

Delft University of Technology

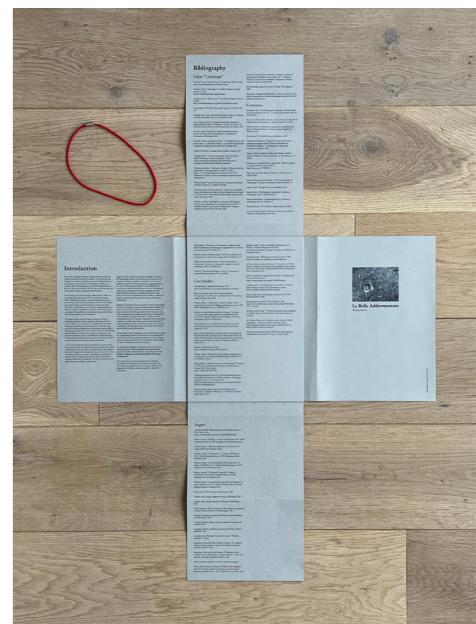
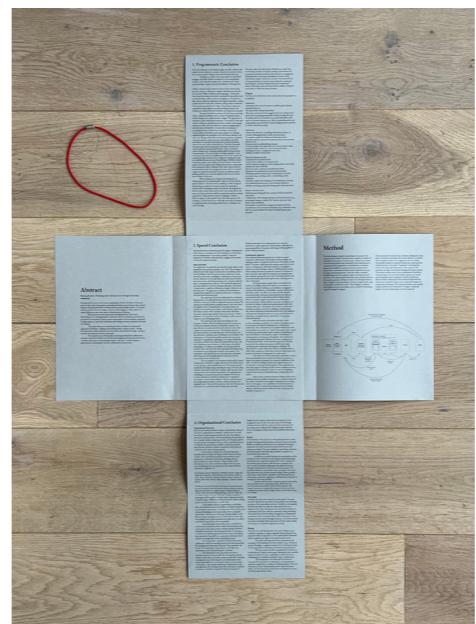
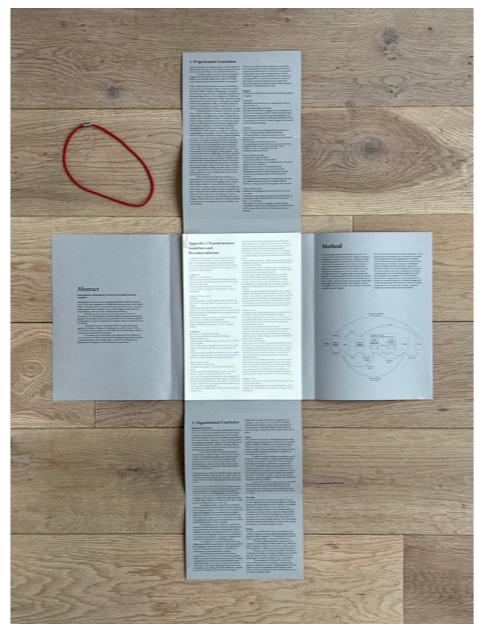
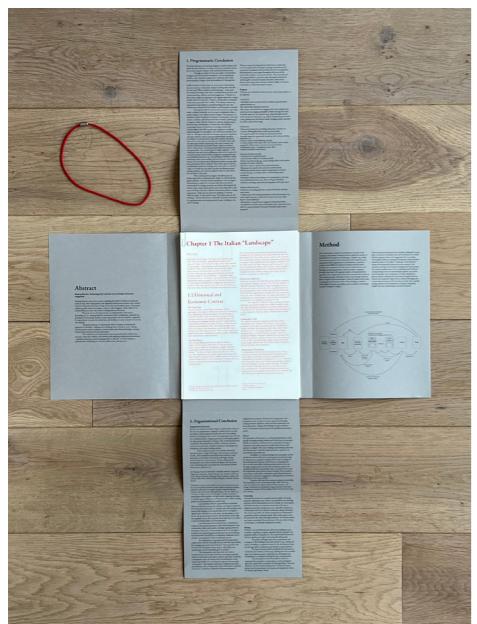
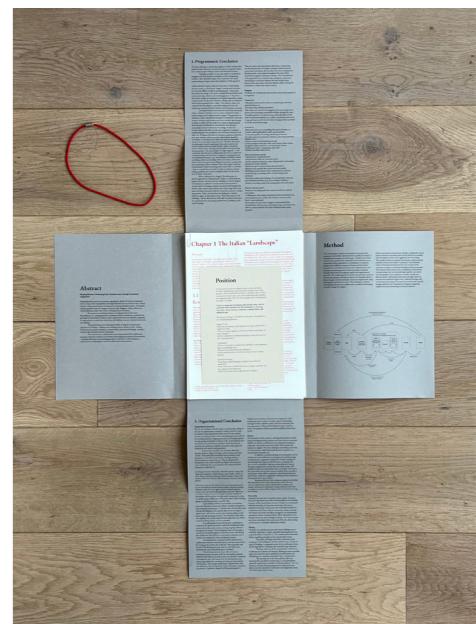
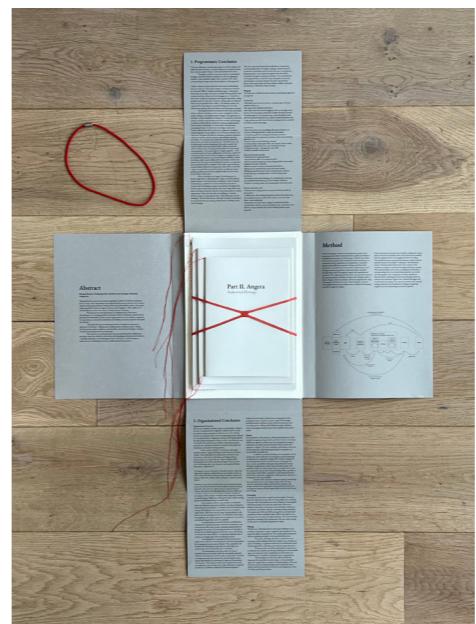
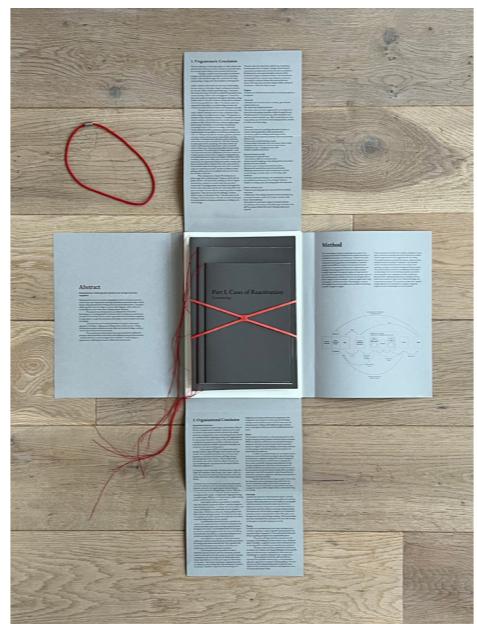
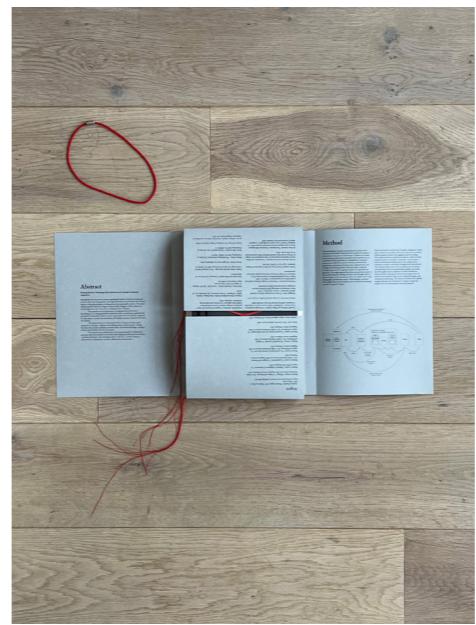
1st mentor Susanne Pietsch
2nd mentor Rufus van den Ban
3rd mentor Lidy Meijers

Due to privacy reasons, the following sections have been removed from the research compilation:

Community bundle Part II. Angera
Conversations with Locals (pp. 3-20)
Central Figures (pp. 23-24)
Poem "Il Gluchista" (pp. 27-28)

Industry bundle Part II. Angera
Current Plans for Soara (pp. 11-12)
Besozzo's Paper Mill (pp. 33-34)

Appendix 2: Actors and Their Roles in the Development Process







Le Belle Addormentate

Sleeping Beauties

Abstract

Sleeping Beauties: Awakening Italy's dormant towns through community engagement

Sleeping Beauties stems from concerns regarding the decline of small post-industrial towns in Italy, where depopulation and neglected infrastructure threaten their cultural identity, risking abandonment or being overrun by unsustainable tourism. The project explores possible futures for Angera, a town on Lake Maggiore, which, while not as severely affected as some other towns, is facing symptoms of decline.

The proposal uses the Soara factory, an industrial relic of the town's flourishing era, as a testing ground for community-driven revitalization, guided by the principles of commoning. It aims to create opportunities for local residents, supported by larger players, to attract the critical mass and funding necessary to launch and sustain the initiative.

The project focuses on reweaving the fabric of Angera by adopting the approach of a bricoleur - utilizing and revitalizing what is already at hand - valuing local know-how, stories, traditions, economic flows, and industrial heritage, creating a narrative that resonates with the community.

The outcome is not a final product, but the groundwork for collaborative processes, where the architect's role involves both designing architectural interventions - sparking enthusiasm, and encouraging others to take part - as well as acting as a quartermaster, facilitating the necessary collaborations and processes.

Introduction

My master's graduation project, *Sleeping Beauties*, stems from a deeply personal connection to Angera, a small town by Lake Maggiore in northern Italy. My parents, both Dutch designers, moved here in the early 90s for its proximity to Milan and northern Italy's thriving design and manufacturing industry at the time. I grew up in Angera and, like many other young people, left to pursue studies and opportunities elsewhere.

Now, looking at the town through a different lens, I reflect on my childhood and the reasons I don't feel drawn to return. With a declining town center, scarce job opportunities, poor connectivity, and a shrinking population, I wonder what might be needed to make it an attractive place to stay and to settle. The closure of industries, such as the Soara magnesium factory, which once played a significant role in the town's economy, has contributed to this decline, leaving behind vacant industrial sites that hold potential for new development.

The project carries a sense of urgency. Angera may have a shrinking population and face significant challenges, but it is not yet a ghost town - it still has a community, rich with stories, traditions, and skills that should be passed on. The large Soara site, with its historical significance and strategic location, offers a unique opportunity to breathe new life into the town by building upon its heritage. However, this window is closing soon, and without intervention, the site risks falling into irreparable decay or being replaced by developments that erase its history and fail to create rooted value for the town and its community.

In a fast paced world that seems spiraling out of control, where human relationships are weakening and our connection to nature is diminishing, towns like Angera, and the wisdom and resilience they hold through their older generations, remind us of the value of simplicity, human connection, self-sufficiency, and the slow rhythms of life. I wonder what role these towns could play in shaping possible futures, fostering a new form of humanism that bridges the ancient and the contemporary.

Angera is not the only town facing the challenges of economic and demographic decline. Across Italy, many small towns are struggling with the consequences of industry closures, youth emigration, and low birth rates, leading to an aging population. As a result, infrastructure is neglected, and industrial sites remain vacant, further contributing to the town's diminishing attractiveness. Despite government-led strategies like Piano Borghi and SNAI, aimed at revitalizing these towns, these efforts often focus on superficial measures, failing to address the deeper social and cultural needs that are crucial to long-term revitalization.

Building on the ideas of Italian architect de Rossi and paesologist Arminio, who critique conventional government strategies and advocate for local, youth-driven and cultural regeneration, my project addresses the challenges faced by Italy's dormant towns, where depopulation and neglected infrastructure threaten their cultural identity, risking abandonment or being overrun by unsustainable tourism. It explores sustainable, community-driven solutions to revitalize these towns, preserving their industrial and cultural legacy. In this context, the concept of the commons - grounded in the sharing of material and immaterial resources - presents itself as a potential solution.

My hypothesis is that integrating commons principles into spatial and organizational practices will provide more sustainable and community-oriented revitalization solutions for Italy's dormant towns, creating opportunities for local residents while avoiding the risk of becoming mere tourist attractions.

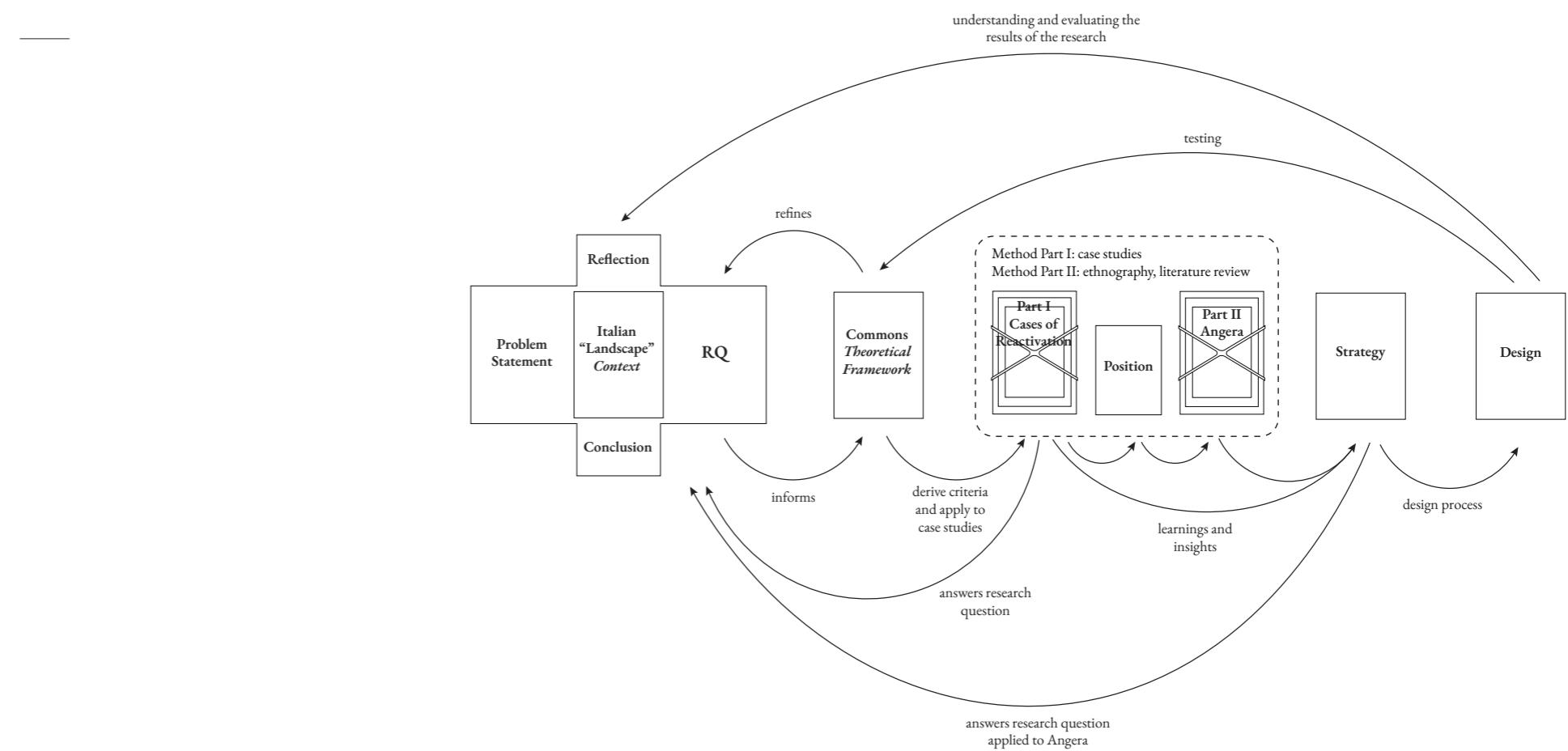
To address these challenges, the research seeks to answer the following question: **How can spatial and organizational practices revitalize Italy's dormant towns impacted by the decline of industrial activities and facilitate community development?**

The research aims to answer this question by examining case studies of community-driven reactivation projects and conducting ethnographic research in Angera. Together, these approaches will inform a tailored proposal for the town's revitalization.

Method

The methodology is based on examining the concept of the commons, from which I derived criteria to guide my analysis. It is divided into two parts. In the first part, I explore case studies of reactivation projects that I selected for their shared focus on community-driven approaches to revitalization. I examined projects across different contexts in Europe and from three perspectives: reactivation of entire towns, industrial sites, and through commoning practices. Each case study is analyzed through three lenses: the regional, spatial, and organizational approach. The insights gained from these cases provide answers to the research question and help me form a lens through which to look at Angera. In the second part, I focus on Angera itself, using ethnography and literature review. These findings, combined with insights from the case studies, serve as a basis for developing a specific strategy for Angera.

I have structured my research into a bundle, enabling the various parts to function as brochures that can be referred to as needed, with the sequence below as the suggested order for reading. The bundle includes an extended introduction, which provides essential context on the Italian “Landscape” and a literature review of the theoretical framework on the concept of the commons, serving as a red thread throughout the entire project. The research results consist of two compilations of brochures, corresponding to the two methodologies applied: case studies and ethnography. Each compilation is further divided into three brochures, reflecting the three lenses through which the research was conducted: region/town, industrial heritage, and community/commoning. The research concludes with a specific strategy tailored to the revitalization of Angera, integrating insights from the methodologies and lenses explored.



Chapter 1 The Italian “Landscape”

Why Italy?

