

## JOURNAL

## PROJECT

CAPACITYES - Children Against Poverty Awake the CITY Education System

📍 Bergamo, Italy

## TOPIC

Urban poverty

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# CAPACITYES, Final Journal: Legacy, Lessons learned, Replicability

See on UIA website



This Journal marks the end of the Capacityes project, which has successfully wrapped up its activities in its final year. The journey wasn't easy, especially with the Covid pandemic hitting Bergamo hard right when the project started. Despite these tough times, Bergamo and its partners showed real strength. They managed to carry out planned activities even in the most difficult moments, finding smart solutions and getting help from local experts. In this last edition of the Capacityes Journals, we highlight the project's achievements, its lasting impact, the lessons learned along the way, and the knowledge ready to be shared with other towns and cities.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Urban poverty has become one of the most pressing issue 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 immune to 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 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 labour 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-communication.

The project aims to achieve the following results:

- Sustainable temporary cohousing 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
- ISMU - Foundation for Initiatives and Studies on multi ethnicity - private organisation
- CSI - Italian Sporting Center of Bergamo - private organisation
- PURELAB - private enterprise

## TRACKING THE PROJECT'S PROGRESS: MILESTONES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

### Post-Project Developments: Tracking the Path Beyond the End Date

The conclusion of the CAPACityES project marks the completion of a transformative three-year journey towards a more enriched Municipality of Bergamo in terms of local policies facing urban poverty. This initiative, operating within the European UIA programme framework, engaged multiple municipal departments, the local community, and numerous children and families in a collaborative effort to combat child educational poverty, but even together with housing poverty and the difficulties of the target families involved in achieving adequate employment positions to carry on the challenges of growing up and establishing a family without difficulty. Key milestones include

(1) the unveiling of co-housing units in via Borgo Palazzo in February, symbolizing a path of cooperation and collaborative living for 11 participating families. An open day on May 4 celebrated this achievement, emphasizing active citizen participation and community engagement to enhance social cohesion. On June 16,

(2) the HUB for KIDS was inaugurated in via Serassi 17/D, a modern space redeveloped from the old Cascina Serassi. This hub serves as a focal point for diverse activities, including sports, cultural projects, and the arts, catering to children and teens from the neighborhood and beyond. The project also left a lasting impact on the urban landscape through

(3) the creation of 10 murals inspired by the Odyssey, designed by artist Luogo Comune with input from children. The murals, now part of the neighborhood, contribute to a new narrative of the relationship between citizens and public spaces accessibility, in terms of even promoting an inclusive co-design. A virtual tour of the murals,

available online, further enhances [accessibility to this public art](#).

Beyond the physical transformations, which were the necessary intervention goals to kickstart the regeneration process in this part of the city of Bergamo, the area that opens up along the structural axis of Via Borgo Palazzo as it exits the historic center and defines an initial peripheral circle, the CAPACITyES project has been a significant driver of meetings and opportunities to imagine and design, through an comprehensive process, a more inclusive city. This inclusion primarily focused on new citizens, those migrant families attempting to rebuild in Europe after challenging journeys that put their very existence at risk. They sought a more serene family and professional path. In this project, the target of migrant families is integrated into a vision to combat urban poverty that emphasizes intergenerational dialogue and the active involvement of women and children as the targets of regeneration actions, but also as promoters of these actions. An aggregate of work with new generations, new citizens, and the disruptive ideas of local artists, when combined, define the innovation of this project. A series of novelties that pave the way for an innovative journey.

