This book explores how abandoned and underused spaces can become engines of social innovation, ecological transition and community empowerment. Developed through a transnational partnership involving Italy, Spain and Slovenia, SPACE-NEST project connects the principles of the New European Bauhaus — sustainability, beauty and inclusion — with the objectives of the European Green Deal and the social economy.

The book presents a methodology based on territorial mapping, stakeholder engagement, focus groups, Social Economy Missions, Design Thinking, participatory prototyping and action planning. These tools were applied in three pilot territories: the Province of Bergamo, the Province of Malaga and the Primorska region. Through a comparative analysis of the three contexts, the volume shows how local communities, public authorities, social enterprises and civil-society organizations can collaboratively identify new uses for abandoned buildings and spaces, linking cultural heritage, green entrepreneurship, circular economy, sustainable crafts and inclusive community services.

The book combines theoretical reflection, practical guidance and territorial case studies. Its Action Plans demonstrate that regeneration is not only a physical process, but also a social and political one, requiring transparent governance, shared responsibility and long-term community participation. SPACE-NEST ultimately proposes an adaptable model for transforming underused spaces into inclusive, sustainable and locally rooted centers of collective life.

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SPACE-NEST Sustainable Path Advancing Community

SPACE-NEST

SPACE-NEST

Sustainable Path Advancing Community Empowerment. New European Bauhaus for Social Economy and Transformative Living



Edited by Federica Burini

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI BERGAMO

2026

SPACE-NEST
Sustainable Path Advancing Community Empowerment. New European Bauhaus for Social Economy and Transformative Living



Edited by

Federica Burini

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Introduction
Sustainable Path Advancing Community Empowerment

This book is the result of the SPACE-NEST project (*Sustainable Path Advancing Community Empowerment – New European Bauhaus for Social Economy and Transformative Living*), co-funded by the European Union and led by a consortium comprising six partners: three local administrations (Diputación de Málaga, Provincia di Bergamo and Občina Izola), one sector representative organization for the green economy (Lombardy Energy Cleantech Cluster), and two non-governmental organizations specializing in sustainable regeneration and social innovation (Action Against Hunger Spain and Inovaktiv from Slovenia).

The SPACE-NEST consortium operates through three local tandems. This tandem-based approach facilitates cooperation among local authorities, sector representatives, and civil society organizations, ensuring that project activities are adapted to the specific needs and contexts of each territory.

The three tandems are structured as follows:

- Malaga Tandem: the Provincial Council of Malaga (Diputación de Málaga) and Action Against Hunger Spain.
- Bergamo Tandem: the Province of Bergamo (Provincia di Bergamo) and Lombardy Energy Cleantech Cluster (LE2C).
- Primorska Tandem: Občina Izola and Inovaktiv.

While aiming at revitalizing abandoned or underutilized rural spaces by transforming them into hubs for social enterprises focused on the green economy, the project also emphasizes renewable energy, the circular economy, sustainable crafts, and green architecture, inspired by the principles of the New European Bauhaus and the European Green Deal.

As the project evolves, Europe stands at a pivotal crossroads. Cities and regions across the continent face a convergence of pressures: the worsening climate crisis, persistent social inequalities, the fragmentation of community life, the underuse and abandonment of urban and rural spaces, and the urgent need to transition towards more sustainable, inclusive, and meaningful ways of living together. At the same time, Europe has never had more powerful tools, frameworks, and resources at its disposal to respond to these challenges. The European Green Deal, the New European Bauhaus, the Social Economy Action Plan, the Urban Agenda for the EU, and subsequent cohesion policy

frameworks all point in the same direction: towards a Europe where the quality of everyday life, the health of ecosystems, and the dignity and agency of communities become the focus of how we design, build, and inhabit our shared spaces. Yet the gap between policy goals and everyday reality remains wide. Frameworks exist, but the pathways to implementation, namely the "how" rather than just the "what", continue to be unclear, fragmented, or inaccessible to many of the actors who need them most. This is the gap that SPACE-NEST has been designed to address.

Covering 80% of the EU's territory and housing 30% of its population, European rural areas face structural challenges such as demographic decline, insufficient connectivity, and a lack of attractive job opportunities. Such issues are exacerbated by the abandonment of buildings and rural spaces which would otherwise offer great potential for regenerating local communities.

SPACE-NEST addresses these challenges by offering innovative solutions for transforming such spaces into resources that promote sustainability, innovation, and social inclusion, in line with the EU's green and digital transitions. By leveraging the principles of the New European Bauhaus, SPACE-NEST seeks to demonstrate how rural areas can become vibrant ecosystems of sustainable and inclusive economic activity. The project first identifies abandoned rural spaces or underutilized ones and then aims to repurpose and regenerate these areas offering them new importance and meaning through recovery and enhancement. In particular, the project supports the establishment and development of socially oriented enterprises engaged in green economic activities that respond to the specific challenges and needs of rural communities. In doing so, the project aligns with the EU's ambition to boost the development of social economy SMEs in rural areas. The project fosters innovative, sustainable, and integrated ecosystems that can contribute to more resilient territorial development, in alignment with the New European Bauhaus and European Green Deal frameworks.

The project was thus conceived as a transnational learning and action plan bringing together partners from Italy, Spain, and Slovenia who share the same conviction: that, when guided by the values of the New European Bauhaus and driven by the active participation of communities and social economy actors, the regeneration of underused spaces can serve as a powerful engine for social cohesion, economic resilience, ecological transition, and cultural vitality. Rather than relying solely on abstract theorization, the project pursued this conviction through a carefully structured methodology of mapping, consultation, co-design, and action planning, applied simultaneously across three pilot territories: Bergamo, in the region of Lombardy in northern Italy, Malaga, in the region of Andalusia in southern Spain, and Primorska, in the coastal region of western Slovenia.

Each territory differs in terms of its geography, demographic profile, economic structure, cultural identity, and the specific spaces and challenges at its heart. Yet all three territories share a common thread: the presence of underused or abandoned spaces with the potential to become new centres of

community life, and the presence of communities and social economy actors ready, willing, and able to help shape that transformation if given the right tools, support, and frameworks.

The specific objectives of the project include mapping and repurposing spaces for sustainable economic activities; establishing a social economy ecosystem to address local challenges through scalable solutions; enabling stakeholders to engage in exchange missions and develop action plans; and promoting the replication of the SPACE-NEST model across Europe.

Key activities comprise: i) conducting territorial analyses to assess local needs and map recoverable spaces; ii) organizing three transnational social economy missions involving 72 stakeholders; iii) developing three territorial action plans inspired by the New European Bauhaus principles.

Dissemination efforts involve hosting events such as Sharing Days, producing a booklet of best practices and organizing an online event with over 100 participants to maximize the reach and impact of project outcomes. Together, these activities aim to create a sustainable model for rural transformation and social innovation.

The project brings together the findings, methodologies, and concrete outcomes generated throughout its implementation across the three European regions: Bergamo, Malaga and Primorska, thanks to a co-planning activity organised by each region's tandem with public and private stakeholders.

This book is based on the results of the project and the experiences of the participants involved throughout the process and is intended to provide concrete orientations for key actors at EU level including policymakers, practitioners, social economy organizations, urban planners, and community leaders. Although the volume gathers together the work of the researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and communities who have explored, tested, and advanced new models of place-based regeneration rooted in the values of the New European Bauhaus (NEB) across the three European regions, it does not merely document the work done. It offers concrete guidance—grounded in evidence, shaped by community voices, and tested through real processes—for the key actors who hold the power and responsibility to transform European places: urban planners, local and regional authorities, social economy organizations, civil society groups, European policymakers, and the communities themselves.

The book is organised in three main parts. Part one situates the project within its broader intellectual and policy context. It explores the historical and conceptual roots of the Bauhaus approach to territorial development and community empowerment and traces the evolution of the New European Bauhaus as a policy initiative. After examining its guiding principles, the book sets out the specific approach that SPACE-NEST developed for applying these principles across its three European pilot

regions. This first part is intended to provide readers with the conceptual foundation they need to understand the methodology and case studies that follow.

Part two presents the SPACE-NEST methodology in detail, the step-by-step process through which the project moved from territorial mapping to co-design. It covers the methods and tools used for mapping places and social actors, the design and implementation of multi-stakeholder consultation processes, and the application of design thinking as a practical framework for community empowerment and collaborative space visioning. This part is intended as both a theoretical contribution to the field of participatory urbanism and an applied guide for practitioners who wish to adopt similar approaches in their own contexts.

Part three documents the three European case studies, Bergamo, Malaga, and Primorska, presenting the territorial analyses, the findings of the consultation and co-design processes, the prototypes and visions developed by participants, and the Action Plans that translate these findings into concrete recommendations for each territory. Read together, these three case studies offer a rich comparative perspective on how the same methodology can yield diverse outcomes, surface different tensions, and generate distinct innovations depending on the specific context in which it is applied.

As the result of a participatory and iterative process involving partner organizations, local communities, stakeholders, researchers, and practitioners across Europe, the book reflects not only analytical work but also the voices, ideas, and energy of the people who took part in focus groups, Social Economy Missions, design thinking workshops, and co-design sessions throughout the project lifecycle.

It has been written for everyone who believes that the quality of the spaces we share shapes the quality of the lives we live and for those committed to setting things right. More specifically, it is addressed to: European and national policymakers seeking evidence-based orientations for implementing the New European Bauhaus, the Social Economy Action Plan, and related frameworks at regional and local level; local and regional authorities looking for tested methodologies to engage communities in the regeneration of underused spaces and the co-creation of new social infrastructure; social economy organizations—cooperatives, social enterprises, foundations, and associations—seeking to expand their role as active agents of place-based development and community stewardship; urban planners, architects, and designers who want to integrate participatory and community-led approaches into their professional practice; civil society organizations and community groups who want to understand their rights, tools, and opportunities to shape the spaces and places they inhabit; and researchers and educators working at the intersection of urban studies, social economy, participatory design, and European policy.

The contributors to this volume write from different disciplinary traditions, professional backgrounds, and national contexts. This diversity is reflected in the multiplicity of voices, approaches, and perspectives that animate the pages that follow. Where tensions or divergences exist—between research and practice, top-down policy frameworks and bottom-up community demands, or the urgency of action and the need for reflection—we have chosen not to smooth them over but to expose them, since it is precisely within these tensions that the most generative learning resides.

Although this book does not claim to have all the answers, it is offered in the conviction that the questions it raises about how we design our spaces, who actually participates in that design, what values should guide our choices, and how the social economy can serve as both a vehicle and a guarantor of genuinely transformative change are among the most important issues that European communities and institutions face today.

The methodologies presented here are open and adaptable and the Action Plans developed in Bergamo, Malaga, and Primorska represent starting points, not end points. Significantly, the communities that participated in the focus groups, workshops, and Social Economy Missions have been changed by the process and they, in turn, are changing their spaces.

We invite every reader of this volume, whatever their role, discipline, or geography, to take what is useful from these pages, adapt it to their own context, share it with others, and continue the work of building a more sustainable, more beautiful, and more just Europe.

The path is not yet complete, but we are moving forward together.

Irene Ojo Mars
Action Against Hunger Spain

Federica Burini
Università degli studi di Bergamo

PART 1

New European Bauhaus for Social Economy and Transformative Living

1.1. The Bauhaus Approach for Territorial Development and Community Empowerment

by Federica Burini, Università degli studi di Bergamo

The relationship between the Bauhaus movement and social-territorial development has been explored extensively in the literature, but the potential impact of the former on the latter in our contemporary world remains hidden.

To better understand the potential of the Bauhaus movement we should re-read what Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus movement, wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century, and which could be related today to our contemporary world of territorial governance and co-planning:

> *"The art of building is contingent on the coordinated team-work of a band of active collaborators whose orchestral cooperation symbolizes the cooperative organism we call* society" (Gropius, 1919/1965, cit. p. 57).

Gropius' choice to use so many words beginning with the prefix "co" in such a short sentence is emblematic.

Founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar in 1919, the original Bauhaus school was conceived not merely as an art and design institution, but as a radical experiment in the social organization of creative work, premised on the conviction that the quality of the built environment shapes, and is shaped by, the quality of collective – or as we would say today, "community"– life. As Gropius himself declared in the founding manifesto, architecture and design are not autonomous aesthetic disciplines but fundamentally social practices oriented towards the construction of a shared world.

The historical Bauhaus school was a *milieu* in which an inventive approach addressed the need to foster architectural innovation by breaking down the boundaries between disciplines and by giving a central role to students' creativity for the collective result.

It was, therefore, both educational and groundbreaking, creating new spaces in which design and manufacturing industry activities could meld. Barriers between artists and craftspeople were thus broken down and artists integrated theoretical, practical and applied work into manufacturing and technological society, while the interconnection between professors, students, craftspeople, artists and communities stood at the core of this movement.

This new approach to functionality laid the foundations for an intersection between different knowledge dimensions with a new approach to architectural innovation and urban regeneration, fostered by the emerging urgency of the problems and conditions then facing Germany. Its strongly

pioneering streak propelled the new school's approach into becoming a movement of international resonance, with Bauhaus artefacts being exhibited all over the world. Even today such artefacts continue to be regarded as symbols bearing very powerful messages.

Ony in 2018 did the need to reassess social, technological and environmental conditions in Europe spark a co-creation discussion that contributed to the launch of the New European Bauhaus, which took shape in 2021 just after the Covid-19 pandemic, gaining a deeper meaning for recovery.

The holistic vision linking craft, art, technology, and community, has been identified by subsequent scholars as the foundational logic that makes the Bauhaus tradition so relevant to contemporary debates about place-based development. In the field of territorial development, the Bauhaus legacy has been interpreted as an invitation to move beyond sectoral, top-down models of urban planning towards more integrated, participatory, and culturally sensitive approaches that recognize the agency of communities as co-designers of their own spaces. This shift aligns closely with the core of community empowerment: the capacity of people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable the institutions affecting their lives.

More recently, scholars working at the intersection of urban studies and social economy have argued that the Bauhaus approach offers a particularly powerful framework for thinking about territorial development in peripheral or post-industrial regions. In these contexts, the regeneration of underused spaces must be understood not only as a technical challenge but as a political and cultural act of collective self-determination.

The New European Bauhaus initiative launched by the European Commission in 2021, explicitly builds on this tradition, positioning itself as "a creative and interdisciplinary movement" that connects the European Green Deal to the everyday lives of people by prioritizing "beautiful, sustainable and inclusive" places (European Commission, 2021, p. 4). Scholars have noted that this framing represents a significant evolution in European spatial policy, one that foregrounds aesthetics, participation and social innovation as co-equal dimensions of sustainable territorial development alongside more conventional metrics of economic performance and environmental compliance.

Writing from within the tradition of Italian community geography, this kind of approach demands what we call a "geography for co-inhabiting", a methodological and ethical commitment to grounding territorial development in the situated knowledge, lived experiences, and creative capacities of the communities most directly affected by spatial change (Burini, Ghisalberti, 2026). This approach is inspired by society's most urgent need to view the world through the lens of geographer Michel Lussault's book *Cohabitons!/Coabitiamo!* (Lussault, 2026). He argues that any decision made anywhere in the world about construction, connection, protection or abandonment is fundamentally ecological and geophysical. Such decisions alter soils, water, biodiversity, microclimates and cycles

of matter and energy. Furthermore, they are also deeply integrated with symbolic, relational, and political dimensions insofar as they connect to local cultures, daily micro-politics, and urban safety. In short, it is a complex process involving terrestrial landscapes, to be brought into harmony by experimenting with new ways of co-existing and co-inhabiting. The Earth, therefore, is the very condition of the urban, and caring for it is not merely an ethical add-on: it is a relational and practical rationality that pursues harmony, closely connected to the global scale. The ability to inhabit the world together responsibly, is the result of caring for what makes places liveable and recognizing mutual dependence as well as the symbolic, practical, and sensory territorial order (Turco, 1988).

Taken together, these perspectives converge on a vision of territorial community-based development that is simultaneously spatial, ecological, social, cultural, and political: one in which the Bauhaus legacy serves not as a nostalgic reference, but as a living methodological resource for the co-creation of places that are, in the fullest sense of the word, Community.

1.2. The New European Bauhaus Policy and Guiding Principles

by Irene Ojo Mars, Action Against Hunger Spain

On 15 September 2021, the European Commission adopted a Communication that sets out the framework, core principles and key actions that will drive the New European Bauhaus forward, as it moves from co-design to delivery.

The **New European Bauhaus (NEB)** is a European Commission initiative that connects the European Green Deal to improvements in everyday life by aligning three core values: **sustainability**, **aesthetics and quality of experience**, and **inclusion**. Operating at neighbourhood level, it encourages open and participatory design processes so that residents actively contribute to shaping healthy, affordable, and culturally rooted places. The NEB translates the European Green Deal into a tangible, positive experience in which all Europeans can participate and progress together.

By creating bridges between different backgrounds, cutting across disciplines and building on participation at all levels, in line with the same profound meaning of the Bauhaus founder, the NEB inspires a movement to facilitate and steer the transformation of our societies according to three inseparable values: i) **sustainability** - from climate goals, to circularity, zero pollution, and biodiversity; ii) **beauty** - aesthetics, quality of experience and style, beyond functionality; iii) **togetherness** - inclusion, from valorizing diversity, to securing accessibility and affordability.

The initiative uses a multi-level, participatory, and transdisciplinary approach across all scales, from global to local.

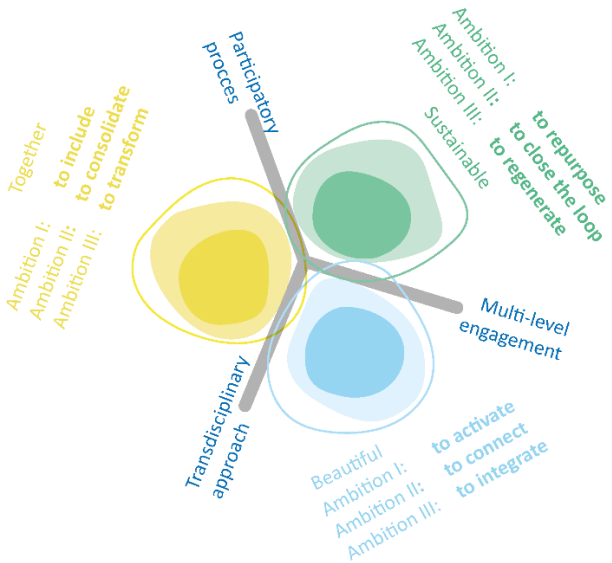


Figure 1 – New European Bauhaus approach

Source: The NEB Toolbox, 2024, https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/tools-and-resources/use-toolbox_en

Each value is then attained by means of three steps: i) sustainability, through repurpose, closing the loop and regeneration; ii) beauty, through activation, connection and integration; iii) togetherness, through inclusion, consolidation and transformation (Figure 1).

These key themes take inspiration from the views and experiences of thousands of citizens, professionals and organizations across the EU who have joined the co-design of the initiative and the open conversation about rethinking the way we live together. Moving forward, the NEB movement will focus on three key, interconnected transformations: converting local spaces, fostering an environment that enables innovation, and shifting our mindsets and perspectives.

Inspired by the co-design phase that further defined its concept and priorities, the NEB combines multiple EU financing instruments. This blend of EU funds with complementary objectives reflects the transdisciplinary nature of the initiative and the will to support pilot projects, explore new avenues and turn the movement's ideas into reality.

It is within this NEB framework that SPACE-NEST responds exactly to its principles and values. First, it focuses on abandoned or disused architectures in the European landscape to propose community-based solutions, reconnect with nature and regain a sense of belonging to combat depopulation processes. Second, it prioritizes places and people in greatest need by creating basic services especially those targeted at the young and the elderly or other vulnerable members of society. Third, it fosters long-term, life cycle and integrated thinking in the industrial ecosystem, by involving private stakeholders in the co-planning process with local public institutions and associations.

1.3. The Main Approach of Space-Nest in European Regions

by Federica Burini and Irene Ojo Mars

The SPACE-NEST project (Sustainable Path Advancing Community Empowerment: New European Bauhaus for Social Economy and Transformative Living) represents a replicable attempt to translate the values and principles of the Bauhaus historical movement into the New European Bauhaus (NEB). This project promotes lived territorial practices in three distinct regions and applies the vision of World Cohabitation to fit specific European contexts.

At its core, the project is grounded in a fundamental conviction: that regenerating underused and abandoned spaces through the NEB's three foundational values—sustainability, aesthetics and quality of experience, and inclusion—and with the active participation of communities and social economy actors, it can become a transformative force for social cohesion, ecological transition, economic resilience, and cultural vitality at the local and regional levels.

This contribution sets out the main conceptual and methodological approach that SPACE-NEST developed for applying the NEB framework across its three European pilot regions: Bergamo (Italy), Malaga (Spain), and Primorska (Slovenia). It also reflects on what this approach means for the broader project of building a more sustainable, beautiful, and inclusive Europe from the ground up.

The SPACE-NEST project is driven by the aspiration to connect the principles of the New European Bauhaus with the dynamics of the social economy, fostering innovative forms of both sustainable and inclusive spatial regeneration.

Within this framework, the project has defined a shared research methodology and established the foundations for collective action across diverse European regions. Reframing Gropius' manifesto, this methodology is based on the conviction that we can foster shared visions among various stakeholders by experimenting with approaches, methods, and tools grounded in advanced technologies to support participatory processes involving a wide range of local actors.

To understand and manage the impact of global forces on local communities, real-world case studies are needed as well as technical expertise. By testing context-specific solutions, this approach addresses complex contemporary social challenges. At the core of this effort is the concept of landscape – a framework for envisioning a new, harmonious way of inhabiting our shared world and for promoting global "geo-care".

1.3.1. The Identification of Territorial and Landscape Contexts in Europe

The SPACE-NEST project identified some territorial contexts with distinguishing characteristics in Europe to ensure the possible scalability of the methodology in other European regions.