Perché Italia? Perché Italia... The Italian word “perché” means both “why” and “because,” symbolizing this nation full of contrasts. Despite its rich cultural heritage, today’s Italy resembles a living museum - a depopulating country dominated by an aging population. With no opportunities and an uncertain future, young people are leaving, abandoning Italy to an uncertain fate. Yet, as with any crisis, this situation holds the potential for profound change and new possibilities. It is precisely in these depopulating towns - the margins - that opportunities for renewal and transformation can emerge. So, Why Italy *now*? Because it is in embracing and revitalizing these marginalized areas that Italy’s future lies. Now more than ever, Italy must turn its attention to these areas, where the seeds of innovation and revival can be sown.

1.1 Historical and Economic Context

The Grand Tour

Italy has long been a central figure in European culture, particularly in the realms of architecture and the arts. The Grand Tour, originating around the Renaissance and first described by Richard Lassels in 1670, was a formative journey for young European aristocrats and bourgeoisie, primarily through Italy. This educational pilgrimage aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of history and culture, serving as a bridge between adolescence and adulthood. Italy’s rich cultural heritage, from the Roman Empire to the Renaissance, made cities like Rome, Florence, and Venice important stops. These journeys significantly influenced European intellectual and artistic pursuits, establishing Italy’s reputation as a center of culture.¹

Post-War Miracle

Italy’s cultural influence persisted through the centuries. Despite the devastation of World War II, which left Italy in severe economic difficulty, the subsequent decades witnessed a remarkable transformation known as the “Italian Economic Miracle.” This period of rapid industrial growth in the 1950s and 1960s significantly altered Italian society and economy.² Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *La Lunga Strada di Sabbia* captures the social and cultural changes of this era, documenting the evolving relationship between Italians and their land during a time of economic modernization.³

The economic boom was fueled by international aid programs, including the UN’s initiatives, the European Recovery Plan, and the Marshall Plan. These efforts aimed to stabilize Italy politically and economically, steering it away from communism and fostering a consumer culture represented by the popularity of products like the Vespa scooter, the Moka coffee pot, and Fiat cars, all of which came to symbolize the “Made in Italy” brand - a mark of quality and innovation that defined the era. This period marked Italy’s emergence as a hub of fashion, design, and a modern lifestyle reflected in the phrase “La Dolce Vita.”⁴

Retreat from Modernity

Despite the successes of the mid-20th century, Italy has struggled with economic stagnation since the 1970s. The early adoption of industrial modernity, followed by abrupt disengagement due to oil crises, civil unrest, and terrorism, led to a gradual decline. By the late 20th century, Italy’s economic growth had slowed down, with GDP levels stagnating and unemployment rates, particularly among the youth, remaining high. The nation, relies heavily on its rich historical and cultural legacy to attract tourism and generate income, yet it is not building a new history for itself.

This stagnation is reflected in Italy’s political and social landscape, characterized by high taxes, inefficient public services, and a lack of progressive leadership. The political disillusionment is intensified by the “Bunga Bunga” scandals and the perception of an elitist disconnect from the country’s broader socio-economic issues.⁵

Demographic Crisis

As a result of the country’s stagnation, Italy faces a severe demographic crisis marked by a low birth rate and an aging population. The fertility rate stands at about 1.2 children per woman, well below the replacement level, while nearly 23% of Italians are over 65. This aging population, along with high emigration rates - over 100,000 people annually - has led to a shrinking workforce. Although immigration has increased, with foreign-born residents making up around 8.4% of the population, it has not fully countered the demographic decline. Rural areas are particularly affected, with 72% of Italy’s 8,000 municipalities having fewer than 5,000 inhabitants.⁶

Abandonment Phenomenon

The demographic shift has led to the abandonment of many small towns and rural areas, particularly in mountainous and remote regions. According to studies by Legambiente and Confcommercio, numerous municipalities are at risk of extinction, with depopulated “ghost towns” becoming increasingly common. This trend highlights a broader national challenge: revitalizing these areas and integrating them into a sustainable economic and social framework.⁷ In response, the Italian government has implemented several strategies to tackle this issue on a broader scale. The following sub-chapter will discuss these initiatives.

4. Carpo, “We Used To Be Good,” 126.

5. Hochuli, interview.

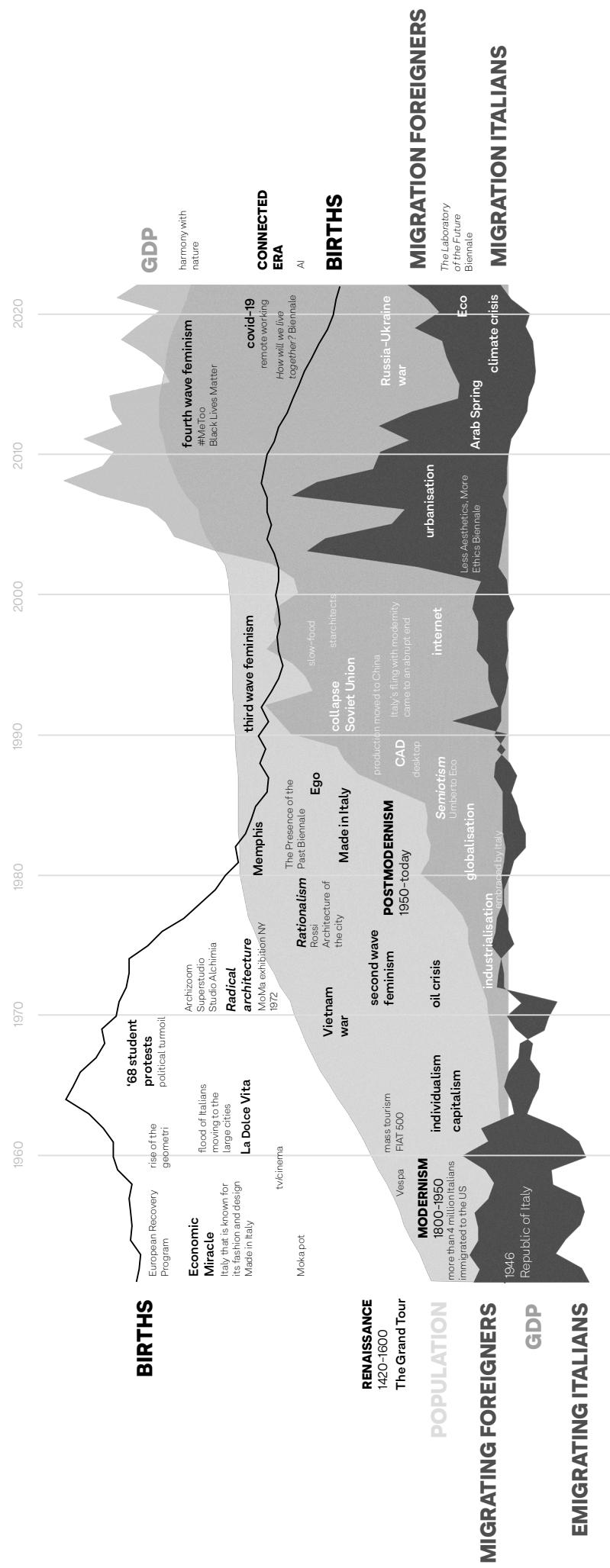
6. Silva, “Geografie dell’abbandono.”

7. Ibid.

1. Profeta, “Grand Tours and The Construction of Italian Identities,” 104-105.

2. Carpo, “We Used To Be Good,” 127.

3. Pasolini, *La Lunga Strada di Sabbia*.



Evolutionary graph showing Italy's 30 years of growth and 30 years of stagnation.

1.2 Government-Led Strategies

Piano Borghi PNRR

The Piano Borghi, an important element of Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), represents a national strategy aimed at combating the depopulation crisis affecting many small Italian villages. This initiative provides €420 million for revitalizing 21 selected villages, one from each region and autonomous province. Each village will receive €20 million to develop infrastructure and services in culture, tourism, social, or research fields.

The initiative also includes an additional €580 million, distributed through a grant application to support at least 229 more villages, chosen from over 1,800 applications. The overarching goal of the Piano Borghi is to foster sustainable growth and distribute development evenly across Italy. Minister of Culture Dario Franceschini has emphasized that this plan seeks not only to restore historical and artistic heritage but also to identify each village's unique vocation. He envisions these investments as catalysts for local job creation and sustainable living.⁸

National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI)

The National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI) complements the Piano Borghi by addressing broader issues across 72 areas and 1,077 municipalities (figure 1). This strategy aims to enhance quality of life through improvements in health, mobility, and education, while also promoting local economic development and tourism. While Piano Borghi provides immediate financial support for specific infrastructure and cultural projects, the SNAI adopts a long-term systematic approach with a focus on integrating production systems and preserving cultural and natural resources to improve essential services and stimulate growth.⁹

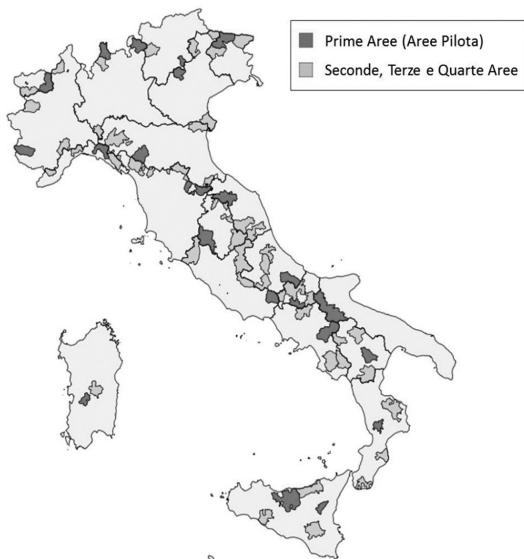


Figure 1. The 72 “Inner Areas” selected by the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI)
Source: Sabrina Lucatelli et al., 2020.

Franco Arminio's Perspective on the SNAI

Franco Arminio, Italian poet and writer, offers a critical perspective on the SNAI, acknowledging its initial promise but highlighting shortcomings. He argues that the SNAI often results in superficial measures rather than addressing the root causes of rural depopulation. According to Arminio, the strategy resembles “putting water in a broken bucket,” with funds sometimes wasted due to ineffective use.¹⁰

Arminio criticizes the fragmented and over-regionalized nature of the SNAI, suggesting that it has shifted focus from genuine regeneration to merely expending EU and PNRR resources. He points out that while the SNAI was initially intended to empower local areas to shape their own futures, it has instead led to a narrow, top-down approach. This approach fails to effectively engage with the specific needs of rural communities, turning what should be a response to a national emergency into a series of superficial and often mismanaged initiatives.¹¹

Beyond a Top-Down Approach

Italy's approach to revitalizing its rural areas has parallels and contrasts with strategies in other countries. Initiatives like “Rural Resettlement Ireland” (RRI) and various European projects focus on transforming rural communities into centers for culture and research. These programs often involve community engagement and a focus on sustainable practices, contrasting with Italy's more tourism-centered approaches.¹²

The Italian experiment with “1 euro houses” highlights both the potential and limitations of these strategies. While these initiatives have brought attention and investment to abandoned properties, they have often failed to address the deeper issues of community and sustainable development.¹³ The outcome has frequently been an increase in tourism without a corresponding rise in local residency or engagement. Initiatives such as “I Borghi più Belli d’Italia” and “Bandiere Arancioni” by the Italian Touring Club also seem to have the scope of promoting small, picturesque villages as tourist destinations without addressing these issues.¹⁴

However, there are promising examples of bottom-up initiatives that prioritize a more engaged approach with local communities and their territories. For instance, Dolomiti Contemporanei integrates contemporary art with the cultural and natural heritage of the Dolomite region, stimulating local creativity and economic activity through community involvement.¹⁵ Similarly, Liminal explores alternative models for sustainable development in rural areas, emphasizing local production, innovation, and community involvement to foster resilient communities.¹⁶

In exploring various government-led strategies like Piano Borghi and the SNAI, it's evident that while there are efforts to address rural depopulation and promote sustainable development, these often fall short of deeply engaging with the communities involved. I agree with Franco Arminio's critique that such strategies risk being superficial without truly revitalizing the essence of these regions. Hence, I was interested in exploring his ideas along with others that advocate for a more profound, empathetic engagement with the land and its people, aiming to genuinely rejuvenate these areas through a deeper understanding and connection.

10. Arminio, “Salvare i paesi.”

11. Ibid.

12. Silva, “Geografie dell’abbandono.”

13. <https://www.1eurohouses.com>.

14. Silva, “Geografie dell’abbandono.”

15. Levis, “Reusing the historical architectural heritage inside UNESCO’s Dolomites,” 134.

16. <https://liminalfutures.com>.

8. Professionarchitetto, “Selezionati 21 borghi d’Italia per altrettanti progetti pilota anti-spopolamento.”

9. Lucatelli and Tantillo, “La Strategia nazionale per le aree interne,” 403-404.

1.3 The Margins as Frontiers of Innovation

Gaze Inversion

The book *Riabitare l'Italia: Le aree interne tra abbandoni e riconquiste* represents a significant academic effort initiated by five key researchers - Antonio de Rossi, Laura Mascino, Carmine Donzelli, Arturo Lanzani, and Pier Luigi Sacco. Their foundational work has expanded to include contributions from over forty experts, offering a comprehensive exploration of Italy's marginalized regions through the lenses of history, architecture, economics, sociology, geography, and ecology. In the introduction, Antonio de Rossi, architect and urban planner, advocates for a transformative shift in our perception of these marginalized areas. He proposes a "gaze inversion", challenging the conventional view that sees these regions as peripheral and secondary. Instead, de Rossi suggests that we should view them as vibrant centers of innovation and cultural production.¹⁷ This approach aligns with Bell Hooks' concept of choosing the margin as a site of radical openness, suggesting that marginalized spaces hold unique and transformative potential.¹⁸

A beautiful and poetic example of this shift is Maria Lai's *Legarsi alla Montagna* (figure 2). In this relational art project, the entire town engaged in a collective act of tying ribbons from the village to the mountain, inspired by a local legend. This action, for the first time, invited people - often distanced from traditional art - to engage in a gesture that held no utilitarian value but was purely philosophical and aesthetic. It transformed the mountain town into a site of creative potential and illustrates how community engagement can strengthen the connection between people and place.¹⁹

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need for a shift in perspective, exposing the limitations of abstract, centralized planning methods. It has emphasized the resilience of regions that combine diverse, localized characteristics with environmental advantages. Rather than reducing these areas to mere backdrops for tourism or consumption, we should recognize their role in fostering new forms of social innovation and welfare. De Rossi argues that the future of Italian development lies in these margins, where cultural, social, and environmental renewal can flourish.²⁰

The New Humanism of Italy's Intense Areas

Complementing De Rossi's vision, Franco Arminio, who coined the term *paesology*²¹, presents his ideas for Italy's depopulated areas, or "intense areas," as he prefers to call them, that extend beyond mere infrastructural improvements. Arminio advocates for a transformative approach that redefines these regions as dynamic hubs of innovation and cultural renewal. He critiques the practice of treating these areas as mere sites for EU and PNRR funding without a coherent, forward-thinking strategy. Instead, Arminio calls for "cognitive repopulation" - infusing life into villages through a vibrant, progressive mindset.²²

Central to Arminio's vision is the active involvement of young people in local development. He imagines a future where these areas attract new residents not solely through the restoration of old buildings, but by creating compelling reasons for them to build lives there. This vision emphasizes the creation of fluid, evolving communities - "stream communities" rather than static "puddle communities." The goal is to integrate modern technology with traditional practices, blending artisanal skills with digital innovation to foster a new form of "humanism" that bridges the ancient and the contemporary.²³

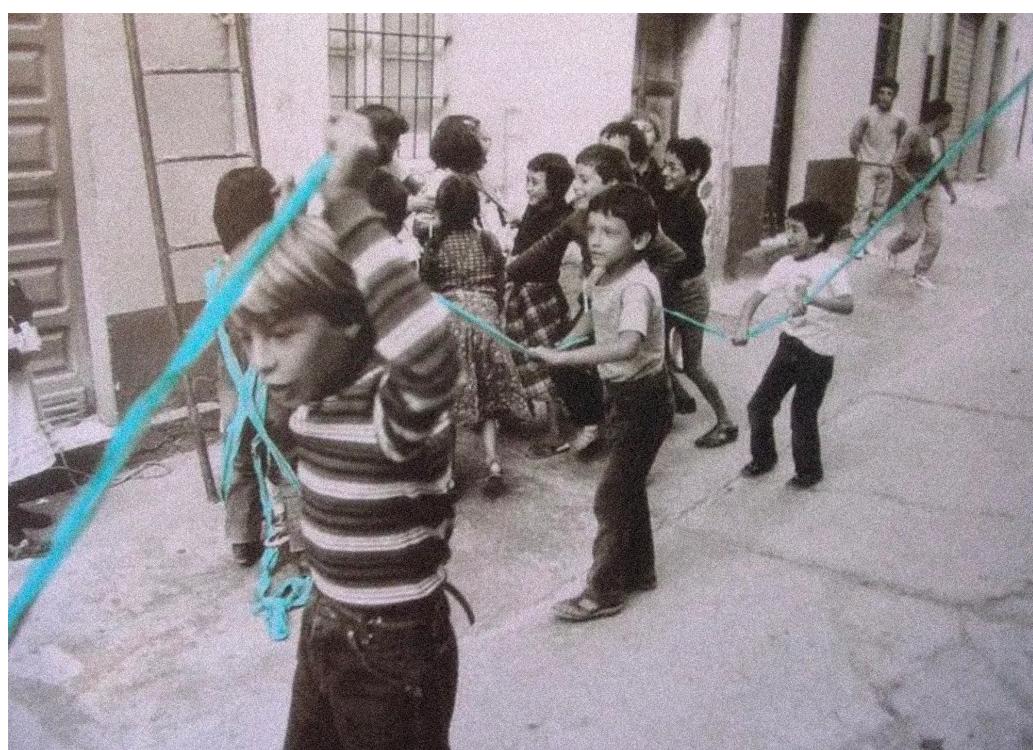


Figure 2. Maria Lai's *Legarsi alla Montagna* (Tying Oneself to the Mountain) (Ulassai, Sardinia, 1981).
Source: Elena Pontiggia, 2021.