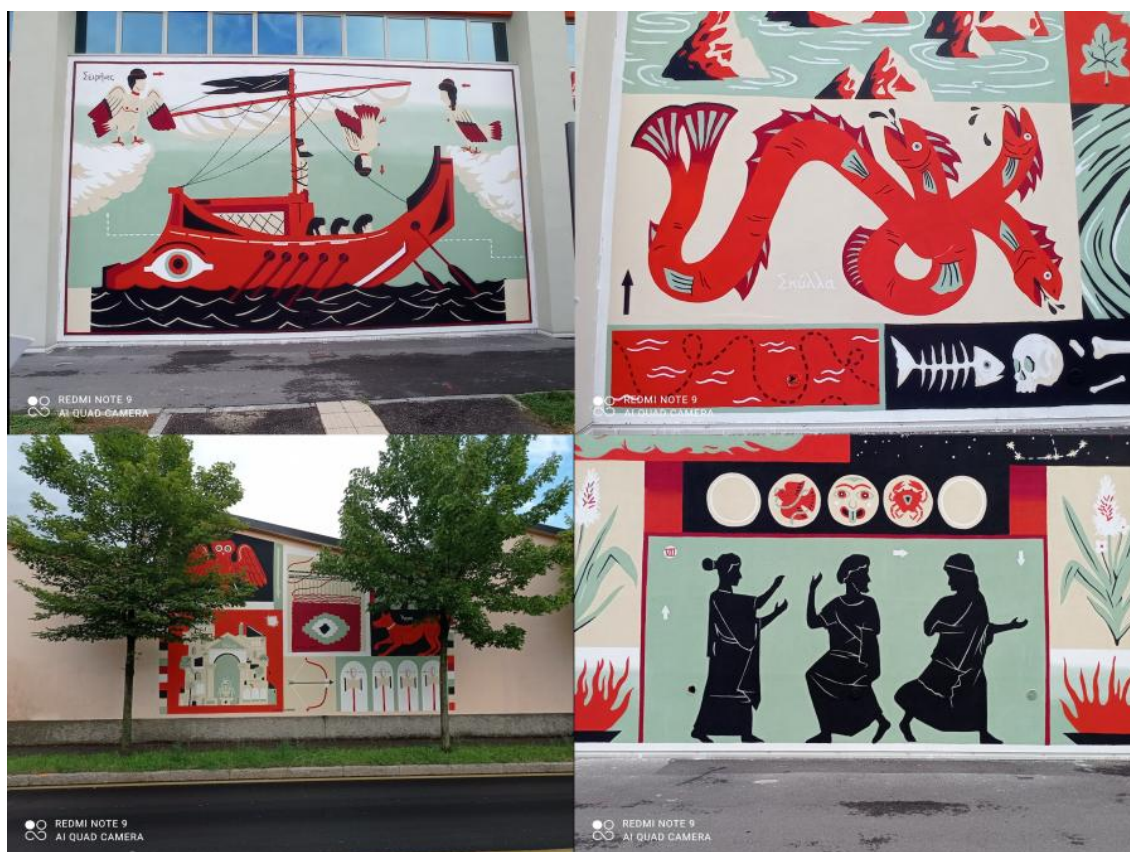
On September 30, 2023, the project's achievements and future initiatives were celebrated, with the event featuring an institutional meeting, shows, and entertainment for children and teens. The day concluded with a convivial gathering for families and neighbors, fostering informal discussions on CAPACITyES results and future activities.

Loredana Poli and Marcella Messina, Councillors for Education and Youth Policies and Social Policies, respectively, provided a first assessment and acknowledged the project's success. CAPACITyES was led by the Municipality of Bergamo, in collaboration with local partners, emphasizing a commitment to placing children, teens, and families at the core of community activities. The project's legacy lies in its dedication to creating an inclusive and open community, ensuring that everyone feels part of a welcoming environment. In conclusion, the CAPACITyES project serves as a model for future urban regeneration initiatives, highlighting the centrality of community involvement, innovation and inclusiveness in creating resilient and vibrant urban spaces. Lessons learnt pave the way for a more collaborative and complete approach to tackling urban poverty and promoting sustainable and inclusive communities.



Final event of CAPACITyES held in the Hub 4 Kids, Source: <https://www.capacityes.it/en/capacityes-closes-up-with-a-celebration/>





The murals that characterise and connect the areas regenerated through the CAPACITyES project (get more [here](#))

### Ensuring Long-Term Sustainability: The Project's Systematic Plan

The CAPACITyES project is making a big difference by tackling urban poverty, housing shortages, educational gaps for children, and spatial segregation in cities. This chapter explores into the core ideas driving the sustainability of this project and the results it has achieved, showcasing how Bergamo is leading the charge towards a more inclusive future, open to the urban transformations shaping many European cities today. Especially in managing increasingly large migratory flows that bring about significant demographic and cultural changes. Here are some of the key concepts underpinning the regeneration process initiated by this urban innovation project:

- **Integrated Strategies for Impact**

The CAPACITyES project, designed to address multifaceted challenges, employs a comprehensive and sophisticated strategy. Acting on various thematic levels—including inclusion, participation, anti-urban poverty initiatives, temporary uses, and collaboration with artists—the project aims for a holistic impact. Multiple redevelopment zones, including the Borgo Palazzo pavilion and Cascina Serassi (The Hub 4 Kids), become active centers of change. The project brings together local actors in dialogue with both local and higher-level institutions, fostering a governance scheme that ensures not only financial sustainability but also socio-cultural and environmental resilience. The actors involved in Bergamo's urban regeneration process span both horizontal and vertical governance ranges. Some partners have experience in both social assistance and active participation at the urban scale, and they are joined by committees and neighborhood associations active in the socio-cultural integration processes of both new citizens and those facing multiple deprivation situations (wide group of stakeholders). The strategy followed by the lead partner has also been to maintain ongoing dialogue with higher-level institutions, such as the region responsible for regionally funded operational plans through EU mainstreaming funds. Above all, there has been a focus on disseminating practices at the national level and generating interest around the CAPACITyES project. The top moment occurred during the national [ANCI meeting](#), where representatives from major central institutions and important Italian municipalities were invited to hold their conference in Bergamo. [Many of them chose to visit the construction sites initiated by this UIA project and learned about the working methodology carried out within the urban regeneration initiative.](#)

- **Redevelopment of the Former Hospital Pavilion and creation of the Hub for kids**

