

CASE STUDY

REPORT

Integrated
development in action!

PROJECT

DARE - Digital
Environment for
collaborative Alliances
to Regenerate urban
Ecosystems in middle-
sized cities

📍 Ravenna, Italy

TOPIC

Digital transition

EDIT 10 OCTOBER 2022

Ravenna - DARE

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website



About DARE

In DARE - Digital Environment for Collaborative Alliances to Regenerate Urban Ecosystems - collaboration between public, private and non-profit sectors is proposed as a strategy for urban regeneration in middle-sized cities. DARE creates a digital environment through a participatory process and a digital platform where data will be made accessible, understandable, and useful, disseminating information about the district, and future changes, allowing citizens to also become active participants in the process. DARE operates in a post-industrial area of the city of Ravenna in need of a regeneration since decades, showing the importance of participation, multi-level and multi-sectoral approaches in territorial development.



Community event at Darsena Pop Up. Photo (cc) Eutropian

Using a co-creative digital environment, DARE intends to renovate the Darsena district of Ravenna by redefining the perspective of urban regeneration and digital platforms: as part of DARE, the intervention in the built environment involves an integrated approach to territorial development where citizens are invited to share ideas and visions that will ultimately transform the social and physical characteristics of the area, while digital tools are designed to enhance citizens' participation and co-creation. An innovative approach for a middle-sized city brought the partnership to work transversally following a participatory, multilevel, and multisectoral program.

Context

The Darsena district of Ravenna is a post-industrial area of the city along the Candiano Canal, the former city port, which the Municipality of Ravenna has been working on to regenerate for several decades. Darsena is a place with historical relevance for Ravenna despite being outside the historical city centre. In the 20th Century it played a pivotal role in the development of the city's economy, its urbanisation, and its international relations during. However, in the 1980s with the rise of a new port in Ravenna, all the industrial buildings were gradually abandoned and the Darsena became a "no-go area". The Darsena's regeneration has always proven to be a challenging task as most efforts to transform the area have been focusing only on improving its physical and architectural aspects. Therefore, the city of Ravenna decided to implement an innovative and integrated solution to improve the quality of life of the citizens by combining digital transition with urban socio-economic regeneration.

As a core principle of EU urban policy for several decades now, integrated territorial development (ITD) proposes to address development challenges by a place-based approach incorporating spatial, sectoral, and temporal dimensions of key urban policy parameters, including economic actors, stakeholders and citizens. In this case study, we describe how DARE was delivered following the ITD approach with a specific focus on how the place-based, multi-sectoral, multi-governance, and participation principles were translated into project design and implementation.

Description

The story of a long-term strategy

The regeneration of Ravenna's Darsena district has been embedded in a wider process started years ago by the local administration with different attempts to intervene in the area. Within this process, the participation of Ravenna in the [Urbact Network CREATIVE SPIRITS](#) captured the general attention of citizens and local stakeholders. As with CREATIVE SPIRITS, the City of Ravenna focused on the transformative potential of creative industries for urban and economic regeneration. Local stakeholders - from the public, private, and third sectors - started thinking about a more sustainable, inclusive and innovative regeneration of the Darsena district. As the process continued, leading to the creation of a heterogeneous partnership, with different competencies covering different fields, that started working on the UIA application and imagining Darsena's regeneration to go beyond the activities of the DARE project.

Since the work of the partnership is a long-term process, it is worth mentioning the continuous adaptation of the consortium to the project's timeframes and unexpected challenges. In this sense, the application for UIA funds can be seen as a picture of the partnership's work at a specific time of their process, with roles and deadlines that were revised during the implementation phase.

From participation to co-creation, through digitalisation and design

One of the main achievements of the DARE project is to connect its digitalisation activities to citizen participation and engagement. Their goal was to create a digital platform to collect knowledge about the area and discuss tactics for the area's future urban development, DARE's partnership called the Ravennati to [an exploration of existing practices, projects, and policies](#). An analysis of the territory, through role-playing games, walks to involve a broader community and "[storymaps](#)", helped in identifying development potentials, leveraging local resources and energies, and setting the first steps of the urban regeneration strategy. The participatory analysis of the site helped to make the best use of endogenous resources for urban transformation that were tailored to the place. In a second phase, two different channels were used to attract as much interest and input as possible: a [call for partnerships](#) and a [call for ideas](#) that addressed different kinds of publics joining the project in informal or more formal ways.

Participation is a common practice in Ravenna but now, within DARE, we're bringing it to a new level, activating citizens and co-designing with them.

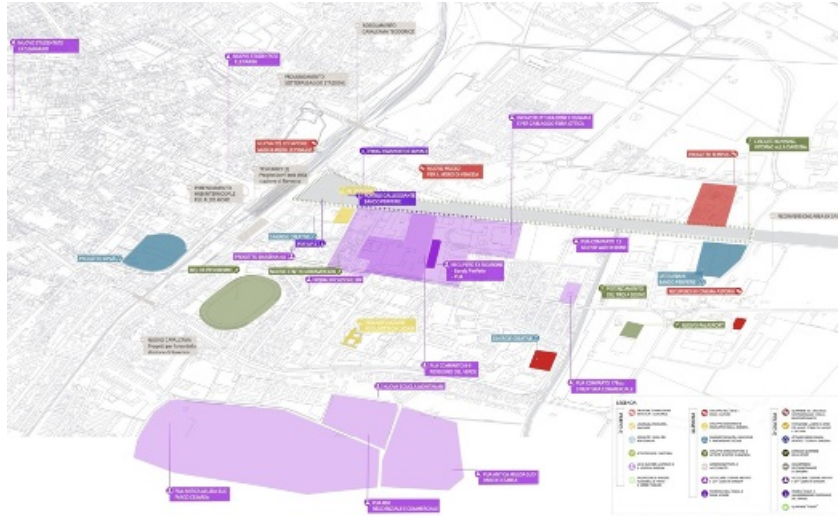
Emanuela Medeghini, Project manager

An important part of the engagement process was played by DARE's visual and communication strategy. Chialab, the partner which developed this strategy, confirmed that the design has had a pivotal position during the different project phases making DARE's lettering and communication style a crucial element of the project.