17. de Rossi, "Introduzione. L'inversione dello sguardo," 3.

18. de Rossi and Mascino, "Community and welfare houses," 307.

19. Pontiggia, "Il nastro, la montagna. Maria Lai pioniera dell'arte relazionale."

20. de Rossi and Mascino, "Community and welfare houses," 307.

21. Arminio, "Paesologia."

22. Arminio, "L'Italia dei paesi."

23. Ibid.

1.4 Spatial Revitalization Strategies

The topic of revitalizing marginalized areas is complex and involves many different disciplines, as demonstrated in the interdisciplinary work *Riabitare l'Italia*. However, in this graduation project, I will examine the issue through the lens of architecture. This chapter will delve into certain recurring spatial strategies for revitalizing these areas. Drawing on de Rossi's categorization in the chapter "Project and Practices of Regeneration" in *Riabitare l'Italia*, five main approaches will be explored.²⁴

Point-Based System

A first strategy is what de Rossi refers to as the Point-Based System²⁵, which aligns with the concept of Urban Acupuncture, introduced by Solà-Morales.²⁶ This strategy, reminiscent of a spatial sculpture by Alexander Calder, involves creating interventions distributed across specific points. These points become collective spaces that, through their interaction, form a cohesive network. It is the case with the previously mentioned system of places on a territorial level developed by the Dolomiti Contemporaneo project in Cadore.²⁷ Farm Cultural Park in Favara and the welfare infrastructures in Ostana exemplify this approach on a town scale. These projects will be examined further in this research as case studies.

Linear or Block System

A second strategy is the Linear or Block System, which focuses on reinforcing a central structure to create a strong spatial element, such as a main street, a series of squares, or a revitalised block of buildings. This approach is evident in projects like the "albergo diffuso" model. This model transforms individual houses into guest rooms, blending local charm with modern hospitality.²⁸ Giancarlo De Carlo was a pioneer of this model through his project of the Telematic Village in Colletta di Castelbianco in the 1990s.²⁹ On a larger territorial scale, this strategy is also applied to infrastructure projects like the Val Pusteria railway line in South Tyrol, where train stations act as new focal points, fostering connectivity and creating central hubs throughout the region.³⁰

Magnet Objects

A third strategy is the Magnet Objects approach, which involves creating symbolic places that attract people and generate a network of activities around them. This can include museums, ecomuseums, cultural and community centers, buildings dedicated to reviving traditional local production, and 0 km agricultural markets. These magnet objects become focal points that stimulate interaction and drive local economic development, as exemplified by Brunello Cucinelli's project in Solomeo, where a ruined castle was transformed into the headquarters of his cashmere company, creating over 2,000 jobs for the local community.³¹

Small Weavings

A fourth strategy, known as Small Weavings, focuses on developing networks of local production and distribution through small-scale, interconnected spaces. This approach emphasizes creating and linking local workshops, production sites, and sales venues to support sustainability and community engagement.³² In the context of new agriculture, Prinzessinnengarten in Berlin exemplifies this strategy by serving as an urban garden that supports local food production and fosters community interaction, thereby creating a self-sustaining local network.³³ In the context of craftsmanship, Blackhorse Workshop exemplifies this strategy by transforming an industrial site into dynamic spaces for local artisans.³⁴ Both projects will be explored further in my research as case studies.

Eroding Abandonment

Lastly, a fifth strategy is Eroding Abandonment, which tackles areas with substantial neglected space and limited resources through a phased approach. It focuses on gradually revitalizing specific key areas to initiate broader regeneration. By making certain pivotal points usable in phases, this strategy effectively utilizes limited resources to trigger gradual redevelopment over time.³⁵

As we conclude Chapter 1.4 on Spatial Revitalization Strategies, we see how diverse approaches provide a range of methods for addressing the challenges faced by Italy's marginalized areas. However, revitalization cannot be fully achieved without engaging the communities that inhabit these spaces. The insights of Franco Arminio and Antonio de Rossi emphasize the need to go beyond mere infrastructure improvements, suggesting the necessity of integrating the principles of the commons into spatial revitalization efforts. By doing so, these strategies can achieve more sustainable and inclusive outcomes, fostering a more profound connection between people and place.

In Chapter 2, we will explore the theoretical foundations of the commons and examine how its concepts can provide a framework for a more integrated and community-focused approach to revitalizing Italy's marginalized areas.

24. de Rossi and Mascino, "Progetto e pratiche di rigenerazione," 499.

25. de Rossi and Mascino, "Progetto e pratiche di rigenerazione," 520.

26. de Solà-Morales, *A Matter of Things*.

27. de Rossi and Mascino, "Progetto e pratiche di rigenerazione," 520.

28. Ibid.

29. la Licata, "Giancarlo De Carlo: spontaneità costruita."

30. de Rossi and Mascino, "Progetto e pratiche di rigenerazione," 520.

31. Ibid.

32. de Rossi and Mascino, "Progetto e pratiche di rigenerazione," 520.

33. Calderon and Clausen, interview.

34. Pietsch et al., "Blackhorse Workshop," 91-98.

35. de Rossi and Mascino, "Progetto e pratiche di rigenerazione," 520.

Chapter 2 Commons

2.1 Foundations of the Commons: Historical Insights and Current Debates

The concept of the commons, while deeply rooted in historical practices, has undergone significant transformation and debate over time. Traditionally, the commons referred to resources shared and managed collectively by communities, such as communal land, forests, and water sources. This collective management played a crucial role in pre-capitalist societies, ensuring access to essential resources for all members.¹

The historical evolution of the commons is marked by critical shifts, particularly the enclosure movements in early modern England (figures 1 and 2). These movements, which privatized common lands previously accessible to rural populations, were seen by Marx and Engels as a pivotal moment in the capitalist accumulation process. They argued that this enclosure was not just a local issue but a broader mechanism of capitalist expansion that displaced many and altered communal relationships to land and resources.²

In contemporary discourse, the commons are often misunderstood or misrepresented. Garrett Hardin's influential *Tragedy of the Commons* argued that shared resources inevitably face overexploitation due to lack of individual motives for conservation. This perspective has been criticized for its oversimplification, as it overlooks the complex ways in which communities have historically managed and sustained their shared resources.³

Scholars like Massimo De Angelis have expanded on this by highlighting that the enclosure process is ongoing, affecting modern commons through phenomena like land grabs and digital privatization. De Angelis emphasizes that the commons are not static but are continuously shaped by evolving practices and challenges.⁴

Juliane Spitta's work further refines our understanding by distinguishing between identitarian and emancipatory approaches to community. Identitarian approaches emphasize exclusivity based on shared identities, potentially leading to division and marginalization. In contrast, emancipatory approaches strive for inclusivity and solidarity, seeking to dismantle oppressive structures while fostering diverse, collaborative communities.⁵

Eve Tuck's critique in *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities* adds another layer by questioning the focus on shortcomings and victimhood in research about marginalized communities. Tuck advocates for a "desire-centered" approach, which highlights the strengths and aspirations of these communities rather than their suffering.⁶ This perspective is crucial for understanding the commons as a dynamic and empowering concept, rather than a static or idealized one.

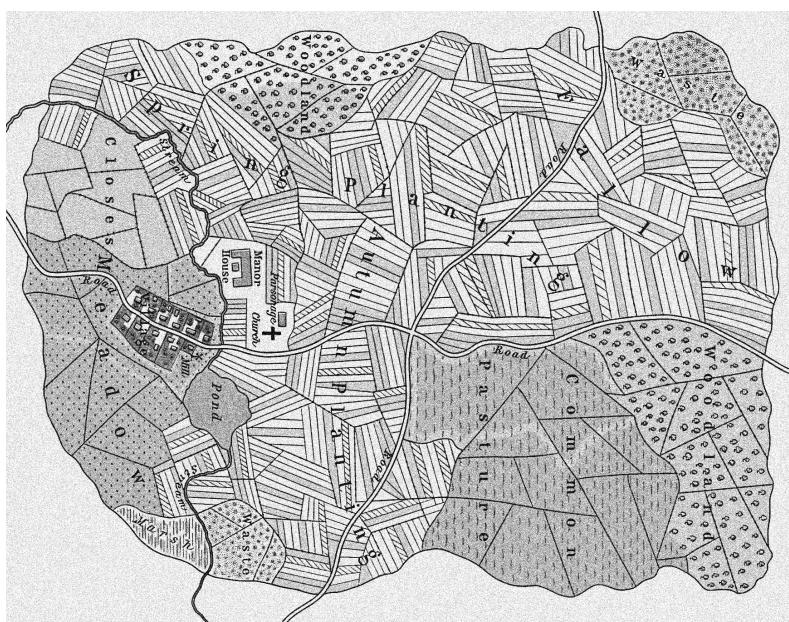


Figure 1. Before enclosures, land in medieval England was controlled by the aristocracy and church and owned by the king. The majority of the land was divided into small strips for farming and grazing. Land with no specific use, known as commons, was owned by the king, but the village community had numerous rights to use it in order to make a living. Source: Oliver Clemens et al., 2010.

1. Buck, *The Global Commons*, 2.

2. Trapp and Thum, interview.

3. Ibid.

4. Trapp and Thum, interview.

5. Spitta, "The Fiction of Community," 21.

6. Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities."

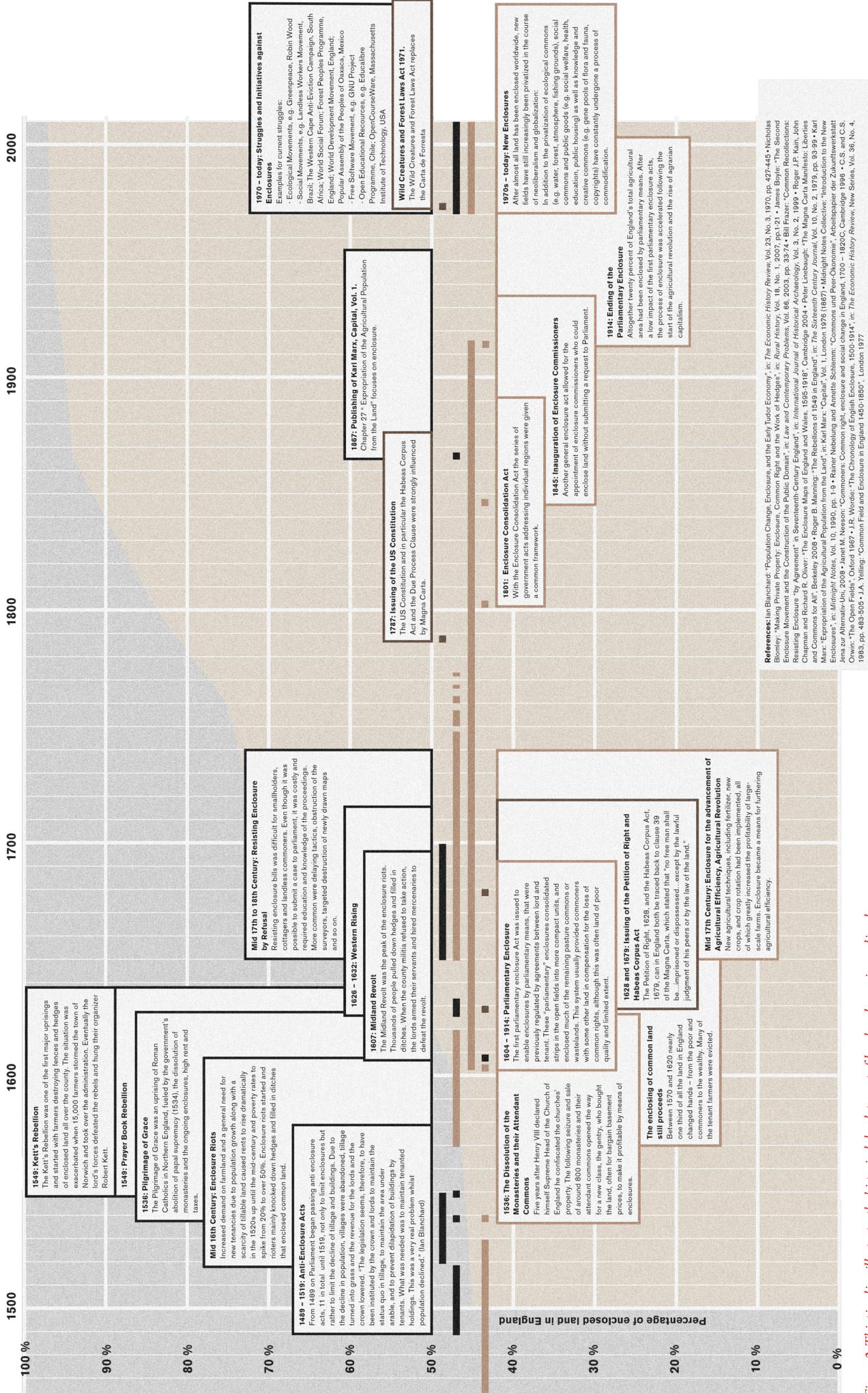


Figure 2. This timeline illustrates the historical development of land enclosure in medieval England, highlighting the transformation of shared commons into private property. This process did not mean communal ownership became illegal, but rather that access to common resources and

2.2 Definitions and Theories

Avermaete approaches the concept of urban commons from three perspectives: Res Communis, Les Communis, and Praxis Communis. These three angles are deeply interconnected and address fundamental aspects of the commons.⁷

Res Communis

Res Communis refers to common-pool resources in architecture and urban design. Elinor Ostrom defines these as resource systems (like fishing grounds or parking garages) and resource units (such as harvested fish). Michel Bauwens further categorizes these resources into inherited commons (e.g., earth, water, forests), immaterial commons (e.g., cultural and intellectual knowledge), and material commons (e.g., man-made reserves). Silke Helfrich highlights that these resources must be actively transformed into commons by their users, the commoners, emphasizing the importance of the community in sustaining them.⁸

Les Communis

Les Communis addresses the commonality within the discipline of architecture. This perspective views architecture as a collective effort governed by shared codes and norms, which form an anonymous system belonging to the broader community of professionals rather than individual architects. This approach aligns with historical practices such as those of the Corps des Ports et Chaussees, where collective knowledge and standards guide the discipline.⁹

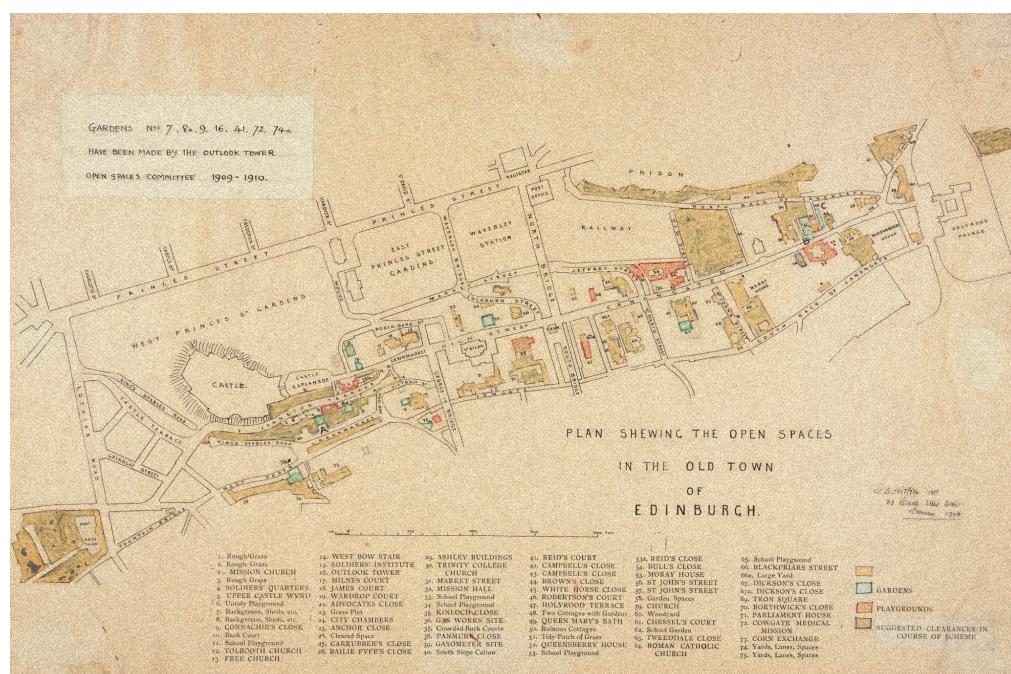
Praxis Communis

Praxis Communis explores the social practices of commoning, focusing on the rituals, pleasures, and political dynamics involved in cooperative activities. As Richard Sennett highlights, these aspects of commoning are crucial for understanding how people interact with and manage shared resources. Austrian philosopher Ivan Illich emphasizes that individuals require the freedom to shape their surroundings according to personal preferences and to utilize these creations in ways that promote mutual care and support.¹⁰

David Bollier extends this notion by noting that commoners often prefer to take direct control over essential aspects of their lives - such as their cities, neighborhoods, food, water, land, and infrastructure - rather than relying on state authorities. This perspective emphasizes the significance of "affective labor," or care work, within the commons, where individuals find fulfillment in managing resources that are important to their communities.¹¹

An illustrative case is Patrick Geddes' work in Edinburgh. Geddes utilized the citizens' local knowledge - a form of immaterial common-pool resource - to conduct a "civic survey," effectively re-mapping Edinburgh as a collection of valuable spatial resources (figure 3). His approach to "civic action" involved implementing small-scale interventions, such as adding stairs and gates, and proposing plantings to enhance the functionality of these spaces. This approach demonstrates how citizen engagement can transform urban environments and foster new relationships between people and their shared resources.¹²

In contemporary urban development, which often prioritizes market and state mechanisms, considering the city as a shared resource - a collective, social, cultural, and material construct shaped by its inhabitants - provides an innovative perspective. This approach suggests that architectural and urban design interventions can serve as means to nurture and unlock these common resources, presenting a fresh approach to urban development.¹³



Leading to My Own Values

According to Massimo De Angelis the concept of commons describes the connection between resources that are collectively owned and managed, which are shared, utilized, and maintained by a community of people through the ongoing practice of commoning. This perspective views the commons as dynamic social relations involving communities and the essential resources they rely on. Stavros Stavrides based his arguments on the commons and commoning on David Harvey and Gustavo Esteva's ideas.¹⁴ Their presuppositions are foundations for forming my own values.

