 1 which specifies precisely this aspect of the project), while now it is essential in defining spaces, functions and services of the Hub 4 kids. The focus is on children's mental and cultural freshness, on their ability to imagine, in fact, Children's imagination can make our cities more welcoming and harbingers of inclusion-oriented messages, of symbolic meanings that can enrich our experience of citizenship.



We have seen in the zoom in no.1 as one of the three key urban regeneration projects implemented in the CAPACITYES project, the cultural corridor consisting of murals that links the two major regeneration interventions, the Serassi farmhouse (Hub 4kids) and the old hospital pavilion of Borgo Palazzo (the cohousing building), was inspired by the drawings developed by the Bergamo school children in the workshops held in the summer of 2020, when it was possible to work outside in the open.

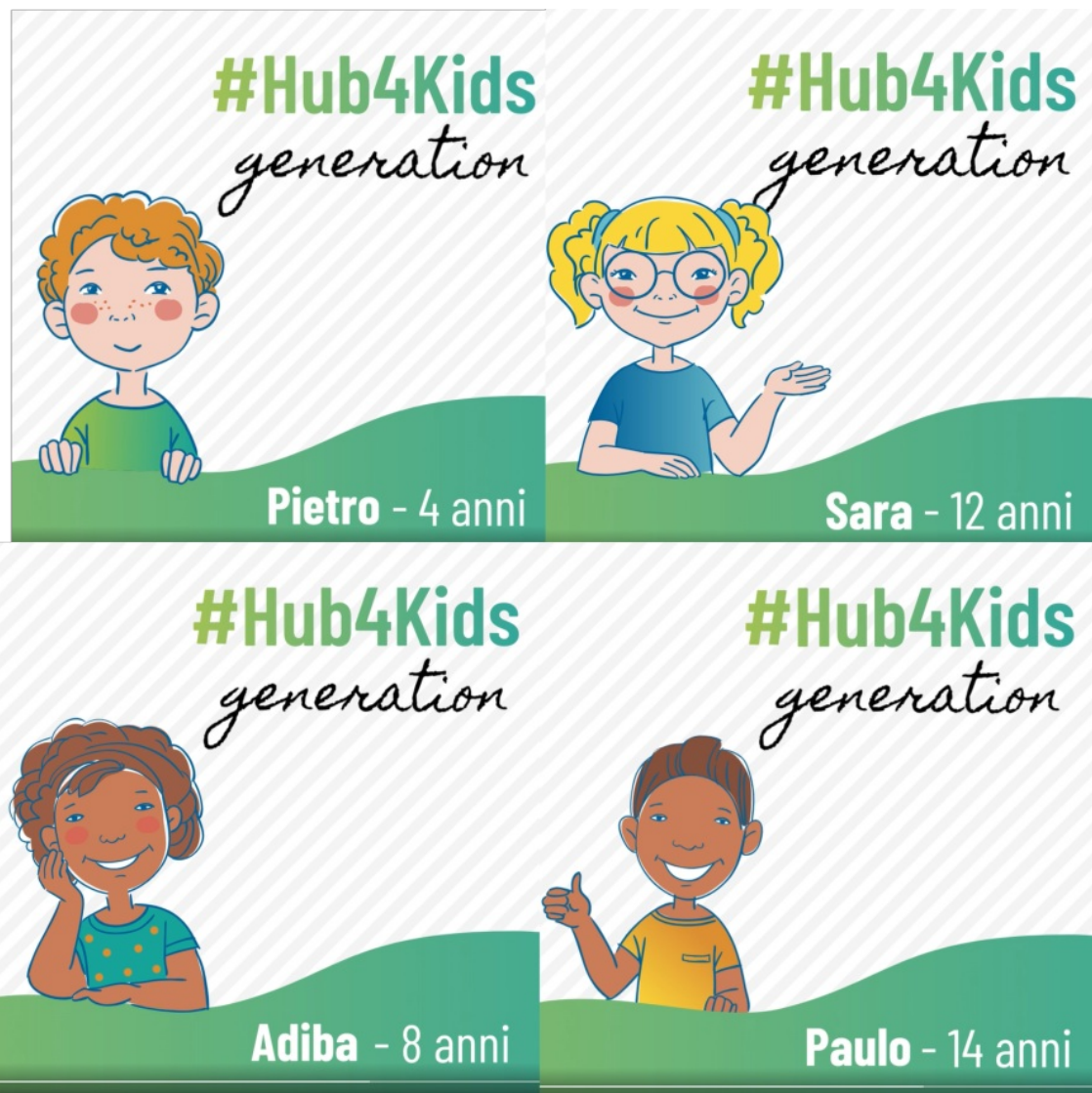
Starting from autumn 2020, the involvement of children has slowed down due to the fact that the rise in COVID infections has made activities with schools difficult. From this point on, **the project began to develop new skills to keep the flow of creative energy from the children continuous.** In this period, the project partners have concentrated on developing targeted interviews with children in order to set up an action group that has been called the "Hub4kids Generation", precisely in view of the future aggregation center that will arise at Cascina Serassi. The work done with children has the characteristics of being intercultural and intergenerational, here are some excerpts from the interviews that were made to children and adolescents:

Paulo from Bolivia (14 years old)

Adiba from Morocco (8 years old)

Pietro from Bergamo (4 years old)

Sara from Bergamo (12 years old)



Interviewed kids' avatars, the project Capacities preparing for the Hub4Kids

The children involved had to answer three simple questions

1. **Introduce yourself**
2. **What are your interests?**
3. **What would you like to find in the 4 kids hub?**

These three simple questions, however, made it possible to better understand the stories of future "users" of Hub4kids to learn and classify their main interests, but also their expectations. Information of fundamental importance, both for the architects who are working on designing the spaces, and for those who will work to be able to structure services that truly respond to the demand that comes from those who will experience these regenerated and recontextualized spaces of Cascina Serassi on a daily basis.

Hub 4 kids: Tales, design and innovative services

The regeneration path of Casina Serassi, as indeed the redevelopment process of the hospital pavilion for cohousing in Borgo Palazzo, constitutes a complex planning process in which the various challenges open in an urban innovation project can be ascertained and measured: From procedural, partnership and inclusion aspects. In particular, in the case of the Cascina, the place identified for the construction of Hub 4 Kids, it is currently expected that the project will be inaugurated at the end of the summer of this year (2022). In this stage of the project the following activities are under implementation:

- Meetings with stakeholders
- Meeting with municipal educational services
- Approval of the Executive Project by the external verifier

- Start of refurbishment

The partners involved in the future management of the HubForKids, have started a path of involvement and collaboration with the local services dedicated to the minors, such as schools, youth centers and stakeholders of the local community. These activities are planned with the aim to develop - with the largest number of actors possible - the Governance Plan of the Hub. The photos below show us the current state of the Cascina. Currently, this building is in a situation of complete abandonment, but it has structural, formal and even landscape features that justify its redevelopment and refurbishment.

