



HEIs as Innovative Triggers of Sustainable Development in European Cities in Post Covid-19 era



REPORT FROM STUDY VISIT ON GOOD PRACTICE PRESENTATION

Host Partner: LAMA Impresa Sociale Soc. Coop.

Participating Partners: WSB, MRU, SMART RI (in presence)

**Stuttgart Media University, University of Danang
(connected remotely)**

Venue: Florence, Londa and San Godenzo (province of Florence)

Dates: 3 - 5 July 2024

Description of the good practice presented during the study visit

1. The topic of the case study

Londa and San Godenzo are two Tuscanian municipalities located in the Apennine mountains. The two municipalities, which can be easily reached from the nearby city of Florence, are access points to an important Italian National Park, namely the “Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna”, a place rich in biodiversity, and a source of vital ecosystem services for all the territory.

The two municipalities shared the desire to begin a process of transformation aimed at tackling issues such as depopulation and demographic ageing. For this reason, LAMA was involved so as to provide technical assistance for a systemic study and analysis of the key territorial levers able to enhance economic, cultural and social development. This study led to the design of a complex and multi-layered territorial development strategy, called “**Montagna Fiorentina**”, then financed by the Next Generation EU programme.

Deeply connected to the territorial regeneration strategy is the participatory process called “**Montagna Prossima**”. This process gave the chance to open the regeneration strategy to the direct participation and consultation of citizens in the two municipalities. The activities of Montagna Prossima participatory process aimed at facilitating people's engagement in the territorial transformation process, while presenting the new strategy and informing citizens about the participation opportunities; above all, people were invited to events for open discussion and co-design, for collecting fundamental indications to steer the practical implementation of the interventions included in the strategy.

From January to June 2023, numerous **participatory initiatives** were organised: public presentation events, thematic round tables, mobile temporary information points, co-design workshops dedicated to young people and women, and final events presenting the process' results. Each of these meetings proved to be a key moment for the expression of different voices and perspectives to orient the practical implementation of the territorial regeneration interventions.

2. Challenge addressed in the case study

The primary challenge for this type of initiative is that participating in a collaborative process requires significant time and effort from those involved. Therefore, it's crucial to clearly define the objective and the potential benefits for participants, from the very beginning.

Additionally, the implementation of the Montagna Fiorentina project has been greatly nourished by the inputs and contributions of the Montagna Prossima participatory process. It is vital to effectively communicate this to local communities so they recognize that their

efforts have been essential to the regeneration of their area. Furthermore, it's important to present tangible results that highlight the goals achieved, enhancing satisfaction and reinforcing the sense that the effort invested was worthwhile.

Another challenge we encountered was ensuring the inclusion of all individuals and groups, as there was a risk of excluding some from the participatory process, thereby missing the chance for them to influence decisions on territorial regeneration. In this sense, it is of paramount importance to identify key individuals and stakeholders, those who participate and remain active throughout the whole process. These individuals are crucial to the engagement process and should be recognized as key allies in spreading the message and encouraging broader participation.

3. Main stages in co-creation of the solution and involved actors

The main stages of the participatory process “Montagna Prossima” were the following:

PHASE 1) MAPPING

The first phase of the participatory pathway involved mapping all the actors and organisations active in the area. The methodology adopted for carrying out the mapping activity was the “Snowball Sampling”, which enabled reaching an initial group of participants, later expanded through engagement activities. The objective of this phase was to engage citizens and organisations, to start sharing information regarding the ongoing process of transformation, and to encourage people to take active part in the participatory process.

PHASE 2) ENGAGEMENT

All mapped subjects were then involved in various initiatives:

- public events presenting the territorial regeneration strategy and all the participation opportunities, in both two municipalities;
- presentation events dedicated to young people under 35;
- interviews with active stakeholders (organisations or informal groups, for-profit and nonprofit enterprises) on the two territories.



PHASE 3) LISTEN AND DEBATE
The third phase focused on listening, debating, and collecting needs and input. The activities included:

- 2 events with thematic roundtables for discussing the topics of TOURISM, CULTURE, WORK, LOCAL IDENTITY, and ENVIRONMENT;
- 6 temporary stations set up in different places in the two municipalities for giving information and gathering inputs from citizens to create a community map;
- 1 online communication channel for information and proposal collection.



PHASE 4) CO-DESIGN

The fourth phase was conducting co-design workshops with women and young people (under 35), two fundamental categories for the social, economic, and cultural regeneration of the two municipalities of Londa and San Godenzo. The co-design workshops aimed to make these target groups real protagonists of the territory's development, giving them skills and support to imagine new proposals for the regeneration of their territory. To encourage women's participation, a free babysitting service was also made available during the meetings.