David Harvey argues that the commons are not fixed entities but rather "unstable and malleable social relations" between a self-defined group and the resources crucial to their collective well-being. Essentially, the commons represent the relationship between people and the conditions they consider vital for their existence, such as water and land.¹⁵

Gustavo Esteva adds that the commons are deeply embedded in the organization of society itself. He describes the commons as a form of polity - a way of structuring community life that recognizes and values shared existence. Esteva refers to this as a "horizon of intelligibility," a framework for understanding the world through collective experiences.¹⁶

Building on these ideas, my research argues that commons should be understood through the processes and practices of commoning. As Mirko Gatti and others propose in *An Atlas of Commoning*, commons are best conceived as practices focused on the production and management of collective resources and spaces, rather than as static entities. In line with Dall and Smith's suggestion in their article "Commons" in *AA Files*, shifting from using "commons" as a noun to "commoning" as a verb emphasizes ongoing, collective processes and interactions. Commoning involves negotiating relationships and conflicts among individuals, communities, and society. This approach highlights that the act of commoning - rather than the resources themselves - is central to understanding and nurturing the commons.¹⁷ Building on these definitions and ideas, I have developed my own values:

Commons: complex, unstable, and dynamic systems that consist of resources shared by a community and are subject to continuous processes of negotiation, conflict, and compromise.

Commoners: a community structured in a way that recognizes itself as a form of "we".

Commoning: the practices and processes involved in managing and sustaining shared resources.

Throughout my research and design project, I will focus on commoning as a verb, acknowledging the dynamic and evolving nature of managing and sustaining collective resources.

2.3 Spatial and Social Dimensions of Commoning

Common Space as Threshold Space

Common spaces, as defined by Stavros Stavrides, fundamentally differ from private and public spaces structured by ownership. Unlike these fixed categories, common spaces are developed through negotiation and collective effort, emerging from necessity and remaining in constant transition. These spaces are not governed by ownership but are shaped by continuous participatory processes. Stavrides emphasizes that common spaces are non-enclosed thresholds, requiring institutions to uphold openness and prevent power accumulation. In contrast to public spaces controlled by authorities, common spaces are redefined through collective action, challenging conventional notions of institutionalization and exclusion.¹⁸

Sharing of Power

The sharing of power is crucial for effective commoning, as outlined by Stavros Stavrides. This involves not merely distributing resources but also ensuring that decision-making authority is shared fairly. Without the balanced sharing of power, commoning risks becoming a way to centralize control and continue exclusionary practices. Stavrides emphasizes that genuine commoning requires continuous negotiation among equals to prevent the accumulation of power by a few. He suggests that viewing sharing as a broader social practice, rather than merely an economic activity, can reveal new ways to balance power and enhance genuine collective engagement.¹⁹

Ostrom's work aligns with these principles by emphasizing the importance of fair governance of commons. She argues that effective governance requires not only clear rules and boundaries but also an inclusive decision-making process where stakeholders have a voice. This approach ensures that decision-making authority is distributed among those affected by the resource management decisions, reinforcing the idea that sharing power is essential for sustainable and fair resource management.²⁰

Institutions of Commoning

Institutions, as described by Stavros Stavrides, are "arrangements of time and space where societies define themselves as reproducible entities", with predictability being fundamental. Institutions of commoning, however, are products of collective and infinite inventiveness, redefining habits through exchanges that create common values. More than just establishing rules, they foster a common ground through participatory processes.²¹

In these exchanges, emotional engagement and expressive movements are crucial, as seen in the Zapatista movement. Institutions of commoning continuously question, describe, and negotiate the common, fostering social relations where the common is dynamic. They support comparisons, seek to create a common ground, and discourage any single center of power, emphasizing inclusivity and adaptability.²²

18. Stavrides, "Common Space: The City as Commons," 17.

19. Stavrides, "Common Space: The City as Commons," 16.

20. Ibid.

21. Stavrides, "Common Space: The City as Commons," 15-16.

22. Ibid.

14. Stavrides, "Common Space: The City as Commons," 15.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Dall and Smith, "Commons," 40-45.

Beyond the Supermarket

Freedom is often framed within the confines of choice - the ability to select from pre-defined options, like choosing products from a supermarket shelf. This “freedom of choice” offers an illusion of autonomy but is constrained by external structures and market forces. It contrasts sharply with the more profound “freedom of creation,” where we not only choose but actively shape and define our own realities.²³

Autonomist Marxism envisions freedom as collective autonomy, where individuals, whether factory workers or students, freely associate and decide the terms of their production and existence. This vision echoes in the principles of “commoning,” where communities collaboratively establish rules and resources without top-down imposition. Here, freedom involves working together to define our needs and solutions.²⁴

David Harvey’s concept of the “right to the city” extends this freedom to urban spaces, arguing that reshaping cities is similar to reshaping ourselves.²⁵

This notion aligns with Amica Dall’s idea of the “workmanship of risk,” where outcomes are not predetermined but shaped through collaborative processes.²⁶

In essence, true freedom goes beyond mere choice; it involves the power to create, reshape, and take responsibility for our collective and individual worlds. This deeper freedom requires agency - the ability to act and transform our environments according to shared values and needs.²⁷

Production and Reproduction

Modernist architecture traditionally enforces a sharp separation between living and working spaces, often rooted in outdated gender norms and economic efficiencies. This division, with domestic labor confined to the private sphere, masks its essential role in sustaining the labor force. As a result, the environmental and human costs of production often remain invisible, dissociated from our daily actions.²⁸

To address these issues, there is a growing call to renegotiate spatial boundaries, integrating domestic activities into public realms and fostering new forms of communal living and working. This involves breaking down the division between public and private spaces, as seen in innovative models like cooperative kitchens in community-oriented projects.²⁹

The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation

“We need places dedicated to communal life that we shape together, conscious of our shared responsibility for them - places where community becomes a lived reality.”³⁰ Giancarlo De Carlo’s participatory design approach critically reexamines modernist functionalist logic, highlighting its oversimplified view of users. Unlike the linear design process of modernism, De Carlo advocated for a non-hierarchical model emphasizing collaboration and user involvement.³¹

Similarly, Richard Sennett, in *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*, discusses the importance of cooperation in community planning. Sennett emphasizes that cooperation is a skill involving working with unfamiliar or different people. He advocates for a dialogic approach in urban design, presenting multiple design models for community input, fostering empathy and collaborative decision-making.³²

The Architect as a Bricoleur

The architect as a bricoleur, inspired by Claude Lévi-Strauss’s concept of bricolage, focuses on using available resources creatively and efficiently. Bricolage involves making do with “whatever is at hand,” repurposing leftover materials from various projects. In architecture, this approach values the effectiveness of results over mere intentions. It emphasizes interpretation, blending social, cultural, and economic aspects within the design process. Architects act as mediators, empowering citizens to shape their environment. This method explores the city’s potential as a pool of material and immaterial resources.³³

Craftsmanship

Richard Sennett’s concept of craftsmanship, as described in *The Craftsman*, emphasizes the value of skill, dedication, and a profound understanding of materials and techniques. This approach is not merely about achieving technical proficiency but about engaging deeply with the process of making, thereby cultivating a sense of pride, personal expression, and responsibility in one’s work.³⁴

This perspective aligns with Amica Dall’s discussion on the “workmanship of risk” versus the “workmanship of certainty,” as described by David Pye in his book *The Nature and Art of Workmanship*. The workmanship of risk, characteristic of true craftsmanship, involves an active, hands-on approach where outcomes are not predetermined but are instead shaped by the maker’s interaction with materials and tools. This method stands in contrast to mass production, where the process is highly controlled, and the results are uniform and predictable.³⁵

Dall advocates for a more inclusive and community-oriented approach to architecture, questioning traditional hierarchies and the role of architects in modern society. She highlights the value of self-built communities, where residents actively participate in the construction of their homes and shared spaces, thereby fostering a deeper connection to their living spaces. This approach, exemplified by projects like Granby Four Streets in Liverpool, challenges the conventional role of architects by empowering individuals to shape their environments according to their needs and desires.³⁶

23. Botha, “Beyond the supermarket.”

24. Trapp and Thum, interview.

25. Harvey, *The Right to the City*.

26. Dall, “Assemble Studio – Amica Dall.”

27. Botha, “Beyond the supermarket.”

28. Gruber and Ngo, “The Contested Fields of Commoning,” 4-5.

29. Ibid.

30. Moore, “Commoning the City,” 3.

31. Charitonidou, “Giancarlo De Carlo’s participatory design methods,” 232.

32. Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*.

33. de Rossi and Mascino, “Community and welfare houses,” 308.

34. Sennett. *The Craftsman*.

35. Dall, “Assemble Studio – Amica Dall.”

36. Ibid.

Squatting as a Spatial Practice

Squatting, as a spatial practice, embodies a form of commoning that offers valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between space, community, and resistance. Rooted in the act of occupying vacant properties without official approval, squatting reflects a broader tradition of reclaiming and reappropriating space to address urgent needs and challenge established norms. This practice, which can be seen as a form of collective action and self-organization, provides a powerful example of how communities can take control over their environment and reshape urban landscapes despite limited resources and neglect.³⁷

Historically, squatting has taken various forms across different contexts. In 17th-century England, the “Diggers” sought to reclaim land for communal use, while modern movements in cities like Cairo and Amsterdam demonstrate the ongoing relevance of squatting in addressing housing shortages and urban inequalities. The Netherlands, particularly in the post-war era, witnessed squatting evolve from isolated acts into a well-organized social movement, marked by initiatives such as the Provo movement’s White Houses Plan and the establishment of the Woningburo de Kraker (Squatter Housing Agency).³⁸

These developments highlight the emergence of a structured “architecture of appropriation,” characterized by its spontaneous, low-budget, and often temporary nature. This architecture, crafted from recycled materials and adapted to the existing fabric of neglected buildings, reflects the immediate needs and creative impulses of squatters.³⁹

Studying squatting as a spatial practice reveals the potential for collective action to influence urban environments and policy. It underscores how communities can navigate and reshape spatial norms through direct engagement and self-management. As we confront contemporary urban challenges, the lessons from squatting - particularly its emphasis on commoning, flexibility, and grassroots organization - offer valuable perspectives for developing more inclusive and resilient approaches to urban development.⁴⁰

Beyond Temporality

In their discussion, Massimo De Angelis, Harald Trapp, and Robert Thum highlight the need for commons that are both enduring and scalable to foster societal transformation. Drawing from Elinor Ostrom’s research, they emphasize that effective commons must adhere to key principles that ensure their long-term viability: clear boundaries, collective decision-making, robust monitoring, graduated sanctions, conflict resolution mechanisms, recognition of rights to organize, nested enterprises, and strong community involvement.⁴¹

The Siedlung Halen project exemplifies these challenges. While initially successful in promoting cooperative living, it struggled with sustaining its ideals across generations. Issues arose in maintaining infrastructure, making efficient decisions, and managing finances long-term. These difficulties highlight the limitations of small-scale commons.⁴²

In the long run, while small commons like Siedlung Halen are valuable, achieving transformative societal change demands scaling these models and integrating them into broader frameworks. This approach is necessary to create sustainable, long-term impacts that can drive significant societal progress.⁴³

37. Boer et al. *Architecture of Appropriation*, 15.

38. Ibid.

39. Boer et al. *Architecture of Appropriation*, 21.

40. Boer et al. *Architecture of Appropriation*, 17-19.

41. Trapp and Thum, interview.

42. Markus, “The Siedlung in Switzerland,” 128-137.

43. Trapp and Thum, interview.

Based on insights from the literature review in Chapter 2 on the Commons I have identified ten criteria, each supported by guiding questions to evaluate the case studies and, later, my own design project.

1. Inclusivity and Participation

The design and management of the commons should actively involve all stakeholders in decision-making processes. This participatory approach ensures that the space or system reflects the needs and desires of the community rather than being imposed from the top down.

Are decision-making processes transparent and inclusive, allowing for continual redefinition of space and use?

Is the project increasing agency for underrepresented and vulnerable communities?

Are mechanisms in place to prevent exclusion or appropriation by identitarian movements?

2. Flexibility and Adaptability

Commons should be designed with adaptability in mind to allow for continuous transformation. Spaces or systems should evolve with changing needs and contexts, ensuring long-term relevance and sustainability.

Can the space or system adapt to changing needs over time?

Are spaces designed to blur public/private boundaries and support collective living, working, and caregiving?

Can the commons model adapt across different scales and contexts while remaining viable?

3. Decentralization of Power

Power within the commons must be shared equitably, ensuring that no single individual or group dominates decision-making or resource distribution. This decentralization of power fosters solidarity and prevents exclusionary practices.

How is decision-making distributed among the community members?

Does the governance structure explore alternatives to state dependency, reflecting grassroots autonomy?

Is the space structured to prioritize sharing over private control, avoiding monopolization?

4. Accessibility and Open Access

Commons must be accessible to all members of the community, both physically and socially. Open access fosters inclusivity and ensures that the space or system is available for use by everyone, regardless of social or economic status.

Is the space or system physically accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities?

Are there barriers to entry, whether economic, cultural, or social, that might exclude certain individuals or groups?

5. Sustainability and Resource Management

Effective commons require careful management of resources, ensuring that they are used sustainably and responsibly. This includes both natural and social resources, emphasizing self-regulation, long-term planning, and shared responsibility.

Are there mechanisms in place for collective responsibility, such as shared maintenance or care?

Does the project utilize resources in an environmentally conscious way that avoids externalizing costs (e.g., labor exploitation)?

6. Solidarity and Collective Responsibility

A successful commons is built on principles of solidarity, where community members share collective responsibility for the space or system. This fosters mutual aid, cooperation, and a sense of shared ownership.

How are responsibilities distributed among the community members?

Are there opportunities for community members to collaborate and support each other?

Does the commons foster a sense of responsibility beyond its immediate community?

Does it create innovative architectural forms that facilitate cooperation and solidarity in daily life?

7. Transparency and Communication

Effective communication is essential for the functioning of commons. Transparency in decision-making, resource allocation, and the overall operation of the space ensures trust and accountability among community members.

Are decisions and processes transparent to all stakeholders?

How are information and updates shared with the community?

Are there clear and open channels for communication and feedback?

8. Cultural and Social Relevance

Commons should reflect and nurture the cultural, social, and emotional needs of the community. This ensures that the space or system is not only functional but also meaningful and relevant to those who use it.

How does the design reflect the cultural, social, and emotional needs of the community?

Are the values and traditions of the community integrated into the design and function of the commons?

Does the space provide opportunities for cultural expression and social connection?

Does the design embed care work into spatial and social systems?

9. Resilience and Long-Term Viability

The commons should be resilient in the face of external pressures, whether economic, political, or environmental. This requires long-term planning, strong community involvement, and flexible frameworks that allow the commons to thrive over time.

Does the commons have the capacity to withstand external challenges and pressures?

How can the commons evolve to remain relevant and functional in the long term?

10. Freedom of Creation and Autonomy

True freedom in the context of commons involves not just the freedom to choose but the freedom to create and shape one's environment. Commons should enable people to collectively define and reshape their spaces according to shared values and needs.

Does the commons empower users to shape and define their own spaces and experiences?

How does the design allow for creative expression and the co-creation of the environment?

Part I. Cases of Reactivation

Town reactivation

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Monte Carasso

In 1979, Luigi Snozzi initiated a transformative town-planning project for Monte Carasso in Canton Ticino, which by 2009, had turned the unremarkable rural village into a place of social and cultural aggregation. Snozzi's strategy focused on creating a new town center designed to promote community engagement and cultural exchange. His innovative approach, supported by a visionary local administration, combined new urban developments with the preservation of the town's heritage. The success of this model lies in the unique blend of local enthusiasm, supportive regulatory frameworks, and the distinct cultural and behavioral attitudes of Switzerland.

Client:
Municipality of Monte Carasso

Users:
Residents of Monte Carasso

Type:
Urban redevelopment of center and community facilities

Architect:
Luigi Snozzi

Completion:
Phased redevelopment spanning from 1979 until 2009

Location:
Monte Carasso, Switzerland

Inhabitants:
1950 1,064
1990 1,610
2013 2,648

Town area:
9.70 km²

Regeneration strategy:
weaving fabric

Creating a new town center that combined modern urban development with the preservation of the town's heritage, and reweaving its fabric creating a cohesive identity and community-focused facilities.