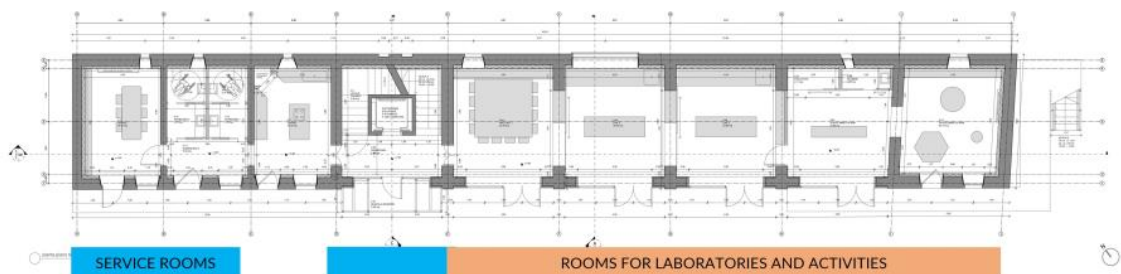


The facade of the former farmhouse (Cascina) on the street front

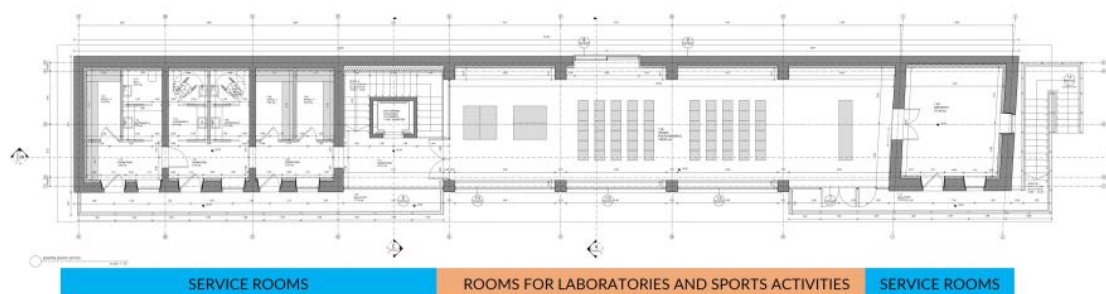


The internal facade of the Cascina and its garden

The new frame of the internal spaces, as shown in the planimetries here below, will make it possible to meet the services that were requested in the workshops that involved the direct beneficiaries of these new spaces and services: the children and adolescents of the Bergamo schools.



Planimetry of the groundfloor, the new envisaged functions and services



Planimetry of the 1st floor, the new envisaged functions and services

The solutions identified for Cascina Serassi, the future Hub 4 Kids, define a set of innovative services for children and adolescents that will have an impact that will go beyond the scale of the proximity neighborhoods. The Hub 4 Kids is a place that speaks to and involves the entire Bergamo community. This project creates a context of intergenerational discussion and offers specific services, also designed for age groups, to the new emerging generations. All this does not arise from top-down planning, but from a highly structured path of inclusion which

guarantees the acceptance of this project by the various local actors involved, but which also responds to an exercise in identifying the real needs of children and of their families. As an example of this process it is worth listing the activities already completed for the redevelopment and design of this new innovative urban place:

- Children Hub - desk research
- "Postcards from the future" initiatives
- Stakeholders auditions
- Co-design training to trainers
- Co-design workshop with children: "Il gira cultura" tool
- Meetings with organizations / stakeholders which develop and manage services for children between 0 - 6 years
- Workshops, events, courses for children realized in different sides of the city to engaged children in the future Hub activities and to widespread the knowledge of the Capacities projects among families and children;
- Silk-screened fables: 3 workshops for children between 3 - 6 years old

The regeneration path of the "Cascina Serassi" has had moments of difficulty not so much linked to the processes of technical planning or to the processes of public acquisition or to conflicts on the destination of the building, here the challenge was above all to be able to intercept the will of children and adolescents. The consultation process of this important target group had an evolution "stop and go", for the simple reason that the meetings were possible only in compliance with the restrictions imposed by the pandemic and this necessarily upset the original plans of the proposal. Again, the current results achieved, and the fact that this project is starting and entering its implementation phase, has demonstrated the remarkable resilience of the Capacities project. This is thanks above all to the initiatives of those partners who have dealt with the care of children and adolescents through various events, it is worth remembering:

- [Buttiamoci senza rete](#) (An event that involved children and teenagers aged 6 to 14 in the "Atelier Scuola Circo" and "3D Printing" workshops).
- [Primo gioco](#) (organized by [Csi Committee](#) of Bergamo, together with the partners of Capacities with the aim of letting children aged 3 to 6 experience the practice of motor activities through games).
- [Favole serigrafate](#) (for a few weeks the project partners involved children aged 3 to 6 in creative *narraserigrafia* activities).