One important, distinctive element concerns the social-demographic aspects and the urban/rural or mountain/sea dialogue of the three regions identified by the project. The first is the Lombardy region in northern Italy, with its very high population density; here the Orobic mountain areas of the Province of Bergamo constitute a really specific landscape with trends of depopulation and abandonment in net contrast with the urbanised and industrialized areas of the plain, in the cross-border area connecting the northern Lombardy valleys with Switzerland. The second, with a lower population density, is the Zahodna Slovenija region located in the cross-border area between Slovenia, Italy, Croatia and Austria, in a dialogue between the Adriatic Sea and the Alpine and mountain landscapes. Finally, the third region is Andalusia situated in the cross-border area between Spain, Portugal and Morocco; it connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Spanish *sierras* and features the lowest population density of the three case studies.

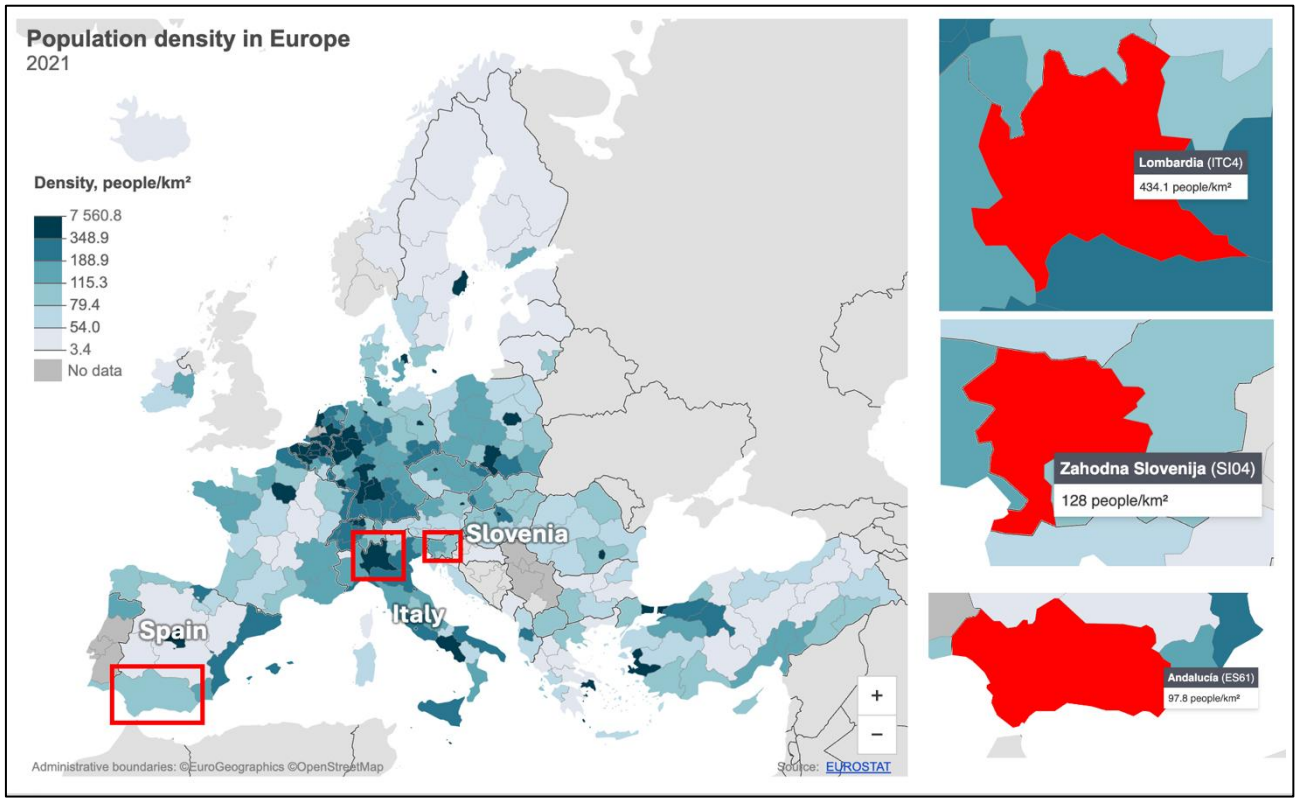


Figure 2 – European regions identified by SPACE-NEST

Author's elaboration of Eurostat data, 2021:

https://eurostat.github.io/eurostat-map/examples/choropleth/population-density.html

The project concentrated on these three regions after identifying territorial contexts with structural features and distinctive landscapes and demographic distribution. The territories were thus identified

through: (1) the coastal-inland transition and its climate-impacted activities, (2) the dominant natural corridors and landforms (mountains/valleys, rivers, karst), and (3) linking these physical patterns to the principal social/demographic issues and economic engines as well as policy-driven development narratives that give each place its distinctive character.

Common features of the three regions include: a clear physical geography combining a coastal or near-coastal interface with inland topography (Malaga and Primorska), or an inland mountain landscape (Bergamo), with a pronounced climate that shapes economic activity (for example, sunlust tourism versus temperate agricultural cycles), and a diversified economy that combines services (tourism, logistics, culture) with some form of traditional base (agro-silvo-pastoral economy and industry).

The distinctive elements then anchor each territory to its unique landscape and development context. For Bergamo, the key signature is a north-Italian Alpine-to-plain mosaic with the Orobic Alps in the north, the Serio and Adda river systems, multiple valleys (Seriana, Brembana, Scalve, Cavallina), and a southern flatland in contrast with the mountainous terrain. This geography underpins a bifurcated economy that blends initiatives for mountain-area development with the substantial urban and industrial activity in the Milan metropolitan area. Conversely, for Malaga the defining features are the coastal belt of the Costa del Sol with a warm, year-round climate, a strong tourism and service economy centred on the city of Malaga and the coastal towns, and inland contrasts represented by the Guadalhorce Valley and Sierra that offer agricultural and nature-based economic niches. Besides tourism, the province has a second major economic engine fuelled by its logistics backbone with its transport networks, airport and port. Finally, for Primorska Regija the distinctive landscape is a maritime coastline plus interior karst and valley systems. The 29-mile Adriatic coast sustains a threefold economy: maritime logistics centring around the port, rural economies based on agricultural and wine production, and a dynamic tourism sector rooted in coastal and inland heritage.

All three territorial contexts show a different social/demographic distribution (Figure 3), being inserted in very specific territorial ecosystems namely: i) a megalopolitan imprint (Bergamo in the megalopolitan area of Milan-Turin-Venice), ii) a polycentric pattern with middle-sized cities having strong commercial relationships (Primorska Regija in the Adriatic basin), and iii) a coastal low-density distribution (Malaga in the Mediterranean basin).

The territorial contexts of the SPACE-NEST project are analyzed to better understand their socio-geographical characteristics that constitute a shared knowledge base and provide the foundation for all co-design activity.

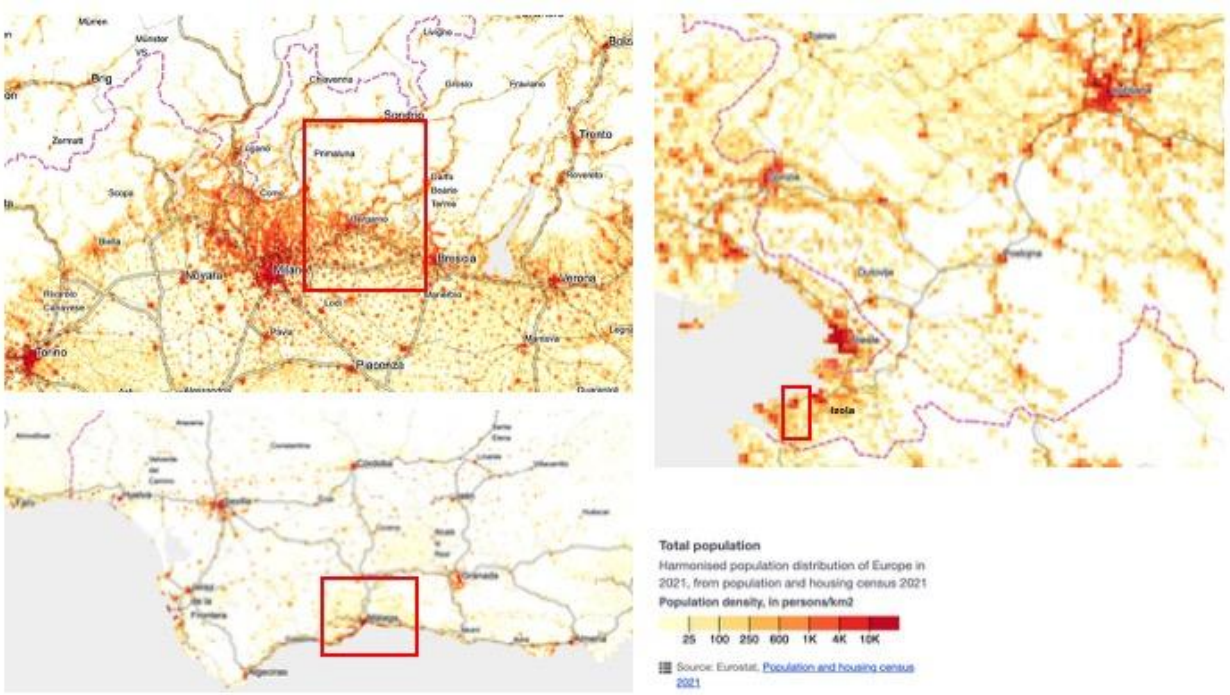


Figure 3 – Population distribution in the SPACE-NEST territorial contexts

Author's elaboration of Eurostat data, 2021: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistical-atlas/?lcis=totalPop21&style=gridviz/total-population-21/light&mpc=1&bl=true&mids=Roads,EURONYM,BORDERS,totalPop21&o=1,1,0.7,1&ch=CENSUS,CH_CENSUS_POP,CH_CENSUS_AGE&center=36.895,-3.89346,8&

The province of Bergamo in the Lombardy Region of Italy

The province of Bergamo is located in the Lombardy region in northern Italy, and its capital is the city of Bergamo. With a population of 1,119,233, the province covers an area of 2,754.91 square kilometres across 243 municipalities.

It borders the province of Sondrio to the north, the province of Brescia to the east, the province of Cremona to the south and the Metropolitan City of Milan and the provinces of Monza and Brianza and Lecco to the west. The northern part spans the Orobic Alps with the highest peak being Pizzo Coca at 3,052 meters (10,013 ft). Its rivers include the Serio, Dezzo, Cherio, Brembo, and Adda, while its main valleys are the Val Seriana, Val Cavallina, and Val Brembana. Among the smaller yet significant valleys are the Val Imagna, Val di Scalve, Val Brembilla, Val Serina, and Val Taleggio. The southern part consists mainly of flatlands.

The province's eastern boundary is formed by Lake Iseo which is crossed by the River Oglio from the Camonica Valley. Minerals are found in several areas including Trescore Balneario and San Pellegrino, the source of the mineral water of the same name.

The testbed of the SPACE-NEST Project was located in 4 municipalities in the Scalve Valley where the University of Bergamo led a research-action project in 2023. Launched by the Scalve Mountain

Association together with the four municipalities, the project aimed at providing scientific and technical support to public institutions, associations, businesses and local communities, in order to foster sustainable territorial development inspired by the principles of the NEB. The goal was to establish a partnership among universities, local authorities, and socio-economic actors to identify development opportunities based on the valley's environmental, cultural and production heritage, while strengthening the connections between local resources, tourism, agriculture, forestry and community services. In this perspective, the Scalve Valley became a living laboratory for mountain territorial regeneration (Burini, 2026).

Given the size and complexity of the provincial territory, the SPACE-NEST mapping process adopted a phased approach. Rather than attempting to map more than 200 municipalities simultaneously, the Scalve Valley was selected as the pilot area because of its manageable scale, strong territorial identity, and the existence of the afore-mentioned, ongoing research-action programme led by the University of Bergamo, an associated partner of the SPACE-NEST project.

During the implementation of the project the team also considered the experience of Val Gandino (Seriana Valley), where the University of Bergamo is coordinating the Alpine Leisure Transformation (ALTe) project, funded by Fondazione Cariplo. ALTe focuses on the regeneration of abandoned ski infrastructures through participatory processes, artistic experimentation and community-based territorial innovation. Although developed independently, the two initiatives share common methodological approaches and provide complementary insights into the regeneration of mountain areas facing demographic, economic and climate-related challenges.

The pilot experience in the Scalve Valley was conceived not as an isolated undertaking, but as the starting point for a broader provincial strategy. Building on the results of the mapping activities, stakeholder engagement and co-design process, the Bergamo Action Plan introduced a set of sustainability measures aimed at extending the SPACE-NEST approach to the entire province. A key legacy of the pilot experience is the development of a digital mapping and matchmaking platform, designed to continuously identify underused and abandoned spaces across the Province of Bergamo and connect them with municipalities, social economy organizations, professionals, researchers, investors and local communities. In this way, the methodology tested in the Scalve Valley can be progressively replicated and adapted to other mountain and rural contexts, ensuring the long-term sustainability and scalability of the SPACE-NEST approach beyond the project's lifetime.

The province of Malaga in the Andalusia Region of Spain

The Province of Malaga is situated in the region of Andalusia. It is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the south and by the provinces of Cádiz to the west, Seville to the northwest, Córdoba to the north, and Granada to the east. The province covers an area of more than 7,000 square kilometres and has a population of around 1,800,000 inhabitants. Most people live in the metropolitan area of Málaga, the provincial capital, and along the coast in a total of 103 municipalities divided into nine territorial areas called "*comarcas*", seven of which are inland and of considerable interest for the SPACE-NEST project. The population density exceeds both the Andalusia and Spanish averages, reaching 222.53 inhabitants per square kilometre.

Set on the southern edge of the Andalusia region along the Costa del Sol, the Malaga Province unfolds as a landscape of striking contrasts and sustained vitality. Its geography threads together a sun-drenched coastline, fertile inland valleys, and rugged uplands, all stitched into a climate that invites outdoor life for most of the year. Along the coast, the province presents a continuous ribbon of beaches, marinas, and resort towns that earned it the title of one of Europe's premier sun-and-sea destinations. Perched at the mouth of the Guadalmedina River, the city of Malaga provides this coastline with a historic centre, a thriving cultural scene, and a port that acts as both a gateway and a hub for regional trade. The Costa del Sol's microclimate, with mild winters, long hot summers, and abundant sunshine, drives a robust tourism economy that ripples through hotels, restaurants, leisure attractions, and service sectors across towns. Inland, the terrain rises into a mosaic of valleys and mountains. The Guadalhorce valley, featuring terraced slopes fed by irrigation channels, has long been an agricultural backbone, producing citrus fruit, vegetables, and protected crops that supply regional and national markets. Moving towards the Sierra de las Nieves and the Montes de Malaga, the inland plains give way to more rugged terrains, where cork oaks, pine forests, and limestone outcrops sculpt a landscape suited to outdoor recreation, forestry, and nature-based tourism. The province also comprises important, protected areas and ecological corridors that preserve biodiversity while offering hikers, climbers, and birdwatchers a sense of the region's wild side. Economically, the Province of Malaga has evolved from a traditional agricultural area into a diversified, dynamic economy founded on tourism, services, and logistics, with notable growth in technology and industry clusters. Tourism remains the sun-and-sea driver of the economy, but a closer look reveals it to be more nuanced: modern hotels and boutique experiences along the coast, a historic city centre that has become a magnet for culture, gastronomy, and urban living, and a second wave of tourism linked to nature, sports, and rural experiences inland. The port of Malaga, the international airport, and a modern road and rail network create a powerful logistical backbone that connects southern Spain to Europe, North Africa, and beyond. Specialized services have been cultivated around hospitality, maritime activities, IT and software development, and knowledge-intensive sectors that benefit from

a skilled workforce and favourable quality-of-life factors. Industrial districts and free zones around Malaga city and its hinterland host a range of manufacturers, logistics providers, and innovative firms in energy, aerospace, and digital technologies, often supported by regional and national incentives. Agriculture, while not dominating the economy as it once did, remains important. Citrus fruits, stone fruits, vegetables, and wine production—especially in traditional growing areas—survive alongside modern agribusiness that leverages irrigation, sustainable farming practices, and proximity to large urban markets. The province's culinary identity—seafood and inland produce prepared with Andalusian sensibility—helps reinforce a strong tourism proposition that feeds local businesses year-round.

Social and economic dynamics are shaped by a mix of ageing demographics in some rural zones and a younger, increasingly skilled workforce around Malaga city and its growth corridors.

In conclusion, there are marked socioeconomic disparities between the interior and the coast of Malaga. Driven by tourism, real estate and technology sectors, most of the wealth, active population and employment are concentrated in the coastal regions of the province, such as the Western Costa del Sol and the Axarquía. In contrast, the inland areas (Antequera, Guadalteba, and the Serranía de Ronda) show less dynamism, lower average income, and a progressively ageing population.

The testbed of the SPACE-NEST Project consisted of 38 spaces identified in 23 municipalities mainly located in inland areas and municipalities affected by the problems previously described.

Primorska in the Zahodna Region of Slovenia

Primorska consists of Slovenia's portion of the Istrian Peninsula, the Adriatic hinterland, and the Soča and Vipava river valleys. The 29-mile (47-km) strip of coast constitutes Slovenia's riviera with a population of around 237,415 people in 6 municipalities.

Often referred to as Slovenia's coastal and Karst region, Primorska unfolds like a mosaic where sea, mountains, and dry karst plains meet the human imprint of centuries of trade, viticulture, and seafaring. The geography tells a story of contrasts and connections: a slender coastline fringed by historic port towns, backed by the emerald slopes of the Vipava Valley and the rolling hills of the Goriška and Karst plateaus, then rising to the rugged limestone and Alpine silhouettes that define the broader western edge of the country. Climatic conditions are moderated by the Adriatic Sea, resulting in mild winters, warm summers and breezes enriched with the scent of pine and salt.

On the coast, towns such as Koper, Izola, and Piran have long served as gateways between the hinterland and the Mediterranean trade routes. The Port of Koper stands as a critical economic artery not only for Slovenia but for the broader Adriatic region. This modern, multipurpose port handles containers, vehicles, and bulk goods, supported by a sophisticated network of rail and road

connections linking the western coast to Central Europe. Alongside its maritime economy, local tourism thrives on scenic coasts and promenades, seasonal festivals, waterfront dining and wellness retreats. Across from the port, the historic centres of these towns preserve a maritime heritage—narrow streets, Renaissance and Baroque façades, and a blend of Italian and Slovenian influences that reflect centuries of exchange across sea and land.

The region's other face is revealed inland with the Vipava Valley and the slopes of Goriška and Karst. The Vipava Valley is a corridor of sunshine, wind, and fertility. Its terraced vineyards, orchards, and fields produce distinctive wines—often crisp whites alongside expressive red varieties—and a climate that makes agriculture feel both intimate and resilient. The Goriška wine subregion, straddling the border with Italy, is celebrated for varietals that flourish in the limestone soils and microclimates created by the nearby mountains and the sea's balancing influence. Olive groves and lavender add aromatic notes to a landscape where agriculture and tourism mingle. On the Karst plain, limestone pavements, caves, and a sparsely vegetated yet rugged beauty shape a landscape where traditional farming blends with small-scale industry and artisanal crafts.

Economically, the Primorska Region sits at the crossroads of logistics, tourism, and agro-food activity, with a scale and variety that makes it less homogeneous than other regions. The coast anchors a robust logistics and trade economy through the port and adjacent services—customs, freight forwarding, warehousing, and multimodal connections linking Central and Southern Europe to the Mediterranean. This port-centric backbone also supports a cluster of maritime services, ship maintenance, and related industrial activity. Tourism on the coast generates revenue through hotels, seaside promenades, winter wellness, seasonal events, and culinary tourism highlighting the seafood, Adriatic wines, and regional green produce.

Beyond the port and the coast, the region's economic story extends into high-value agriculture and agrifood industries, with wine production playing a starring role in Goriška and the Vipava Valley. Small and medium-sized enterprises contribute through winemaking, olive oil production, and farm-to-table experiences that attract visitors seeking authentic rural immersion. In recent years, knowledge-intensive firms, sustainable farming practices, and craft-oriented tourism have emerged as complementary engines of growth, leveraging the region's natural assets—sun, wind, limestone, and a favourable microclimate—to attract investment and skilled labour.

The social fabric mirrors this blend of coastal and inland life: a population that is ageing in some areas yet motivated by entrepreneurship and a tourist-season economy that creates employment peaks during the summer. Another reason for its appeal as a tourist destination is the region's cultural diversity—the legacy of Italian, Slovenian, and broader Mediterranean influences— and the attraction of its small communities where preservation is balanced with modernization.

Challenges and opportunities coexist. The coastline's dependence on seasonal tourism requires resilience, diversification of revenue streams, and the sustainable management of coastal ecosystems and water resources. Meanwhile, the port's growth must be balanced with environmental stewardship and the preservation of the region's unique landscapes. Inland, maintaining the competitiveness of agricultural products and ensuring that small producers can access wider markets remains important, as does investing in infrastructure, healthcare, and education to attract and retain talent. Additionally, the region's seismic context and environmental stewardship considerations call for thoughtful planning and risk management.

The testbed of the SPACE-NEST Project consisted of 20 buildings in four municipalities: Izola, Piran, Koper and Sežana.

1.3.2. The SPACE-NEST Methodology Applied to European Contexts

Abandoned or underused spaces in rural and peripheral areas are not merely architectural objects. They are part of the social and cultural ecosystem which has been transformed by society over the centuries and can be transformed into potential for regeneration and innovation for community development.