This point focuses on the remarkable transformation of the former hospital pavilion, a structure left abandoned for many years. Originally intended as a healthcare center, this early 20th-century building now serves as the cornerstone of a cohousing initiative aimed at families grappling with severe poverty. Borgo Palazzo, the focal

point of CAPACITYES alongside the Boccaleone and Celadina neighborhoods, embodies a regeneration process that includes residential development, green spaces, and infrastructure upgrades. Initiated in 2019, the project holds promise for approximately 8% of Bergamo's population, fostering a regenerative process that addresses urgent needs while laying the foundation for a resilient and sustainable future. This recovering process is further reinforced by actively involving children in the definition of solutions and creating a space entirely dedicated to them—the Hub 4 Kids, the second foundational element in the project's induced process. Lastly, children serve the cause of art, or rather, art serves as a tool for urban interpretation. This is exemplified through murals painted by expert international artists, linking actions and construction sites in the area, and framing a local urban policy action with the inherent meaning of integration of diversity, recognition of the numerous journeys of hopelessness forced upon migrants, the quest for a safe haven, and ultimately, the attainment of a home where ambitions can flourish. The murals depicting the journey of Odysseus symbolize, at the very least, all of these thoughtful themes.

This regenerative process is further reinforced by actively involving children in the definition of solutions and creating a space entirely dedicated to them—the Hub 4 Kids, the second foundational element in the project's induced process. Lastly, [children serve the cause of art, or rather, art serves as a tool for urban representation](#). This is exemplified through murals painted by expert international artists, linking actions and construction sites in the area, and framing a local urban policy action with the inherent meaning of integration of diversity, recognition of the numerous journeys of despair forced upon migrants, the quest for a safe haven, and ultimately, the attainment of a home where ambitions can flourish. The murals depicting the journey of Odysseus symbolize, at the very least, all of these profound themes.

- **From Neglect to Cohousing: A Regenerative Process**

The journey unfolds, highlighting the city's strategic approach to repurpose neglected structures like the hospital pavilion. This initiative not only addresses housing problems but also taps into knowledge, practices, and political messages to integrate and uplift those facing difficulties. Borgo Palazzo, with its multicultural population, becomes a canvas for urban regeneration. The CAPACITYES project serves as a catalyst in a broader context, laying the groundwork for new urban regeneration initiatives beyond isolated interventions. The innovative actions launched through CAPACITYES, partly due to UIA funding, help structure and reinforce the urban regeneration approach for this part of Bergamo initiated by the Municipality, specifically in the Borgo Palazzo neighborhood. The project outcomes assist in focusing on how to proceed more effectively with the regenerative process planned for this area. By localizing the experience in the former hospital pavilion, not only does it address the pressing need for housing, but it also revives a strategic area of Bergamo through temporary activities linked to education, employment, and inclusivity. The regeneration of this district relies on a diverse community, embracing multiculturalism and fostering intergenerational dialogue. Ultimately, the UIA experience enriches Bergamo's regeneration lexicon with new concepts, methodologies, and perspectives, fostering ongoing dialogue among the various stakeholders crucial to the CAPACITYES project's success in these areas. [Cohousing not only as a shelter, but as a generator of a new sustainable community that will substantiate the future steps of the regenerative process of the Borgo Palazzo area.](#)

- **Facing Challenges and Embracing Achievements**

The partners of this project have demonstrated great resilience in facing external challenges during the project's implementation phase. These challenges ranged from the pandemic to the special Italian law offering a 120% tax incentive for building renovations, which led to a shortage of construction materials due to high demand. Additionally, the inflation resulting from the crisis in Ukraine disrupted cost predictions unexpectedly. The resilience displayed primarily stems from the exceptional management skills exhibited by the lead partner. They took proactive measures to advance the project without delay. For example, during the pandemic, the lead partner utilized the summer period to initiate outdoor participatory processes. They restructured the monitoring methods for choices related to the participatory process, linking them to the local partnership and a wide group of stakeholders. The lead partner renegotiated construction management timelines and methods, involving not only technical experts but also politicians in a strong municipal-level coordination. [This approach kept all project partners actively engaged and provided clear instructions to those responsible for the construction works.](#) Moreover, continuous efforts were made to keep the target group of families united and motivated. This involved consistent involvement in informative, educational, and motivational events. In summary, the project's success is attributed to a strong municipal-level coordination that kept all partners active and engaged, along with ongoing efforts to inform, educate, and motivate the families involved.





The hospital pavilion before being redeveloped.



Inauguration party for cohousing spaces (former abandoned hospital pavillon), May 2023

The following chapter will focus on the lessons learned, emphasizing that the journey from neglect to collaborative living is not just a physical transformation but a recognition of Bergamo's unwavering dedication to building a sustainable, inclusive, and empowered communities.



The Hub 4 Kids a few days before its inauguration, you can see the completely redeveloped farmhouse.

## GENERATED KNOWLEDGE

### Lessons Learned from the Project

The completion of the CAPACITyES project, particularly the successful move-in of families into the upgraded co-housing facility, signifies not only a relevant achievement but also brings forth valuable lessons learned. The project, led by the Municipality of Bergamo, encountered diverse obstacles, and its evolution offers insights into effective project management and community engagement.

The following is a summary of the lessons learnt from the two major projects implemented in CAPACITyES: [the redevelopment of an abandoned hospital pavilion](#) into a building used to house families in distress in co-housing conditions and an [old abandoned farm transformed into a Hub4kids](#), a child- and adolescent-friendly place to promote associative, recreational and educational activities. Finally, the project has initiated a series of [artistic installations](#) in the neighborhood where the regeneration process began.