Commons criteria:
Inclusivity and participation
Cultural and social relevance



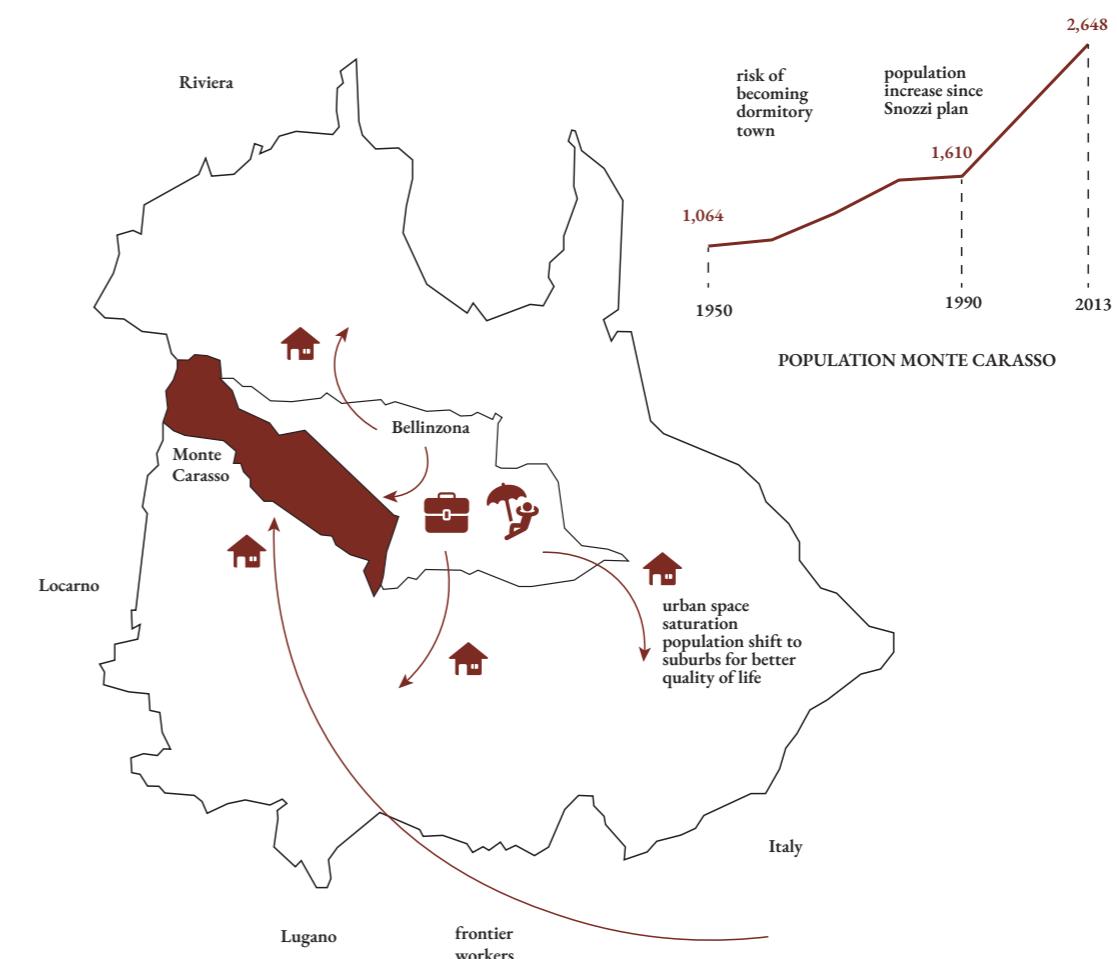
Monte Carasso in the Bellinzona Region

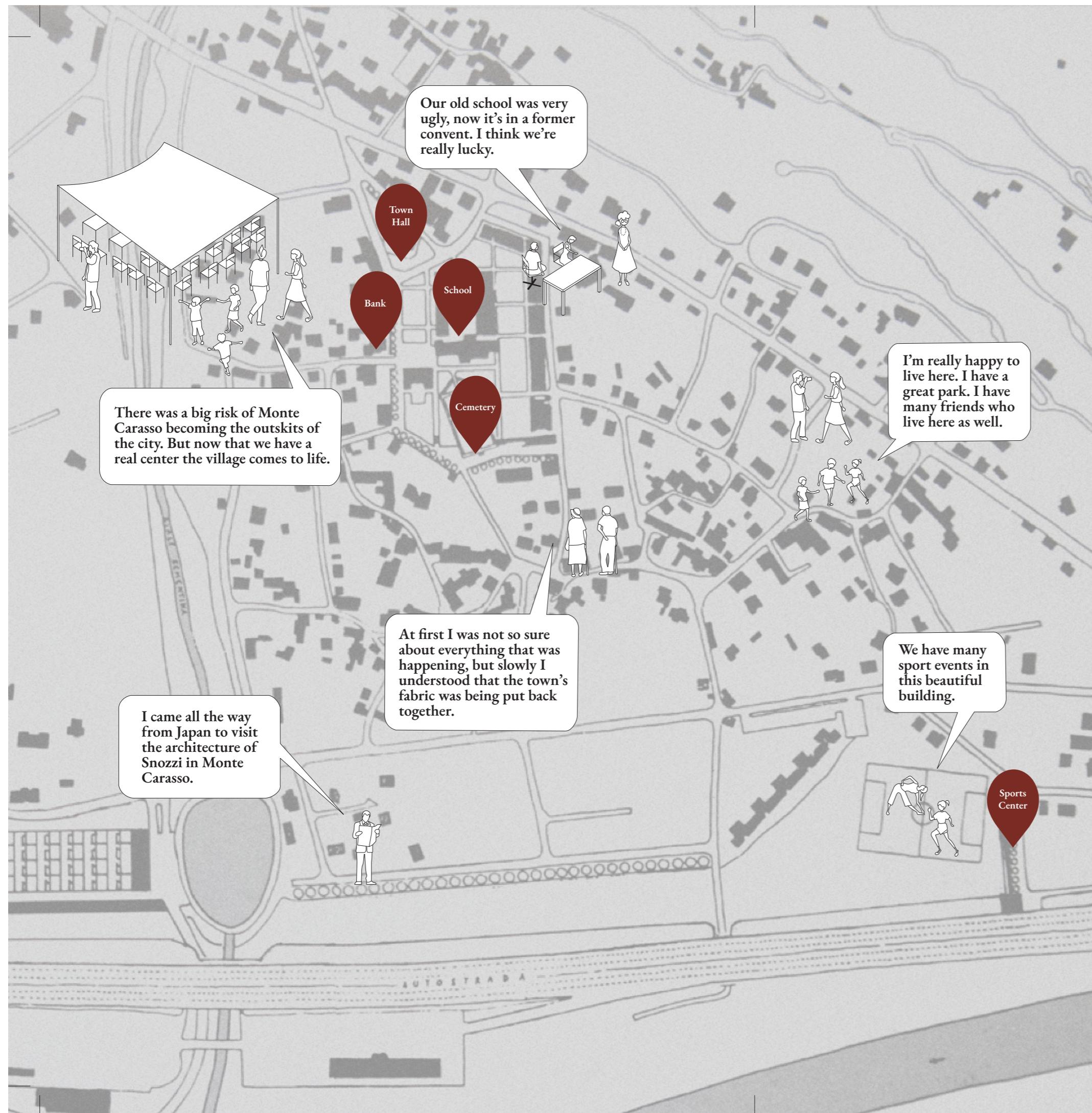
Monte Carasso, located in the Bellinzona region of the Ticino canton, has undergone significant changes from 1950 to 2013, reflecting broader demographic and urban trends in the area. Situated on the right bank of the Ticino River and bordering the Magadino plain, Monte Carasso's population remained relatively stable until the late 20th century. The implementation of Luigi Snozzi's town-planning scheme marked a turning point, aligning with a wider population shift from Bellinzona to its surrounding municipalities.

Bellinzona, the district capital, experienced demographic stagnation due to urban saturation and a population shift towards suburbs offering a better quality of life. Consequently, Bellinzona's role has increasingly become that of a commercial and entertainment hub, while nearby municipalities like Monte Carasso have evolved primarily into residential areas.

Monte Carasso's demographic profile, similar to other suburban areas, features a higher proportion of young residents and immigrants compared to the regional average. The demand for single-family homes has driven urban sprawl, a trend that Snozzi's urban planning aimed to address by promoting high-density development on small lots.

The project, due to its originality and authenticity, has established itself not only within the local context but also sparked an extensive architectural discourse. The town's transformation raises important questions about the nature of historic urban centers and whether a modern, deliberately planned agglomeration can attain such a status despite its relatively short history and small population.

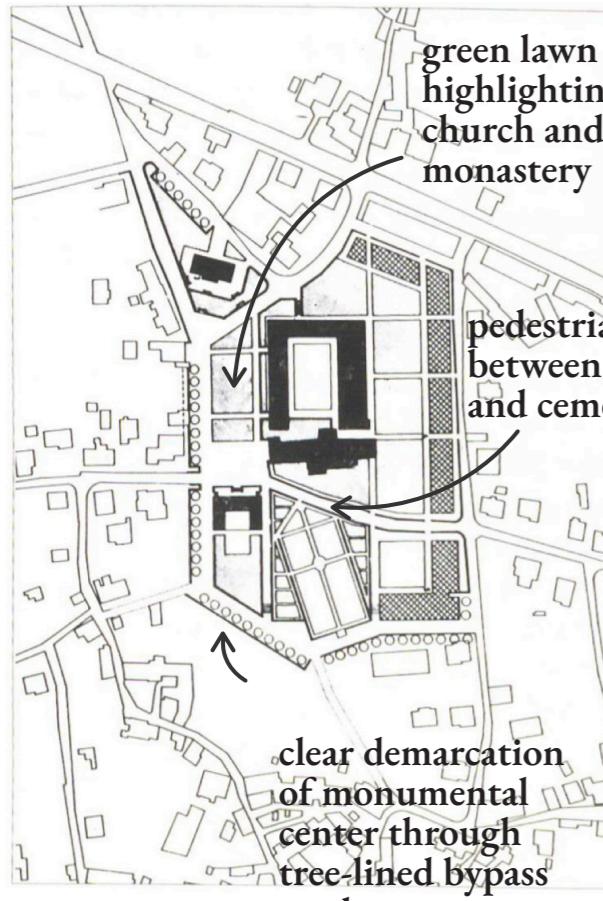




Snozzi as a Local Architect

Luigi Snozzi's urban redevelopment of Monte Carasso has deeply resonated with its residents, surpassing its physical transformation to become a symbol of community pride and identity. The project has captured the hearts of locals, who have recognized its cultural and social significance through a process of committed maturation. At its core, the success of Snozzi's vision lies in the collaboration between architect and politician, creating a partnership that guided the project towards its holistic realization. The town's increased prominence has drawn visitors from places like Japan, drawn by Monte Carasso's revitalized sense of place.

Beyond the project's architectural outcome, it has taken on a significant democratic relevance, positively influencing the way community issues are perceived and managed. Monte Carasso is seen as a model of a democratic city, not because it is built directly by the people, but because its planning system provides substantial benefits to its residents.



A New Center

Luigi Snozzi's Monte Carasso project aimed to comprehensively redevelop the central area of the municipality, integrating historical elements with modern urban design principles. Central to his vision was the clear demarcation of a monumental center, achieved through a partly tree-lined bypass road that enlarged the ancient convent enclosure. Pedestrianization of the road between the church and cemetery further enhanced the area's cohesion. Snozzi highlighted the church and monastery by creating a terraced green lawn, removing buildings to open up space bordered by the gymnasium and private homes. The inclusion of a kindergarten on the south side of the village square, along with extensions to the cemetery and new pedestrian connections, transformed the area into a functional and symbolic place. This approach not only respected Monte Carasso's historical fabric but also revitalized the convent, shaping a new identity while preserving its architectural heritage.



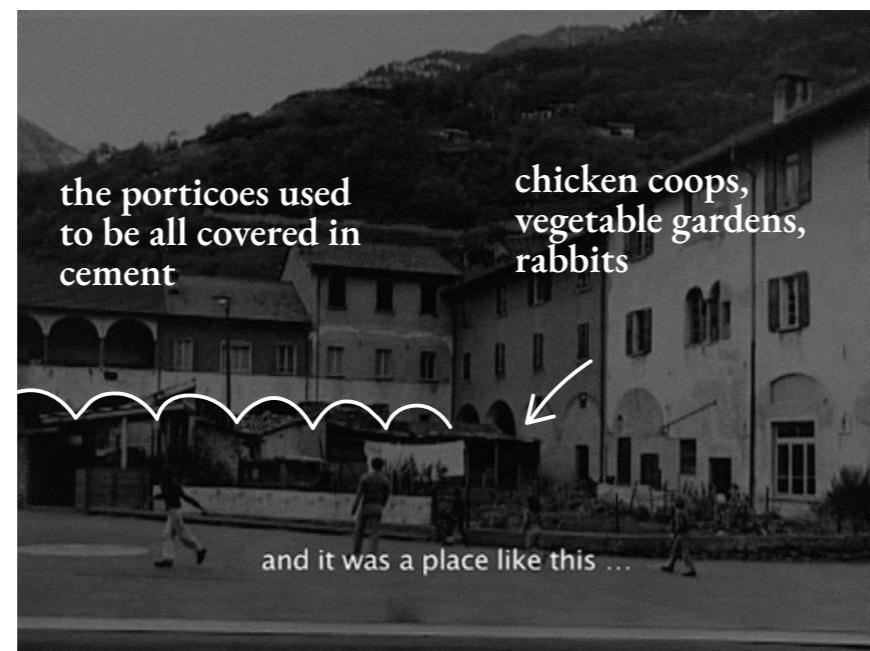
the consistent use of concrete in all Snozzi's projects created a homogeneous place respecting the existing fabric of Monte Carasso

reintroduction of the historical boundary walls to delineate private and public

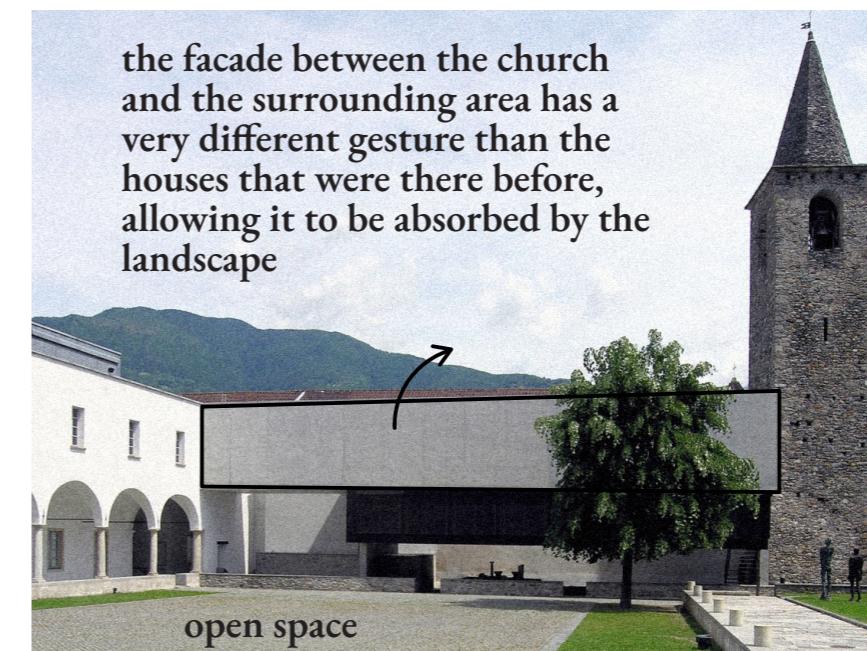
Reweaving the Town's Fabric

Incorporating reinforced concrete, Snozzi harmoniously blended durability with aesthetic appeal, resonating with Ticino's traditional stone construction. His use of high boundary walls effectively delineated private and public spaces, aligning with Monte Carasso's historical context and enhancing urban density and functionality. These walls not only provided structural support but also promoted a pedestrian-friendly environment by minimizing the need for conventional sidewalks and street signage. By repurposing existing buildings into public facilities, Snozzi demonstrated a visionary approach that extends architecture's value beyond mere function, enriching Monte Carasso's architectural landscape with a modern yet respectful nod to its heritage.

before



after



Farm Cultural Park

Favara Farm Cultural Park, situated on the island of Sicily, represents a pioneering initiative dedicated to revitalizing the historic town of Favara. Thanks to the tools of contemporary art and culture, this project has started a major recovery and regeneration effort, initially focusing on the historic center and expanding throughout the town. Founded by Andrea Bartoli and Florinda Saieva in response to a tragic building collapse in 2010, the project has transformed the Sette Cortili area into a dynamic hub for exhibitions, artist residencies, co-working spaces, restaurants, and shops, breathing new life into the community.