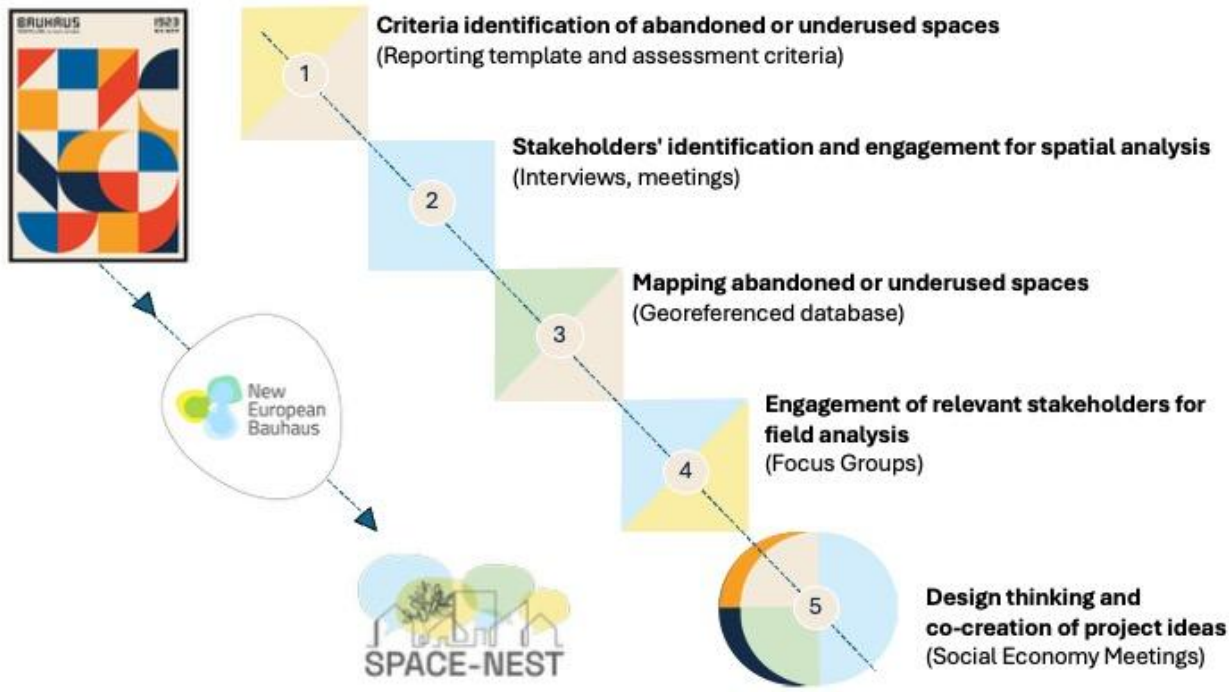


Figure 4 – SPACE-NEST multi-phase methodology for stakeholder identification and regeneration of spaces

The first phase focused on building a common approach to the identification of abandoned or underused spaces showing potential for regeneration in rural and peripheral areas. The aim was to

recognize these sites not as problems, but as opportunities for social innovation, cultural vitality, and sustainable entrepreneurship. To support this process, a reporting template and clear assessment criteria were developed and shared with all tandems, ensuring comparability while leaving room for regional specificities. This phase was not assigned to project partners alone, but it was conceived as a co-creation phase together with local stakeholders.

For this reason, the second phase activity was the mapping of stakeholders, which is crucial for anchoring the regeneration process in real territorial dynamics. Regional tandems identified and categorized a wide spectrum of actors, ranging from social economy SMEs, cooperatives, non-profit organizations to municipal authorities, economic organizations, and umbrella bodies. This mapping exercise not only provided visibility to actors deeply rooted in the territory but also helped include those acting on the sidelines or at higher institutional levels, thus strengthening the ecosystem of collaboration.

The methodology therefore combines spatial analysis and stakeholder engagement, reflecting the conviction that regeneration is not only a technical or architectural challenge but a social and relational process.

Mapping activities were performed during the third phase, followed by a phase of stakeholder engagement for field analysis with participatory events such as focus groups, creating a shared knowledge base from which to explore opportunities and constraints.

By consolidating information on spaces and stakeholders, promoting dialogue with local actors, and outlining pathways for feasible transformation, this preparatory work set the stage for the last phase related to a more advanced analysis. This laid the foundation for the design thinking and co-creation of project ideas, reinforcing the overarching vision of SPACE-NEST: to transform neglected spaces into drivers of collective well-being and resilience, guided by the values of Beautiful, Sustainable, and Together.

A final Social Economy Mission, in the form of an international meeting, was organized in each region to apply the Design Thinking methodology and to create specific prototypes for every territorial context.

1.3.3. SPACE-NEST Best Practices Analysis

The SPACE-NEST project identified and analyzed existing best practices showing examples of underused buildings transformed into vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive community hubs by blending eco-friendly design, circular economy principles, and local participation, with the social economy driving locally anchored development.

A comprehensive document was created as a consortium publication for framing rural renewal in Europe through the lens of the NEB and social economy best practices.

The booklet presents 41 best practices drawn from EU-wide contributions collected in 2025, organized into three chapters: i) best practices from project partners (Italy, Spain, Slovenia); ii) best practices from the territories involved in the project (Bergamo, Malaga and Primorska), and iii) best practices from other EU regions.

It also highlights how these initiatives foster heritage preservation, environmental stewardship, social cohesion, and economic resilience.



Figure 5 – SPACE-NEST Rural Renewal booklet

Many European rural areas are facing the challenges of depopulation and ageing. By combining the NEB creative vision with community-led enterprises and with the support of digital innovation and strong policies, these communities can become more sustainable and attractive.

PART 2

Space-Nest Methodology:
From Mapping to Co-Design

2.1. Mapping Abandoned or Underused Public Spaces in the Three European Contexts

by Federica Burini, Gloria Cornolti and Chiara Tisat

As explained in the previous chapter (Figure 4), the first phase of the methodology of the SPACE-NEST project involved the identification of abandoned or underused public spaces suitable for social economy initiatives. This formed the basis for designing a practical and uniform reporting template enabling regional tandems to capture essential data, and to initiate a dialogue with key local stakeholders to support space repurposing.

In November 2024, a draft set of guidelines was presented by the Province of Bergamo to project partners during the project's consortium meeting and in January 2025, the guidelines were validated during the project's kick-off meeting in Malaga.

These guidelines outlined: i) the criteria for identifying potential spaces (e.g., unused public buildings, vacant land, underutilized infrastructure); ii) assessment dimensions: existing infrastructure (technical requirements for transforming the space, including renovation needs, technological upgrades, and compliance with building standards and legal constraints to determine any barriers or requirements for reconversion such as structural integrity); contextual factors (surrounding neighbourhood, socio-economic conditions, nearby green areas, heritage/tourism potential); stakeholders' inputs (needs, concerns, and aspirations and the important elements/characteristics that spaces need to have); iii) accessibility (transport links, proximity to community hubs, barrier-free access); iv) a process for regional tandems to evaluate and prioritize identified spaces.

The mapping journey focused on gathering and systematizing data on underused, abandoned, or publicly accessible spaces across the participating territories, particularly those located in rural areas. This foundational effort was designed not only to identify potential locations for reconversion but also to build a shared understanding of what constitutes "opportunity spaces" for the social economy sector.

Recognising the diversity across the regions, each with its own geography, institutional framework, and community dynamics, the process was deliberately structured to be both systematic and adaptable. At the start of the mapping phase, a common set of guidelines was introduced to ensure consistency in data gathering while also allowing for territorial flexibility. Regional tandems were invited to interpret and apply these guidelines in a way that reflected local realities, knowledge, and strategic priorities.

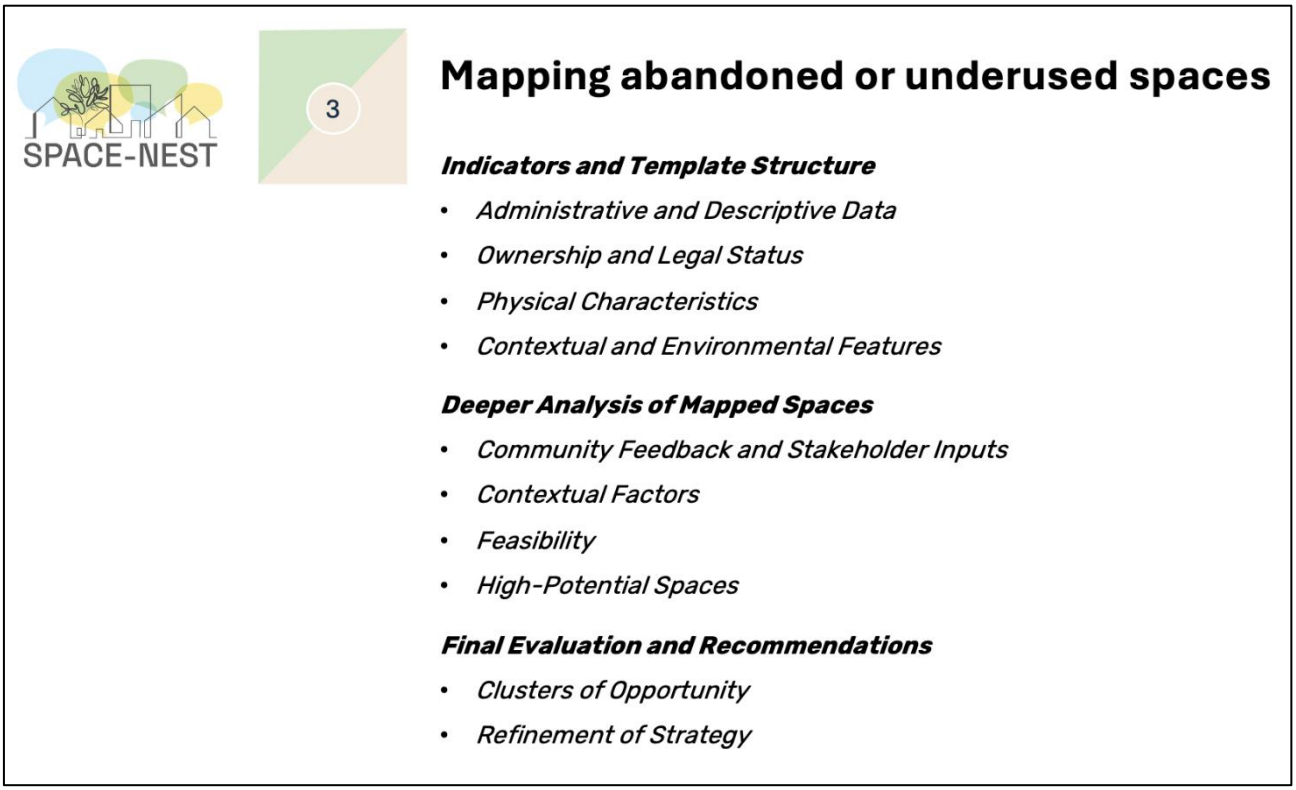


Figure 6 – SPACE-NEST Methodology for mapping abandoned and underused spaces

One of the first issues addressed was how to define rurality. It quickly became apparent that there is no single, universally accepted definition of what qualifies as "rural." The project acknowledged the coexistence of several classification systems, notably the DEGURBA typology, which categorizes areas as cities, towns and suburbs, or rural areas and the NUTS urban-rural typology, which uses the categories urban, intermediate, and rural regions.

Rather than enforce a standard definition, SPACE-NEST adopted a territory-led approach. Each participating region was encouraged to define its own understanding of what constitutes a rural area based on contextual indicators such as population density, land use, settlement patterns, infrastructure access, and cultural identity. This bottom-up method allowed regions to root their mapping process in local meaning rather than externally imposed classifications.

Data Collection: Starting from What Exists

The initial data collection began with an effort to consolidate all existing mapping initiatives and spatial data relevant to the identification of buildings or land available for reuse. This included:

- municipal property inventories
- urban and rural planning documents
- records from community organizations, parishes, and foundations
- cadastral data

- databases from local or regional development agencies

Partners were also asked to include examples of disused or underutilized spaces already integrated into the approved project, serving as benchmarks or early pilot sites.

Identification and Categorization of Spaces

The focus of the mapping was on buildings, plots of land, and public infrastructure that were:

- no longer actively used
- owned or managed by public authorities or third-sector entities with a public-interest mission
- strategically located within or near areas of social or economic need

Attention was given to types of ownership which affect feasibility, legal complexity, and timelines for repurposing.

The two main categories were:

- public ownership: for example, by municipalities, provinces, or state agencies
- third-party ownership with a public interest orientation including parishes, non-profit associations, and cultural foundations

Additionally, the process enabled qualitative, stakeholder-informed criteria to be captured, for example, regarding spaces with strong symbolic value, perceived community need, or local political support for redevelopment.

Indicators and Template Structure

To ensure robust documentation and allow for meaningful comparisons across regions, a standard reporting template was introduced. This structured form includes both technical specifications and contextual details. The main categories and fields are as follows:

Administrative and Descriptive Data

- Province
- City/Municipality
- Address
- Coordinates (latitude, longitude)
- Previous usage and reason for abandonment
- Proposed future use
- Image upload

Ownership and Legal Status

- Ownership status (public/public-interest)
- Cadastral data

- Upload: cadastral plan in PDF format (if available)
- Legal restrictions (heritage protection, planning constraints)

Physical Characteristics

- Building size (in m²)
- Number of floors
- Current physical status (vacant, semi-used, etc.)
- Energy certification level
- Compliance with electrical and hydrothermal-sanitary standards
- Structural integrity certification
- Presence of architectural barriers
- Mobility access features (lift, ramps, stairlifts)
- Lift compliance with safety and accessibility standards
- Presence of external green spaces
- Presence of historical/artistic elements

Contextual and Environmental Features

- Proximity to urban centres or towns
- Nearby cycle/pedestrian paths
- Proximity to parks or protected natural areas
- Nearby cultural/historical attractions

Each item in the form is associated with either a free-text field, a dropdown menu, or a document upload field, depending on the type of data. This approach strikes a balance between standardization (for data consolidation and cross-regional analysis) and narrative flexibility (to allow partners to add context-specific detail).

By the end of April 2025, each regional tandem had compiled a complete dataset of spaces, documented through the standard template and enriched by both technical indicators and stakeholder input. This mapping exercise laid the analytical foundation for the selection of pilot spaces and the development of tailored engagement strategies with local authorities, civil society actors, and other relevant stakeholders.

The outcome of this first step was not merely an inventory of disused buildings, but a strategic and locally grounded portfolio of opportunity—a collection of spaces identified for their potential to become active sites of inclusive, community-driven transformation through the activation of social economy initiatives.

In-depth Analysis of Mapped Spaces

Following the completion of the initial mapping phase, each regional tandem proceeded to a more in-depth evaluation of the identified spaces. Using both the structured data collected and qualitative insights gathered from local stakeholders, teams conducted a detailed assessment of the potential, relevance, and feasibility of each space for reconversion into a social economy initiative aligned with the values of the NEB.

The evaluation methodology was jointly developed, with the Province of Bergamo coordinating the design of the system and integrating input from all project partners. Each tandem then applied this shared framework to its own mapped portfolio. The analysis drew upon several key elements:

Community Feedback and Stakeholder Inputs

Regional tandems organized focus groups and stakeholder consultations to understand the requirements, expectations, and visions of the local communities. These conversations provided valuable insight into the characteristics the spaces needed to be truly responsive to local aspirations. Stakeholders helped identify both social and functional criteria for successful reuse, such as accessibility, visibility, flexibility of use, and symbolic value.

Contextual Factors

Each space was evaluated within its broader territorial and socio-economic context. Factors considered included the condition and role of the surrounding neighbourhood, connectivity to public services and infrastructure, existing community assets nearby, and the broader socio-economic challenges or opportunities in the area.

Feasibility

Technical and legal feasibility were also carefully examined. This included assessments of renovation needs, energy efficiency requirements, accessibility standards, and possible legal constraints such as heritage protection or land use restrictions. Spaces were analyzed to identify any barriers to reconversion, ranging from lack of infrastructure to bureaucratic or financial obstacles.

High-Potential Spaces

As a result of this multi-dimensional assessment, each tandem identified a shortlist of high-potential spaces—those most aligned with the New European Bauhaus principles of sustainability, inclusivity, and aesthetics, and most ready to host social economy activities. These spaces were selected not only for their individual qualities but also for their demonstration potential, serving as visible and practical models of transformation in rural areas.

Final Evaluation and Recommendations

Building on the in-depth analysis, tandems moved into the final evaluative phase. This stage focused on prioritizing, clustering, and refining strategic direction towards implementation.

Clusters of Opportunity

In many territories, the analysis revealed groups of spaces located in proximity to one another or connected through common community networks, economic themes, or territorial strategies. These were identified as geographical or thematic clusters—opportunity zones where the coordinated development of multiple spaces could create a broader, more integrated social and economic impact. These clusters were mapped and described, highlighting their collective potential to drive regeneration at local level.

Refinement of Strategy

Based on the findings, each tandem revised and sharpened its territorial strategy. The focus was narrowed down to those spaces showing the highest potential to embody the three NEB pillars of sustainability, inclusion, and beauty, as well as to support long-term, community-rooted social economy models.

Each tandem ultimately selected some priority spaces from its rural area. These sites represent the strategic core of the SPACE-NEST implementation phase and will serve as pilot projects, providing valuable insights and lessons for replication and upscaling in future stages of the initiative.

2.2. Identification and Engagement of Relevant Stakeholders for Field Analysis

by Federica Burini, Gloria Cornolti and Chiara Tisat

The identification and engagement of relevant stakeholders for field analysis represents an important and strategic phase of the SPACE-NEST methodology. It involves the foundational groundwork for identifying and engaging relevant stakeholders within the social economy ecosystem, especially those aligning with the New European Bauhaus (NEB) pillars, in order to conduct field analysis.

The Province of Bergamo led the preparation of a draft set of guidelines designed to map key stakeholders, particularly social enterprises and organizations active in areas connected to the NEB. This framework provided partners with a consistent structure for collecting and analyzing regional data, ensuring alignment across all participating territories.

The main objectives were to: i) identify and engage with key local stakeholders including social economy SMEs, government agencies, non-profit organizations, businesses, and community groups; ii) map out the roles, interests, and interrelations of these stakeholders within the regional social economy landscape; iii) establish effective communication and collaboration channels to promote knowledge sharing and support for space repurposing initiatives.

Once completed, the draft guidelines were presented to the consortium during an online meeting, after which partners were invited to provide feedback. Following a round of revisions incorporating partner inputs, a finalized version was produced with the validation of the stakeholder mapping guidelines during the project's official kick-off meeting in Malaga in January 2025.

These guidelines served as a common reference for all project regions as they initiated stakeholder engagement and support for the broader goal of repurposing underused spaces through inclusive, community-driven approaches.

2.2.1. Analytical EU-level Framework

The objective was to develop a coherent EU-level framework that would guide the stakeholder mapping process and inform the regional implementation strategies. This work included the following key areas: i) European Union's Social Economy Action Plan: a comprehensive analysis was carried out on the EU's Social Economy Action Plan and associated documents. This review focused on understanding the strategic priorities, regulatory environment, and funding opportunities that could influence or benefit social enterprises and their involvement in space repurposing initiatives; ii) New European Bauhaus (NEB) Integration: the team explored the alignment between NEB values and social economy principles. Special attention was given to how the NEB framework promotes

sustainability, inclusiveness, and aesthetic innovation, and how these values can be effectively embedded in social enterprise-led initiatives; iii) funding and support mechanisms: the mapping also identified a range of EU funding programmes and support mechanisms available for social economy actors, particularly those supporting innovation, capacity-building, and the development of community-oriented spaces.

The result of this research was a consolidated policy framework, synthesizing EU-level strategies and instruments into a practical reference tool. This framework was embedded into the regional stakeholder mapping template, ensuring that all regional tandems could align their local analyses with broader EU objectives and funding ecosystems. Such integration enables partners to better position their stakeholder engagement strategies within a shared European context, while also strengthening the policy relevance and scalability of project outcomes.

2.2.2. Analysis of National-Level Laws and Regulations

In parallel with the EU-level policy review, an analysis was performed of national legal and regulatory frameworks relevant to the social economy in each of the partner countries. This phase was crucial in contextualizing the SPACE-NEST project within the local legal environments that shape the functioning and development of social enterprises.

Each regional tandem was responsible for conducting a national and local-level analysis, examining three key aspects. Firstly, they analyzed country-specific legal frameworks, where partners reviewed the existing legislation governing social enterprises, cooperatives, and non-profit organizations within their respective countries. This included exploring various legal forms, such as Social Cooperative Enterprises (SCIs), Community Interest Companies (CICs), and other nationally recognized structures supporting the social economy. Secondly, they examined tax and fiscal incentives and considered the financial and fiscal landscape for social enterprises, identifying available tax benefits, grants, subsidies, and support schemes that promote growth, innovation, and resilience within the sector. These incentives are vital for enabling social enterprises to scale their impact and engage in space repurposing initiatives aligned with NEB values. Finally, each tandem investigated regulatory barriers, identifying potential hurdles or constraints posed by national regulations, such as restrictive labour laws, complex administrative procedures, high capital requirements, or limitations on the activities of non-profits. Understanding these barriers is essential for tailoring project strategies to navigate or mitigate legal challenges that may hinder implementation.

The outcomes of this step were incorporated into the stakeholder mapping template, ensuring that each region's strategy is grounded in a clear understanding of its legal operating environment. This harmonized approach allows the consortium to identify both common challenges and unique legal

opportunities across countries, informing cross-border learning and policy recommendations later in the project.

2.2.3. Identification of Stakeholder Categories and Stakeholder Mapping

The next step focused on the systematic identification, classification, and mapping of stakeholders relevant to the social economy ecosystem in each project region. This was a crucial activity to ensure that all local actors with the potential to contribute to or benefit from SPACE-NEST's objectives—particularly the repurposing of underused spaces—were recognized, analyzed, and effectively engaged. Led by the Province of Bergamo, a comprehensive stakeholder mapping template was developed and shared with all project partners. With this tool, regional tandems were provided with a structured approach for collecting and assessing stakeholder data in a coherent and comparable manner.