These installations serve a dual purpose: to artistically mark the regeneration journey undertaken and to enhance the involvement of children and teenagers in shaping future choices for this neighborhood in Bergamo through participatory moments based on [creative workshops](#).



CAPACITyES project communication event to schools, children involved and local stakeholders



**Adaptability Amid Unpredictability:** Navigating through the pandemic-induced challenges, including increased prices and material shortages, highlighted the importance of adaptability. The Main Urban Authority's adept handling of externalities showcased the need for proactive crisis management and coordination with partners. Below are some of the strategic choices underlying the planning path undertaken by the CAPACITyES partnership that characterised and founded the main line of action to hold together the objectives to be achieved, the method to apply and the projects implementation:

1. **Human Construction Site as a Social Experiment:** The transition from 'physical' construction to the 'human' construction site underscores the complexity of community engagement. The experiment in cohousing emphasized the significance of actively involving citizens and leveraging neighborhood social networks to enhance social cohesion. The concept of a "Human Construction Site" involves a significant shift in perspective, moving away from solely addressing physical construction challenges towards prioritizing human-centric considerations. This transition signifies a departure from conventional concerns solely related to erecting buildings and infrastructure towards a more comprehensive focus on enhancing the human experience and promoting societal well-being. It entails recognizing and tackling various challenges that directly impact people's lives, encompassing social, economic, and cultural dimensions. By adopting this approach, the aim is not only to create physical spaces but also to foster vibrant and flourishing communities, where individuals can thrive emotionally, socially, and economically.
2. **Co-Design and Personalized Solutions:** In a careful co-design process, accurately integrating the viewpoints of children and families, there emerged a profound emphasis on the necessity of customizing spaces to cater to their distinct requirements. This collaborative approach not only guarantees a more community-oriented living environment but also underscores the fundamental principle of inclusivity within urban regeneration initiatives. By actively involving the voices of children and families, the project transcends conventional urban development paradigms, advocating for spaces that resonate with the diverse lived experiences of its inhabitants. This holistic approach to design not only fosters a sense of ownership and belonging but also fosters a deep-deep-rooted connection between residents and their surroundings, thereby laying the groundwork for a vibrant and cohesive community fabric.

**3. Typology of Challenges:** Categorizing challenges into typologies, such as those pertaining to:

- equal opportunities,
- relational dynamics,
- technical-participatory elements,
- management strategies, and
- spatial contextualization,

offers a structured framework for tackling complex issues. This systematic approach enables a comprehensive examination of diverse challenges, facilitating targeted interventions and ensuring holistic problem-solving across various domains. By delineating challenges into distinct categories, stakeholders can effectively prioritize resources, implement tailored strategies, and foster collaboration towards sustainable solutions.

As previously mentioned in the preceding section of this journal, the consistent factor ensuring the success of this regenerative process, and allowing a stable control on the helm of this project, is the steadfast commitment of the lead partner and the meticulous adherence of the partnership to the agreed-upon terms and deadlines. The constant and effective management by the lead partner has fostered the resilience necessary to pilot the numerous complexities associated with the CAPACyTIES project. This has enabled the step-by-step alignment and prioritization of all challenges, both anticipated and unexpected. A summary of these challenges follows.

**Looking at specific challenges of the co-housing initiative:**

- **Equal Opportunities and Fair Choices:** The selection of families for the cohousing experiment raised challenges related to ensuring fairness. This experience underscores the importance of transparent processes and fair decision-making.
- **Relational Context and Stakeholder Involvement:** Challenges linked to the relational context in Borgo Palazzo and neighboring areas highlight the need for comprehensive stakeholder engagement strategies, fostering collaboration and inclusivity.
- **Technical-Participative Challenges:** Recognizing that cohousing requires unconventional design approaches emphasizes the need for innovative, bottom-up participative techniques to address the unique nature of this housing experiment.
- **Management and Financial Sustainability:** The challenges related to the maintenance, activities in common spaces, and long-term financial sustainability underscore the importance of robust management strategies and sustainable funding models for similar initiatives.
- **Spatial Contextualization:** The spatial contextualization challenges around the building, situated in a health-oriented service center, emphasize the need for thoughtful integration within the existing urban fabric.



In its undertaking to establish innovative and practical co-housing adapted to the needs of the target group, CAPACITYES encountered and successfully addressed several challenges. These experiences serve as valuable lessons and considerations for future attempts, pointing out the importance of adaptability, community engagement, transparent decision-making processes, and design approaches unafraid to experiment with innovation. The project's success thus far establishes a precedent for inclusive, community-driven urban development initiatives, with a specific focus on co-housing as a solution to housing and structural poverty, [particularly for new migrant families](#).