Before cohousing

Adaptive reuse is the process of renewing and revitalizing buildings for sustainable new uses and contemporary functions, other than those initially envisioned in order to address present-day needs. What is happening with the Capacities project is an adaptive reuse contextualised within a very well structured urban regeneration path that brings into play different aspects:

- The problem of urban poverty and housing,
- the inclusion of migrant families,
- the involvement and sensitization of future citizens (children and adolescents) towards these urban issues often held on the sidelines of the main political discussions.

An integrated process capable of opening a dialogue between art and politics, between grassroots movements, community actions and the technical offices of the Municipality. A path that is keeping together a target of families with daily emergencies and a strictly structured path, thanks to the help of social services, but also to the daily work of the partners involved. This deliberately complex regenerative formula is working and the place where its full application can be seen is certainly the conversion of the Borgo Palazzo hospital pavilion. In this place all the main nodes of the various problems to be faced come to a head, here the main challenges converge. The greatest challenges of an innovative approach can be found in this recovery of the hospital pavilion. On the occasion of my last visit as an expert, I was able to attend and actively participate in a significant moment of participation that saw the presence of local stakeholders and neighborhood associations, not only

from Borgo Palazzo, but also from the neighboring neighborhoods (Boccaleone and Celadina). Together with the local actors involved, the regeneration path of the pavilion proposed in the UIA Capacities project was evaluated in progress. The Municipality of Bergamo together with the partners of the Capacities project asked some simple questions to start the dialogue with the participants, such as:

How do you evaluate the temporary cohousing proposed by the Capacities project as a solution aimed at fostering the housing autonomy of some families in difficulty?

The opening of a dialogue on concrete evidence and proposals for structured solutions immediately created the necessary climate to start a stable participatory approach capable of guaranteeing the information necessary to give sustainability, but also ownership, to the design choices proposed by the Municipality's technicians.



The MUA representative and the UIA Expert explain to the local stakeholders the innovative elements of this cohousing experience in Borgo Palazzo



Dialogue and co-work in the participatory workshop (Borgo Palazzo)



The technical design for the refurbishment of the former hospital pavilion (Borgo Palazzo, cohousing) and of the Cascina Serassi (Hub 4 kids)

The meeting with the stakeholders, the first of a series of workshops with local associations and interest groups, went very well, also because these first selected stakeholders are used to collaborating with the Municipality of Bergamo and represent that part of the local community who has a constructive attitude. However, the process will also have to be extended to groups and associations that are present in the area, but less used to sharing decision-making processes. It is essential not only to inform the inhabitants of the neighborhood, but build together the “sense of belonging and sharing” of the project and balance, sometimes recalibrate, through the process of local participation, the objectives to be achieved in the ongoing urban transformation.