Definition of Stakeholder Categories

Partners received guidance on categorizing stakeholders into clearly defined groups relevant to the social economy ecosystem:

- Social Economy SMEs: small and medium-sized enterprises with a dual economic and social mission, often working in fields like environmental sustainability, renewable energy, the circular economy, cultural heritage, and inclusive urban development.
- Government Agencies: public bodies at national, regional, and municipal levels responsible for policymaking, funding, and regulation within the social economy and spatial planning sectors.
- Non-Profit Organizations (NGOs): civil society organizations focused on social service delivery, advocacy, and community development aligned with the values of the social economy.
- Businesses and Private Sector Actors: companies engaged in CSR, impact investment, or public-private collaborations, with a demonstrated interest in social innovation or spatial regeneration.
- Community Groups: local grassroots initiatives, informal networks, and social cooperatives involved in bottom-up economic empowerment, co-design of public spaces, and social cohesion efforts.

Stakeholder Mapping and Analysis

Using a combination of desk research, surveys, and interviews, each tandem was tasked with mapping at least 30 stakeholders within their rural area. The mapping included several layers of analysis:

- Influence vs. Interest matrix: stakeholders were positioned based on their degree of influence and interest in social economy and space repurposing initiatives. This helped determine engagement strategies—whether to inform, consult, involve, or partner with each stakeholder.
- Geographical focus: stakeholders were mapped by their spatial scope (local, regional, national, or international) to understand their potential scale of impact and operational reach.
- Sectoral focus: each stakeholder's primary field of activity was recorded—for example, sustainability, social inclusion, tourism, green technology, cultural revitalization—to align them with relevant project themes.
- Stakeholder perspectives: by conducting interviews or surveys, tandems gathered insights on stakeholders' views, priorities, and expectations related to repurposing buildings and public spaces, including perceived barriers and enablers for their involvement.

The outputs of this step provided a granular understanding of each region's social economy landscape, enabling more targeted engagement and forming the basis for co-design and participatory planning in later project phases. By ensuring that a diverse set of actors was mapped and engaged, SPACE-NEST built a strong foundation for community-led, sustainable space transformation aligned with NEB principles.

Not only did the mapping identify social economy stakeholders, but also public stakeholders, including municipalities, inter-municipal associations, and public development agencies. These institutions vary in their level of engagement and capacity, but overall, their role is pivotal for:

• authorizing space repurposing projects

• providing or facilitating access to funding and public infrastructure

• ensuring alignment with broader territorial strategies

An early and strategic involvement of public authorities is key to building institutional buy-in and enabling multi-level governance for the project.

Moreover, even economic stakeholders operating with social impact in mind or those demonstrating interest in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and impact-driven collaborations were mapped. Their potential contributions ranged from technical expertise and materials to financial support and workforce development.

2.2.4. The Methodology for Organizing Focus Groups with Stakeholders

The Focus Group dates back to the 1940s when Robert R. Merton developed a new technique for detecting opinions and attitudes, later called *"focused group interview"* or, more simply, "group interview". According to Vanda Lucia Zammuner, the focus group is a qualitative data collection technique used in social research based on the information that emerges from a discussion held by a group on a theme or a subject that the researcher wishes to investigate in depth (Zammuner, 2003).

It is an exploratory analysis which, through group discussion, allows for a debate to be started on a pre-established topic and for the spontaneous opinions and points of view of the subjects involved to emerge and to strengthen or revise the perception of the state of the art of a given theme and its unexpressed potential.

The characteristic elements of the focus group are the group as a fundamental element, together with the interaction of the participants and the focus on a given topic.

As a unit of analysis, the group presents greater complexity than the relationship between two individuals. On the one hand, group interaction provides fertile ground for deeper analysis and the enrichment of ideas; on the other hand, it may generate power dynamics, defensive mechanisms, and forms of resistance.

Regardless of the kind of group, when carrying out any focus group relational dynamics arise that depend on the characteristics of the participants. According to Richard A. Krueger, these dynamics manifest as the expert who influences the group, the dominant one, the intolerant one, the one who digresses, and the shy one, among others.

For this reason, when conducting a focus group, two key figures are called for: the interviewer or moderator and the observer or observers.

The interviewer and the moderator/facilitator

Whoever holds this role has the delicate and fundamental task of paying attention to the dynamics of the group by enabling all participants to air their views, managing any bullying attitudes and encouraging an open and calm discussion.

They must be open-minded and inspire trust, have good listening skills, and be able to maintain control of the group by balancing discussions, encouraging quiet members and gently managing dominant ones, without imposing their own views.

Main Functions:

- production: gather information useful to the investigation
- facilitation: focusing attention on the main topic
- elucidation or regulation: observing and managing the group dynamics

These roles drive the focus group forward and the two roles are complementary. The interviewers help the facilitator by recording people's comments and updating the moderator, when necessary, on

the main topic under debate. Instead, the moderator/facilitator is fundamental for adhering to the programme and contents of the focus groups or meetings, for reminding all participants of times and schedules and finally for suggesting conclusions and final comments on the main results obtained through the process.

The observer/observers

This role requires deep sensitivity, the ability to grasp the most important concepts that arise, and a keen awareness of emerging group dynamics and aspects of non-verbal communication.

Two people perform the management activities, including a moderator and an observer, and using these guidelines, they help the group discover new projects for unused rural spaces in the areas concerned. These projects match the community needs highlighted during the focus group and the key principles of the NEB.

The focus group usually lasts an average of about two hours but there can be longer or shorter focuses depending on the participants and the interaction created between them.

The guidelines developed by the Province of Bergamo served as an operational tool to support partners and operators involved in the investigation of the social, cultural and economic needs of the rural communities of each tandem (Bergamo, Malaga, Primorska Regija). They also helped identify projects and entrepreneurial ideas that encourage social economy groups to reuse abandoned or underused buildings and spaces in the rural areas of the territories studied, in line with the principles established by the NEB. The SPACE-NEST project involved the organization of at least one focus group for each territorial context, with the aim of:

- identifying the territorial needs, potential and challenges related to the implementation of the principles and initiatives of the NEB
- identifying the social and economic needs of communities in terms of services related to sustainability
- identifying possible SEM business ideas promoting the use of abandoned spaces according to the needs of the territory and the implementation of the NEB.

Group composition

The focus group must consist of participants selected because they meet the research objectives and whose characteristics create a homogeneous group in a horizontal sense, for example, as a result of their skills, experiences, representation of different entities or in a vertical sense due to their role within an organization or the territorial level represented.

It is inadvisable to seek a high degree of homogeneity within the group. Preferably, different positions and perceptions should be represented and a broad spectrum of perspectives elicited, even if in opposition to each other. There is no general rule as the composition of the focus group depends on the objective set and the possibility of creating a discussion environment that gives everyone involved a voice.

Creating a heterogeneous group also helps focus attention on characteristics of numerical relevance to a specific topic and thus direct the discussion towards a divergent solution based on the participants' individual opinions.

Each focus group of the SPACE-NEST project involved a heterogeneous group of at least 15 participants, consisting of 5 citizens, 7 social enterprises and 3 key stakeholders. Particular care was taken to encourage the presence of underrepresented target groups and entrepreneurs, including young people and people with a migrant background.

Procedural stages of Focus Groups

During the planning phase, the moderators first identified the territory on which to concentrate the focus group activity within the rural area of interest, and involved the actors operating there in various capacities to maximize the effectiveness of the action. Once the specific area had been identified, a fundamental step was to use the results of the mapping phase by analyzing two documents: i) *"Space Mapping" Template*: extracting a list of disused or underused properties or spaces, according to the criteria followed in the mapping phase, by accessing a series of useful information: images, planimetric maps, addresses, ascertaining whether the property is public or private, the current state, distance from urban centres, parks, cycle paths, historical-cultural attractions, and so on; ii) *"Stakeholder Mapping" Template*: selecting exclusively the entities falling within the 5 typologies of the Social Economy (associations, cooperatives, foundations, social enterprises, mutuals and/or mutual aid societies), whose headquarters are in the municipalities of the rural area of interest or whose "geographical area of reference" is in the territory under examination.

In this way, a list of social economy entities operating in the relevant area is obtained, complete with a series of information, such as name, size, economic sector, main social objective, address and contacts. Subsequently, only those entities whose activity is shown in the corresponding column to be carried out with the NEB focuses (buildings, open spaces and/or neighbourhoods), will be extracted from this list.

The operations above prepare the working materials for presentation to the focus group, and for discussion of the spaces mapped. They also help gather possible business ideas that match both the identified needs of the territory in question and the potential of the buildings mapped.

To facilitate the brainstorming of the focus group participants, an interview track must be prepared to clarify the expected outcomes of the qualitative and quantitative analysis relating to the two dimensions examined (real estate and stakeholders). This also fosters constructive discussion, based on these considerations.

Preliminary and follow-up meeting and preparatory activities

Awareness raising activities were organised, for example, info sessions, informal meetings and webinars, to introduce the community and key stakeholders to the project prior to the focus groups, to engage participants, and later to validate the results and conclusions.

Each tandem sent participants preliminary surveys and/or presentations to collect data or impressions that could be used during the focus group.

One of the freely available software programs, such as Mentimeter, could be used to create a presentation featuring:

1. Audio-visual materials to introduce:
    - the project overview and focus group's goals
    - the concept of Social Economy
    - the principles of the New European Bauhaus
    - relevant findings from the mapping phases
2. Collection of examples and experiences from participants:
    - focus on possible reuse and valorization of disused buildings or spaces
    - present 2/3 best practices from the booklet
    - highlight the benefits of possible new social economy initiatives for local communities and collect participants' expectations and inputs

Furthermore, if it is more appropriate, the focus group can be:

a) divided into small groups

b) organized in different sessions (on separate days)

c) organized on site or in hybrid format.

Location

After identifying the research objectives to be pursued, a suitable venue must be found for the *focus group*. In addition to choosing a suitable *location* offering accessibility, parking, and spacious and comfortable rooms, a convenient geographical location must be selected to limit the travelling time of the group participants.

Location suggestion: if possible, consider organizing the focus group (or part of it) in an abandoned or renovated space/building.

To facilitate the organization and management of the activities, the table below proposes a possible outline of the focus group structure.

SPACE-NEST Focus Group Structure Hypothesis

Selected date: ....
Duration: full day
Participants: at least 15 participants.

First part – PLENARY
Introductory phase with introduction of roles. Introduce the moderator (host) and the observer, clearly explaining their roles. Quick introduction at the roundtable where participants share key details: name, surname, organization/office represented. Overview of the context of the focus group.
• Overview of the project and objectives of the focus group
• The concept of social economy, EU, national and regional policies
• The principles of the New European Bauhaus (NEB)
• Relevant results from the mapping phases

Opening of the discussion. Use open questions to encourage participants to freely share:
• comments and reflections on the presentations
• initial impressions or observations on disused spaces and community needs.
Transition phase. Direct the discussion towards specific examples and participants' experiences:

- present 2/3 good practices from the booklet
- focus on the possible reuse and valorization of disused buildings/spaces
- highlight the benefits of possible new social economy initiatives for local communities.

Key Questions Phase. Conduct a roundtable to gather detailed input on:
• needs for social, cultural and economic services in rural areas
• characteristics that buildings or spaces should have to meet these needs.

End of the morning session

Light lunch

Second part – DIVISION INTO GROUPS
Move on to 2 or more examples of abandoned buildings.
Each group focuses on 1 space/building and the solution to 1 need (missing service).
Output: new business ideas to reuse the space through the implementation of new services (or extension of existing ones).

Conclusion
Each group presents what they have produced.
Summary of the day

Logistics
• Light lunch
• Round trip to the plenary venue - abandoned locations for the focus group session to be held outdoors
• Conducting the plenary session and outdoor sessions for groups
• Necessary materials (post-its, blackboard, etc.)

Figure 7 – Focus Group Structure Hypothesis

Recruitment

During the recruitment phase, and in line with the scope of the investigation, participants should be carefully selected to ensure that the focus group adequately represents the perspectives relevant to the research objectives. Typically, a focus group should consist of between 8 and 15 participants, depending on the complexity of the topic being addressed.

In the case at hand, as the focus group aims to explore issues that cut across different types of organizations, profiles and areas of expertise, at least 15 participants should be involved, including a minimum of 5 citizens, 7 social enterprises, and 3 key stakeholders. This larger group size will help ensure a balanced representation of the various stakeholder categories and provide comprehensive coverage of the different aspects of the investigation.

Specific attention will be paid to facilitating the presence of underrepresented target groups and entrepreneurs, including young people and people with a migrant background. Additional entities may be invited, for example, local institutions, local organizations representing social economy stakeholders, universities and research centres.

Regardless of whether the group is homogeneous or heterogeneous, a specific invitation must be written and sent by email to all selected participants.

Group discussion

For the focus group in question, the ideal outline should consist of 4-5 well-formulated questions, which can be accompanied by follow-up surveys.

Regarding the structure of the questions:

- the opening question requires quick answers and is intended to create a comfortable environment, introduce the topic being analyzed, and allow for an initial form of reflection;
- the transition question anticipates the key questions by introducing the heart of the topic – key questions require detailed answers and in-depth considerations from the interviewees;
- the closing question can be of three types:

1. it can encourage the group to reflect on the points raised by trying to identify the statements or concepts that emerged which they consider fundamental;

2. the moderator should summarize what was covered during the work session to understand if all the data has been collected;

3. it can recap the subject of the investigation to understand if there are opinions or content that have not been expressed.

The **suggested procedure** is presented below.

Procedure for organizing a focus group within a SPACE-NEST project
Introductory Phase (approx. 15 minutes) Introduction of the moderators of the focus group, both the facilitator and the observer, clearly defining their roles and thanking all the participants for their willingness to participate in the survey. **Overview of the focus group context and opening discussion (approx. 30 minutes)** Recap from the *Mentimeter* preliminary survey. Encourage participants to freely share their ideas or comments at the roundtable. **Key Question Phase (approx. 45 minutes)** Using key questions at a roundtable discussion, the facilitator will explicitly ask participants to express their views regarding the need for social, cultural and economic services that affect the rural area or areas of interest and the characteristics that the buildings or spaces should possess to host such services. **Group Activity: Developing Business Ideas for Specific Spaces (approx. 90 minutes)** Divide participants into small groups. Each group (5-7 participants) is assigned one specific abandoned/underutilized space/building and one key need identified in the core discussion. The goal is to develop a new business idea that repurposes the space to address the identified need. **On-Site Exploration (approx. 90 minutes)** Groups go on a field trip to visit their assigned space/building. If on-site visits are not possible, provide photos, maps, or videos of the spaces. **Business Idea Development (approx. 45 minutes)** Each group formulates a concrete business idea that meets a social, cultural, or economic need, aligns with the New European Bauhaus principles, and is feasible in the given space. **Conclusion and Synthesis (approx. 30 minutes)** Presentation and Reflection. Each group presents their business idea to the entire focus group. Discussion and feedback session to refine ideas. Identify common themes and diverging viewpoints in the proposed solutions. Summarize Key Insights. Provide a recap of the main ideas and observations, ensuring all viewpoints are acknowledged. Seek confirmation from participants about the accuracy of the interpretation. **Next Steps and Follow-Up** Inform participants that the findings will be analyzed and shared with them. Final acknowledgments. Thank everyone for their time and contributions.

Figure 8 – Focus Group Procedure in SPACE-NEST

Analysis and sharing of results

Following the conclusion of the focus group, the facilitator, supported by the observer, proceeds to formalize and compare the notes taken during the meeting.

The observer plays an important role because, having participated in the focus group, he or she is able to grasp and report details of the conversation that the leader, who is busy "governing" the group and guiding the discussion, would probably miss.

Following an inductive approach, the key concepts emerging from the discussion are integrated and selected, while identifying areas of convergence and divergence. The findings are then synthesized and formalized, highlighting, where possible, the different perspectives, priorities, and sensitivities that emerged during the meeting.

The formalization, in the form of a document or synthesis presentation, must be forwarded to all participants of the focus group for their information, for the dual purpose of sharing the results and consolidating a "constructive relationship" with them.

2.3. Design Thinking for Community Empowerment

by Maja Jotić, Tine Nagy and Desiree Scalia

Design Thinking is a human-centred approach that invites communities to dream boldly and solve together (Brown, 2008). The process begins with a strong emphasis on empathy, involving a systematic exploration of everyday experiences and understanding individuals' fears, needs, and wants. By ensuring that different perspectives, from the elderly to the young, are taken into account, the process helps to identify what is most meaningful and relevant.

Within this framework, problems are perceived as opportunities to co-create, experiment with ideas, and test solutions in the real world, and not left to a detached panel of experts. Diverse stakeholders collaborate in multidisciplinary teams, using rapid brainstorming, iterative experimentation, and tangible artifacts (maps, storyboards, mock-ups) to translate ideas into small, learnable experiments. Creating models and prototypes at an early stage becomes a shared practice of learning. They may take the form of a sketch for a redesigned park, the representation of redesigned user experience created with LEGO bricks, a digital access point piloted in a community centre or a micro-grant programme tested with a cohort of neighbourhood innovators. Feedback loops are deliberate and inclusive. Ensuring iterative refinement reflects local realities and cultural contexts. The aim is not only to improve the project, but also to provide a strengthened sense of agency, where residents see themselves as designers of their own futures, capable of shaping governance, services, and opportunities with dignity and collective purpose.

Design Thinking reframes innovation as a user-focused discipline putting user needs and experiences at the heart of service, process and strategy design. Rather than treating design as a later aesthetic addition, design thinking brings designer skills into the early stages of the development cycle. This helps to identify problems from the user's perspective, generate broader possibilities, and test tangible prototypes, often in the form of simple, fast experiments rather than polished final solutions. Rapid prototyping is a tool for learning, not the presentation of end products; the real value of prototypes lies in revealing strengths, weaknesses, and new directions through iterative feedback.

Within the SPACE-NEST project activities, design thinking serves as the methodological backbone for community empowerment. As an iterative, participatory approach, it enables participants to move from observation and research to the development of concrete, testable solutions grounded in real community needs. To achieve this, the methodology is implemented through a structured five-phase process:

- **Empathize** - Participants conduct research to gain a better understanding of the problem, using an ethnographic approach to visit and observe the targeted space, collect personal stories, and talk with relevant stakeholders.
- **Define** - Using tools such as empathy maps and fishbone diagrams, participants synthesize gathered information into clear problem statements, framed as *"How might we…"* questions.
- **Ideate** - Collaborative brainstorming sessions generate a wide range of creative ideas, emphasizing quantity, openness, and visual thinking.
- **Prototype** - Teams build low-fidelity prototypes, for example, using LEGO bricks, or simple models, to communicate ideas tangibly and visually.
- **Test** - Prototypes are shared with other participants for feedback on clarity, appeal, and areas for refinement, enabling iterative improvement.

This process was applied successfully across all three pilot regions, enabling more than 120 stakeholders, ranging from architects and urban planners to local citizens and social entrepreneurs, to co-create visions for the transformation of underused spaces.

In each territorial context of the three countries involved, a Social Economy Mission was organized, involving stakeholders, citizens and consortium partners in a process of design thinking concerning one or two specific abandoned or underused sites.

Participants first visited the selected buildings and public spaces, observing their physical condition and spatial potential (***empathize***). Local administrators and community representatives shared stories and insights about the social, economic and demographic challenges. This phase allowed participants to grasp both the tangible and intangible dimensions of the local context.

As a second step, participants were divided into groups (***define & ideate*** also combined if needed) and they jointly synthesized the information gathered during the visits, identified key challenges and transformed them into opportunity statements. From there, they generated a wide range of creative ideas for the reuse of the visited buildings.

Each group then transformed its concept into a simple prototype using LEGO bricks (***prototype***), which helped to make the idea more concrete.

In the final session, groups presented their prototypes to the rest of the participants (***test***) and some of the teams combined the prototype presentation with the NABC template (Needs, Approach, Benefits, Competition). Participants provided feedback, highlighting strengths and potential impact.

PART 3

European Case Studies and Action Plans

3.1. The case of Scalve Valley in the Province of Bergamo

by Gloria Cornolti and Chiara Tisat

3.1.1. Mapping Abandoned or Underused Public Spaces in the Province of Bergamo

In the vast and complex rural territory of the Province of Bergamo, the SPACE-NEST mapping began with a focused test phase in the Scalve Valley, a small Alpine valley chosen for its manageable scale, distinct identity, and existing collaborations.

With over 200 municipalities, mapping the entire province would have required immense time and coordination. Consequently, the team chose strategically to begin in an area already studied by the University of Bergamo, associated partner of the SPACE-NEST Project. University researchers, coordinated by the geographer Federica Burini, had already started an important community-based process in this region in 2023 to identify drivers of development, challenges and possible solutions for the development of the valley community.

This prior research provided a valuable foundation of data, especially related to abandoned and underused buildings, local contacts, and spatial insights. The University's continued involvement during the pilot phase facilitated both methodology and validation, making the Scalve Valley test phase not only a convenient but also a deeply informed and meaningful territorial lab (Burini, 2026).

Using the standardized reporting template, the local team worked closely with community stakeholders including municipal officials, associations, and residents to identify disused or underutilized buildings. These included former municipal offices, vacant school buildings, unused storage depots, and plots of land with dormant potential. The template helped gather not only technical and cadastral information, but also community desires for how these spaces might be transformed into co-working spaces, local heritage hubs, cooperative workshops, or places of encounter and mutual support.

The catalogue of 30 spaces across four municipalities in the Scalve Valley revealed a wide variety of building types (religious sites, schools, hospitality structures, industrial buildings, and infrastructure). This diversity reflects not only the valley's layered spatial history but also a wealth of prospects /abundant future opportunities. These are places once central to local life, now disused or underutilized, yet still deeply embedded in the community's identity.

Many of these sites show strong potential for transformation into cultural venues, co-working spaces, educational or community centres, or sustainable tourism hubs. Their reconversion aligns closely with the principles of the NEB, namely beauty, sustainability, and inclusion, and with broader goals of social economy activation.

The mapping process benefited greatly from strong local cooperation. Municipalities were highly responsive, eager to share data, and engaged in the evaluation. Several buildings emerged as particularly promising, especially those already rooted in community memory, places that people remember and care about, and that can act as symbolic anchors for future projects.
This initial test phase confirmed that even in a compact territory like the Scalve Valley, each building holds its own story and potential.