Detail of the co-housing pavilion after the building renovation process

#### The Hub 4 kids Journey's lessons

Three key ingredients were strategically employed, and the results, particularly in the creation of the Hub4Kids, shed light on essential lessons learned:

- 1. Active Involvement of Children and Adolescents:** The Hub4Kids stands as a testament to the transformative power of involving children and adolescents in participatory planning processes. This inclusive approach not only generates innovative ideas but also allows diverse cultural and social backgrounds to converge, maximizing the creative potential of the younger generation.
- 2. Artistic Installations and Performances:** Introducing artists and their creations as added value in neighborhood regeneration proved to be a catalyst for positive change. Beyond aesthetic enhancements, art became a vehicle for community engagement, bridging gaps, and fostering a sense of pride and ownership in the revitalized urban spaces.
- 3. Empowering Families in Difficulty:** The project's unique approach of not only considering families in extreme difficulty as beneficiaries but also involving them as co-designers and co-creators proved instrumental. Empowering these families, often first-generation migrants, resulted in solutions that significantly improved their housing conditions.

Finally, The Hub4Kids, emerging from the regeneration of an abandoned farmhouse, serves multiple roles:

- **Aggregator of Families:** The Hub acts as a central gathering point for families, creating a sense of community and fostering social bonds.
- **Creator of Community Bonds:** Through diverse activities and workshops, the Hub becomes a catalyst for community dialogues, breaking down barriers and enhancing social cohesion.
- **Provider of Innovative Services:** The Hub introduces innovative services tailored to the needs and desires of its diverse audience, acting as a dynamic center for creativity and engagement.

The main challenges faced by HUB4KIDS were primarily related to **unexpected delays in the availability and costs of materials** required to renovate the old abandoned farmhouse. These delays forced a complete reprogramming of a series of events that were supposed to take place within the HUB. Instead, these events had to be reorganized using other facilities, especially schools or other communal spaces. In this situation as well, adaptation occurred efficiently. The partners were able to review and adjust the program, turning necessity into a

virtue. Having to move events to other unplanned locations unexpectedly facilitated outreach, generating increased interest from other local actors in the project. This, in turn, triggered synergies that now contribute constructively to the use of HUB4KIDS.



The HUB4KIDS construction site at the time when material were not available and prices where undergoing an inflationary process

## 5. City-Wide Engagement Strategies:

- Lesson Learned: Extend project impact beyond neighborhoods, involving entire cities.
- Best Practice: Organize city-wide activities to make hubs recognizable, fostering continuous interaction.

[The regenerative path implemented by the municipality of Bergamo through this innovative project](#) uses key projects (the Co-housing, the Murals, the Hub) as generators of services for the weaker classes, but also as generators of opportunities. The most relevant is that of opening a dialogue across spatial boundaries, the Hub4Kids, for example, wants to be for all the children of Bergamo and not only for the neighbourhood in which it is located, but also the Co-Housing project wants to be an example for the reuse of abandoned buildings, but also an attempt to build community with and around new citizens, migrants who are trying to integrate into the cultural and productive fabric, but who without this type of local policy, are faced with family and professional situations of great hardship. If the murals are a sign of how art can become a context and means of expressing a nomadic condition not sought after, but forced by events, so the Borgo Palazzo co-housing and the Hub4Kids are catalysts for new policies aiming at constructive dialogue and mutual knowledge, starting from the scale of the neighbourhood community and influencing the entire city and civic fabric.

## 6. Balancing Inclusivity and Innovation:

- Lesson Learned: Balance engagement, inclusivity, and innovative solutions for sustainable urban development.
- Best Practice: Encourage a dynamic approach that adapts to community needs while fostering innovation.

Thanks to the UIA programme's call to continuously seek and invent innovation in local urban policy processes, the CAPACITYES project highlighted two key elements driving regenerative approaches for citizens facing multiple challenges. Recognizing the role of local communities, whether individuals or organized stakeholders, as catalysts for innovation, the project aimed to foster a dialogue with those in vertical governance. This collaboration seeks to stabilize innovation processes within mainstream funding:

1. **Building Innovation Locally:** Emphasizing the value of creating innovative solutions at the municipal/local level, allowing experimentation beyond traditional planning methods known for their inflexibility.
2. **Sustainable Management of Results:** Tackling the challenge of sustaining outcomes from innovative supranational projects promoted by the EU, the discussion centered on integrating these results into mainstream funds after project closure.

These six key points mentioned earlier provide a foundation for various paths taken in the urban regeneration process aimed at addressing urban poverty in Bergamo. While not exhaustive, they offer Lego-like elements that can be combined to construct new forms of local policies, generating inclusive conditions for those living on the margins not by choice, demonstrating resilience. Families, seeking opportunities in urban areas, often lack the

support needed. The CAPACITyES project in Bergamo offers crucial ingredients for regenerative approaches that don't require significant financial investments but activate:

1. **Dialogical and Welcoming Capacity:** Fostering dialogue and welcome, supported by local associations.
2. **Integration of Social Services:** Incorporating various social services within public administrations, revitalized through active participation.
3. **Political Vision:** Uniting disruptive elements like the UIA program with regeneration catalysts, such as abandoned places, and connecting cultural operators, designers, and social innovators to focus on those often overlooked by development policies.