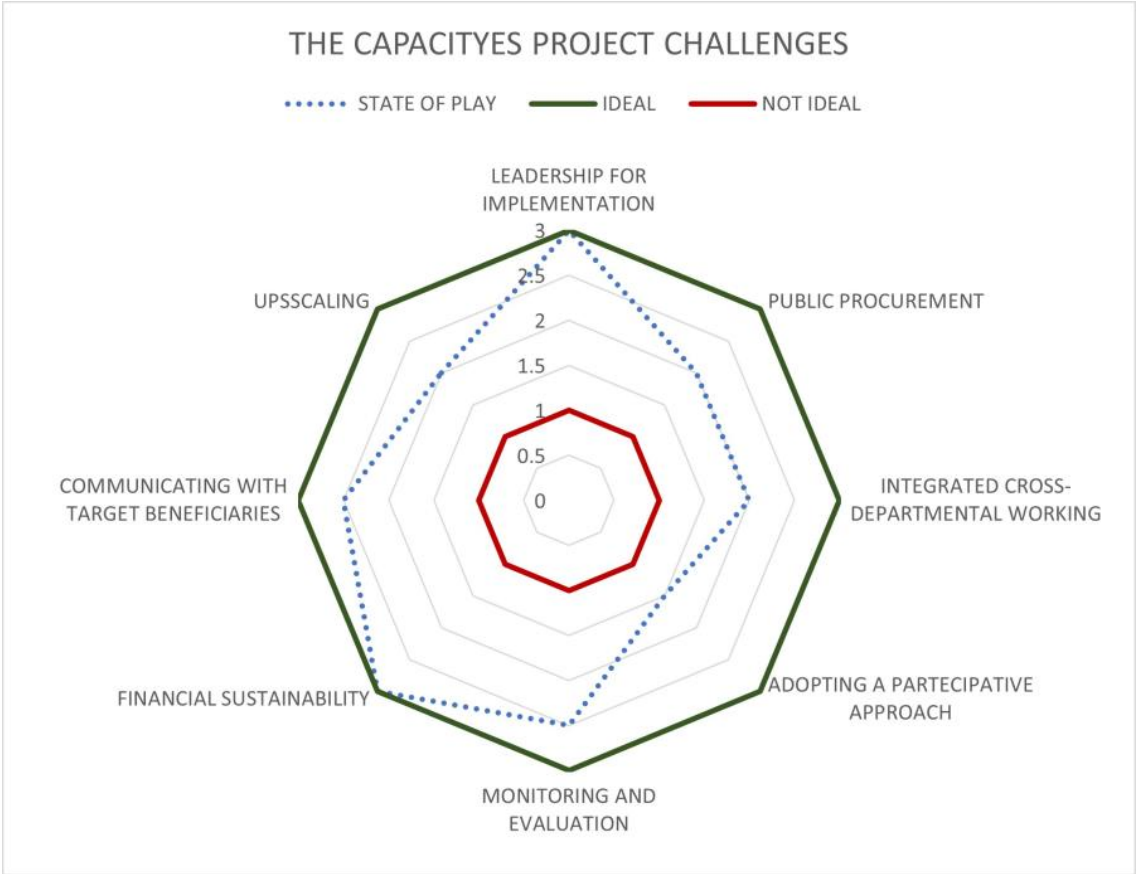
Parallel to this work that the MUA is coordinating with local stakeholders, as can be read in detail in [the last web article published last December](#), the other partners continue to work together with the future guests of the pavilion that will be redeveloped.

An approach that integrates different aspects of planning and makes us understand how much work of a cultural, social, training, participatory technical design, sharing and local rooting actions must be done before being able to settle families in this new one, and innovative, housing context.