Mapping was not just about data collection, but about uncovering relationships between people, place, and purpose. It also reinforced the value of involving stakeholders early—not only for information gathering, but to spark local ownership over the reuse process.

Typologies of Identified Spaces

- **Private Buildings for Public Use**: Several buildings originally in private hands were found to possess strong cultural and historical value. Their central locations and distinctive architectural character make them well-suited for public functions, such as community cultural hubs, local museums, or tourist information centres. These spaces represent an opportunity to blend preservation with reinvention.
- **Decommissioned Public Buildings**: Former primary schools, clinics, and administrative buildings were also mapped. Though no longer in active use, these sites retain structural potential and could be transformed into centres for social services, co-working spaces, or multi-purpose venues to serve residents and seasonal visitors alike.
- **Historical and Industrial Infrastructure**: Several sites represent industrial or pre-industrial heritage, including mills, rail depots, or waterworks. These spaces offer a window into the valley's past and a canvas for creative reuse as exhibition centres, craft laboratories, or living museums.
- **Dilapidated Buildings**: Approximately a third of the mapped sites are in a state of advanced decay. While presenting greater challenges, these buildings also carry symbolic weight. With radical rehabilitation or reconstruction, and careful attention to their historical features, they could be brought back to life as community landmarks.

The physical condition of the identified spaces reveals a mixed scenario:

- **25%** of the buildings are in good or acceptable condition, requiring only minor interventions to be suitable for reuse.
- **40%** are in a moderate state of deterioration, needing significant restoration to ensure safety, functionality, and compliance with current standards.

- the remaining **35%** are in precarious or dilapidated condition, facing structural instability or extensive damage. These buildings will require urgent and transformative work, including partial reconstruction in some cases, to be safely and effectively repurposed.

Key Features and Observations

- Several buildings include external green spaces, making them suitable for community gardens, educational outdoor spaces, or nature-based services.
- Many sites are near pedestrian and cycle paths, enhancing their accessibility and potential for sustainable tourism.
- The presence of historical or artistic elements was noted in over half of the identified sites, reinforcing their heritage value and potential cultural draw.

Evaluation Criteria and Methodological Approach

The evaluation of mapped spaces in the Scalve Valley was carried out locally, based on a set of shared yet adaptable criteria, ensuring alignment with the overarching goals of social economy and the NEB. The evaluation criteria were applied locally according to the following principles:

- social impact and contribution to the social economy
- heritage value and tourism appeal
- accessibility and infrastructural connectivity
- state of preservation and habitability
- interest expressed by local stakeholders
- feasibility, replicability, and environmental sustainability
- absence of ongoing project planning

From the listening and participation activities, the following specific needs also emerged: access to services, slow mobility, scattered accommodation, desired innovative uses (co-working, artist residencies, hostels, incubators), and references to existing European models (Caminito del Rey, rural co-living, Alpine co-working).

High-Priority Spaces

Based on these assessments, four buildings and two districts were identified as having strong strategic potential for initiating pilot regeneration projects aligned with NEB principles. The first three underwent in-depth focus group analysis with local stakeholders.



Figure 9 – Bonaldi Grassi House, Schilpario

1. Bonaldi Grassi House – Schilpario.

The Bonaldi Grassi House represents one of the most significant heritage assets in the historic centre of Schilpario. Its architectural value, public ownership, and strategic location close to the Ethnographic Museum make it an ideal candidate for adaptive reuse as a multifunctional community and cultural hub capable of generating long-term social, economic and cultural impact.

Consisting of three interconnected buildings developed around a courtyard and a green open space, the historic complex reflects the evolution in local architecture over several centuries. Valuable elements such as the seventeenth-century wooden *stua*, that is a traditional, fully wood-panelled Alpine room warmed by a single ceramic stove, the vaulted rooms, traditional balconies (lóbia), and the relationship between indoor and outdoor spaces offer an exceptional opportunity to combine heritage conservation with contemporary uses. The public ownership of the complex represents an additional advantage, facilitating future regeneration processes and reducing administrative barriers.

Rather than becoming a conventional cultural centre, Casa Bonaldi Grassi could be developed into a living civic hub where culture, creativity, social economy and local entrepreneurship interact. The ground floors could host craft workshops, circular economy laboratories, exhibitions, local product showcases, educational activities and community events, while the upper floors could accommodate temporary residences for artists, designers, researchers, students, entrepreneurs and professionals involved in territorial innovation projects. The multifunctional nature of the complex would allow

different activities to coexist throughout the year, contributing to the diversification of the local economy and to the seasonal rebalancing of tourism. Temporary residences, co-working spaces and creative laboratories could attract new users while strengthening relationships with local schools, associations, artisans, tourism operators and cultural institutions.

From a sustainability perspective, the restructuring provides an opportunity to demonstrate how historic buildings can be regenerated through low-impact restoration, improved energy efficiency and universal accessibility while preserving their architectural identity. The modular configuration of the three buildings also enables a phased implementation strategy, allowing parts of the complex to become operational before the completion of the entire restoration programme.

The Bonaldi Grassi House could also become an important node within a wider territorial network linking museums, cultural itineraries, mountain trails and local production systems. From this perspective, the complex would function not only as a destination but also as a platform connecting heritage, creativity, social innovation and community development across Scalve Valley.

Finally, the regeneration of the Bonaldi Grassi House would contribute to strengthening the attractiveness of Schilpario for both residents and visitors, creating opportunities for intergenerational exchange, cultural production and experimentation with new forms of social economy that can be replicated in other mountain communities.

These are the main criteria of analysis:

- Motivation: historic public property with high architectural value, strategically located in the historic centre of Schilpario and well-suited to become a civic, cultural and creative hub serving both residents and visitors.
- Needs: community spaces; cultural and educational activities; temporary accommodation for artists, researchers and professionals; support for local crafts and creative entrepreneurship; year-round tourism diversification.
- Approach: preserve the historical identity of the complex while introducing flexible multifunctional uses, energy-efficient renovation, universal accessibility, circular economy practices and collaborative governance involving public institutions and social economy organizations.
- Benefits: revitalization of the historic centre; enhanced cultural and creative production; stronger community participation; new opportunities for local employment and

entrepreneurship; increased territorial attractiveness; preservation of cultural heritage through active reuse.

- Comparative Models: community cultural hubs and adaptive reuse projects combining heritage conservation, creative industries and social innovation, including experiences such as Contrada Bricconi, Genalguacil Pueblo Museo, and other New European Bauhaus-inspired regeneration initiatives explored during the SPACE-NEST Social Economy Missions.



Figure 10 – Former Hospital and Clinic in Schilpario

2. Former Hospital and Clinic – Schilpario.

The former hospital and clinic building lends itself to a reconversion of high social value, thanks to its spatial configuration, its strategic position within the urban fabric of Schilpario, and its strong symbolic significance in the community's collective memory.

Once a place dedicated to healthcare and assistance, the former hospital still retains a profound identity linked to the notions of protection, service, and proximity. It could be transformed into a multifunctional hub capable of hosting decentralized social and healthcare services, spaces for temporary accommodation (e.g., for professionals, families, or vulnerable individuals), and intergenerational activities such as workshops, community gatherings, shared clinics, or day care centres.

Its central location in the town makes it easily accessible for residents, visitors, and professionals, enabling the reactivation of an urban fabric that is currently partially underutilized, stimulating new relational dynamics and generating a positive impact on the entire community.
From a sustainability perspective, the renovation may also serve as an opportunity to introduce innovative solutions in energy efficiency and integrated service management, transforming the building into a pilot model of low-intensity community welfare, replicable in other mountain municipalities as well.
The project could be integrated into existing or emerging social and healthcare networks and interact with local initiatives related to home care, active ageing, and social inclusion. Furthermore, the possibility of hosting temporary accommodation for healthcare professionals, volunteers, or practitioners would meet a concrete demand that is often unfulfilled in peripheral contexts.
Finally, the memorial value of the building—still perceived today as a place of care and dignity—makes it particularly suitable for a respectful, identity-based transformation, capable of preserving the past while opening itself to the future.
From an urban planning perspective, the building is located at a central node of the local road network, making it immediately integrable with the services and urban facilities already present. Furthermore, its compact volume and internal layout facilitate adaptation to mixed uses without the need for new land consumption.

These are the main criteria of analysis:

- Motivation: central node in a territorial system of distributed welfare; space for the community.
- Needs: housing for health professionals, medical services, temporary accommodation.
- Approach: preserve building identity, incorporate green design, create multifunctional civic space.
- Benefits: integration of social functions, local needs addressed through accessible services.
- Comparative Models: regeneration projects with social impact (e.g., *La me cà*).



Figure 11 – House on the Rock in Azzone

3. House on the Rock – Azzone.

Situated in a panoramic and strategic position, the so-called House on the Rock overlooks one of the most representative landscapes of the Scalve Valley, effectively becoming a symbolic gateway to the valley and a narrative threshold between past and future. Due to its dominant location and the strong visual impact it exerts on the surrounding landscape, the building lends itself to being transformed into a cultural and community hub, capable of hosting hybrid functions such as co-working spaces, temporary exhibitions, participatory events, educational workshops, and memory trails.

Although it requires substantial renovation work, the structure stands out for its historical, landscape, and documentary value: not only for its architectural quality and its harmonious dialogue with the rock on which it is set, but above all for its strong connection with the history of the Gleno disaster, of which it represents one of the most significant remaining testimonies in the territory.

Its importance is further underscored by the cultural protection placed on the building, pursuant to Italian Legislative Decree 490/99, Article 2, No. 366 of 20/07/1915, which safeguards its integrity as a heritage asset, requiring conservation and enhancement measures consistent with its status.

The building is currently privately owned, but the municipal administration has clearly expressed its intention to acquire it and make it accessible to the community, which may involve joint valorization tools with public entities, cultural foundations, or local partnership networks. The aim is not only to preserve a fragment of memory, but to transform it into a living, participatory place capable of generating meaning and new forms of social project development.

In a broader perspective, the House on the Rock could become one of the main hubs in the network of cultural facilities linked to the memory of Gleno, engaging with the dam route, artistic installations, and other material and immaterial testimonies present in the valley. Not only would it represent a true "gateway to memory," but also a fertile ground for social innovation, encounters, and youth creativity. From a landscape perspective, its dominant position ensures high territorial visibility, turning it into a natural landmark. Architecturally, the structure lends itself to reuse restoration work compatible with preservation requirements, offering the possibility of combining traditional materials and techniques with innovative solutions.

These are the main criteria of analysis:

- Motivation: landmark and symbolic portal to the valley; social hubs for young people, co-working, cultural labs.
- Needs: cultural gateway, shared hospitality, multifunctional use.
- Approach: shared space for residents, tourists, and social enterprises; participatory governance.
- Benefits: enhances identity, youth engagement, fosters local innovation networks.
- Comparative Models: similar revitalized mountain spaces with mixed-use governance.



Figure 12 – Via Mala in Scalve Valley

4. Via Mala.

An identity-defining route of the Scalve Valley, the Via Mala represents much more than a historical path: it is a true narrative and geographical axis along which memories, landscapes, and future opportunities intertwine. Once a fundamental communication route between Val di Scalve and Valle

Camonica, today it retains extraordinary potential as a territorial regeneration corridor, capable of connecting places, communities, and functions through an integrated and sustainable approach.
Its reactivation can serve as the backbone of a system of widespread enhancement, linking the main buildings and spaces mapped within the SPACE-NEST project—such as the House on the Rock, the Casa Cantoniera, and historic hamlets—and creating a coherent network of cultural, environmental, and social facilities along the route.
Moreover, its strategic position in relation to the existing cycle-pedestrian network and the villages it crosses makes it an ideal platform for developing slow itineraries, experiential tourism, hiking and educational activities, as well as proximity-based economies founded on hospitality, craftsmanship, and local production.
Rethinking the Via Mala does not only mean improving its usability but rebuilding a social imaginary capable of restoring centrality to a valley often perceived as peripheral. Its regeneration can foster new forms of territorial habitability, strengthen the sense of belonging, and become a powerful tool of territorial storytelling, capable of involving residents, visitors, and institutions in a collective project of re-signification and future.
From an infrastructural standpoint, the Via Mala already constitutes a natural corridor connecting environmental and community systems, thus providing a ready-made basis for the development of cycle-pedestrian networks and slow mobility services. The restoration would have minimal impact in terms of new building work, favouring the recovery and maintenance of the existing assets.

These are the main criteria of analysis:

- Motivation: historic trail to be reimagined as a driver for local economic regeneration.
- Needs: connect with Valle Camonica, enhance tourist appeal and improve territorial cohesion.
- Approach: integrate with Casa Cantoniera, Casa sulla Roccia, and Via Decia; network of trails.
- Benefits: international attractiveness, economic revitalization.
- Comparative Models: Caminito del Rey (Spain), Swiss Via Mala.



Figure 13 – De Signo District in Nona di Scalve

5. De Signo District – Nona di Scalve.

This historic hamlet represents one of the most characteristic nuclei of Nona di Scalve and preserves significant traces of traditional rural architecture, with stone buildings, inner courtyards, and collective spaces that tell the story of a past rooted in agriculture, livestock farming, and community life. Its value is not only architectural, but also identity-based and landscape-related, as a tangible testimony of the relationship between humankind and the mountain environment.

Being part of a network of hiking routes and historic villages that cross the Scalve Valley, the hamlet holds strong potential for cultural, social, and tourism enhancement. The restoration of its buildings could give rise to a widespread laboratory of experimentation, where different functions coexist in perfect harmony: temporary residences for artists, researchers, or university students on exchange programs; potential work and living spaces for social service workers and professionals engaged in community welfare projects; as well as housing and workshops for young agricultural entrepreneurs or artisans, thereby encouraging a return to the mountains and the development of local micro-economies.

A regeneration project for Contrada De Signo could also be linked to a broader cultural programme across the territory, including festivals, exhibitions, workshops, and artist residences, capable of attracting visitors and creating new collaborative networks. This would allow the hamlet to be transformed into a platform for social and cultural innovation, where hospitality, production, and creativity intertwine, fostering the active participation of the inhabitants.

The rehabilitation of the hamlet would thus not only bring life back to currently underused spaces but also strengthen the sense of belonging and community cohesion, positioning Nona di Scalve as a

micromodel of integrated mountain regeneration, capable of combining memory, sustainability, and future.

From a settlement perspective, the hamlet preserves a historic grid well-suited to diffuse regeneration interventions, capable of maintaining the original layout while at the same time introducing compatible new functions. The courtyards and common spaces allow for collective uses that strengthen social cohesion and reduce management costs.

These are the main criteria of analysis:

- Motivation: historic district with significant environmental and social value.
- Needs: adaptive reuse for temporary housing, social cohousing.
- Approach: diffuse regeneration through artistic, craft, and community activities.
- Benefits: community activation, micro-economy stimulation, social cohesion.
- Comparative Models: similar experiences in nearby villages (e.g., *Contrada Bricconi*).



Figure 14 – Contrada CAI (Italian Alpine Club) in Schilpario

6. Contrada CAI (Italian Alpine Club) – Schilpario.

Located along one of the main axes of the valley, Contrada CAI represents a context of particular interest for experimenting with integrated models of reuse with an agricultural vocation, in line with contemporary needs for sustainable rural regeneration. Its position, on the border between the settlement area and the natural environment, makes it a strategic place of connection between cultivated landscapes, mountain trails, and the production activities of the territory.

The structure lends itself to a reconversion that preserves its original link with the land, enhancing spaces for agroecological cultivation, small-scale livestock farming, artisanal food processing

(workshops for preserves, honey, herb drying), or experiential rural training. At the same time, complementary social and collective-use functions may be envisaged, such as small rural hostels, open-air classrooms, or environmental education centres.
The area falls within the Site of Community Importance (SCI) "Alta Scalve Valley," recognized for its ecological and landscape value. This requires particular attention in the planning of interventions, which must be fully compatible with the conservation and protection objectives defined at European level (Habitats Directive). In this sense, the reuse of the building could serve as a virtuous example of eco-compatible regeneration, demonstrating how agricultural functions can coexist with the enhancement of biodiversity.
It should be noted that the buildings are currently privately owned, a factor that makes it essential to activate co-design processes with the owners, or, if necessary, to identify instruments for acquisition, leasing, or shared management by third-sector entities or community agricultural cooperatives.
Technically, its position at the margin between natural and residential spaces makes it ideal as an "ecological buffer" and laboratory for sustainable agriculture. From an architectural standpoint, the existing structures have the typical features of mountain farmsteads, which allow for low-impact reuse and the experimentation of innovative rural building models.

These are the main criteria of analysis:

- Motivation: strategic position between natural and residential areas; still active agricultural potential; location within a high-value environmental context.
- Needs: spaces for cultivation, processing, and short supply chains; small temporary residences for seasonal workers or volunteers; integrated agricultural and environmental services.
- Approach: multifunctional agricultural regeneration linked to education, green tourism, and the proximity economy; sustainable management compatible with European environmental directives.
- Benefits: countering the depopulation of hamlets; revitalization of local micro-supply chains; widespread ecological education; active stewardship of the territory.
- Benchmarks: similar experiences in Lombardy's agricultural parks, in mountain villages of Trentino (e.g., Caseificio di Peio), or in social farming models promoted by networks such as Coldiretti or AIAB.

3.1.2. Stakeholder mapping for field analysis in the Province of Bergamo

The regional tandem for Bergamo conducted a comprehensive stakeholder mapping exercise in the **Scalve Valley**. This activity aimed to identify and understand the local ecosystem of actors involved

in or relevant to the social economy, particularly in connection with the values of the NEB. The results highlight the strong presence and diversity of associations as well as the significant role of local public authorities and private sector partners in shaping the territory's potential for space repurposing and social innovation. A wide range of actors working at both local and provincial levels was identified, including grassroots organizations, cooperatives, and social enterprises rooted in the territory, as well as umbrella organizations and institutional networks operating at regional or national level. Italy's robust legal framework, anchored in laws such as Law 381/1991 and Legislative Decree 117/2017, clearly aligns with EU principles for the Social Economy and the NEB. All five EU-recognized social economy associations are legally acknowledged and regulated in the Italian context. The mapping shows that both operational actors and support structures (such as representative associations and public registers) are active and interlinked. This dual presence strengthens the ecosystem's capacity for collaboration, knowledge transfer, and policy alignment. Furthermore, the combination of territorially rooted initiatives and system-level enablers provides fertile ground for inclusive, sustainable space repurposing. The legal and organizational landscape in Lombardy offers a solid foundation for advancing NEB-aligned actions through the SPACE-NEST project. The mapping process resulted in the identification of 41 stakeholders, divided into three main categories: 24 social economy entities, 10 public administration bodies and 7 economic organizations.

Social Economy Stakeholders

The 24 social economy stakeholders identified include a range of cooperatives, associations, and community-based organizations operating in fields such as social care and support for marginalized groups, youth engagement and cultural programming, environmental sustainability and circular economy, community development and heritage preservation. These organizations are often deeply embedded in the local context, operating with limited resources but strong social capital and local trust. They play an essential role in shaping inclusive, place-based solutions and are well-positioned to contribute to the co-design and co-management of regenerated spaces. However, many would benefit from capacity-building support, particularly in the areas of funding access, project design, and collaboration with institutional partners.

Public Sector Stakeholders

The mapping identified 10 public sector stakeholders, including municipalities, inter-municipal associations, and public development agencies. These institutions vary in their level of engagement and capacity, but overall, their role is pivotal for authorizing space repurposing projects, providing or facilitating access to funding and public infrastructure, and ensuring alignment with broader territorial

strategies. Early and strategic involvement of public authorities is key to building institutional buy-in and enabling multi-level governance for the project.

Economic Stakeholders

While fewer in number, the 7 economic stakeholders identified such as local businesses, cooperatives, and trade bodies represent strategic partners for innovation, investment, and employment. Some already operate with social impact in mind or have demonstrated interest in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and impact-driven collaborations. Their potential contributions range from technical expertise and materials to financial support and workforce development.

Mapping Impact and Value

The mapping exercise was valuable not only as a diagnostic tool but also as a strategic mechanism to give visibility to under-recognized actors and include those who operate on the margins of formal decision-making processes. This included both geographic peripheries and smaller or informal organizations with deep community ties and untapped potential. The mapping achieved three main goals: first, it identified deeply rooted local actors crucial to any socially embedded regeneration process; second, it involved cross-border or peripheral stakeholders who may bring additional economic, relational or professional capital into the process; and third, it laid the groundwork for ecosystem-building and cross-sector partnerships in future phases of the project.

Ecosystem Challenges and Opportunities

Despite a rich social fabric, the local ecosystem is somewhat fragmented, with limited collaboration among sectors. The SPACE-NEST project serves as a catalyst for connection by uniting public, private, and third sectors in shared cooperation. Notably, creative industries and youth organizations appeared underrepresented during this phase, suggesting a gap to be addressed in the next stages to fully integrate NEB values related to aesthetics and intergenerational participation.

Focus Group in Viminore di Scalve

The focus group took place on 16 April 2025 in Vilminore di Scalve and was jointly organized by the Province of Bergamo and LE2C Lombardy Energy Cleantech Cluster, with the participation of the research team of the University of Bergamo. It was the result of a structured preparatory process: a preliminary meeting held in Vilminore di Scalve on 18 February helped frame objectives and expectations, while two subsequent organizational meetings were dedicated to finalizing the agenda, methodology, and logistics. This preparatory work ensured the smooth implementation of the focus group on the day and maximized the value of the discussions. The event was attended by 29

participants representing a broad range of local actors: university researchers, municipal administrators, cooperatives and social enterprises, cultural and environmental associations, foundations, as well as small and medium-sized enterprises. Due to this diversity, a multidisciplinary discussion was guaranteed, combining institutional, technical, and community perspectives.



Figure 15 – Participants of the focus group organized in Vilminore di Scalve

The focus group was designed to be interactive and participatory, combining short presentations with roundtable discussions, collaborative exercises, and group work. Preliminary activities included the mapping of spaces and stakeholders in the Scalve Valley; this information was shared at the beginning of the session to provide participants with a common knowledge base. Following this introduction, participants were divided into working groups and invited to reflect on the challenges of the area and to co-design ideas for the reuse of abandoned or underutilised spaces.