PHASE 5) PRESENTATION

To share advancements and results, two types of dissemination activities were carried out: the publication of synthetic reports and the organisation of two final public events, one in Londa and one in San Godenzo.

Also, regular communication activities (online and offline) were implemented during the whole duration of the participatory pathway and across all the engagement activities.



4. Implemented solution

The conclusion of the Montagna Prossima participatory process has coincided with the start of the territorial strategy "Montagna Fiorentina" implementation, which thus benefited from the contributions gathered in the participatory process. In particular, here are some of the inputs from the participatory process that was fundamental for the strategy interventions:

Visual identity and website: The participatory approach has also been applied to the design of the visual identity and the main functions included in the web platform of "Montagna Fiorentina". <https://montagnafiorentina.com/>. Citizens were asked to draw their idea of the mountain, representing the values and emotional symbols from their personal experiences and part of the local culture. These visual elements were incorporated into the generative visual identity of Montagna Fiorentina and featured in all coordinated image materials, thereby enhancing the community's sense of belonging and connection to the project.



Touristic experiences: To increase the attractiveness of the territory while promoting the area's cultural heritage, local economic productions, and natural resources, the participatory process represented the opportunity to map and connect local actors (profit and non-profit organisations) capable of offering residents and visitors immersive experiences in the local cultural heritage and enjoyment of typical products and traditions, together with local communities. This process led to the creation of a catalog of touristic experiences that has been disseminated both offline and online (in the dedicated section of the [Montagna Fiorentina website](#)).

Co-design projects follow-up: The co-design process involved young people and women from the two municipalities, and generated a series of ideas and inputs for the Florentine Mountain interventions. We describe here how two of these ideas have already been implemented within the new strategy:

The first project seeks to respond to a need that emerged during the participatory process: the lack of accommodation facilities for visitors. The project mapped and connected those people having empty rooms or flats to be used as tourist accommodation to provide a uniform and widespread service.

The other project is the work done by a youth group proposing to create an open-air space for the aggregation and social life of young people, which could also host initiatives and events organised by them. The open-air space was then built thanks to the collaboration with students and teachers from the IUAV University of Venice.



5. Short-term and long-term results of intervention

In general terms, the participation in the initiatives of Montagna Prossima and the contribution to the definition of the main elements of the territorial regeneration strategy enhanced a **sense of recognition and ownership** around the project while building a stronger **sense of community**.

One of the most critical short-term impacts generated by the project was the **creation of networks and new collaborations** between local actors. This impact was stimulated through the involvement of local communities in the numerous participation initiatives organised within the Montagna Prossima participatory process. These events not only engaged citizens and informed them about the transformation process underway but also stimulated dialogue and networks between local actors and strengthened the relationship between participants and the municipal administration.

Indeed, the participation process has allowed the consolidation of the existing **dialogue between local communities and the public administration**. The Municipal Administration of both Londa and San Godenzo listened to the organisations present to learn about their needs and development proposals for the territory and also made itself available for discussion, providing helpful information and, in the case of the co-design paths, also providing technical support to make the ideas that emerged both feasible and sustainable.

In the long term, one of the main objectives of the Montagna Prossima participatory process was to activate the local community, in terms of awareness and participation in preparation for a broader process designed to have long-term continuity. In this sense, among the long-term impacts expected by the project it is important to mention:

- **counteracting the demographic outflow** and encouraging people to stay and invest in the area's potential;
- **increase in skills, and therefore employment opportunities**, with particular reference to women and young people taking part in co-design courses;
- **increase in cultural participation**, thanks to the creation of new opportunities for promoting the area, on a cultural, artistic and environmental level;
- **increase in tourist practices supporting and respecting the territory and its communities**, thanks to the engagement of local actors in the promotion and implementation of touristic experiences enhancing the local heritage.

6. Description of the good practice to be multiplied based on this case

The Montagna Prossima participatory process is grounded on an **innovative multilevel methodology**, which focuses on engaging and listening to people's needs, addressing territorial issues and potentiality, fostering peer exchange, cooperative learning and a collaborative approach in the design of local regeneration interventions, on the levers of culture and environment. These innovative features are not bound in time and space, thus making the methodological approach potentially replicable.

Therefore, the process's approach and general structure of the process can, therefore be adopted (and adapted) in other places with similar characteristics (rural or peri-urban contexts, small municipalities), undertaking transformation and regeneration processes. It's important, however to underline that each context presents specific challenges and opportunities that should be identified in a thorough preliminary context analysis, necessary to decline the participatory activities in the specific place duly.

Lastly, expert figures facilitating citizen participation and fostering dialogue with public administration must continuously stimulate and support the engagement process. In this sense, Universities can play a pivotal role in this, as key partners in designing, guiding, and facilitating these processes to ensure their success.