

NEWS

PROJECT

MAC - Monteruscello
Agro City

📍 Pozzuoli, Italy

TOPIC

Urban poverty

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MAC (Monterusciello Agro City): A courageous, creative, concrete and inclusive project.

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This latest Journal of the MAC Project is a critical narrative of a project that encountered many complicated moments to deal with during its implementation phase, but it has also carried out ambitious projects in a difficult urban context. This latest issue restarts from the initial problems, the completed projects are shown, their transferability and future sustainability are taken into account, closing with a reflection on the still open challenges. An urban regeneration project, the MAC, which has been able to hold together the innovative themes of urban agriculture with the great problems, often unsolved at other European scales, of youth unemployment, the need to include local communities and to reduce marginality and urban poverty.

The MAC project seeks to reduce urban poverty in the neighbourhood of Monterusciello, where poverty is understood in the social and economic sense and within the physical environment. Monterusciello is a new public housing district with 20,000 residents with low-income, a high level of unemployment, and characterised by large unused spaces.

The proposal is designed to trigger a process of economic, entrepreneurial, and social development, together with the improving of the urban environment. The project will create a new agro-urban landscape which will radically transform the character of the neighbourhood: a landscape made of urban areas and agriculture land connected by a productive thread; the agriculture giving work opportunities, training and production to the city; the city benefiting of the agriculture areas as gardens, thanks to the innovative techniques which will also increase the vegetation.

Thirty hectares of Municipal open areas will be transformed into farmland, developed the innovative techniques of permaculture in order to spearhead an economic process and urban growth as a means to combat poverty. The project will have three pillars: implementation of agriculture through innovative permaculture; improvement of the urban environment; and encouragement of entrepreneurship and employment.

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Partnership:

• Comune di Pozzuoli

- Università degli Studi di Salerno - University
- Coldiretti Napoli - National Association
- Confagricoltura Napoli - National Association
- Agrocultura - Private Company
- L'iniziativa - Associazione di promozione sociale - NGO
- Fondazione FORMIT - Research Centre

The context and the initial problems

Since 2012, the municipal administration of Pozzuoli has constantly worked to develop an urban regeneration strategy for the district of Monterusciello, the last new town designed and realized in Italy of this scale in the 80's. An action activating 50 hectares of abandoned public space.

The topics faced in the MAC Project have been jointly defined, as main actors, by the Municipality of Pozzuoli, Department of the Government of the Territory, *Confagricoltura* trade associations and *Coldiretti*. The aim of this action in partnership was to set up a process for the enhancement of agriculture in the urban context of Monterusciello as an economic, social and environmental resource such as to guarantee that specific urban areas a real opportunity for development and income.

On the occasion of the first UIA call, The Municipality of Pozzuoli proposed the MAC project - Monterusciello Agro-City, by joining to the topic of urban poverty and redevelopment of disadvantaged urban areas. The UIA funding made it possible to launch this regeneration action which was divided into different levels of action,

- [from physical requalification](#),
- [to training actions](#) to the launch of innovative local tools for urban planning,
- up to the [organization of events](#) to determine an ever greater inclusion of the local community.

The planned urban regeneration intervention in the Monterusciello settlement pre-establishes the formation of a relevant set of ecosystem services. They are self-sustaining both in economic and financial terms economic and financial and capable to generate employment in the heart of the metropolitan area, which historically suffer from unemployment issues, especially among young people, and from persisting marginalization and social exclusion. The project implements forms of [interstitial agriculture](#) and proximity to urban fabrics, resulting in an exceptional reconstruction of the landscape such as to give new appeal to traditional building settlements, originally conceived as social housing, although inserted in an urban context economic and popular, although framed in a new town of exceptional urban value.



New vineyards created in the previous abandoned public land. Skyline of the Monterusciello blocks on the horizon.
Source: Stefano Grasso (MAC, partner)

[he Journal no.1](#) details the main problems of the neighborhood present at the beginning of the MAC project. In this final Journal it is worth reporting the main problematic contexts:

- [very high youth unemployment](#)
- urban planning services and standards never properly implemented
- housing stock with serious problems of physical and energy requalification
- [a high number of abandoned public spaces](#)
- a population with low schooling
- a conflictual relationship between residents and the public institutions

A truly innovative project at the local level, but also at a European one

There are several elements of innovation within the urban regeneration path activated by the MAC project in Pozzuoli. The main originality of this project is implementing an action to revive the local economy through investments in permaculture led Urban Agriculture (UA). UA is not considered only as a social and aggregative function at the service of the local community, as often happens in the urban regeneration of neighbourhoods in crisis, but as a catalyst for sustainable economic development. UA is setting the fundament for a local action designed to counteract urban poverty and acting as a modifier of the [contemporary urban landscape](#), making it not just productive, but also [more accessible](#) to the local community.