Finally, participation has been a priority not only for the citizen's engagement but also for the consortium's work during the project. Therefore ICT partners are involved not only as service providers but also as an integral part of the process. This approach is reflected in the innovative use of digital tools in DARE.

Many projects dealing with the theme of 'smart city' are using platforms to manage and control cities. In DARE our objective is different, we want to support the city's regeneration by changing the perspective on the use of ICT technologies

Paola Clerici Maestosi, Smart City Researcher - Enea



Map of projects. Image © MultiLab

A highly heterogeneous learning partnership

Within DARE, three different departments of the City of Ravenna are involved, as well as different research centres, NGOs, small enterprises, the University of Bologna, and business support organisations. A similar variety of partners and competencies bring also complexity and communication challenges to the working structure. DARE partners highlighted language barriers in working between diverse technical cultures: for example, city officers and IT developers needed more time than expected to understand each other's requests. Nevertheless, thanks to the strong collaborative approach of the partnership, the multidisciplinary and participatory governance structures available ([DARE Redazione](#) and the [Process Organisers Team](#)), and the richness of organisational cultures involved (from the public sector, digital developers, and EU projects management), project partners could deal with complexity and communication challenges.

Finally, public officers from the City of Ravenna see a lot of advantages in having learned from the DARE process and having embraced innovation in the project's collaborative framework in terms of project planning, and the assignment of roles. A fundamental experience that comes at an important moment, in spring 2022, when the municipality has to plan with Italian funds from the Next Generation EU to recover after the Covid crisis.

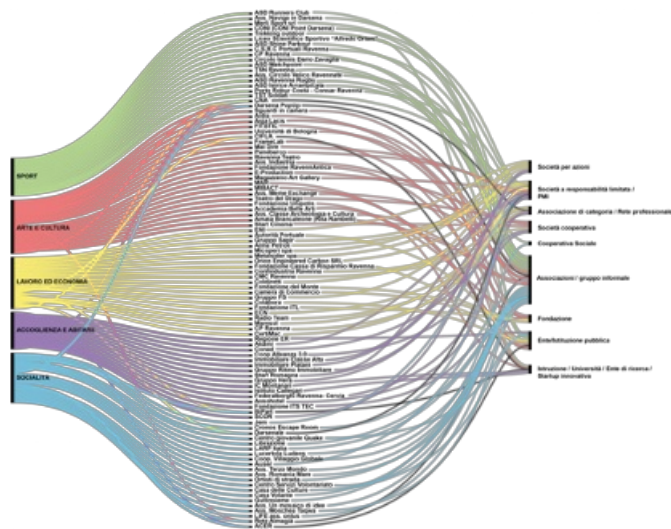
Nature of integration

Although the concept of ITD is not new, European cities still struggle to put it into practice. Ravenna's experience with the DARE project shows how it is possible to achieve integrated development by implementing integration at the territorial, cross-sectoral and governance levels at the same time.

The initial urban exploration and analysis done in collaboration with the Ravennati combined the place-based and participation approaches in practice. As a result of this sound analysis of Ravenna, the production of a digital archive represents a participatory layer of knowledge about the area that - in line with [The New Leipzig Charter's](#) definition of place-based approach - will suggest future strategies for local development. At the same time, the call for partnerships involved the general public and a broad range of stakeholders following the participation and co-creation principle, combining it with [educational moments](#) where project ideas were supported and accompanied by the DARE team. Beyond putting principles in practice, these actions could lead to an empowered sense of community.

As recommended by the Pact of Amsterdam and the New Urban Agenda, vertical and horizontal multi-level and multi-stakeholder cooperation, both bottom-up and top-down, is key to good urban governance. In this sense, a

special mention goes also to the multi-sectoral approach adopted by the DARE consortium which coordinated different areas of urban policy and a big variety of stakeholders represented in the project consortium and in dedicated multidisciplinary and participatory governance structures. Applying the cross-sectoral approach is a way to combine competences leading to stronger institutional learning, governance change and innovation through cooperation.



Selected stakeholders. Image ©MultiLab

Takeaways

- Building on a specific momentum to bring partners together towards a shared goal in a long-term process: This might be a former EU project (a URBACT Network in this case) or an earlier funding application where local networks and logic of cooperation have been created.
- Building on earlier initiatives, practices, and visions: Mapping and assembling existing initiatives in an area allows for building on earlier visions, helps to create long-term strategies, and to apply a place-based approach.
- Hybridise and innovate across sectors: By encouraging different fields of action (urban regeneration, digital transition, and communication) to interact with each other, projects can create a mix of skills and work methods that leads to an integrated approach by innovating usual organisational schemes
- Working in new organisational interfaces for cooperation: New structures, umbrella organisations, or governance mechanisms act as organisational interfaces between the municipality, civil society, and private partners, allowing for more horizontal (multi-sectoral) cooperation and co-governance (multi-level) processes during implementation.

Further reading and selected key resources

- [Project website](#)
- [Zoom-in 1](#)

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