Figure 16 – Capturing a moment during the focus group organized in Vilminore di Scalve

Several key issues emerged from the discussion. On the social side, participants stressed the lack of services for young people and elderly citizens, which contributes to isolation and depopulation in mountain areas. From a cultural perspective, the shortage of inclusive and accessible meeting places was highlighted, with participants expressing the need for spaces capable of hosting cultural events, creative activities, and informal community gatherings. On the economic side, participants pointed to the difficulties of activating entrepreneurial initiatives in a fragile and remote territory, due to financial constraints, bureaucratic complexity, and limited visibility at the regional and national level. At the same time, participants also identified opportunities for regeneration and renewal. There was strong consensus around the value of multifunctional spaces capable of combining cultural, social, and economic functions. Examples of possible uses included cultural centres, local incubators, and co-working hubs that could host both residents and external professionals such as digital workers, artists, and researchers. Nature-based and tourism-related initiatives were also considered highly promising, especially in relation to the recovery of historic routes and natural heritage.

The co-design activity resulted in 3 concrete project ideas:

- conversion of the former hospital in Schilpario into a youth hostel, offering affordable accommodation linked to cultural and outdoor activities;

- creation of an integrated tourist itinerary along the Via Mala, aimed at combining natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and local products in a single cross-sectoral experience;
- regeneration of the "House on the Rock" in Azzone into a multifunctional centre with co-working spaces, intended as a hub for community initiatives, training programmes, and entrepreneurial support.

The group discussions underlined that successful regeneration must be rooted in participatory governance. Community management, universal accessibility, and environmental sustainability were seen as non-negotiable conditions for long-term success. Moreover, participants stressed the importance of linking regeneration with broader strategies such as sustainable tourism, green transition, and youth engagement.



Figure 17 – Scenes from the focus group organized in Vilminore di Scalve

Feedback collected at the end of the session was very positive. Participants appreciated the depth of the discussion between local community members and external experts, the collaborative working atmosphere, and the possibility of turning ideas into actionable proposals. They valued the SPACE-NEST approach, which frames regeneration not only as a technical or architectural challenge, but as a holistic process combining the values of beautiful, sustainable, and together as promoted by the New European Bauhaus. In conclusion, the focus group highlighted both challenges and opportunities typical of peripheral mountain areas: demographic decline, limited services, and resource constraints on the one hand, but also, strong cultural identity, rich natural heritage, and a community willing to innovate on the other. The session demonstrated that abandoned spaces could become levers for social cohesion, sustainable entrepreneurship, and cultural vitality.

3.1.3. Design Thinking and Social Economy Mission (SEM) in the Province of Bergamo

From 11th to 14th November 2025, the Province of Bergamo organized the Social Economy Mission in the villages of Bergamo, Dossena, Valpiana, Oltressenda Alta, Schilpario and Azzone located in the Bergamo Orobic mountains. The attendees were urban planners, architects, project managers, social cooperatives, representatives of municipalities and provinces, cultural operators, and rural development stakeholders from Spain, Italy and Slovenia. Several stakeholders were involved in the preparation of the visit, including representatives of the municipalities (Dossena, Valpiana, Oltressenda, Schilpario, Azzone, Vilminore di Scalve), social cooperatives and local entrepreneurs engaged in mountain regeneration. Moreover, the University of Bergamo was involved, as an associated and scientific partner, and delivered a presentation about the local context. Partner organizations were responsible for recruiting participants in their countries (Spain, Italy, Slovenia). They issued a call for participants, selected suitable candidates, and provided them with initial information. Partner organizations in Spain, Italy and Slovenia used the info-pack prepared by the host partners to select participants and provide the initial information needed about travel arrangements and the programme. They were responsible for signing collaboration agreements and organizing transportation and hotel accommodation. Information about hotels and local and regional transport options was provided to partners by the hosts. The host partners delivered a final preparatory schedule before the mission, including the last details and final reminders. A WhatsApp group was also created to ensure real-time communication throughout the mission, allowing logistical updates, schedule adjustments and quick instructions to be shared as needed.

The SEM included one icebreaker activity and guided visits to key rural regeneration initiatives in Dossena, including the historic mines and Tibetan bridge, and to community-based welfare and social inclusion centres such as La Bonne Semence & Contatto. Participants also explored Contrada Bricconi, a restored Alpine hamlet integrating sustainable farming and contemporary hospitality. On the second day, the group visited several abandoned or underused buildings in Azzone and Schilpario, including the Casa nella Roccia (House on the Rock), a former school and a historical house donated to the municipality. They engaged with local authorities and stakeholders to understand their challenges and potential. The mission culminated in the design thinking workshop in which participants co-created solutions for two of the buildings visited.



Figure 18 – Group photo at Casa sulla roccia, Azzone

The SEM process in Bergamo applied design thinking as follows:

1. Empathize

Participants began by visiting the selected buildings and public spaces in Azzone and Schilpario, observing their physical condition and spatial potential. Local administrators and community representatives shared stories and insights about the social, economic and demographic challenges of the Scalve Valley. In addition, the University of Bergamo provided valuable background information and a contextual analysis of the valley, helping participants understand the broader territorial dynamics and ongoing regeneration efforts, while enabling them to grasp both the tangible and intangible dimensions of the local context.

2. Define & 3. Ideate (combined due to time constraints)

Back in Vilminore, the groups jointly synthesized the information gathered during the visits. Due to the limited time available, the Define and Ideate stages were merged into a single collaborative phase. Participants identified key challenges and transformed them into opportunity statements. From there, they generated a wide range of creative ideas for the reuse of the buildings they had visited. All

contributions were welcomed, and the process encouraged visual thinking, cross-country exchange and the exploration of multiple regeneration scenarios.

4. Prototype

Each group transformed its concept into a simple prototype using LEGO bricks, which helped make the ideas more concrete.

5. Share (Test)

In the final session, groups presented their prototypes to the rest of the participants. Some of the teams combined the prototype presentation with the NABC template (Needs, Approach, Benefits, Competition). Participants provided feedback, highlighting strengths and potential impact.



Prototype 1 – The House on the Rock: VENTAGLIO ROUTE

The proposal redefines the Casa nella Roccia in Dezzo (Azzone) as the symbolic gateway to the entire Scalve Valley, transforming it from an isolated house on the rock into the entry point to a coordinated territorial system. The concept envisions an integrated plan involving all municipalities, strengthening both the industrial identity of the valley and its tourism potential. Dezzo becomes the "valley beacon", the place where visitors and new residents begin their journey into local history, nature and industry. The House on the Rock, together with the historic building on the village square, would host offices, meeting rooms, a tourism hub and a small museum narrating centuries of industrial tradition and the unique story of the House on the Rock itself.
At the heart of the proposal is the **VENTAGLIO Route**, a new inter-valley trail named after the fan-like geography of the area. The route would connect four valleys and link historical manufacturing facilities, workshops and production sites, allowing visitors to walk through the industrial and cultural landscape. Along the trail, small services, cafés, rest stops, micro visitor centres, could emerge, stimulating local entrepreneurship. Local industries would also take part in building and renovating spaces along the route, reinforcing the connection between heritage and contemporary skills. To improve accessibility, a gondola lift between Dezzo and the Gleno Dam is proposed, offering both a

practical connection and a panoramic attraction. Altogether, the vision positions Dezzo as the entry door to a living and evolving valley system.

Prototype 2 - Scalve Valley Mountain Hub: from an abandoned house to a circular living hub

This proposal begins with a large, abandoned house in the centre of the village, currently a sign of decline but rich in potential. The idea is to transform it into a circular, multifunctional mountain hub where creativity, craftsmanship, outdoor culture and community life meet. Using recycled materials, local craftsmanship and low-impact solutions, the renovation itself becomes a model of sustainable Alpine architecture, turning the building into an attractive community landmark.
The mountain hub is organized around four interconnected pillars.
1. Upcycling & Design Lab. A workshop collecting used winter sports equipment—skis, ropes, crampons, snowboards—from residents, ski resorts and clubs. These items are repaired, reused or upcycled into bags, accessories, furniture or pieces of art. This lab becomes a training space for young people, artisans and designers, generating a circular micro-economy.

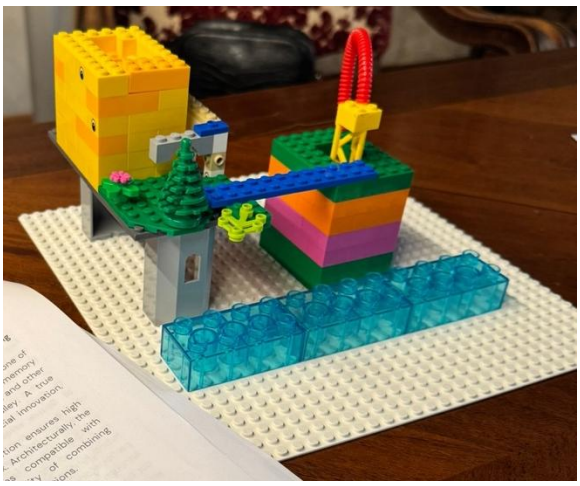


2. Mountain Sports & Training Services. The hub offers training for guides and operators, equipment rental and maintenance services, and an info point promoting responsible, all-season tourism.

3. Alpine Co-working & Remote-Working Retreat. A nature-based workspace hosting professionals, researchers and digital nomads through workation programmes and innovation camps linked to local actors.

4. Artist & Designer Residences. Creative residences that produce installations, prototypes and cultural events inspired by the valley.

Together, these functions generate a vibrant ecosystem that strengthens identity, fosters skills and opens new economic opportunities.



Prototype 3 – The House on the Rock: BRIDGING PAST and FUTURE

This proposal envisages the Casa nella Roccia as a symbolic bridge between the valley's historical identity and its future development. Deeply rooted in local history and collective memory, the building becomes the "past" component, housing an interpretation centre dedicated to the valley's environment, traditions and resilience. Its strong emotional value offers the ideal foundation for activities that reflect and preserve the territory's heritage. The project proposes acquiring and renovating an adjacent building to host the "future" component: a Rural Social Innovation Lab. This space would attract multidisciplinary teams who work together on new ideas, policies and projects for the social and economic renewal of the region. Each floor of the four-storey building could accommodate different functions linked to the lab: mountain sports services, community meeting rooms, maker spaces, training activities or small craft workshops.

The two structures are physically and conceptually connected by a bridge, both a literal passage and a metaphor for the project's vision: linking historical legacy with contemporary creativity. Accessibility improvements, including the installation of a lift, ensure broader community use. This dual-building ecosystem creates a powerful narrative: the past hosted in the Casa nella Roccia and the future generated in the annexe, working together to revitalize the Scalve Valley.



Prototype 4 - THE HOUSE WITHIN THE HOUSE

The proposal for the abandoned building in Schilpario visualizes a place where community, culture and knowledge intersect. The ground floor becomes a welcoming space dedicated to cooking workshops centred on local products, herbs and vegetables grown in the surrounding area. These activities are led by local residents and involve tourists, second-home owners and travellers, transforming the house into a "school of the valley", where recipes, stories and traditions are shared and preserved. The upper floors are conceived as temporary residences for those taking part in educational or

community programmes: trainee chefs, students, researchers, artists, volunteers and slow-tourism visitors. Renovation, management and programming would be entrusted to a local cooperative, which would also involve under-resourced populations in construction, hospitality and event organization, thus creating social and employment opportunities. A second, invisible layer defines the identity of the project: the data house. The building would collect structured information on visitors, workshop participation, mobility flows and the use of spaces. This data, translated into dashboards, maps and visual narratives, would support local authorities and the cooperative in understanding needs and making informed decisions. The House Within the House is thus both a physical home inhabited by people and a digital home inhabited by data. Together, they create a regenerative model that is socially rooted, technologically supported and capable of guiding the valley towards a more sustainable and inclusive future.

The evaluation of the Social Economy Mission in Bergamo showed high levels of participant satisfaction. The Mission successfully brought together partners from Italy, Spain and Slovenia for an immersive exploration of mountain regeneration, social innovation and community-driven transformation. Through study visits, meetings with local stakeholders and a collaborative design workshop, participants engaged deeply with the challenges and opportunities of rural regeneration in the Scalve Valley. The mission demonstrated the value of combining territorial immersion, cross-border exchange and design thinking methodologies, offering participants both inspiration and practical insights aligned with the principles of the NEB. While feedback confirms the high quality and impact of the mission, participants also provided indications for future activities, particularly regarding programme pacing, language consistency, and expanded time for discussion.

3.2. Inner Regions of the Province of Malaga

by José Luis Alcón López, Irene Ojo Mars and Salvador Palomo Pérez

3.2.1. Mapping Abandoned or Underused Public Spaces in the Province of Malaga

Given the vastness of the Province of Malaga, the mapping process began with a strong focus on collaboration with the seven Local Action Groups (Grupos de Desarrollo Rural) operating in the inland areas. During the first phase, the tandem contacted the managers and technical staff of these Local Action Groups, as well as several municipal mayors, and other relevant local stakeholders. This collective effort produced an initial shortlist of 30 abandoned or underused spaces across the seven inland areas.

In the second phase, a series of on-site visits was organized over several weeks and structured considering each region (*comarca*). Guided by local or regional representatives and stakeholders, the tandem visited all the previously identified spaces, and, in several cases, additional ones suggested during the fieldwork, bringing the final total to 38 mapped spaces. For each of them, detailed information was collected according to the mapping template: location, ownership, physical condition, previous use, and potential scenarios for reuse. The visits also enabled the team to record exact geographic coordinates and produce photographic documentation of all the sites.

Typologies of spaces identified

To facilitate future work and analysis, the 38 mapped spaces were grouped into five main categories:

- **Co-working / Maker spaces** – spaces suitable for shared work environments, creative industries, and collaborative production.
- **Habitat / Accommodation (Residences, Co-living, Co-housing)** – properties with potential for innovative housing models and community living.
- **Museums / Interpretation Centres** – heritage or cultural buildings adaptable for educational and interpretative purposes.
- **Business Incubators / Training Facilities** – sites that could host entrepreneurship, vocational training, or incubation programmes.
- **Other** – a diverse category including spaces with unique features that did not fit into the previous groups but hold local relevance and potential.

This two-step approach, combining centralized coordination with extensive fieldwork and stakeholder involvement, enabled a comprehensive and reliable mapping process to be conducted. It

also reinforced early collaboration with key territorial actors, ensuring that the identified spaces were not only catalogued, but also recognized as meaningful assets within their local communities.

To facilitate the work of the focus group, all members of the Malaga tandem took part in an initial phase of prioritizing the mapped spaces. The following assessment criteria were applied:

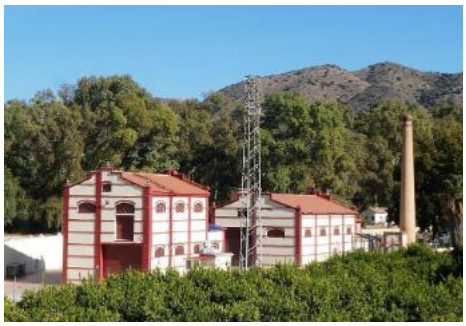
1. Social impact
2. Uniqueness
3. Condition (Habitability)
4. Heritage value of the space
5. Contribution to strengthening the social economy ecosystem
6. Alignment with the New European Bauhaus Strategy
7. Active participation of key stakeholders
8. Relevance for focus group participants
9. Future viability of the proposed use in the local context
10. Maturity and consolidation of the project or intended use

In this way, the initial list of 38 spaces was narrowed down to 17, making sure that all five categories were represented. For each of these 17 spaces, a short information sheet was prepared, grouped by category with 3-4 spaces per category. The following is an example of a worksheet prepared for one of the 17 spaces:



Figure 19 – Example information sheet for selected spaces in the Province of Malaga

As a result of the work carried out by the focus group participants, with the guidance and validation of a technician from the Architecture Service of the Provincial Council of Malaga, six prioritized spaces were selected for further development. Following the focus group process, an additional space of interest was also selected in Cortes de la Frontera.



Orange blossom essence factory in Álora



Municipal business incubator in Cuevas Bajas



Former agricultural cooperative in Almáchar



Municipal hostel in Fuente de Piedra



Multipurpose industrial building in Alfarnatejo



Old Silo Area connected to the Municipal Hostel in Fuente de Piedra

Figure 20 – Six selected spaces in the Province of Malaga

3.2.2. Stakeholder mapping for field analysis in the Provincial Council of Malaga

In February 2025, the Employment Service of the Provincial Council of Malaga and Action Against Hunger Spain presented and distributed an institutional invitation to a first level of key stakeholders: the Rural Development Groups and all the town councils of rural municipalities in the province of Malaga with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants.

This invitation encouraged them to identify local key economic actors, such as social economy enterprises, entrepreneurs, promoters of good practices and citizens. Once integrated as key agents, they took part in focus groups, shared experiences during social economy missions with European partners, and helped choose good practices.

The tandem also identified additional organizations of interest to the project and provided a summary of the SPACE-NEST project, as well as information regarding the NEB strategy at European level and its connection and integration with local development in the province of Malaga. Most of these organizations subsequently participated in the development of the focus groups and in the identification of best practices.

In this regard, 11 key associations were contacted and identified, with local development groups being particularly important, along with organizations promoting rural tourism, women's associations, and business associations. A total of 63 key stakeholders was identified.

Social Economy Stakeholders

Altogether **47 social economy organizations** were identified, including associations, cooperatives, foundations, social enterprises, non-profit organizations, and volunteering initiatives active in areas such as rural development, social inclusion, sustainability, culture, entrepreneurship, and community development. The seven Local Action Groups were particularly relevant in connecting the process with local communities and territorial initiatives. Their local knowledge and networks can support the identification of community needs and the development of socially oriented uses for underused spaces, while closer cooperation with public authorities and economic actors could further strengthen the implementation and sustainability of future projects.

Public Sector Stakeholders

The mapping involved 16 public sector stakeholders, including municipalities, the Provincial Council of Málaga, regional and territorial bodies, and institutions supporting local and rural development. These actors provided essential knowledge on the ownership, condition, regulatory context, and possible future uses of the spaces considered. Their involvement is particularly important for facilitating access to public assets, funding and administrative procedures, as well as for coordinating regeneration initiatives across the different territorial levels of the province.

Economic Stakeholders

Economic actors identified through the mapping include local businesses, entrepreneurs, cooperatives, business associations, and organizations working in finance, innovation, and business support. Their potential contribution is particularly relevant to projects involving business incubation, co-working, tourism, local production, training, and social entrepreneurship. They can provide entrepreneurial knowledge, investment, employment opportunities, technical expertise, and support for developing viable operating models for the selected spaces.

Mapping Impact and Value

The mapping exercise provided a clearer picture of the potential of underused spaces to contribute to the development of Malaga's inland areas. By bringing together municipalities, Local Action Groups, territorial organizations, and other local actors, the process connected physical assets with local needs, ideas, and development priorities. The identification and assessment of 38 spaces, followed by the prioritization of 17 and the selection of 5 for further development, helped focus attention on concrete opportunities for reuse and regeneration. Furthermore, the exercise encouraged dialogue between

different types of stakeholders and demonstrated how existing buildings and sites can become platforms for entrepreneurship, social innovation, cultural activity, local services, and community life, providing a basis for continued cooperation in future phases of SPACE-NEST.

Ecosystem Challenges and Opportunities

The mapping highlighted substantial opportunities for reactivating underused spaces in Malaga's inland areas, while also pointing to challenges arising from the province's geographical scale and the diversity of its 103 municipalities. Effective coordination among local authorities, social economy organizations, businesses, and communities, together with appropriate technical, financial, and institutional resources, will be crucial for transforming identified sites into viable initiatives. At the same time, the range of proposed uses—from co-working and co-living to business incubation, training, cultural activities, tourism, and the promotion of local products—offers opportunities for supporting entrepreneurship, attracting new residents, strengthening local identity, and diversifying rural economies. In this context, SPACE-NEST can help connect local initiatives and promote collaboration across sectors, supporting the NEB approach through socially inclusive, sustainable, and place-sensitive regeneration.

Focus group in the Visitor Reception Centre at Fuente de Piedra Lagoon

The focus group took place on 8 May 2025 in the Visitor Reception Centre at Fuente de Piedra Lagoon, with 35 participants consisting of citizens, municipal representatives, local action groups, social enterprises, cooperatives, NGOs, cultural associations, entrepreneurs, academics, and local businesses.

In preparation for the focus group, several activities were undertaken, including field visits, the mapping of abandoned and underused spaces, and an online survey. The preliminary survey was sent to all participants who had confirmed their attendance at the focus group. The survey received 19 responses and provided valuable baseline insights into community needs and expectations. Respondents highlighted challenges such as the shortage of affordable housing, the lack of employment opportunities, environmental degradation, and social isolation. At the same time, they expressed strong interest in potential new uses for spaces, including social housing, cultural centres, co-working hubs, community kitchens, digital training facilities, museums, and agro-ecological projects. These inputs helped shape the design of the workshop dynamics and provided participants with a shared foundation for reflection.

The focus group brought together a heterogeneous mix of perspectives and interests, ensuring diversity of voices, and included citizens, social enterprises, key stakeholders, and young people. To support the process, specific roles of moderators and observers were assigned.

This structure encouraged balanced facilitation and guaranteed active participation from all attendees.

The workshop was designed around two main participatory dynamics:

- **First group dynamic**

  Objective: to reflect collectively on the socio-territorial potential of rehabilitating abandoned or underused spaces.

  Method: participants worked in groups using visual participatory tools (panels, post-its, voting), building on the survey results. They explored challenges, opportunities, and innovative uses such as co-living, digital skills centres, cultural hubs, energy communities, and agroecological initiatives.

  Output: identification of enabling factors (public-private partnerships, citizen leadership, cross-sector collaboration) and conditions for success (multifunctionality, sustainability, accessibility, realistic governance models).