The state of Piazza De Curtis at the beginning of the MAC Project,
source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/149808383@N07/albums/72157694710292222>



The requalification of the main square De Curtis, source: <https://puntomagazine.it/>



The new offices in Piazza De Curtis, they will host the Agro Urban Center, source: <https://puntomagazine.it/>

The new town of Monterusciello was the response of Pozzuoli to the serious bradyseism which affected the city's historic center in the early 1980s ([see Journal no.1](#)), a new town built in strictly modernistic design and conception, inspired by the measures and spatial distribution of ideal cities of the classicism, with significant extensions of public land and infrastructure. Most of these public spaces have been abandoned and stayed unused for many years. Through the MAC project, this public heritage returns to being an asset serving the local community, which is characterized by significant phenomena of social exclusion: Monterusciello is a difficult neighbourhood, afflicted by chronic unemployment, especially in the younger segments of the population. Focusing on the good kinship structures and proposing to extend them to the various, often dissonant, fragments of the local community, the MAC project is imprinting a moment of rebirth and regeneration through a comprehensive, well-designed and professional action based on UA led development model.

Through an integrated, inclusive and professional investment in UA, supported by the permaculture methodology, the MAC project proposes solutions capable to:

- Create a local economy, primarily supporting the inhabitants of Monterusciello (where unemployment among the neighbourhood youth draws shares of over 40%),
- Construct shared spaces and new urban commons and make them accessible (recovering the infrastructure envisaged in the original project, but which never provided a real service to the population),
- Address aggregation and leisure needs of the local community (the revitalised land creates a network of accessible public spaces nearby the UA functions, as a physical platform for crystallizing a true neighbourhood identity and community).

The results obtained and their degree of transferability

The MAC is a composite project in which the theme of urban agriculture (UA) defines the plot of a regenerative path that includes several components ranging from physical renewal, social inclusion, youth training/employment and the definition of a new model of local economic development based on urban agriculture operated with industrial methods and scales (on this point the details can be found in [Journal no.5](#)). The path of the MAC project has not been very easy, for some reasons that have combined with each other, sometimes synergically and others instead conflicting, these reasons are:

- A project that in its contents and expectations has really included many challenges (refer to [Journal no.2](#) for the details of these challenges) which required the implementation of several projects on a local scale
- A local context not logistically prepared to face these challenges, the measure of a European project of this

size, but, on the other hand, a clear political vision on the issues to be developed to address the problem of Monterusciello regeneration

- A partnership that has often struggled to find a synergic dialogue, but which has been able to be cohesive in critical moments. Very good in communication processes and community inclusion, very problematic in the dialogue between sectoral knowledge (see [Journal no.4](#)).

These reasons have sometimes pushed the project forward, sometimes they have resulted in moments of unreasonable stalemate. The pandemic certainly had its negative role on many of the delays that characterized the MAC project. The basic message is that the complicated projects for the local context have been implemented and the MAC experience is of considerable interest to other European cities and many of the local processes have a good degree of transferability.

The transferability of the MAC practice is built around three interpretative keys:

- rebuilding for sharing
- training for making
- preparing for regenerating

The details of these three lines of coordination and action are detailed in [Journal no.3](#).

The MAC project manages to combine the redevelopment of the reference public spaces for an entire community (e.g. the redevelopment of Piazza De Curtis as reported in the chapter above) by adding new features and services linked to the new development method implemented through urban agriculture implemented on an industrial scale.

The Mac project combined the requalification actions with the preparation of specialized personnel able to contribute to giving sustainability to the path started through the UIA funding. An integrated approach that related the serious problem of youth unemployment in Monterusciello with a series of training actions, excellent involvement of local schools.



Interns discuss the final theses of the training courses,
source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/149808383@N07/albums/72157705193702331>

Finally, a series of spaces and offices have been prepared to host those soft coordination structures such as the "Agro Urban Center" which should continue to keep the dialogue between the local community, stakeholders and public administration alive: it should be noted that on the latter point good intentions still fail to settle in a clear practice linked to a continuous action of this urban center, which however could make the difference in the post UIA phase.

- The regenerative structure proposed by Pozzuoli has a high replicability value: putting public areas back into

play for agricultural production of quality and quantity useful for starting a local economic cycle (the market at Km 0) can be an easily contextualized model in many other European urban realities, neighborhoods or small and medium-sized cities.