Founders:
Art-collecting couple Andrea Bartoli and Florinda Saieva

Users:
Local community and creatives

Type:
Hub for exhibitions, artist residencies, co-working spaces, restaurants, and shops

Architects:
Enzo Castelli and Salvatore John A. Lotta

Completion:
Initiated in 2010, ongoing transformation

Location:
Favara, Italy

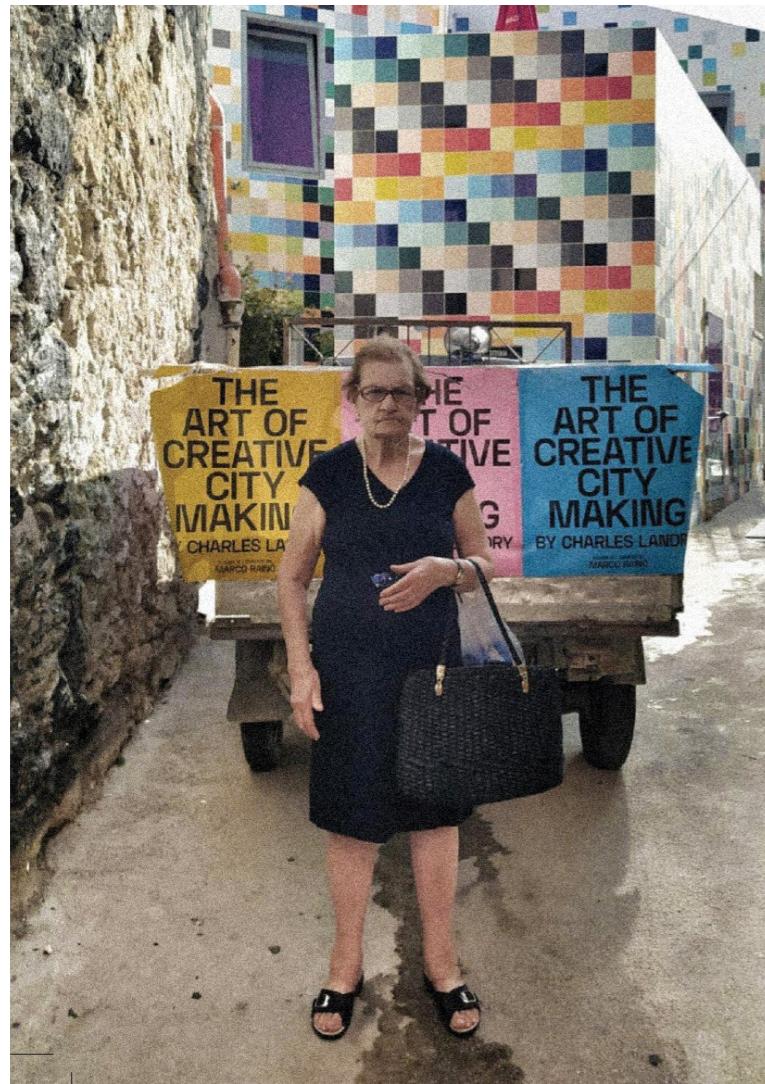
Inhabitants:
2002 21,026
2010 33,744
2017 32,527

Town area:
81.88 km²

Regeneration strategy:
creative ecosystem

Farm Cultural Park uses art to attract culturally-driven individuals, reshaping Favara's identity. This creates opportunities for local entrepreneurs, fosters cross-pollination, and empowers youth through education's hands-on approach to learning.

Commons criteria:
Cultural and social relevance
Freedom of creation and autonomy



Transformative Impact Beyond Favara

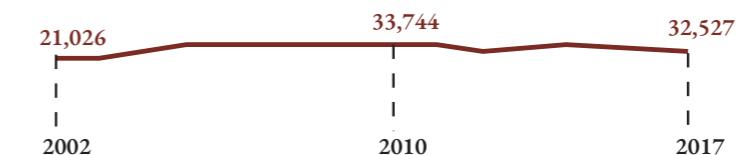
Favara Farm Cultural Park has played a transformative role in revitalizing the local economy and fostering a sense of regional pride. By attracting over 30,000 visitors annually, the park has positioned Favara as a top contemporary art destination, ranking sixth globally according to the British blog Purple Travel. The enthusiasm of founders, Notary Bartoli and Lawyer Saieva, has inspired both locals and international creatives to invest in the town, leading to the establishment of various businesses such as restaurants, shops, ateliers, and bed & breakfasts.

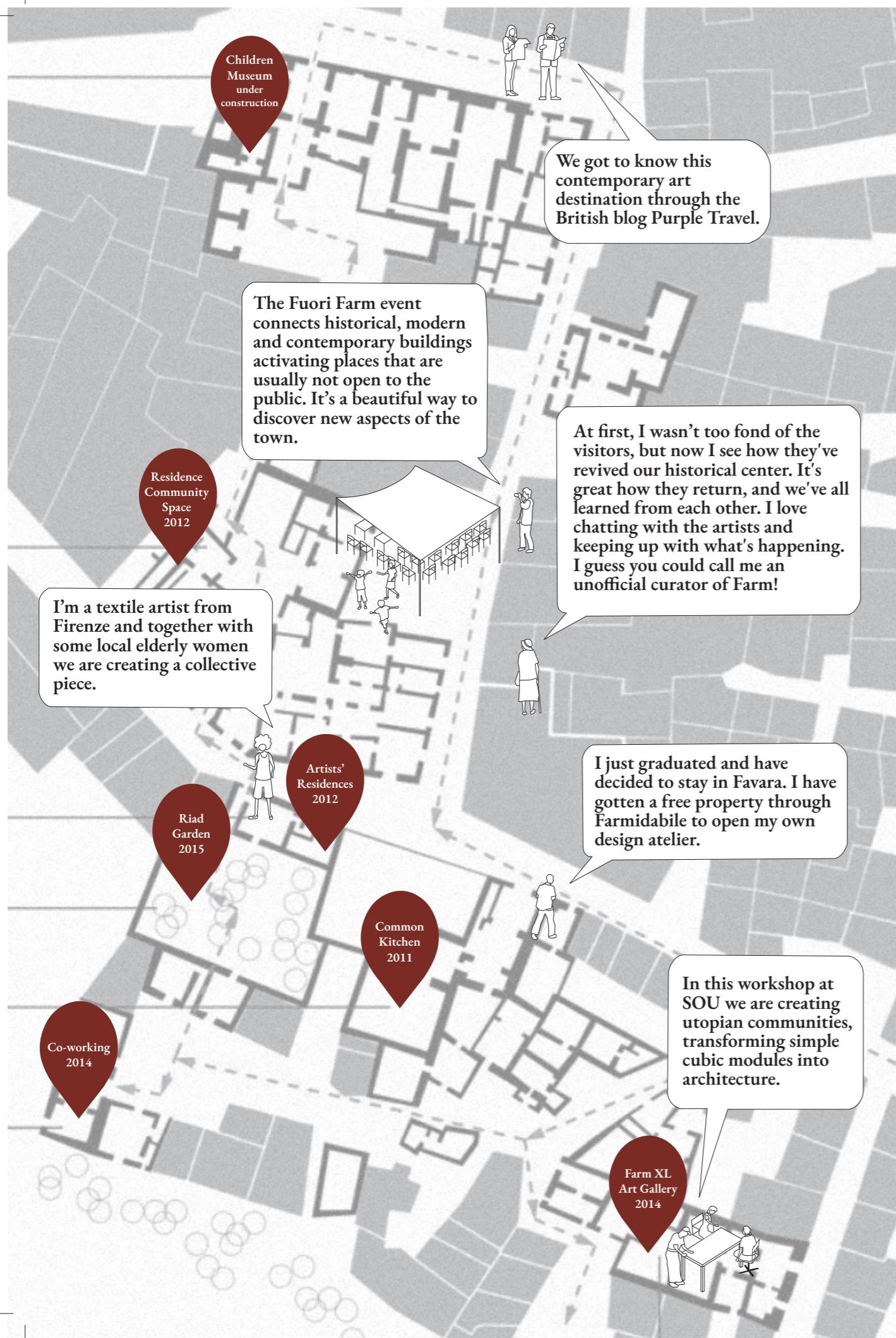
The Farm's impact extends beyond Favara, as seen with the Boom-Urban Lung ideas competition, which funded projects to enhance urban life in three Sicilian cities. This initiative supported cultural and social projects and created strategies for economic growth and community identity.

Additionally, the Farm has created an international network of Urban Farmers to exchange experiences and best practices, aiming to replicate its model of public design, urban regeneration, and contemporary culture elsewhere.

After establishing essential institutions like SOU, the School of Architecture for young people (with 25 branches across Italy by September 2020), and Prime Minister, the School of Politics for young women (by 2020, 13 locations throughout Italy), Farm has decided to expand to other cities. This expansion will be in collaboration with municipalities, universities, companies, foundations, philanthropic organizations, or active citizen groups. Anyone interested can apply to host Farm in their city.

Venice Architecture Biennale 2012 and 2016





Unlocking People's Imaginations

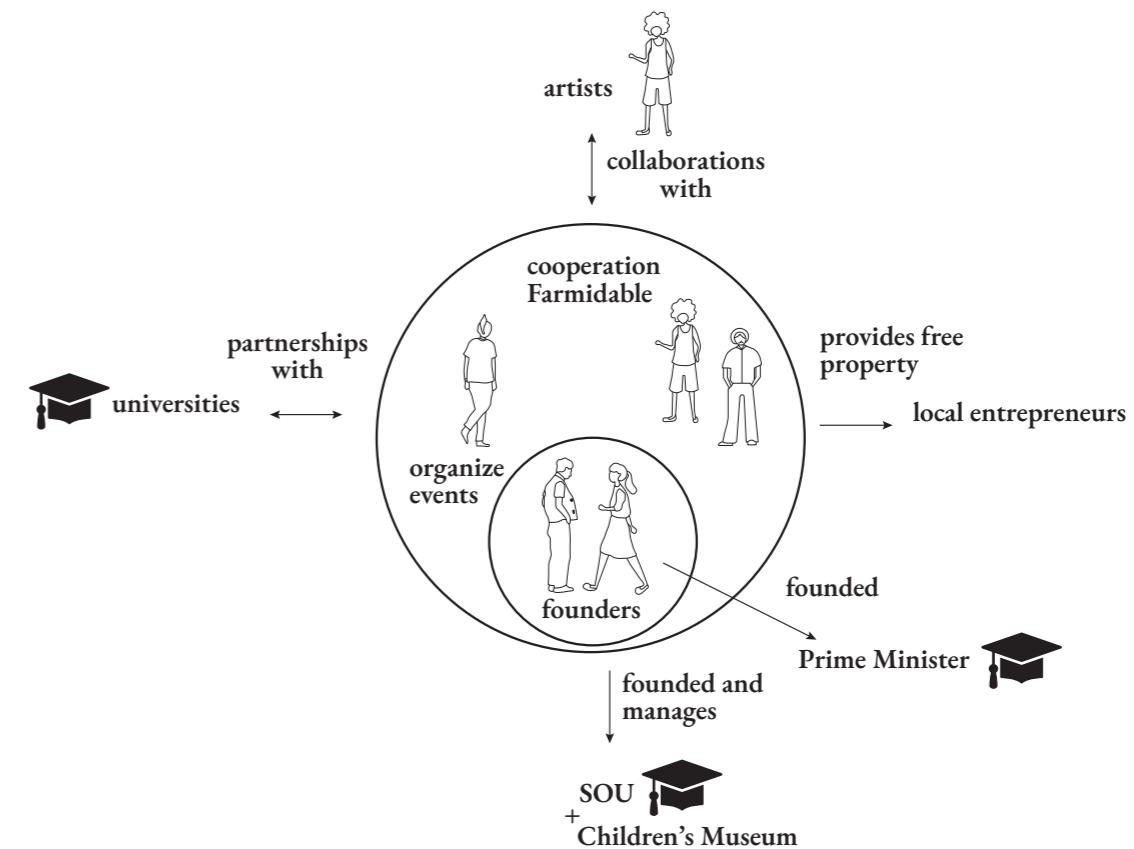
Farm Cultural Park is a bottom-up initiative, driven entirely by its founders without much institutional support. This self-financed project adopts an entrepreneurial approach, relying on local involvement and support rather than outside funding.

In June 2014, the Community Cooperative Farmidabile was established to help realize Farm Cultural Park's vision for revitalizing Favara's historic center. The cooperative manages the Children's Museum and provides free properties to young locals who wish to start their own businesses. This initiative empowers the local community to redesign a new identity for Favara, using available local resources.

Farm is a creative "workplace," where freedom and experimentation guide the activities. The SOU School, part of Farm, focuses on nurturing creativity and social commitment among children and adults. It promotes a hands-on approach to learning and encourages people to take charge of their own futures.

The project has shifted the mindset of Favara's residents, who were initially hesitant about change. Now, the community is embracing the ongoing recovery of their historic center, with more young people choosing to stay and invest in their town, seeing it as a place with new opportunities.

Farm Cultural Park embraces "permanent temporariness" with its yearly mix of major and minor events. The Bartolis host renowned and emerging artists for residencies, using these events to keep the space vibrant and draw both locals and visitors. The events have expanded beyond the Sette Cortili, involving the entire town in various exhibitions, meetings, and experiences.



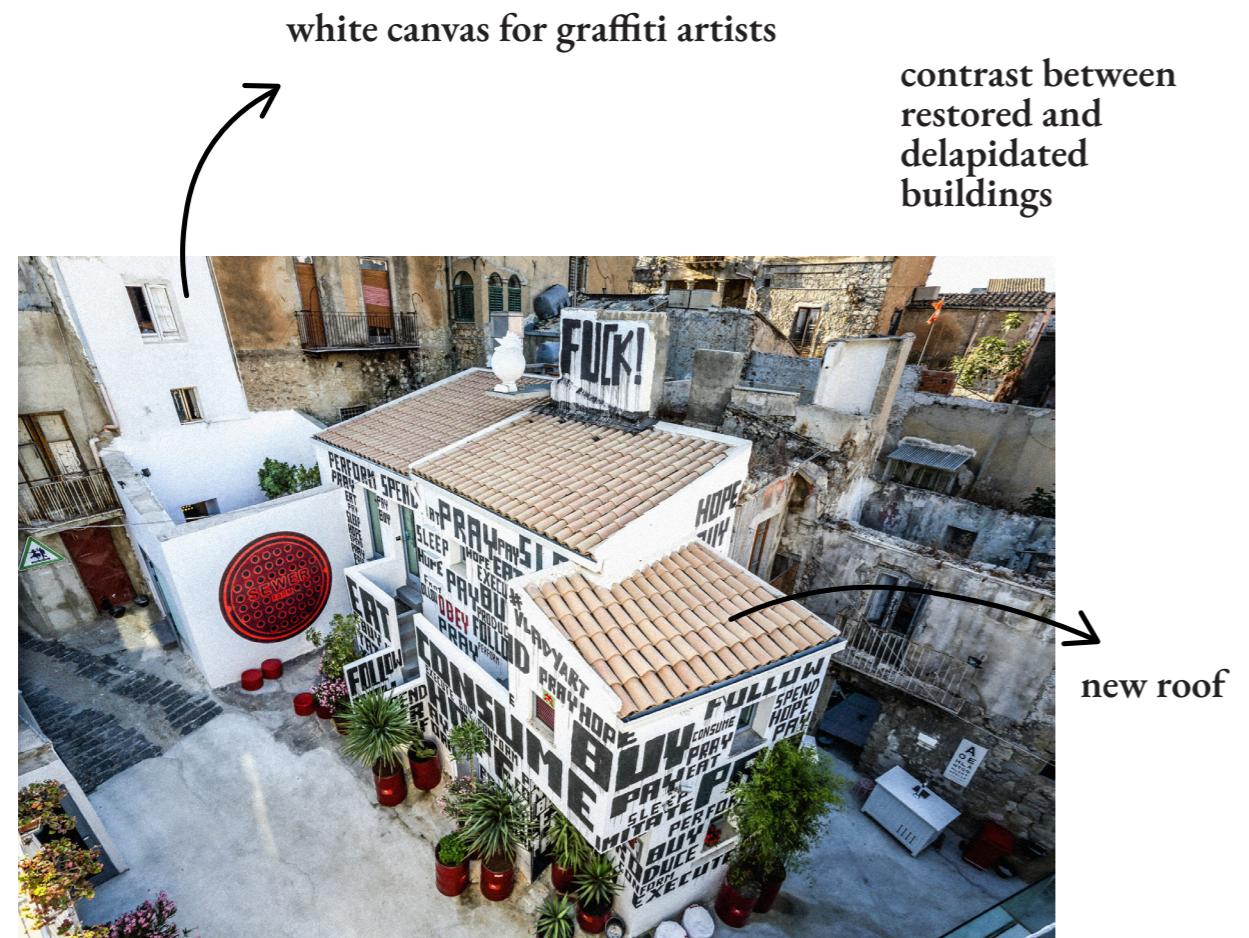
ACTOR-NETWORK DIAGRAM

A Living Canvas

Farm Cultural Park's master plan, designed by Favara-based architects Enzo Castelli and Salvador John A. Liotta, reclaims 5,000 m² for diverse cultural activities. Drawing inspiration from Camden Town, Palais de Tokyo, and Jemaa El Fnaa, the park embodies a vibrant blend of artistic energy and cultural diversity. This combination fosters an environment rich in *joie de vivre*, where a wide range of activities and people coexist, creating a unique cultural identity.

The architectural approach at Farm Cultural Park emphasizes minimal and flexible interventions. The buildings in the Sette Cortili area were renovated, with updates like new roofs and window fixtures. Using materials such as white plaster, glass, and grey metal, the design is simple and cost-effective, while respecting the historical context. This "urban acupuncture" approach involves small, respectful changes that rejuvenate the space, creating a neutral canvas for artistic expression.

The spirit of Farm Cultural Park is playful, emphasizing creativity and freedom of expression. Important messages are conveyed through road signs like "Greetings Obligatory" and "Caution: ongoing transformations in progress." White walls are enlivened with sculptures, while streets feature metal bins with plants, designer chairs, lighting, and temporary installations. Everything, from exhibitions to buildings, is in constant change, following principles of adaptability and flexibility, where the permanent gives way to the temporary.



**caution:
ongoing
transformation
in progress**

**greetings
obligatory**



temporary
artistic
installation
inside one
of Farm's
courtyards



Ostana

Ostana, a small village in the upper Po Valley at the foot of Monviso, experienced a severe population decline throughout the 20th century. In 1985, an initiative was introduced to revitalize the town by emphasizing its cultural heritage and natural assets, which succeeded in attracting visitors. However, this effort failed to halt the depopulation, and by the late 1990s, only five residents remained. A new strategy was launched in 2003, focusing on a system welfare services. Today, with a population of over fifty, including young, educated families, Ostana represents the possibility of a new way of living in the mountains.