Figure 21 – First group dynamic at Fuente de Piedra Lagoon

- **Second group dynamic**

  Objective: to prioritize the 17 pre-selected spaces using the assessment criteria (social impact, uniqueness, condition, heritage, contribution to social economy, NEB alignment, stakeholder participation, interest, local viability, maturity).

  Method: participants were divided into five groups, each assigned to one category of space. Each group received 3–4 space information sheets and was asked to jointly select one final space.

  Output: six final spaces were prioritized, each with concrete project ideas. Every group appointed a spokesperson, who was asked to present their conclusions: why they had chosen that mapped space, what specific uses it could have, what minimum conditions would be required for the space to be successfully activated, and what it could contribute to the social economy network.



Figure 22 – The second group dynamic at Fuente de Piedra Lagoon

Results: seven final spaces and project ideas

The group work resulted in the following spaces being prioritized:

1. **Municipal Hostel (Fuente de Piedra)** → proposed as a *co-living hub* for digital nomads, Erasmus students, and eco-tourism initiatives, combined with culinary training activities.
2. **Former Agricultural Cooperative (Almáchar)** → transformation into a *Museum of the Muscatel Grape Raisin*, preserving heritage while creating a visitor centre and shop for local products.

3. Municipal Business Incubator (Cuevas Bajas) → development of a *local energy community* with rooftop photovoltaics, alongside a training centre for entrepreneurship and green skills.

4. Orange Blossom Essence Factory (Álora) → conversion into an *entrepreneurship support hub and tourism information centre*, building on its historic industrial identity.

5. Multipurpose Industrial Building (Alfarnatejo) → establishment of a *training centre in ceramics and essential oils*, supporting unemployed women in forming a cooperative and boosting local crafts.

6. Former Farm School (Viñuela) → Very spacious property featuring multiple buildings and outdoor areas, offering the potential to establish a co-creation space—such as a co-working hub—alongside a shop for local products, cooking workshops designed to foster integration among the area's diverse nationalities, and educational workshops for schools and seasonal camps, thanks to the existing hostel-style building.

Additionally, the Malaga Provincial Council's Architecture Service identified another potentially suitable space in Cortes de la Frontera.

7. **Former institute** (Cortes de la Frontera) → space that was set up as a school in the 1970s, along with some boarding facilities that fell into disuse in 2004, proposed as a multipurpose space.

The discussions revealed several recurring challenges: funding limitations, bureaucratic hurdles, and uncertainty around governance models. Yet participants also highlighted strong opportunities, including the reuse of heritage assets, the potential of co-living and digital work, the promotion of social economy initiatives, community-based tourism, ecological transition, and the empowerment of women-led cooperatives.

Feedback from participants was very positive. They valued the collaborative methodology, the clarity of the decision-making process, and the chance to shape future uses of meaningful local spaces. The focus group successfully translated the mapping exercise into a concrete shortlist of spaces and project ideas, rooted in the principles of beautiful, sustainable, and together. The session demonstrated that, when guided by participatory governance and the values of the NEB, abandoned or underused spaces can become catalysts for social cohesion, entrepreneurship, and cultural vitality in rural areas of Malaga.

3.2.3. Design Thinking and Social Economy Mission (SEM) in the Province of Malaga

From 20 to 23 April 2026, the Provincial Council of Malaga and Action Against Hunger organized the Design Thinking and Social Economy Mission (SEM) in the Province of Malaga, between Serranía de Ronda and Malaga.

The 45 participants came from Spain, Italy and Slovenia and represented a diverse range of backgrounds, sectors and professional profiles. Members of the group included representatives of local and regional authorities, rural development organizations, social economy entities, associations, foundations, entrepreneurs, researchers, project managers and community development practitioners. Participants were involved in fields such as social innovation, rural regeneration, community-led development, entrepreneurship, architecture, culture, environmental sustainability, education and local governance. Special attention was given to the participation of underrepresented entrepreneurs and organizations working with disadvantaged groups, in line with the inclusion objectives of the SPACE-NEST project. Moreover, the SEM brought together stakeholders from both urban and rural areas, creating opportunities for exchange between different territorial realities and experiences. Participants ranged from young entrepreneurs and students to experienced professionals, municipal representatives and leaders of social economy initiatives, fostering a multidisciplinary and international learning environment.

The stakeholder group included representatives from:

- public authorities and local governments
- rural development organizations and Local Action Groups (LAGs)
- social economy entities and cooperatives
- NGOs and civil society organizations
- foundations and organizations working on social inclusion
- universities and research institutions
- architects, planners and professionals involved in territorial development
- entrepreneurs and underrepresented entrepreneurs
- business support organizations and innovation hubs
- environmental and community development organizations

Participants were active in fields such as rural regeneration, social innovation, community-led development, social economy, entrepreneurship, culture, sustainability, education, architecture, inclusion and local governance.

The diversity of profiles was intentionally sought to encourage knowledge exchange, peer learning and the co-creation of solutions aligned with the principles of the New European Bauhaus and the objectives of the SPACE-NEST project.

Design thinking was applied during the SEM process in Malaga as follows:

1. Empathize

Participants were introduced to the social, economic and territorial context of the Serranía de Ronda through study visits, presentations and direct interaction with local stakeholders. Visits to Algaba de Ronda, Benalauría, Genalguacil and Benarrabá allowed participants to understand local challenges and opportunities related to rural development, social innovation, entrepreneurship, depopulation and community-led initiatives. The empathy phase continued in Cortes de la Frontera, where participants received information about the municipality and visited the former secondary school building selected as the case study. Local representatives, including the mayor and technical staff, explained the history of the building, its current situation and its potential for future use.

2. Define

Based on the information gathered during the visits and discussions, participants identified key challenges and opportunities related to the building and the wider territory. They reflected on local

needs such as housing, youth retention, economic diversification, social inclusion and community services, defining the main issues that their proposals should address.

3. Ideate

Working in multidisciplinary and international groups, participants generated ideas for the future reuse of the building. Through collaborative discussions and brainstorming sessions, they explored different concepts linked to social economy, co-living, entrepreneurship, culture, education, intergenerational activities and sustainable rural development.

4. Prototype

Each group developed its preferred concept and transformed it into a tangible proposal using LEGO bricks and visual tools. These prototypes helped participants communicate their ideas, define the main functions of the space and illustrate how different users and activities could interact within the building.

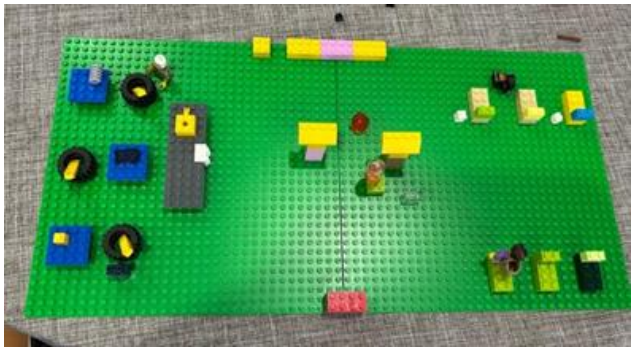
5. Share (Test)

The groups presented their proposals to the rest of the participants and received feedback through discussion and questions. This exchange allowed participants to evaluate the strengths of each proposal, identify possible improvements and reflect on their feasibility and potential impact. This process enabled participants to co-create innovative solutions for the reuse of an underused public building, combining local needs, community participation, sustainability and creativity in line with the principles of the New European Bauhaus and the objectives of the SPACE-NEST project.



Prototype 1 – Cork Processing and Vocational Training Centre

This group proposed transforming the former school building into a multifunctional centre combining a cork-processing facility with a vocational training centre focused on cork and wine-related activities. The proposal responds to the lack of local cork-processing industries despite the abundance of forest resources in the region. Production facilities would be housed on the ground floor, while the upper floor would provide specialized training opportunities for young people and future entrepreneurs. The concept aims to create local employment, retain population and strengthen a strategic economic sector through collaboration with universities, vocational training centres and forestry stakeholders.



Prototype 2 – 4WIN (Women in Nature)

The group developed a concept combining co-living accommodation for women facing economic vulnerability with the production of natural and sustainable cosmetics.

This project promotes social inclusion and economic empowerment through a business model allowing women to gain autonomy and employment opportunities through the production and sale of cosmetics. The initiative would make use of local natural resources and sustainable materials such as cork packaging, while also incorporating elements of responsible tourism. Strategic partnerships would involve local authorities, farmers, social services, and third-sector organizations.



Prototype 3 – "Why Not for Living?" Community and Social Innovation Hub

This proposal envisioned the building as a multifunctional space integrating social housing, co-working facilities, community services and economic activities. The concept included intergenerational living, shared spaces for community interaction, public services, a community kitchen, and a FabLab for young entrepreneurs. Revenue will come from the production and sale of cork-based products, local markets, exhibition spaces, and catering services. The proposal aimed to address several local challenges simultaneously, including housing shortages, entrepreneurship, and social inclusion.



Prototype 4 – Sustainability Interpretation and Intergenerational Centre

The group proposed the creation of a public space dedicated to sustainability, community interaction and local development, consisting of a sustainability interpretation centre, co-housing facilities, local markets, tourism accommodation and spaces for youth entrepreneurship. Emphasis was placed on the building's strategic location near three natural parks and on the use of local forest resources, especially cork. While strengthening

connections between generations, the concept also sought to promote environmental awareness, and create new economic opportunities linked to local products and sustainable tourism.



Prototype 5 – Cultural, Community and Co-living Space
This group focused on creating a community-centred facility combining cultural, residential and social functions. Spaces were included for local associations, cultural programming, a Media Lab, shared kitchens, co-living facilities, and meeting areas for elderly residents. A local products market and activities linked to the cork sector would further reinforce connections with the territory. The concept aimed to provide a vibrant community hub supporting culture, social interaction, and quality of life for residents.

Overall, the five prototypes shared common objectives: attracting and retaining population, creating employment opportunities, supporting social inclusion, promoting community participation and making sustainable use of local resources. Housing solutions, social economy initiatives, entrepreneurship, culture and territorial identity emerged as recurring themes across all the proposals.

The SEM Malaga successfully combined study visits, stakeholder exchange and participatory activities to explore new approaches to rural development, social economy and the reuse of underused spaces. Participants had the opportunity to learn from inspiring local initiatives, exchange experiences with stakeholders from different countries and work together on practical solutions for the future reuse of a vacant public building in Cortes de la Frontera. The Design Thinking workshop showed how local challenges can be transformed into opportunities through collaboration, creativity and community participation. Furthermore, the proposals developed by the groups addressed key issues such as housing, entrepreneurship, social inclusion, culture and sustainability. Participant feedback was very positive, highlighting both the quality of the programme and the value of meeting and learning from people with different backgrounds and experiences. The SEM demonstrated the potential of combining local knowledge, international exchange and participatory methodologies to support innovative and sustainable solutions for rural areas.

3.3. Obalno-Kraška in the Primorska Region

by Špela Guštin, Maja Jotić and Tina B. Kregar

3.3.1. Mapping Abandoned or Underused Public Spaces in the Primorska Region

For the mapping phase, the research was limited to the Obalno-Kraška statistical region (NUTS 3), which consists of eight municipalities. A total of 20 spaces were mapped across four municipalities (Izola, Koper, Piran and Sežana) that can be grouped into six categories as described below.

Former industrial sites
These sites represented the industrial backbone of the Slovenian coastal region from the late 19th to the 20th century. Factories such as Argo, once the largest food processing plant on the Adriatic, and Delamaris, the oldest fish cannery in the area, reflect the long tradition of fish processing in Izola. The Izola Shipyard, active until the early 2000s, showcases the region's maritime engineering heritage. Buildings like the Salvetti Factory, with its diverse industrial past (glass, soap, chemical production), and Mala oprema, a carpentry facility, illustrate the range of small to mid-scale businesses. The Riba plant and Sečovlje mine, which once mined coal below sea level, underline the breadth of industrial activities that have now largely disappeared, leaving behind historically valuable yet often abandoned structures.

Cultural heritage/Cultural spaces:
Many former industrial or commercial buildings have been transformed into vibrant cultural spaces. The Grando Salt Warehouse and Monfort Warehouse, once used for storing salt, are now venues for concerts, exhibitions, and events, preserving their architectural heritage while supporting modern cultural life. Retaining its elegant stone detailing, the administrative building of the Piran Salt Pans is a fine example of post-First World War craftsmanship. Forma Viva Portorož, an outdoor sculpture park, reflects international artistic collaboration and appreciation of natural stone and landscape. The Verdi Palace in Izola, originally Gothic and later remodelled in the Baroque style, represents the layered historical identity of the town. Finally, the Bržan Homestead in Smokvica showcases rural Istrian architecture, highlighting the area's agricultural roots.

Natural heritage:
The dry-stone cottage known as "Kažeta" in the Strunjan Landscape Park is a small, traditional Istrian structure historically used by farmers and shepherds. Such stone shelters were built without mortar

and served as storage for tools or temporary refuge in the fields. Its recent renovation reflects a growing interest in preserving rural heritage and cultural landscapes that are increasingly under threat due to depopulation and agricultural decline.

Transport infrastructure (abandoned or active):

These sites capture shifts in transportation patterns and urban development. The abandoned railway line from Kreplje to Italy stands as a symbol of historical connectivity that has since been lost, although parts of its infrastructure remain partially intact. While not historically significant, the gravel parking area in front of Marina Portorož reflects current tourism-related infrastructure that supports seasonal flows of visitors, particularly large tourist coaches.

Military infrastructure:

Remnants of past border regimes are visible in several modest yet historically significant buildings. Karavla Plavje and Karavla Gropada are small border posts that were once used by soldiers to control crossings between Slovenia and Italy. The Small Border Crossing in Lipica served as a public administration office during periods when strict national borders shaped everyday life. These structures now lie mostly abandoned or unused, but they still mark the physical and symbolic boundaries of past geopolitical landscapes.

Tourism:

The now abandoned Hotel Klub Lipica was once part of the tourism infrastructure surrounding the renowned Lipica Stud Farm. Its closure reflects broader transformations in the tourism sector and possibly shifts in visitor preferences, planning, or maintenance. Today, the building stands as a reminder of a once-active hospitality node with a vibrant hotel in a globally recognised destination.

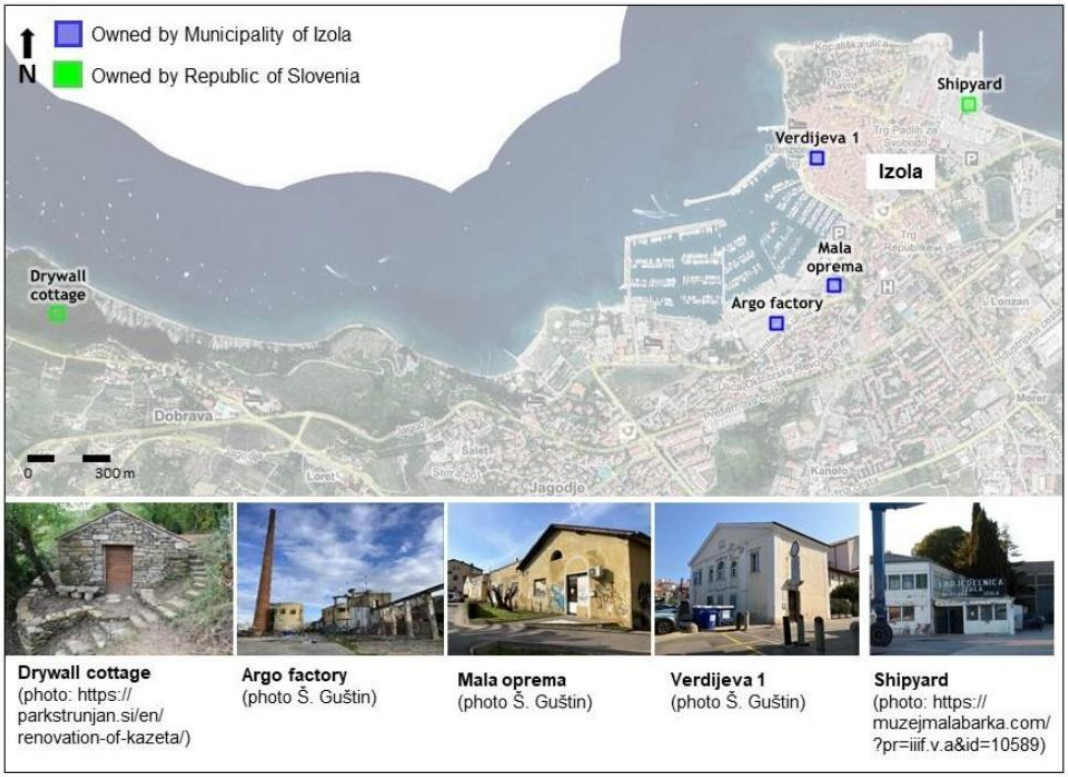


Figure 23 – Location of the five selected spaces owned by the Republic of Slovenia

Figure 23 shows the locations and photographs of the five most promising spaces selected for further analysis. These sites were chosen as they are located, for decision-making purposes, within the area under the territorial jurisdiction of the Municipality of Izola. Three of the spaces are owned by the Municipality of Izola (Argo, Mala oprema, and Verdijeva 1), while the dry-stone cottage and the Shipyard are owned by the Republic of Slovenia.

The feasibility of using the five selected spaces as pilot projects to showcase the successful implementation of the New European Bauhaus principles is as follows:

1. Dry-stone cottage

As the building is located in the area zoned as agricultural land, it can only be used for agricultural purposes, such as storing agricultural tools and crops. In addition, it lies in a landscape park, where additional measures must be respected.

2. Argo factory

The area is zoned for commercial, service, and public functions and the preparation of a new spatial plan is foreseen ("OPPN"). All arrangements and designs are to be based on a competition for urban planning solutions. Within the complex, the entrance buildings of the former factory must be preserved as well as other structures of architectural and industrial heritage. The construction of

residential buildings and other hospitality facilities intended for short-term accommodation is prohibited. A larger public park area should be provided.

3. Mala oprema

Planners intend to renovate or replace the former Mala oprema complex and the old houses nearby with new tourist accommodation and residential buildings. However, the current plan is outdated. An architectural competition and a new Municipal spatial implementation plan ("OPPN") are foreseen for the creation of activities/facilities in the area.

4. Verdijeva 1

The palace is currently being renovated to host official ceremonies, festivals and culinary events, even during the low season and in adverse weather conditions. The characteristics of Istrian wine production, olive oil and other typical products of Slovenian Istria will be displayed digitally, thus enhancing the cultural heritage and the importance of the building for tourists. In addition, the palace will enrich the overall tourist offer and support interactive experiences, such as a "Treasure Hunt" game with clues based on the life of the Podesta in the Venetian Republic.

5. Shipyard

The area is owned by the Republic of Slovenia. An architectural competition and a new Municipal spatial implementation plan ("OPPN") are foreseen to arrange activities and facilities in the area.

3.3.2. Stakeholder mapping for field analysis in the Primorska Region

For the stakeholder mapping, it was decided to conduct the research across the whole of Slovenia rather than limit it to the Primorska region, due to its relatively small size. As a result, 30 social economy entities and 17 public administration bodies were identified.

The Slovenian institutional framework for social enterprises is highly fragmented. The OECD (2022) conducted an in-depth policy review in 2022 and found that, in Slovenia, the regulatory competence for social entrepreneurship falls within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology. It was transferred to this ministry from the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in January 2015 with a view to strengthen the business orientation in social enterprises. However, the responsibility over entities that can be regarded as social enterprises is, in practice, spread across various ministries according to their legal form and status. De jure social enterprises and conventional enterprises are under the competence of the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology; cooperatives are under the competence of the Ministry of Agriculture;

NGOs are under the competence of the Ministry of Public Administration; and companies for persons with disabilities and employment centres are under the competence of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

Mapped social economy entities in Slovenia include a wide range of organizations working in culture, education, sustainability, and community development. Many are civil society initiatives, such as cultural and youth associations, which focus on social inclusion, creative practices, and participatory approaches to local development. Others are involved in architecture, design, and the circular economy, particularly through the reuse of materials and the revitalization of spaces. Educational institutions and training providers also play an important role, especially in areas like environmental awareness, social entrepreneurship, and digital skills. In addition, some public bodies are included where they actively support or collaborate with social economy actors. Together, the organizations reflect a mix of established initiatives and newer, more informal or project-based efforts, many of which are already engaging—either directly or indirectly—with topics relevant to the NEB.

The following entities, representing examples of good practice, were identified in the Primorska region:

- **Društvo PiNA:** A Koper-based NGO working at the intersection of youth, culture, social innovation, and civic engagement. It manages HEKA, a laboratory for art and science, and acts as a regional support hub for EU programmes, promoting participation, inclusion, and creative collaboration.
- **Središče Rotunda:** A civil society centre in Koper that supports non-governmental organizations and social initiatives through education, networking, and advocacy. It serves as a regional point for community development, active citizenship, and the promotion of social responsibility.
- **Inkubator Sežana:** A business and innovation support centre offering mentoring, co-working, and incubation services to startups and SMEs. It focuses on creative industries, sustainability, and entrepreneurship, with an emphasis on supporting local economic development.
- **Center uporabnih predmetov - CUP Izola:** A public institute in Izola that connects local development, youth work, and social innovation. It runs programmes for community engagement, education, and entrepreneurship, with strong ties to local policy and urban development initiatives.
- **Društvo Tovarna Kulture / Associazione Fabbrica di Cultura:** A grassroots cultural organization based in Izola, promoting participatory culture, reuse of abandoned spaces, and

community-driven artistic production. It operates across Slovenian and Italian-speaking communities, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and social inclusion through the arts.

Public administration (PA) in Slovenia can be divided into state PA and local PA. State-level PA, as of January 2026, consists of 19 ministries, including subordinate bodies that perform specialized expert tasks, for example, Slovenian Environment Agency, and 58 administrative units. Local PA consists of 212 municipalities. For statistical purposes, Slovenia is divided into 12 statistical regions. In this study, we mapped five national-level public authorities (four ministries and one council), four administrative units, and eight municipalities.