- The link created between schools, training and young people looking for work applied to a proximity project defines a method that has its own validity independent of the theme inherent to urban agriculture and can also be adapted to other types of initiatives related to the empowerment of weak communities. .
- The attempt to propose innovative tools and policies promoted at the scale of the local administration, for example also through the creation of a charter of principles, as was done through the Monterusciello Manifesto, always determines a notable operational strengthening of the local dimension, the one at which sustainable development must be planned.

Challenges faced and final remarks

[The Journal no. 2](#) was completely dedicated to delving into the challenges of MAC projects. In this latest Journal, and in this last paragraph, still talking about challenges, the fundamental message is: the challenges have been partially overcome, but the message is positive as the initial situation was extremely difficult. In the term “partial” there is a great deal of work carried out by the partnership of the MAC project.

A partnership that was politically aggregated on the basis of a good, innovative idea for the development of a highly problematic area like Monterusciello, but which did not have the language and knowledge to manage an EU project. The learning path was remarkable, in a few months the team of the Municipality of Pozzuoli managed to take the situation in hand and activate the partners, where activating should be understood as: transforming a partnership invented during the design phase of the proposal into a partnership able to work together, with the usual frictions that are also reflected in those partnerships accustomed to the language and timing of EU projects.

How? It was important in this learning path:

1. The support received by the UIA experts (content, process and administrative issues)
2. To feel to be part of the international selected community experimenting innovative solutions (being part of important international events, plus the daily work of communication and dissemination)
3. To have a strong local political commitment around this initiative.

A partnership that, when it managed to place itself in its roles, made the difference and led to improvement a very difficult and ambitious project. In fact, it must be remembered that the MAC project has numbers, quantities, difficulties in the implemented projects that it is not easy to carry out in the scale of a UIA project, but this partnership believed in it. The partners understood the importance of the opportunity they had in hand linked to the UIA funding, they understood that they could not fail and that they had to follow this path of innovation and internationalization to the end.

Moreover, the project also demonstrated good resilience in the difficult period linked to the pandemic (see [Journal no. 5](#)), which rearranged the training actions, but did not prevent them from completing the work on urban redevelopment sites and activating the urban agriculture experiments in abandoned public spaces currently almost all recovered and in production.

The table below gives a final judgment on how the main UIA challenges in the MAC project were contextualized and prioritized:

CHALLENGE	FINAL OBSERVATIONS	FINAL JUDGMENT ON HOW THE CHALLENGES IN THE MAC PROJECT WERE HANDLED
Leadership for implementation	At the end of the UIA experience, The MAC project partnership succeeded in working synergistically. Good steering capacity demonstrated by the lead partner, that is The Municipality of Pozzuoli	GOOD

Public procurement	The MUA is very well prepared in dealing with all technicalities related to the design and management of a public procurement and got confidence to align timing of EU projects with timing of ordinary practices.	GOOD
Integrated cross departmental working	The coordination among different departments within the MUA of this urban regeneration process demonstrated to be quite good. Step by step was improved even the dialogue on the line of the vertical governance (dialogue with the Region will be essential to have a stable follow up of the project)	GOOD
Adopting a participative approach	The element of participation and dialogue with the local community has improved as the project progresses. The partner who acted as a binder between the Legal Community, the Municipality and the other partners did an excellent job.	VERY GOOD
Monitoring and evaluation	The partnership was able to learn immediately from the mistakes made, especially at the beginning of the project. A structured system of self-assessment in progress was not detailed, but informally the lessons learned were immediately understood and applied in the next steps to be taken, finally a constant improvement also in this aspect.	SUFFICIENT
Financial Sustainability	There is a public private agreement that should stabilize the process implemented with the UIA and give continuity to the action of urban agriculture at an industrial scale that began in Monterusciello. Inclusions, in this sense, are an excellent start for the continuity of the idea promoted by the MAC.	VERY GOOD

Communicating with target beneficiaries	It is important to stabilize the process started with the definition of innovative tools such as the Urban Council and the Agro Urban Center. Not insisting on the definitive functionalization of these tools can clearly create problems in sustaining a clear advantage for the final beneficiaries.	SUFFICIENT
Upscaling	This MAC practice has experienced a truly innovative path and achieved it in a very difficult urban context, one of the most difficult in Europe. The MAC project is an important source from which to draw ideas, methodologies and also the right amount of ambition without which one cannot be innovative.	VERY GOOD

SOCIAL MAC

WEBSITE: <http://www.macpozzuoli.eu>

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