Client:
Municipality of Ostana

Users:
Local community, Alpstream Center for the study of Alpine Rivers, sustainable tourists, artists in residence

Type:
Community houses and welfare infrastructure

Architects:
Antonio de Rossi and Massimo Crotti (Turin Polytechnic), Marie-Pierre Forsans, Studio GSP, Luisella Dutto

Completion:
Aigo Peyro 2008
Lou Pourtoun 2015
Mizoun de la Villo 2019

Location:
Ostana, Italy

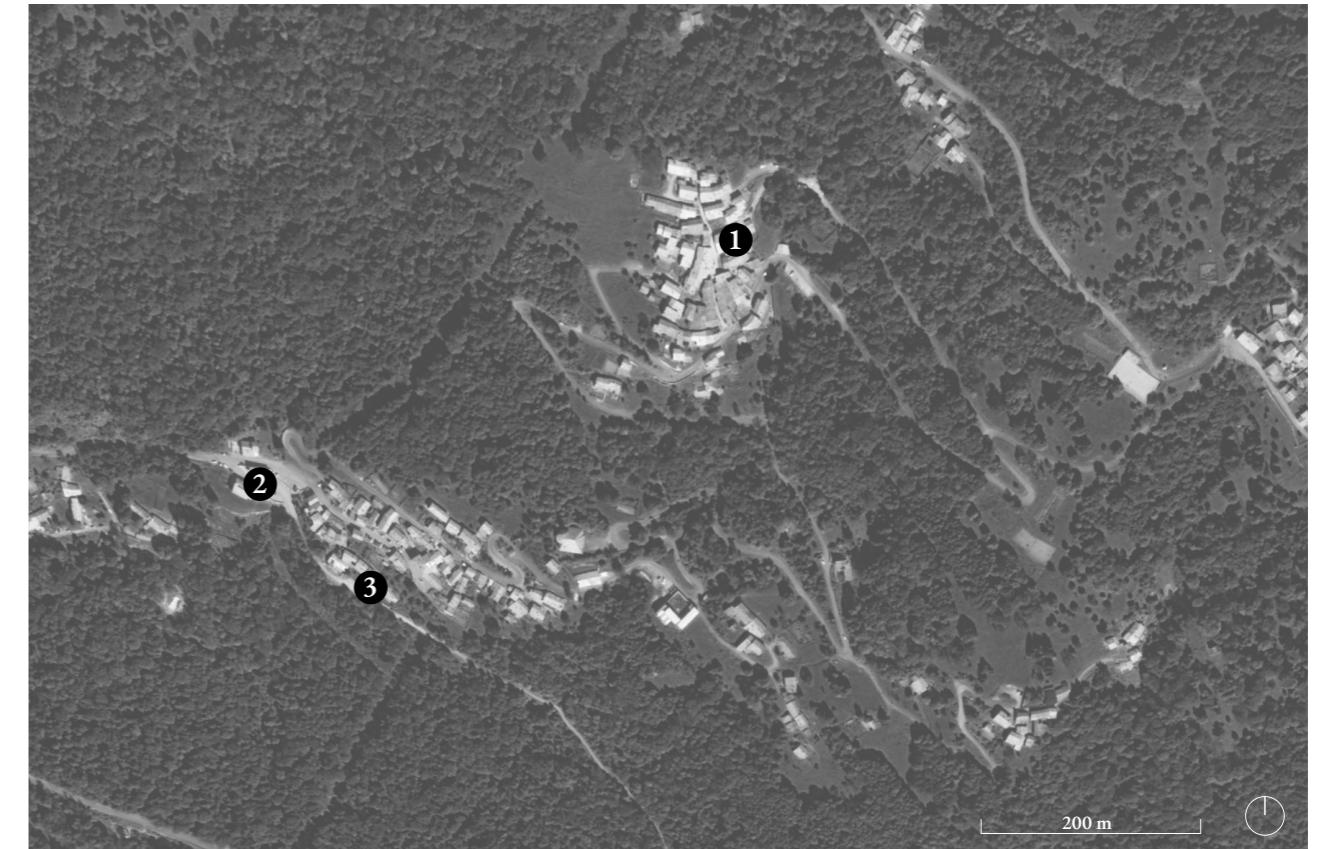
Inhabitants:
1921 1,200
1980 5
2023 85

Town area:
16.8 km²

Regeneration strategy:
production over consumption

Setting up a system of welfare services to encourage resettlement and generate entrepreneurial opportunities with the focus on the production - not just consumption - of culture.

Commons criteria:
Sustainability and resource management
Decentralization of power



1. Lou Pourtoun cultural center including an ecomuseum, multipurpose space, and media library
2. Porto Ousitano with urban sports facilities, shops, and a restaurant
3. Aigo Peyro wellness and sports center

Location unknown

4. Bordata Ambornetti self sufficient tourist resort
5. Mizoun de la Villo with medical clinic, physiotherapy for elderly, library, and bakery
6. Valentin co-housing
7. Chestnut cabinol for artists in residence
8. Tum-in cheese production
9. Vegetable garden
10. Muntaecala elevator

Welfare Houses as Accelerators of Regeneration

Ostana's most recent revitalization strategy integrated a system of welfare services to support resettlement, infrastructure for local micro-economies, and fostering cultural production rather than mere consumption. Lou Pourtoun cultural center became the driving force behind the regeneration of the town.

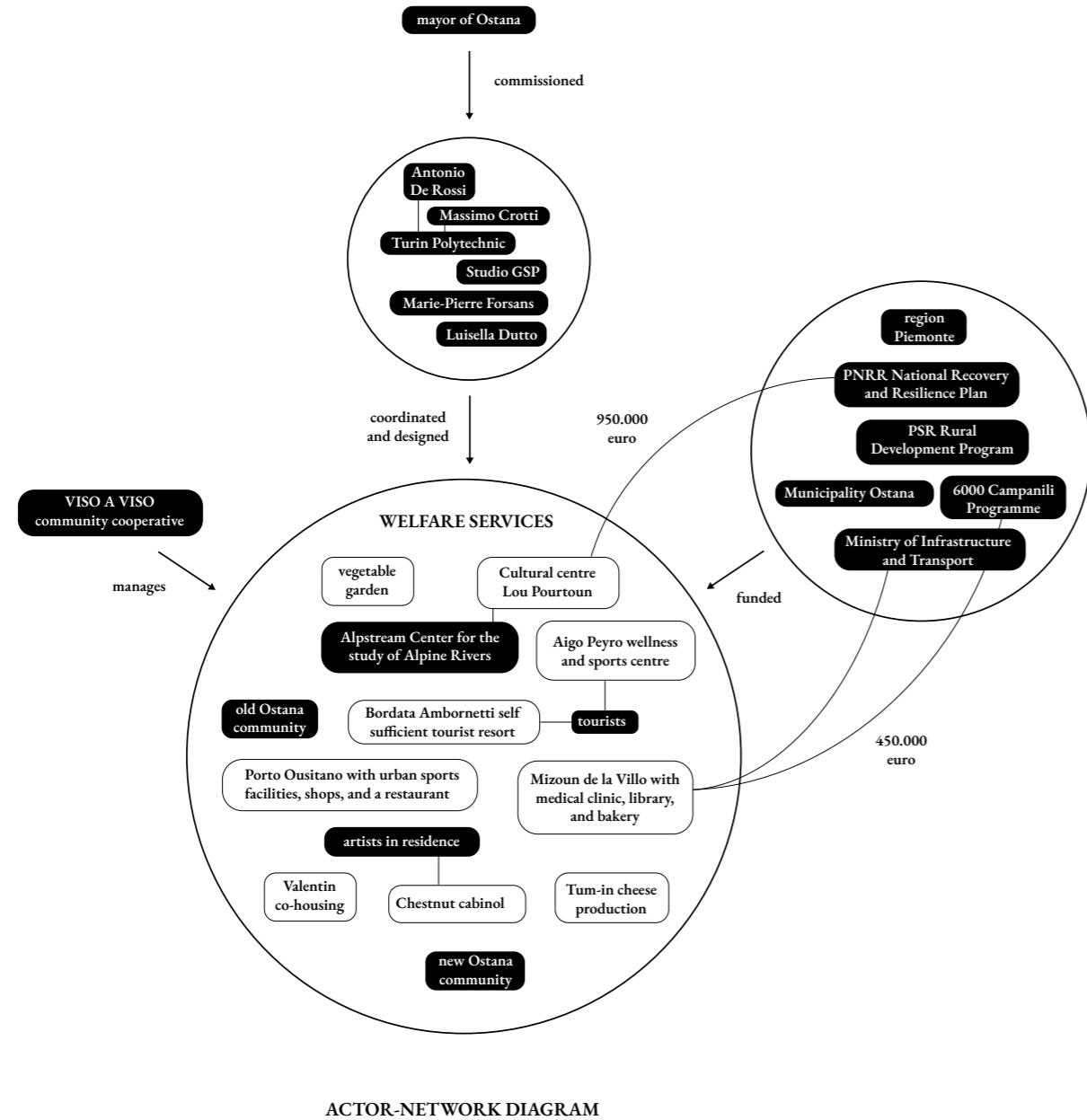
As discussed by De Rossi, *case del welfare*, or "welfare houses" go beyond basic service delivery to become active vectors for revitalization. These spaces offer support services, help achieve work-life balance, provide educational and training facilities, foster health and cultural infrastructures, and support resettlement through social housing. They also include co-working spaces and incubators for local economies. Rather than merely delivering services, these spaces function as systems that activate new forms of community, entrepreneurship, knowledge and local know-how. This approach involves the active contribution of communities and cooperatives, creating innovative management models.

The physical and spatial dimension is integral to these processes. Experiments across Europe show that the localization component, the ability to establish relations with the surrounding region, and the quality of interventions are fundamental to regeneration. Creating "focal points" that develop generative triggers is central to this process. On the architectural scale, collaboration and interaction are essential, overcoming traditional separations and fostering spaces that encourage a sense of identity and belonging. The ability to bring together different generations and provide services in an integrated way is fundamental to creating a "critical mass" and ensuring the habitability of a place.

"Up here there is nothing to consume. Instead, there is much to produce."
Gianluca d'Incà Levis, Dolomiti Contemporanea.

Vision and Coordination

Ostana's regeneration began with former mayor Giacomo Lombardo, who recognized the importance of integrating new competences, funding, and collaborations with universities. Since 2008, De Rossi, in collaboration with the Polytechnic of Turin, has been coordinating the revaluation of many of the town's facilities.



Creative Funding

When constructing Porto Ousitano, which became the new center of Ostana, height differences posed a challenge, and there was no budget for the necessary retaining wall. The creative solution was to transform it into an outdoor bouldering area, which secured €450,000 in funding for sports infrastructure from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport and the “6,000 Bell Towers” program. The former community center, Lou Portoun, was entirely constructed with €950,000 from PNRR funding.



Community Cooperation

The Viso a Viso cooperative, established in 2020, manages welfare structures in Ostana, pooling resources and skills for mutual benefit. They focus on local products, cultural events, and long-term community-driven projects, ensuring the management of facilities remains centered on community well-being.

Reinterpreting the Vernacular

De Rossi's architectural approach begins with a deep valuation of Ostana's history, playing with local historical themes. His designs reinterpret elements like balconies and loggias, drawing inspiration from the vernacular architecture of the alpine valleys. He also draws on the pauperistic 1970s attempts at creating a hybrid style, blending modernity with a new idea of comfort.

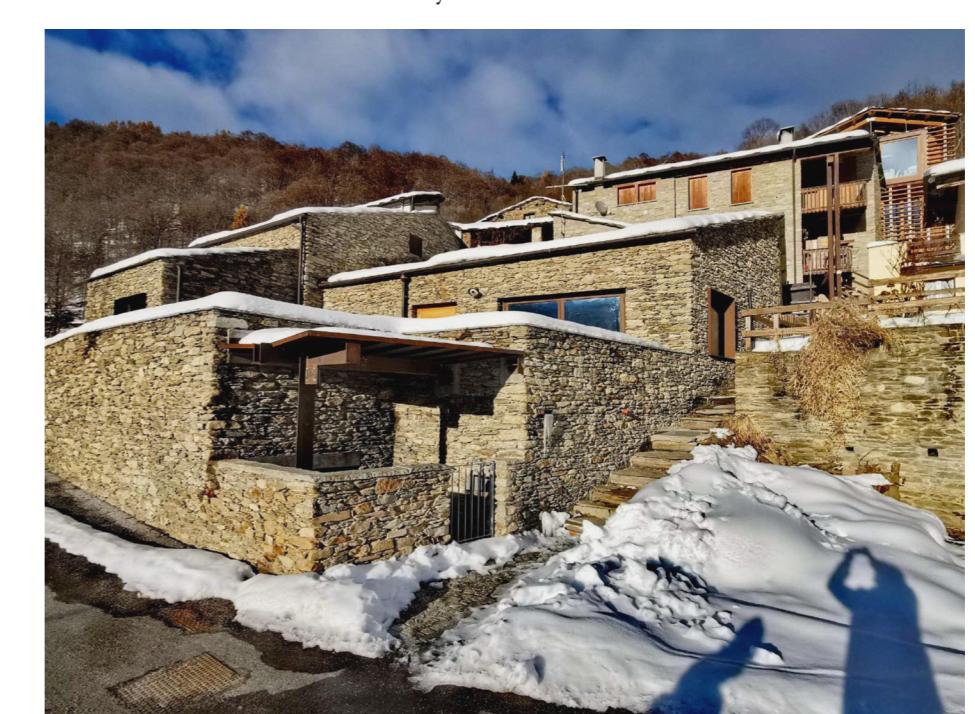
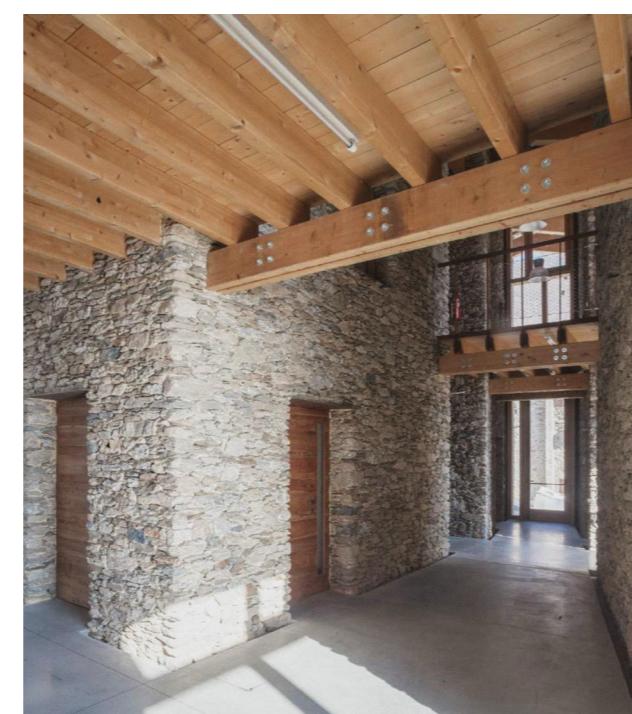


Rebuilding a Local Wood Production Chain

Collaboration with the Polytechnic University of Turin has driven experiments with local materials, focusing on wood and the rebuilding of a local wood production chain. In Italy, wood is underutilized, often burned for heating, while most construction wood is imported from France and Austria. Experiments with small artifacts and prefabricated structures using local wood aim to encourage its adoption as a sustainable building material.

Building with Stone

Similarly, stone in Italy is typically only used for cladding, not as a structural material. Aigo Peyro's wellness and sports center pioneered the use of load-bearing stone, applying ancient Roman techniques of "sack masonry," alongside zero-energy consumption practices, which include solar energy and geothermal systems. Lou Pourton is also built entirely from stone and blends traditional techniques with contemporary elements such as floor-to-ceiling windows and corten steel frames, creating a balance between tradition and modernity.



The Covered Street Typology

Lou Pourton, the cultural center, is named after a traditional covered street typology. The street runs along the contour line with small stone volumes built upstream and downstream - historically houses and stables above, and rustic barns below. The pourton connects the village's stone structures, creating a distinctive internal and external pathway, forming a village under one roof.

Programmatic Conclusions

The effectiveness of the reactivation strategies in Monte Carasso, Favara, and Ostana varies significantly in terms of population growth. Monte Carasso and Ostana experienced notable increases in inhabitants, while Favara saw a decline since the start of the project. There seems to be a correlation between strategies focused on community infrastructure and resulting population growth. However, Favara's approach, while less effective in driving immediate settlement, presents an interesting case with its focus on creating a creative ecosystem by introducing a major art institution and a school of architecture for children. This strategy provides compelling reasons for young residents to stay, fostering entrepreneurship opportunities and attracting culturally-driven individuals and businesses, which encourages cross-pollination. It is important to note that the reactivation project in Favara is still relatively recent, and its full effects may not be visible until later, particularly as it empowers a new generation - currently children or recent graduates.

Overall, the three cases demonstrate the effectiveness of strategies that prioritize cultural production - through welfare services and entrepreneurial opportunities - over mere tourism-driven consumption, showcasing their ability to attract critical mass. They also illustrate how incorporating a major institution can serve as a catalyst for drawing people, sparking investment, and generating new energy for the town. At times, achieving one objective requires initially prioritizing a different focus. For instance, creating a future for the inhabitants of Favara involved first attracting people and energy from outside the town to bring vitality and generate financial support. Similarly, in Monte Carasso, the initial focus was not on building houses to encourage settlement; rather, the strategy reflected the cultural and social needs of the community and centered on creating a vibrant town center, with the school housed in the old monastery - serving as a focal point that gave the place meaning. These cases illustrate it's essential to start with a focal point, something that gives a place identity and purpose, attracts critical mass, provides funding, and lays the foundation for long-term resilience. Lastly, as the case of Monte Carasso beautifully demonstrates, one must start by carefully studying the existing fabric, understanding what it is that might be needed in a specific region and developing a program that complements what is already there, rather than competing with it.