#### **Guidance for Urban Authorities: Implementing Innovative Projects and Best Practices**

The CAPACITyES project focuses on making cities more child-friendly. Urban authorities play a crucial role in addressing city challenges. The success in facing and resolving these challenges with sustainable solutions depends on the ability to engage local stakeholders. Only through an inclusive process of problem analysis and co-design of solutions can shared development frameworks be established, leading to tangible results, especially with sensitive issues like those addressed in CAPACITyES. The project highlights the complexity of tackling urban poverty and stresses the importance of reusing abandoned buildings for housing. The Municipality of Bergamo successfully addressed challenges, upgrading cohousing buildings for families. However, this achievement brings new challenges, as families undergo housing transitions, training, and integration into Bergamo's social fabric. The Hub4Kids isn't isolated but promotes city-wide engagement for children, adolescents, and families.

Project partners, along with local and international experts, implemented clear planning principles, including

- selecting target groups and maintaining continuous support,
- fostering dialogue between decision-makers, technicians, and families.

The project's success offers guidance for other urban authorities considering similar innovative projects.

#### **1. Active Engagement of Communities:**

- Lesson Learned: Actively involve children ([Journal no.2 delves into these aspects of the project](#)), adolescents, and families in participatory planning processes.
- Best Practice: Prioritize inclusive engagement for diverse cultural backgrounds to maximize creative potential.

As highlighted in previous publications and further explored in Journal no. 3, the Capacities project has placed significant emphasis on an inclusive and participatory approach from the grassroots level. This involves not only identifying local issues but also creating communities within target groups, encompassing diverse nationalities and shared experiences of migration and integration into the local social, cultural, and economic context. Particularly, grassroots participation has introduced a circularity to the project, involving ongoing monitoring of actions to align project initiatives with both project ambitions and the needs expressed by individuals—be they operators or beneficiaries—involved in the day-to-day management and implementation.

#### **2. Integration of Artistic Elements:**

- Lesson Learned: Artistic installations and performances enhance neighborhood regeneration.
- Best Practice: Introduce artists to create added value, fostering community pride and ownership.

The creativity and imagination of children take center stage in one of the three key initiatives driving the regenerative efforts championed by CAPACITyES. Street art, a lively manifestation of this creativity, serves as a vital link between two other intervention areas—renovating a building for CO-HOUSING and constructing HUB4KIDS—forming an "urban corridor" decorated with murals. This mural-clad urban corridor captures the attention of Bergamo's residents, materializing children's ideas and drawings while transforming their imaginative concepts into a regenerative act. The fusion of fantasy and creativity becomes an essential element in re-contextualizing the urban spaces traversed by this vivid ensemble of color. Children's vast imagination, combined with the artistic flair of a street artist like Luogo Comune, led to the realisation of a Project that succeeded in conveying the drama of the migrants' permanent journey and the difficult search for a safe harbour where they can develop a new, economically, socially and culturally sustainable life, which ferries them out of a state of stagnant urban poverty.

#### **3. Empowering Vulnerable Populations:**

- Lesson Learned: Empower families in difficulty as co-designers for impactful solutions.
- Best Practice: Consider vulnerable populations not just as beneficiaries but as contributors to project success.

The project placed significant importance on vulnerable families, a focal target necessitating innovative



approaches. This marked a pivotal phase in urban innovation, providing crucial support to families selected from housing waiting lists. The assistance covered psychological aid, addressing socio-cultural diversities, and integrating values from diverse backgrounds. This initiative aimed to forge new "hybrid urban communities" through dialogue with long-standing residents, notably in areas where CAPACITYES initiatives were underway. These evolving communities, shaped by project interventions, impacted the demand for urban services, facilities, and standards in their respective areas. Simultaneously, local actors engaged in this grassroots process played dual roles as both targets and beneficiaries, while also serving as proposers of "locally rooted" solutions, demonstrating a high degree of sustainability and community ownership.

#### 4. Creating Central Community Hubs:

- Lesson Learned: Establish central hubs as aggregators, creators of bonds, and providers of innovative services.
- Best Practice: Utilize hubs to mend urban fabric, offering diverse activities to meet community needs.

In the realm of this project, the true essence of the hub is a sustainable outcome—a result of the reconstruction of an abandoned farmhouse to establish a Hub4Kids. However, equally significant is the planning process undertaken with children and adolescents through meetings, events, workshops, shaping the content that will form the backbone of the services the hub will provide to next generation of children in the future. The Hub is as a transformative initiative, weaving together the urban landscape by introducing a diverse range of services tailored specifically for the young generations. Serving as a catalyst for community dialogues, the Hub4Kids acts as a bridge across different areas of the city, extending its impact beyond the immediate neighborhood. It engages children and adolescents on a citywide scale, evolving into a language and narrative that fosters a renewed dialogue between its hosting neighborhood and the entire city of Bergamo.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Looking Back and Assessing the Project