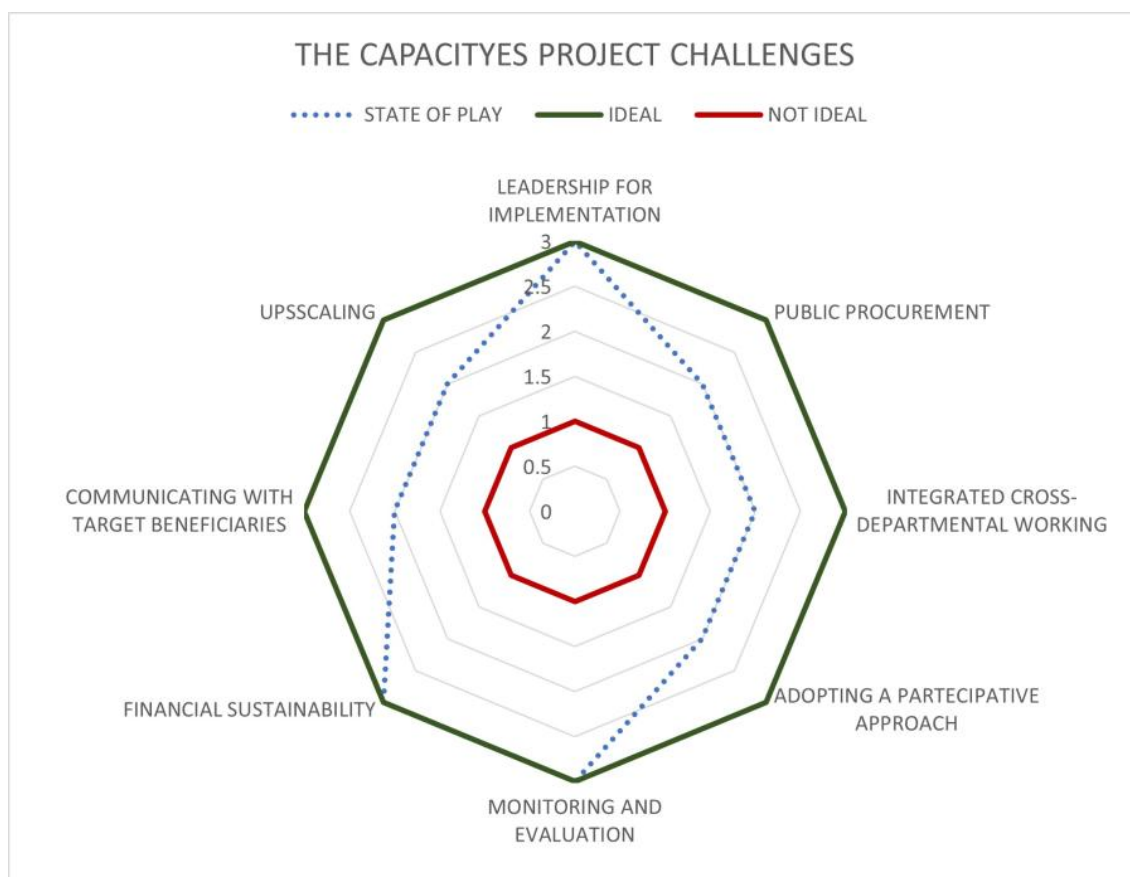
Update on the status of the main challenges

Compared to the previous diamond of challenges, published in [Journal #1](#), which summarizes the state of play of the open challenges in the Capacities project, there have been changes in this last year of activity. The project confirms a great confidence and competence in all those aspects related to LEADERSHIP FOR IMPLEMENTATION, the MUA team has firmly in hand the management of project activities and also the coordination of the partnership, including the management of critical situations. In fact, if generally, the project is improving its skills in facing the challenges, some of them are determining some criticisms, which requires more engagement in decision making. The criticisms are above all in the MONITORING AND EVALUATION and in the ADOPTING A PARTICIPATIVE APPROACH. These two important assets of the project have certainly not deteriorated, but let's say they have not even taken that expected step forward. The participatory processes and the involvement of local communities, as stated above, are starting well, but the partner who was in charge of managing this operation has withdrawn from the project. The management has promptly put in place an alternative solution, but in any case there will be some delay connected to this aspect, finally, the partner who is withdrawing also had some responsibility on MONITORING AND EVALUATION. The next few months will have to focus on improving these two new aspects to bring them back to excellent levels on all other points. In fact, certainly there has been a considerable dialogue with the TARGET BENEFICIARIES, despite the many restrictions related to COVID. As expressed on other occasions, the Capacities project is showing a remarkable ability to be resilient and to always find a way to keep involved within the project the target beneficiaries (especially the children and the families who will have to start experimenting with cohousing). The interest perceived for the project and its first results favors

the potential of this project to be replicated both in the national and in the European context. This project is launching several new examples of how to manage an urban regeneration process, giving a lot of space in the soft, relational, training and community building components from below. Its set of components, both of real physical transformation (the murals, the farmhouse and the pavilion) and generation of new urban functions and services, defines conditions in the territory that are favorable to the dialogue between different policies, usually sectorial, and therefore becomes an example of how to implement the much-requested integrated territorial approach in practice. Only by considering this aspect, the Capacities project is a candidate to be a perfect practice to be taken as a reference for building urban regeneration paths strongly immersed in the contemporary challenges of European cities. Let's conclude this issue making a comparison between the previous and the current diamond of challenges, here below.