Social Economy Stakeholders

The mapping identified 36 stakeholders representing a diverse ecosystem of social enterprises, NGOs, cultural and creative organizations, innovation hubs, incubators, research institutes, regional development agencies, cooperatives, and community-based initiatives, working across entrepreneurship, sustainability, culture, technology, social inclusion, and local development.

Public Sector Stakeholders

The mapping identified 16 stakeholders who represent national, regional, and local public authorities and governance bodies, including government ministries, administrative units, municipalities, and the Council for the Social Economy. They bring perspectives on policymaking, public administration, economic and social development, agriculture, tourism, regulatory frameworks, and the implementation of policies and initiatives at local level.

Mapping Impact and Value

Not only was the mapping exercise valuable as a diagnostic tool but also as a strategic mechanism to give visibility to under-recognized actors and include those who operate on the margins of formal decision-making processes. First, the mapping made it possible to pinpoint actors deeply rooted in the territory who are crucial to any socially embedded regeneration effort. Second, it enabled the involvement of cross-border or peripheral stakeholders who may bring additional economic, relational, or professional capital into the process. Third it helped lay the groundwork for ecosystem-building and cross-sector partnerships for future project phases.

Ecosystem Challenges and Opportunities

Despite the diversity of the social economy, cultural, and public sector actors identified, the Slovenian ecosystem remains somewhat fragmented, with responsibilities and support mechanisms for social economy entities distributed across different ministries and levels of public administration. The SPACE-NEST project can act as a catalyst for stronger connections and cross-sector cooperation,

bringing together civil society, public authorities, cultural and creative organizations, innovation hubs, and community-based initiatives. Notably, the mapping also highlights the potential to further connect established organizations with newer, more informal or project-based initiatives, as well as to strengthen cross-border cooperation in the Primorska region. At the same time, the ecosystem would benefit from stronger governance and coordination mechanisms capable of connecting heritage regeneration, social innovation, entrepreneurship, and community participation with long-term development processes. These opportunities could contribute to building a more coordinated and resilient ecosystem capable of supporting inclusive, sustainable, and locally rooted regeneration in line with the values of the NEB.

Focus group in the Primorska Region

The focus group took place on 16 April 2025 at the municipal townhall of Izola. It was organized by the Municipality of Izola, Inovaktiv, and STEP Institute, and was attended by 18 participants and three organizers (Figure 24). As part of the SPACE-NEST project's research activities, a regional focus group was conducted in Izola to explore how the NEB principles can guide the regeneration of underused or abandoned spaces. The goal was to gather qualitative insights into local social, cultural, and economic needs, and to co-develop ideas for inclusive, sustainable, and multifunctional community spaces.

This focus group contributed to the broader research effort aimed at understanding the specific opportunities and barriers for socially driven spatial transformation in the Primorska region. The group included a diverse mix of individuals representing various sectors such as local governance, cultural and creative industries, social entrepreneurship, environmental planning, youth work, and urban development.

Participants came from municipalities, non-profit organizations, associations, and local businesses—primarily from Izola, Koper, and Lucija. Organizations represented included InnoRenew CoE, Eventio, the Municipality of Izola, OOZ Izola, INTERSO, and Tovarna Kulture, among others.

The stakeholders spanned a range of categories, including non-profit entities, associations, local volunteer bodies, environmentally and socially oriented institutions, and companies with a corporate social responsibility (CSR) focus.



Figure 24 – The focus group in Izola

Prior to the session, participants were provided with background information on the NEB initiative and the SPACE-NEST project via email, including a summary of prior research and a Mentimeter questionnaire to reflect on regional spatial challenges. This preparation ensured a common understanding of key concepts and encouraged early engagement with the topic.

The focus group followed a two-part structure. It began with a plenary introduction and open discussion guided by several questions addressing regional needs, reuse of abandoned spaces, inclusivity, and community engagement. This was followed by group work in three smaller teams, where participants developed concrete ideas using a structured template focused on space regeneration—particularly regarding the former Argo factory site.

As a result of the discussions, several key convergences were revealed. Participants emphasized the lack of inclusive, intergenerational meeting spaces, the need to repurpose underutilized areas for community benefit, and the importance of preserving cultural and technical heritage. Divergences emerged around governance models (public vs. private), perceptions of financial limitations, and levels of trust in local government capacity.

The proposed uses for regenerated spaces converged around cultural and culinary centres, youth and intergenerational venues, and adaptive community hubs. Although there was general agreement, differences emerged on the intended permanence of use, programme orientation (artistic vs. entrepreneurial), and desired levels of citizen participation. Factors identified as enabling project

implementation included the availability of EU and national funding, strong volunteer interest, and local partnerships. Barriers included bureaucratic hurdles, such as unclear ownership and permits, a lack of clear management frameworks, and questions around financial sustainability. Three main concepts were developed during the group work:

- A **temporary cultural and culinary hub, featuring** pop-up shops, co-working areas, an escape room, and outdoor events.
- The **"Izola Living Room"** – an open, intergenerational space for creative collaboration, social gathering, and heritage preservation.
- An experimental, **low-investment approach to urbanism**, allowing the space to evolve over time through community-driven adaptations.

Certain spatial characteristics were considered essential across all the proposed ideas: flexibility over time, multifunctionality, the integration of natural elements, inclusive design, and infrastructure capable of supporting diverse social and cultural activities. The main implementation challenges involved coordinating across stakeholder groups and adequately documenting all contributions within the limited time available. Nevertheless, participants responded positively to the format. They valued the participatory approach, the cross-sectoral dialogue, and the opportunity to contribute to a shared vision. Suggestions for improvement included allocating more time for group work, providing more structure, and guiding participants towards more specific and workable solutions. Participants also pointed to inspirational examples from other contexts—such as Cukrarna and Rog in Ljubljana, the Koper market hall (Tržnica Koper), and a disused Italian school building—as useful reference points. Many expressed interest in staying involved in the ongoing SPACE-NEST process, and several were eager to participate in the Social Economy Mission (SEM) event scheduled for June 2025.

The focus group demonstrated considerable local interest and creative capacity for spatial transformation aligned with the values of the NEB. While underscoring both the potential and the limitations of bottom-up regeneration efforts, the discussion emphasized the need for flexible spaces, intergenerational inclusion, supportive infrastructure, and simplified administrative frameworks. The outcomes of this session will feed into the broader research on social economy-driven spatial innovation across the SPACE-NEST pilot regions.

3.3.3. Design Thinking and Social Economy (SEM) Mission in the Primorska Region

Between 10 and 13 June 2025, the Municipality of Izola, Inovaktiv, and STEP Institute organized a Social Economy Mission in the Izola and Koper area in Slovenia. A total of 36 participants attended the event, including urban planners, architects, project managers, and representatives of

municipalities and provinces in Spain, Italy, and Slovenia. Among them were more than seven stakeholder representatives from municipalities and provinces. Partner organizations were responsible for recruiting participants in their respective countries (Spain, Italy, Slovenia). They issued a call for participants, selected suitable candidates, and provided them with initial information. They were responsible for signing collaboration agreements and organizing transport and accommodation. Information about hotels and local and regional transport options was provided to the partners by the host organizations. The host partners (Municipality of Izola and Inovaktiv) sent two preparatory emails to participants containing essential information, including the schedule, a description of study visits, and key details about the locations. Prior to the event, a WhatsApp group was created to facilitate communication, and where all relevant information was shared, such as locations and logistical updates.

The programme included two introductory icebreaker games, and a presentation of the project and the participants. Several study visits were organized (Innorenew CoE, PiNA, and the Municipality of Koper), and these also included content on EU calls and opportunities. A design thinking workshop was held with a practical activity involving a guided visit of the Argo factory site and a short, guided tour of Izola. Arrangements were also made for organized lunches and dinners, and a partner meeting.

The SEM process in Primorska followed the five phases of design thinking:

1. Empathize

Participants began with a guided exploration of the Argo factory site, observing its physical condition and engaging with locals. They collected photos, personal stories, feelings, and insights to understand the space from a human-centred perspective.

2. Define

Using tools like the empathy map and fishbone diagram, participants synthesized the gathered information into clear problem statements. They framed these insights into “How might we…” questions to guide their ideation.

3. Ideate

In collaborative brainstorming sessions, participants generated a wide range of creative ideas aimed at revitalizing the abandoned space. All contributions were welcomed, and emphasis was placed on building upon each other’s thoughts, encouraging visual thinking and quantity over quality.

4. Prototype

Teams created low-fidelity prototypes using LEGO bricks. These visual and tangible representations helped communicate their ideas and tell a compelling story.

5. Test

Prototypes were shared with other participants, who provided feedback on clarity, appeal, and areas for improvement. The presentation of the prototypes and the feedback received served as the basis for developing an action plan during the next phases of the projects.

This process enabled the groups to explore potential transformations of the Argo site that integrate community needs, sustainability, and creativity to reflect the values of the NEB. The design thinking workshop resulted in five prototype concepts for the regeneration of the former Argo factory site. Each proposal addressed identified local needs and opportunities while incorporating principles of sustainability, inclusiveness, and cultural heritage preservation. Together, the prototypes illustrate a range of possible future scenarios for the revitalization of this strategically important urban area.



Prototype 1 – Transforming the Argo site into a multifunctional hub

Group 1 proposed to redevelop the Argo site into a multifunctional urban hub through a public-private partnership, combining commercial viability with social value. As public funds alone are insufficient, they aim to attract private investors aligned with sustainability and social impact. The concept includes a mix of revenue-generating and socially oriented spaces: co-working and incubation facilities for green, cultural, and maritime sectors; a club-restaurant-bar for young people; and an outdoor infrastructure for concerts and social gatherings. To enhance inclusivity and environmental resilience, they plan shaded areas, tree planting, and the installation of solar panels. Community participation is central, with several spaces allocated through a public call for ideas and citizen voting. Their vision combines urban regeneration, climate adaptation, and innovation in a financially sustainable model.



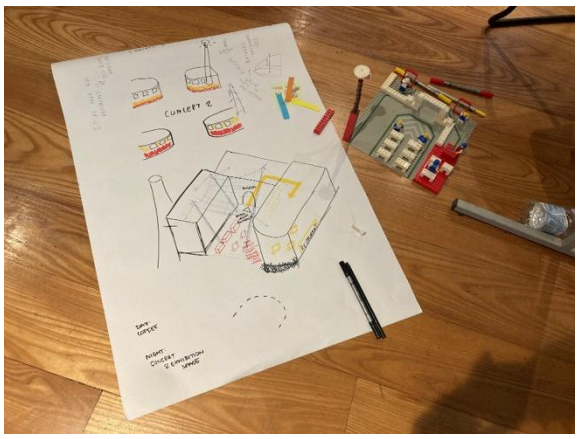
Prototype 2 – The Argo site as an evolving community space

Group 2 imagined the Argo site as a gradually evolving community space that begins with small improvements and expands over time. Central to their vision is a green oasis with an urban garden that supports both social bonding and sustainable food practices, with produce to be used in a future restaurant. Initially, the area would be activated through food trucks, allowing for low-risk testing before establishing a permanent infrastructure. The design includes adaptable spaces that interweave co-working, co-living, and cultural programming, including events and exhibitions that honour the site's industrial and maritime heritage. A cycle path would reconnect the site with the coast, and artistic elements such as graffiti workshops and collaborations with local artists would reinforce its identity. The approach emphasizes adaptability, community ownership, and connections between past and future.



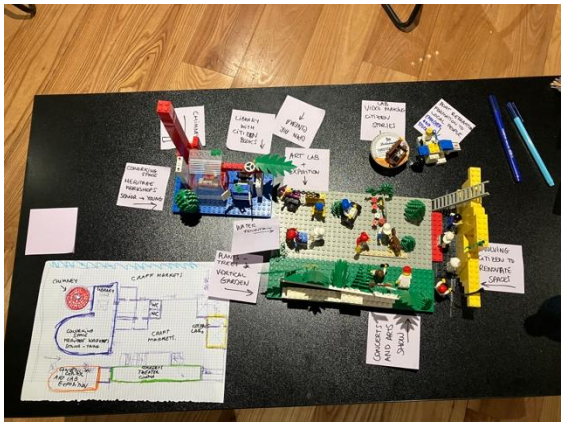
Prototype 3 – The Argo factory intangible heritage between memory and modernity

Group 3 focused on preserving and reinterpreting the intangible heritage of the Argo factory, especially the history of food production, fishing traditions, and the role of women in industrial labour. Their concept builds a bridge between memory and modernity through artistic expression, immersive storytelling, and cultural participation. One key element is a sensory-based exhibition that reconstructs the experience of sardine processing, allowing visitors to engage with the sound, smell, and atmosphere. Another space would host an artist-in-residence program for collaborative learning and public engagement. The site would also offer flexible cultural venues for performances, traditional food experiences, and community events that celebrate the identity of Izola. Their proposal treats heritage not as static memory, but as a living force shaping future uses of the space.



Prototype 4 – The Argo site as a dynamic space both day and night

Group 4 reimagined the Argo site as a dynamic space that shifts in character between day and night. During the day, the open square becomes a vibrant setting for cafés, informal gatherings, and a local market. By night, it becomes a venue for concerts, exhibitions, and cultural events. The architectural concept draws inspiration from the iconic sardine can, with bold red and yellow colours applied to the buildings to create a distinctive and playful visual identity. Visitors would enter through the market, pass through a museum that explores the site's history, and exit through a restaurant serving local dishes made from ingredients also available at the market. To address the current lack of shade, they propose to use overhead sails modelled after traditional batana boats, creating both comfort and a visual homage to the region's maritime past. Their concept blends storytelling, aesthetics, and functionality to make the space welcoming and unique.



Prototype 5 – The Argo factory as an open and inclusive public space

Group 5 envisioned the former Argo factory as an open and inclusive public space that invites active community participation in its transformation. Their concept places strong emphasis on greenery, with trees, plants, and vertical gardens to cool the area and support ecological goals. The site would host a mix of co-working spaces, educational workshops, and cultural programs such as exhibitions and artist studios, developed in partnership with local organizations like PiNA. They also imagine elements to foster everyday use and storytelling — including drinking water fountains, an outdoor cinema, and memory pathways that narrate the factory's past through citizens' voices. A defining feature, the original chimney, would be preserved as a local landmark. The proposal includes practical training areas, such as boat repair workshops, to revive traditional skills and offer economic opportunities. Their vision links heritage, environment, and collective action in a project that honours the past while shaping a shared future.

The evaluation of the Social Economy Mission in Izola showed high levels of participant satisfaction. Attendees appreciated the overall organization of the event, the variety and relevance of the study visits, and the practical and creative nature of the design thinking workshop. The involvement of local

stakeholders and the opportunity to work on the real-life case of the former Argo factory were particularly well-received, providing meaningful insight into local and regional revitalization efforts. Suggestions for improvement included allocating more time for discussion, achieving a better balance between structured and informal activities, and providing clearer guidance on the expected outcomes of the design thinking process. Overall, the event was perceived as inspiring, well organized, and rich in opportunities for networking, knowledge exchange and mutual learning.

3.4. Action Plans for Space-Nest Underused or Abandoned Spaces

by Irene Ojo Mars and Federica Burini

Within SPACE-NEST, the New European Bauhaus is not treated as an aesthetic reference, but as a transformative framework. In fact, regeneration should create places with three key characteristics: they must be beautiful, rooted in identity and landscape; sustainable, through reuse, energy efficiency, and reduced land consumption; inclusive, generating access, relationships, services, and opportunities.

Across the three SPACE-NEST Action Plans, the common ambition was to convert underused and abandoned spaces into inclusive, sustainable community assets through social economy approaches and the NEB principles of sustainability, inclusion and quality of place.

All the plans were grounded in territorial mapping, stakeholder engagement, focus groups, study visits and co-design, translating local needs into realistic actions combining short-term experimentation with longer-term regeneration, stronger governance and financing pathways.

In Bergamo, the plan concentrated on Casa sulla Roccia and Casa Bonaldi Grassi as pilots for a wider, replicable model of rural and mountain regeneration, integrating cultural and community uses, hospitality, work and production spaces with stronger territorial governance and a provincial mapping and matchmaking platform.

In Primorska, the approach focused particularly on Izola and prioritized circular reuse, community activation, cultural heritage and partnerships between municipalities, social enterprises, craftspeople and other local actors; concrete actions included youth-led experimentation, the revitalization of the ARGO site and temporary “Living Room of Izola” pop-ups.

In Malaga, the focus was on transforming underused and abandoned rural assets into drivers for local employment, rural development and social economy. Key priorities included developing Concept Notes and pre-feasibility studies for selected sites, while establishing a provincial roadmap to embed social economy models and NEB principles into future projects, funding opportunities and territorial governance.

Overall, the three plans advocate a progressive, participatory and place-based pathway, in which small-scale pilots build evidence and partnerships before larger investments are made, while collaboration between public authorities, social economy organizations, communities and other local actors creates the capacity for long-term implementation and replication.

Conclusions

by Federica Burini and Irene Ojo Mars

In the three European territories of Bergamo, Malaga, and Primorska, SPACE-NEST has been conceived as a journey which demonstrates that abandoned spaces are not dead ends but launchpads for a just, resilient, and beauty-rich future.

By weaving together the New European Bauhaus principles with a robust focus on the original vision of the Bauhaus movement, the project shows how mapping, participatory design, and action planning can unlock local assets, cultivate community agency, and seed scalable, green enterprises.

The chapters cumulatively argue that sustainable transformation emerges not from stunning plans alone, but from disciplined collaboration among residents, public authorities, and social economy actors, grounded in place, learning-by-doing, and transparent governance.

Firstly, a collaborative mapping exercise is performed to identify abandoned or underutilized places and the local ecological, cultural, and economic assets that can revive them. Subsequently, diverse stakeholders, local authorities, social economy actors, residents, entrepreneurs, and civil society are convened to co-create a vision aligned with the New European Bauhaus principles.

In a further step, it is very useful to design a co-creative process that moves from mapping to participatory design workshops, then to rapid prototyping of concrete activities (green energy installations, sustainable crafts, circular economy pilots, or social enterprises) tested in real settings. This leads to the development of a staged action plan that couples small, scalable pilots with capacity-building in governance, financing, and skills, ensuring feedback loops that refine plans based on community input. By anchoring the work in inclusive governance and transparent communication, with attention to local culture and ecosystem resilience, the outcomes extend beyond physical spaces to empower everyday life, local economies, and social cohesion. As a final phase, it is useful to implement a robust dissemination and replication pathway, documenting lessons learned and linking the pilots in Bergamo, Malaga, and Primorska with EU-level frameworks to scale impact through shared methodologies and policy alignment.

In the Province of Bergamo, the combined results of the mapping exercise and the focus group provided an integrated overview of the opportunities and challenges for the territory. The analysis revealed that abandoned and underused spaces, such as former hospitals, community buildings, and sites of cultural and natural heritage are widespread and symbolically significant for local identity. These spaces are potential anchors for new forms of community engagement, entrepreneurship, and cultural regeneration. The stakeholder mapping confirmed the presence of a rich but fragmented

ecosystem of actors: municipalities, cultural and environmental associations, cooperatives, foundations, and SMEs. All these actors show strong commitment to social inclusion, heritage preservation, and sustainability. However, the research also highlighted the lack of a structured coordination mechanism and insufficient technical and financial capacity to transform ideas into long-term viable projects. The focus group provided further insight into local priorities. Participants stressed the urgency of addressing social isolation and demographic decline, the limited availability of services for young people and the elderly, and the need for accessible cultural spaces. At the same time, they expressed enthusiasm for multifunctional hubs capable of combining cultural, social, and entrepreneurial activities. The three pilot ideas co-developed during the session demonstrated the feasibility of linking space regeneration with social and green entrepreneurship.

In the Malaga Province, the significant resources available could be allocated to strengthening the social economy ecosystem through the implementation of the NEB strategy. Places of interest have been identified, although it is essential that, in addition to the intended use of these spaces, relevant urban planning information be further investigated to ensure the viability of the proposed uses in the future.

Classifying the spaces involved in the recovery process by function is crucial. In this regard, categorizing and prioritizing the most promising uses provided a key contribution. The future success of these projects and of our stakeholder partnerships depends on securing targeted funding through the Horizon Programme's NEB Facility and aligning our outreach with Europe-wide NEB dissemination efforts. Funding opportunities will also have to be identified for the transformation/renovation of the spaces prioritized and for capacity-building activities.

The Primorska region, and more specifically the Obalno-kraška area, offered a unique setting where industrial heritage, strong local identities, and active social initiatives come together. Through the mapping and focus group activities, it became clear that there is both a richness of available spaces and a strong interest among local actors to use them in new, community-oriented ways. Many of the buildings identified, such as the former Argo factory, the Izola shipyard, or the Mala oprema carpentry workshop, bear strong witness to local industrial development. Some sites, like the Monfort warehouse or the Kažeta cottage in Strunjan, have already found new life as cultural or heritage spaces. Others remain empty or underused, despite being centrally located and full of potential. This underlines an opportunity: to reconnect people with these places by creating inclusive, multifunctional spaces rooted in local context. The focus group brought together people from different backgrounds, such as public administration, NGOs, cultural workers and small businesses, and highlighted a shared desire for more spaces that bring people together across generations. Participants stressed the need for flexibility, nature-integrated design, and open formats that allow

spaces to evolve over time. Some interesting proposals emerged, including a temporary cultural and culinary hub, an intergenerational “Izola Living Room,” and a gradual, low-cost revitalization of the Argo factory through community involvement.

As Europe charts its ecological, digital and just transitions, SPACE-NEST leaves a clear imprint: empowerment grows where spaces, people, and policies meet in continuous dialogue, where pilots become prototypes for inclusive growth, and where the courage to co-create translates into tangible improvements in everyday life.

The road ahead invites replication, adaptation, and bold experimentation, guided by a shared conviction that sustainable living is not a distant ideal, but a living practice rooted in communities across the continent. Adopting a SPACE-NEST approach means approaching communities with a shared framework for transforming underused spaces into engines of social economy and sustainable living.

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