Over time, the Municipal Urban Authority (MUA) has shown excellent management skills, handling unexpected challenges like the Covid pandemic and issues arising from the war in Ukraine. The project's ability to adapt and find new solutions highlights its flexibility and dedication to meeting goals. Introducing online tenders in public procurement was a major step forward, promoting transparency and public involvement. While this change was initially driven by necessity during the pandemic, it has the potential to transform traditional practices in Italy, paving the way for future projects. The project's focus on teamwork across departments and a community-oriented approach to urban renewal demonstrates a commitment to comprehensive governance. Despite ongoing challenges in sustaining this innovative approach and aligning it with EU policies, the foundation has been laid for a collaborative and effective urban development model. The project's participatory approach, even amidst pandemic limitations, shows a commitment to involving the community in problem-solving. Successfully transitioning from online to in-person engagement ensured that families and children could actively contribute to decision-making. Regular monitoring and evaluation allowed for adjustments in real-time, promoting continuous learning. Engaging stakeholders ensured that project activities met community needs, highlighting the importance of communication and flexibility in achieving success. Looking ahead, the financial sustainability of CAPACITYES depends on ongoing discussions with higher-level authorities managing funds. The local business model established for the cohousing project, involving families in financial contributions and skills development, represents a shift towards empowerment rather than simple social assistance. As the project concludes, its impact extends beyond completed initiatives. CAPACITYES has laid the groundwork for redefining traditional practices, fostering innovation, and establishing a collaborative model for urban development. The lessons learned and successes achieved position the project as a valuable reference for future endeavors in sustainable urban regeneration.

### Unveiling the Project Legacy: Challenges and Solutions.

Finally, Let's dive into the lasting effects of the CAPACITYES project in Bergamo, exploring the knowledge gained and the practical solutions it implemented.

- **Smart Lessons**

CAPACITYES served up some valuable insights on urban problem-solving. Tackling issues like housing shortages, educational gaps, and social inclusion, the project emphasized the need for a holistic approach. It's like playing a strategic game where you consider everything at once, involving everyone from the locals to decision-makers.

- **Transforming Spaces and Lives**

Beyond just talk, CAPACITYES took action. One notable feat was the conversion of an old hospital into a home for families facing hardships. This wasn't just about providing shelter; it was about revitalizing the neighborhood, making it more vibrant and welcoming for everyone.

- **Adapting in Tough Times**

Facing challenges like a pandemic, CAPACITyES didn't throw in the towel. The city adapted its plans, showcasing resilience and the ability to innovate in the face of adversity. This flexibility and community support demonstrated effective problem-solving during uncertain times.

- **Empowering Young Visionaries**

Kids in Bergamo played a pivotal role by creating captivating murals. These weren't just artistic expressions; they symbolized the inclusion of children in city planning. It highlighted the notion that great ideas can come from anyone, regardless of age, fostering a more enjoyable city experience.

- **Hub4Kids: A Haven for Young Minds**

CAPACITyES transformed an old farmhouse into Hub4Kids, a future hub for youthful activities. Despite facing delays, the project cleverly adapted to keep kids engaged. Once operational, it promises to be a vibrant space for children to gather and enjoy.

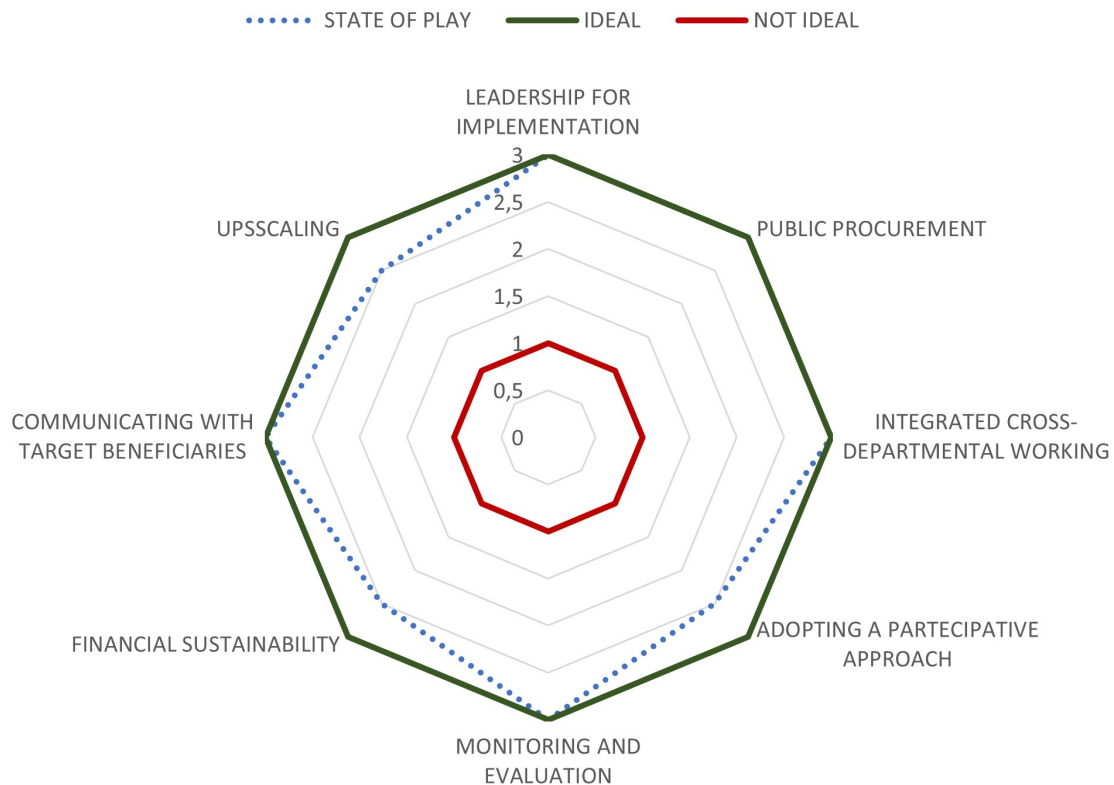
- **A Learning Curve for All Cities**

Bergamo's experience isn't exclusive; it's a lesson for all cities. CAPACITyES encourages cities to balance global awareness with local priorities. It emphasizes collaboration and contingency planning, offering a roadmap for cities to navigate challenges and enhance their communities.