The current state of play of challenges in the Capcityes project



The state of challenges one year ago.

The table here below provides a detailed explanation of the faced challenges:

CHALLENGE	LEVEL OF RISK	DESCRIPTION
LEADERSHIP FOR IMPLEMENTATION	LOW	The team is improving its management and confidence with the tools, both administrative and financial, inherent in to the UIA program. The second year was also very difficult to manage the project due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, especially for activities with children. The project management team has always found the ability to change underway and find viable alternatives whenever an obstacle has arisen. One year later, it is an even stronger team.
PUBLIC PROCUREMENT	MEDIUM	A key CAPACITYES step already has been completed and two other, which involve a path of design and construction of not exactly simple renovations, are entering the implementation phase. Up to now, the management of public procurement by the Municipality of Bergamo has been exemplary. At this moment there are no major problems from this point of view.

INTEGRATED CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL WORKING	MED IUM	In the first part of the project, because of the COVID restrictions, a lot of “horizontal integrated actions” had to be postponed. In this second year this component of the cross-departmental dialogue has been possible and reinforced, especially in the realm of the requalification of the former hospital Pavillon and of the Cascina Serassi. The dialogue between the municipality designers and the other involved stakeholders, private and at level of the local community was also important.
ADOPTING A PARTICIPATIVE APPROACH	MED IUM	The attitude of the project team, but also of all the other partners, to invest decisively in participatory actions and in the involvement of stakeholders and dialogue with neighborhood communities remained unchanged. In this second year, the crucial steps in which the local communities will have to deal with such as the transformations induced by the CAPACITYES project are intensifying. Unfortunately, one of the project partners who should have carried out an activity of three of these actions had to give up the project, but alternative solutions were immediately put in place. Therefore, even in this respect the project does not present any risk situations to highlight.
MONITORING AND EVALUATION	MED IUM	In this respect, the project is experiencing a moment of transition. In fact, the partner responsible for this activity has withdrawn from the project, so the activities within the partnership are being reorganized. Despite this defection, the first evaluation meeting with local stakeholders was nevertheless held with more than satisfactory results. This aspect must be given priority in the coming months of the project.
FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY	LOW	More and more consensus is being built around the project, both on the part of local stakeholders and of higher-level administrative institutions. At this moment, the probabilities are very high that the project will have continuity of investments even after the end of the European funding. In the coming months, the project team must begin to structure the dialogue with institutions and stakeholders to define how and where to give this continuity, through which process.
COMMUNICATING WITH TARGET BENEFICIARIES	MED IUM	Communication with the target group of beneficiaries has been, also in this last year, at the center of the activities promoted by the project partnership. Despite the severe impact of the economic crisis induced by the pandemic on target families, already poor, but now for many of them the situation has also worsened, the municipality of Bergamo has succeeded, through an integrated action with the local system of social services (partnership of project and social services act in synergy) to keep the target group united and to face the darkest and toughest period, from an economic point of view, induced by the pandemic. The situation is improving now that the restrictions are loosening and many jobs can restart.
UPSCALING	MED IUM	The project presents considerable possibilities to be replicated both at local, national and European level. The thematic covered and addressed are topical in the contexts of various Italian and European cities. The pandemic, and now also the war in Ukraine, will bring more and more families to European cities that find themselves living in the condition of refugees and the situation of poverty. Putting real estate, often abandoned and empty, back into play in order to recreate better housing conditions for these families, but also launching empowering actions to create new local economies is an absolute priority at this time in Europe.

Urban poverty

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