### **Final Remarks**

At the end of the project course, the CAPACITyES project partnership proved to be able to hold its own and face the main challenges of a UIA project with competence and dedication. With regard to the ability to manage a complex, innovative process, with a difficult target group to keep close and active within the project for three years, the LEADERSHIP FOR IMPLEMENTATION was very strong from the very beginning, sound in the last metres of this project. The UPSCALING possibilities of the CAPACITyES project are good, the project in itself has all the necessary ingredients to be replicated on a regional, national, but also European scale, as it has defined a precise inclusive methodology, especially effective in integrating families from migratory flows that currently affect the European territory, much depends also on the strategic decisions of the superordinate levels of governance, but from this local level a "way of doing things" certainly emerges that can help several cities to be more welcoming and inclusive, in this the impeccable continuity of action, information, active involvement and training made with the target groups (COMMUNICATING WITH TARGET BENEFICIARIES) was fundamental. As far as FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY is concerned, both the training activities, especially in the co-housing project, and the local partnerships and programme of events established both during, but also in perspective, for the management of HUB4KIDS, have defined paths of financial self-sufficiency of the two projects directly linked to the daily actions of the local community, much will also depend on the previous point, on how much the Municipality of Bergamo will be able to add other funds from financing established at a regional level, above all, and on how much it will invest in the future in this type of policy at a local, municipal level. Again, the process of monitoring the participatory process, is seen at this concluding moment, as a strong point in the process that structured the CAPACITyES project, this aspect was not always strong during these three years, and it was often not easy to find the balance of this process in progress, and it was also necessary to proceed with the replacement of the original partner who could not find a way to manage a participation that was not only proactive, but also knew how to reflect on its own choices with reference to the objectives to be achieved, but in the end MONITORING AND EVALUATION were structured well, since it was understood that this type of action must be based on local expertise, close to the problems of the neighbourhood. Finally, the lead partner grasped, from the very beginning, a clear point for the success of this type of complex programme, the implementation of an inter-sectoral approach at the level of municipal competences, INTEGRATING CROSS DEPARTMENTAL WORKING. The leadership has always insisted on bringing together technicians with urban or architectural design skills with others who managed social policies and those who were responsible for structuring the formal process to assign the tasks on the market, PUBLIC PROCUREMENT, a dialogue of strong local clarification and programming of time and content that ensured that even in the face of externalities that could stop the project, the network of local actors, partners and wide group of stakeholders, were able to find innovative approaches, such as the case of procurement managed entirely online, an absolute innovation in the Italian bureaucratic context, which is often extremely bureaucratic and far too lax in controlling even often irrelevant details. The challenges chart below shows that the CAPACITyES project was characterised by a crescendo in tackling the key challenges that characterise the classic path of a UIA process and that eventually reaches almost an ideal level in the face of those challenges where the role of the lead partner is primary.

## THE CAPACITYES PROJECT CHALLENGES



In summary, CAPACITYES has demonstrated its effectiveness in tackling challenges within the UIA project with skill and dedication. Successfully navigating a complex and innovative process, particularly with a challenging target group over three years, highlighted strong leadership throughout the project. The potential for CAPACITYES to expand is promising, offering a model that can be replicated at regional, national, and European levels. The local approach, emphasizing ongoing action, information sharing, active participation, and training with target groups, proved to be pivotal. Financial sustainability, especially concerning training and local partnerships for the co-housing project and events at HUB4KIDS, shows potential but relies on municipal decisions and regional funding. From the outset, the lead partner emphasized an inter-sectoral approach, integrating cross-departmental collaboration, fostering dialogue, and proposing innovative solutions. The legacy of CAPACITYES illustrates the transformative impact of collaborative urban regeneration—from the physical revitalization of buildings to the empowerment of children and resilience displayed in the face of external challenges. CAPACITYES leaves a lasting mark on the urban landscape, serving as a source of inspiration for cities across the EU and worldwide. It advocates for embracing complexity, prioritizing inclusivity, and envisioning a future where urban spaces are thoughtfully tailored to the needs of local communities.



A participative moment for CAPACITYES projects in the transition period to post-COVID



## COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL CHANNELS

Follow the transformations of the project in real time on the dedicated website <https://www.capacityes.it/> and on the following social channels:

WEBSITE: <https://www.capacityes.it/>

FACEBOOK: <https://www.facebook.com/capacityesbergamo/>

X (Former TWITTER): <https://twitter.com/CapacityesBG>

INSTAGRAM: <https://www.instagram.com/capacityesbergamo/?hl=en>

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Urban poverty

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See on UIA website