Programmatic strategies for the reactivation of an entire town:

- Introduce a **major institution** as a focal point and main revitalization driver to attract critical mass, secure funding, bring new energy to the town and foster cross-pollination (e.g., museum, school).
- Create a **fertile ground that provides opportunities for creation, entrepreneurship, and collaboration** (e.g., workshops, artist studios, artist-in-residence programs).
- Develop **community infrastructure** that strengthens social cohesion, supports intergenerational connections, and ensures the habitability of a place (e.g., daycare, community gardens, healthcare, educational training, cultural center, space for events).
- The program must **complement the existing structures**, enhancing what is already there rather than competing with it.
- The program must **reflect the cultural, social, and emotional needs** of the community.
- Focus on the **active production of culture** rather than tourism-driven consumption.
- Focus on the **empowerment and education of the new generations** to ensure long-term viability.

Spatial Conclusions

From the perspective of settlement and localization the reactivation strategies in Monte Carasso, Favara, and Ostana all started with creating focal points around which to develop generative triggers, a strategy also known as the point-based system or urban acupuncture, discussed earlier in 1.4 Spatial Revitalization Strategies. This seems a strong approach as it organically weaves the fabric of the entire town, reducing the risk of failure by focusing on multiple focal points instead of relying on a single intervention.

On the physical and architectural scale, all three cases paid close attention to what already existed, respecting and reinterpreting the existing fabric, and stitching it back together. In most cases, there was little to construct; instead, the architectural approach was more about reinterpreting the existing buildings and ensuring their technical functionality through minimal interventions, such as installing a new roof or reinforcing structural elements. Architectural interventions were carefully embedded in their surroundings, serving as a backdrop that allows for temporary structures or community events to be at the forefront. This approach creates space for constant change and community-driven reimagination, as demonstrated in Favara's "living canvas".

The consistency in material choice - wood and stone in Ostana, reinforced concrete in Monte Carasso, and white plaster and grey metal in Favara - creates coherence across the town, ensuring that all buildings follow a similar logic. It is interesting how, in the case of Ostana, the use of wood in construction is part of a broader effort to rebuild a local production chain, and how both wood and stone are being reimagined as structural materials through experimentation in collaboration with the Polytechnic University of Turin. Here, the architecture truly embodies both tradition and innovation.

Spatial strategies for the reactivation of an entire town:

- Create interventions distributed across specific **focal points** that become collective spaces, which, through their interaction, form a cohesive network.
- Pay close attention to the existing fabric and use what already exists as much as possible, repairing and reinterpreting it through **minimal interventions**.
- The **architecture serves as a stage** offering flexibility for creative expression and allowing temporary structures and community-driven events to be the main actors.
- Ensure cohesion through **material consistency**, using a similar logic in all interventions.
- Value and reinterpret local **typologies, historical elements, and traditions** of the community.
- Embrace **experimentation and innovation**, reimagining local production chains and exploring new material possibilities.

Organizational Conclusions

The reactivation strategies in Monte Carasso and Ostana differ significantly from those in Favara in terms of organization. In the first two cases, the initiatives stemmed from an encounter between an architect and a politician. The success of these projects lies largely in their collaboration, which facilitated a holistic realization of the vision. In contrast, the initiative in Favara was entirely self-driven by an art-collecting couple who initiated the project independently, engaging with the municipality only to secure the necessary permissions.

This distinction is also reflected in the types of funding. Monte Carasso and Ostana were funded primarily through municipal budgets, regional funds, with Ostana also receiving support from Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR). In contrast, the founders of Farm Cultural Park in Favara relied on self-financing and had to adopt a more entrepreneurial approach. They collaborate with universities and artist-in-residence programs, organize events, and established educational programs and a museum. The ability to generate funding through these activities was crucial, given the limited external support.

Both Ostana and Favara established cooperatives to manage welfare structures, organize events, and ensure the facilities remain focused on community well-being. These cooperatives also build and maintain partnerships with universities, artists, and other stakeholders, fostering collaboration and innovation to further strengthen their initiatives. The extent to which the community of Favara is involved in these decision-making processes is uncertain. While it is not clear if Monte Carasso also has a cooperation managing its structures, events also seem to play a significant role in strengthening community ties there. Snozzi's urban development project for the central square has become the main location where such gatherings take place. In Favara, Farm Cultural Park relies heavily on its yearly mix of events as a primary tool to attract both locals and visitors and foster cross-pollination.

In terms of phasing, all three projects started with one or more focal points from which the initiative grew organically. This approach allows for a constantly redefining process, where the projects evolve through learning by doing, adapting to new challenges and opportunities as they emerge. It also ensures funding can be distributed over time rather than requiring a single, large investment upfront.

What stands out is how the case in Favara developed a model that not only functions on a local level, but is also adaptable to diverse contexts throughout Italy. This reflects a broader sense of responsibility and a vision that extends beyond Favara. However, I do have some questions regarding the project's potential disconnection between its broader vision and the local community's direct needs, as well as the economic barriers to entering Farm Cultural Town.

Organizational strategies for the reactivation of an entire town:

-Foster collaboration and maintain strong **ties with the municipality** from the beginning to ensure a holistic realization throughout the town.

-Adopt an **entrepreneurial approach**, rather than relying solely on external sources, to build resilience and ensure long-term viability.

-**Decentralize power**, ensuring that decision-making and resource distribution are shared equitably and managed collectively (eg., by establishing a cooperative).

-**Organize events** to strengthen community ties, attract visitors, and foster cross-pollination.

-Implement **organic phasing** by starting with one or more focal points and letting the initiative grow organically, allowing for a learning-by-doing approach with funding spread out over time.

Part I. Cases of Reactivation

Industrial reactivation

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NYMA

Located near Nijmegen's new bridge over the Waal, the historic NYMA terrain, once home to a silk spinning mill founded in 1929, is undergoing a major transformation. Among the buildings on this industrial site is the NYMA Makerspace, led by Bas de Vries, Bauke Smit, and Wimke van den Heuvel, which is set to become a dynamic place for creative entrepreneurs. Building on the success of the temporary Smeltkroes space in the Honigcomplex, this new permanent site will offer a workspace for over 250 makers. What makes this development interesting is the integration of a group of potential end-users into the development team of the entire area from the very beginning, ensuring that the space is tailored to their needs and fostering a strong sense of community and collaboration.

NYMA AB / Makerspace and Watertower
Initiators:
Bas de Vries, Bauke Smit, and Wimke van den Heuvel

Users:
Over 250 creative makers and entrepreneurs

Type:
Makerspace with shared workshops, ateliers, studios, meeting spaces, bar, restaurant

Architects:
Eek and Dekker

Completion:
In development, first users entered in 2023

Location:
Nijmegen, Netherlands

Project area:
4,500 m² of leasable floor space

Regeneration strategy:
fertile ground, inclusive collaboration
NYMA repurposes a former artificial silk factory and offers a fertile ground for innovation, culture, craftsmanship, and art, supporting creative entrepreneurs. End-users joined the development team from the start as collective owners, shaping the project to meet their needs.

Commons criteria:
Inclusivity and participation
Freedom of creation and autonomy



NYMA Development Team et al. "NYMA Ontwikkelplan: Een belangrijke bestemming in het NYMA avontuur." *Municipality Nijmegen*, Version 1.0, November 2019. <https://www.nymanijmegen.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NYMA-Ontwikkelplan.pdf>.

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Verschueren, Marie Louise. "NYMA Gebiedsvisie: Herontwikkeling van NYMA Vasim en NYMAfabriek." *Municipality Nijmegen*, July 2017.

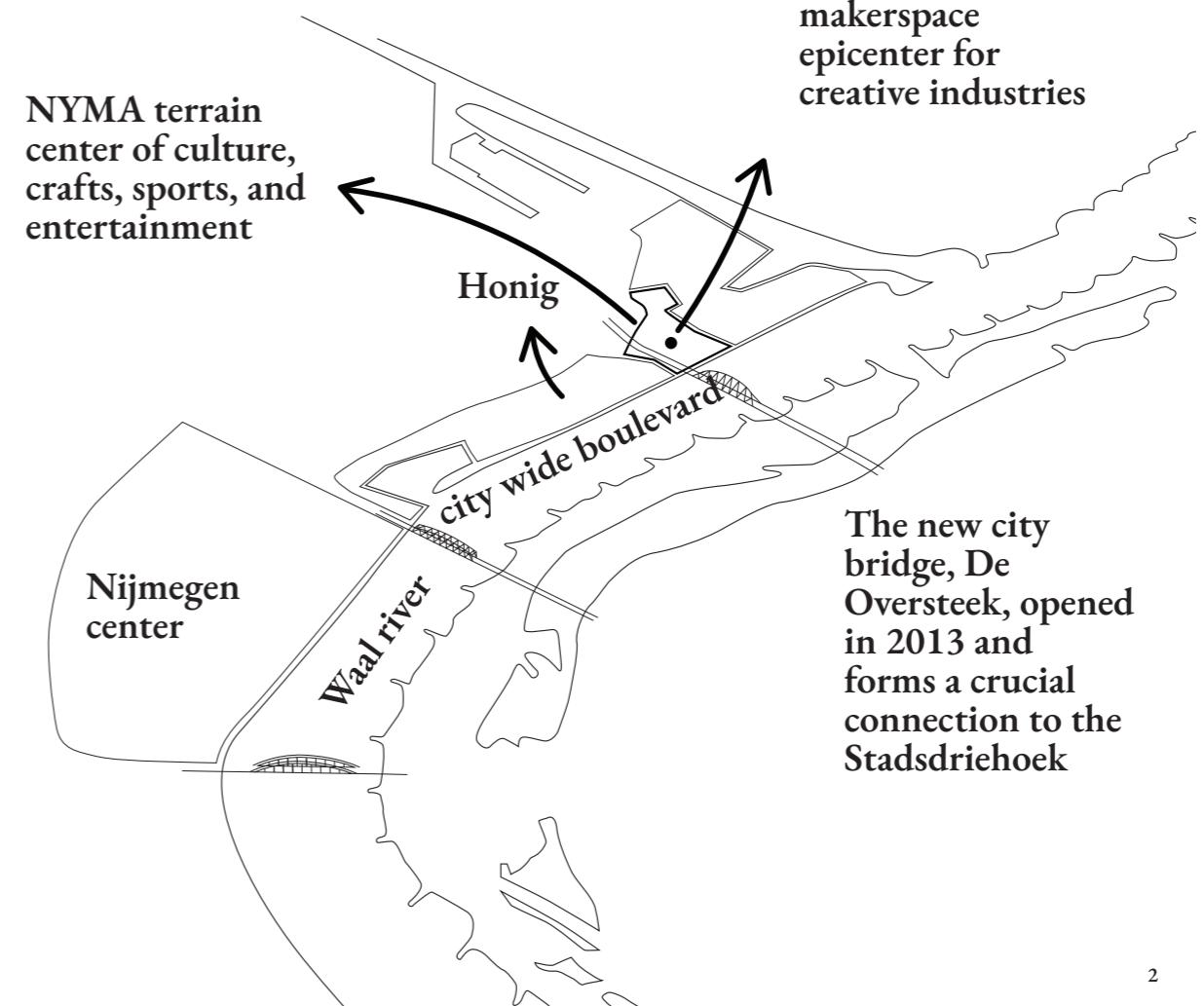
de Vries, Bas, Bauke Smit en Wimke van den Heuvel. "NYMA makersplaats." *Studio in de Maak*, November 1, 2019. https://nymamakersplaats.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/SIDM_NYMA_brochure_DEF.pdf.

ZUS [Zones Urbaines Sensibles]. "NYMA Transformatiekader: beeldkwaliteit & stedenbouw." *Verstuur* 1.2, July 10, 2020.

A New Experimental Area for the City

The NYMA area is very important for the progressive development of Nijmegen, particularly the Waal area. The development outlined in *Nijmegen Stad in Beeld* focuses on expanding the city along the Waal, with plans to add approximately 10,000 homes and 10,000 new jobs by 2030. NYMA serves as the essential link in various developments along the river, especially as a key entry point from the southern bank via the Oversteek bridge. This area is set to become a vibrant workspace hub for startups and scale-ups, contributing significantly to the city's mixed urban development and job growth. Formerly an industrial wasteland, the area is now being revitalized through culture, crafts, sports, and entertainment, reflecting Nijmegen's ambition to evolve into a dynamic urban environment. The NYMA Makerspace is an integral part of the broader NYMA development.

NYMA terrain
center of culture,
crafts, sports, and
entertainment



NYMA
makerspace
epicenter for
creative industries

Collaborative Development

The NYMA terrain's development is an example of organic area development. To maintain unity and quality in this evolving process, a transformation framework has been established by ZUS, guiding the project's progress and ensuring consistent standards. A key feature of the area development of NYMA is the involvement of the NYMA Entrepreneurs Cooperative, which consists of around 100 members who are potential end-users. This cooperative is part of the development team from the start, thanks to the commitment of Bauke, Wimke and Bas, ensuring that their needs and perspectives are central to the project. The development team includes the Municipality of Nijmegen, quartermaster Maarten de Wolff, the NYMA Entrepreneurs Cooperative, and the developers Lingotto and Klok Groep. This inclusive approach contrasts with typical developments, as it prioritizes collaboration and the involvement of end-users early on.

Managing NYMA

The area management is structured through the NYMA gebiedsfonds (area fund), a model where various investors (public, private, and societal) combine resources for integrated development and management. The development team, including stakeholders and tenants, handles management tasks such as maintenance, public space management, and communication. The area manager ensures cohesion between the board, stakeholders, and the municipality. Within the makerspace management tasks are divided between the tenants.

Hybrid Ownership

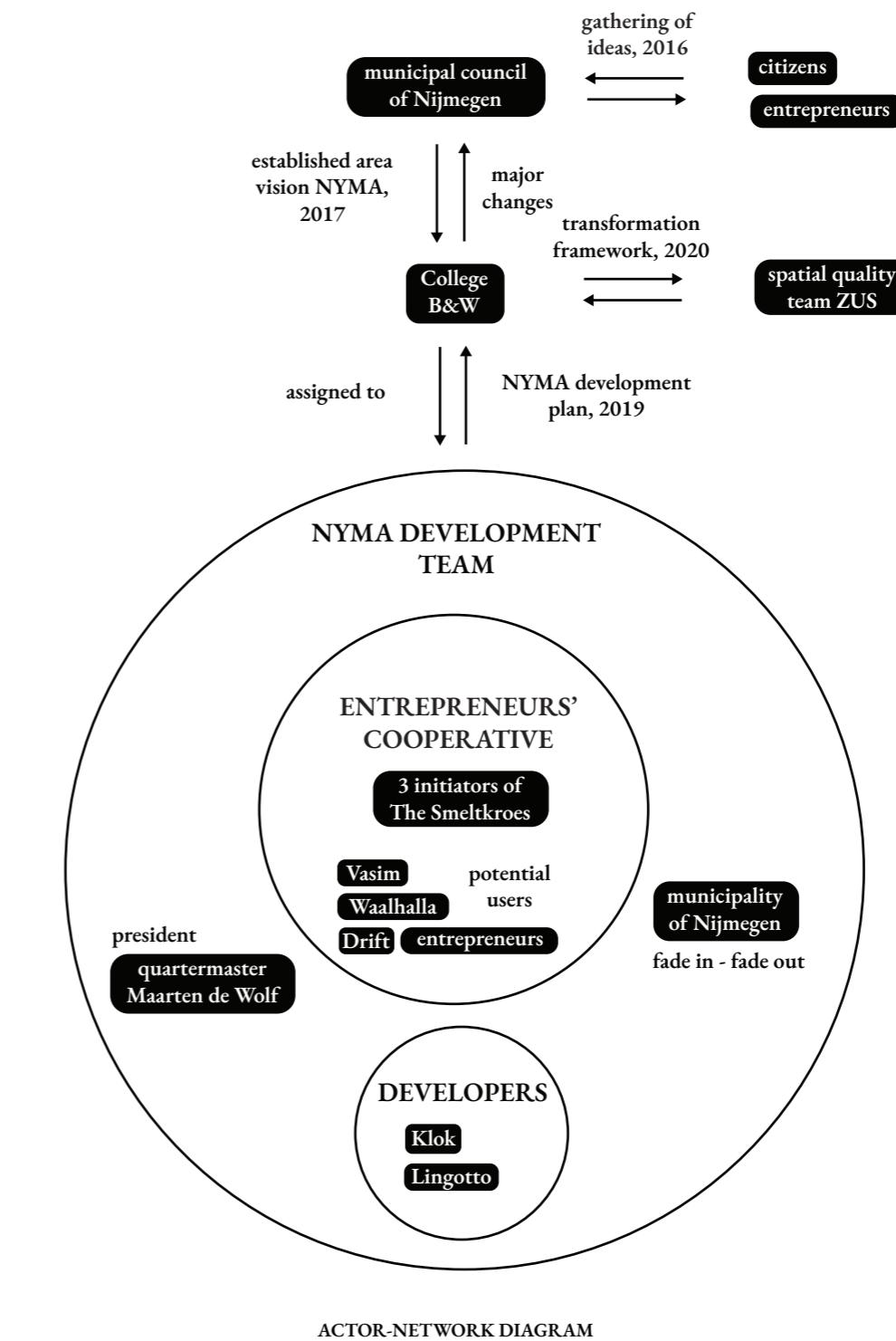
NYMA uses a hybrid ownership model. The Municipality of Nijmegen retains land ownership, leasing it through leasehold agreements, while buildings are sold under market conditions. Building NYMA AB, for instance, is owned by both developers Lingotto & KlokGroep and the entrepreneurs of the makerspace through certificates. This shared ownership model allows investors to partially own the NYMA makerspace, fostering broad support and engagement.

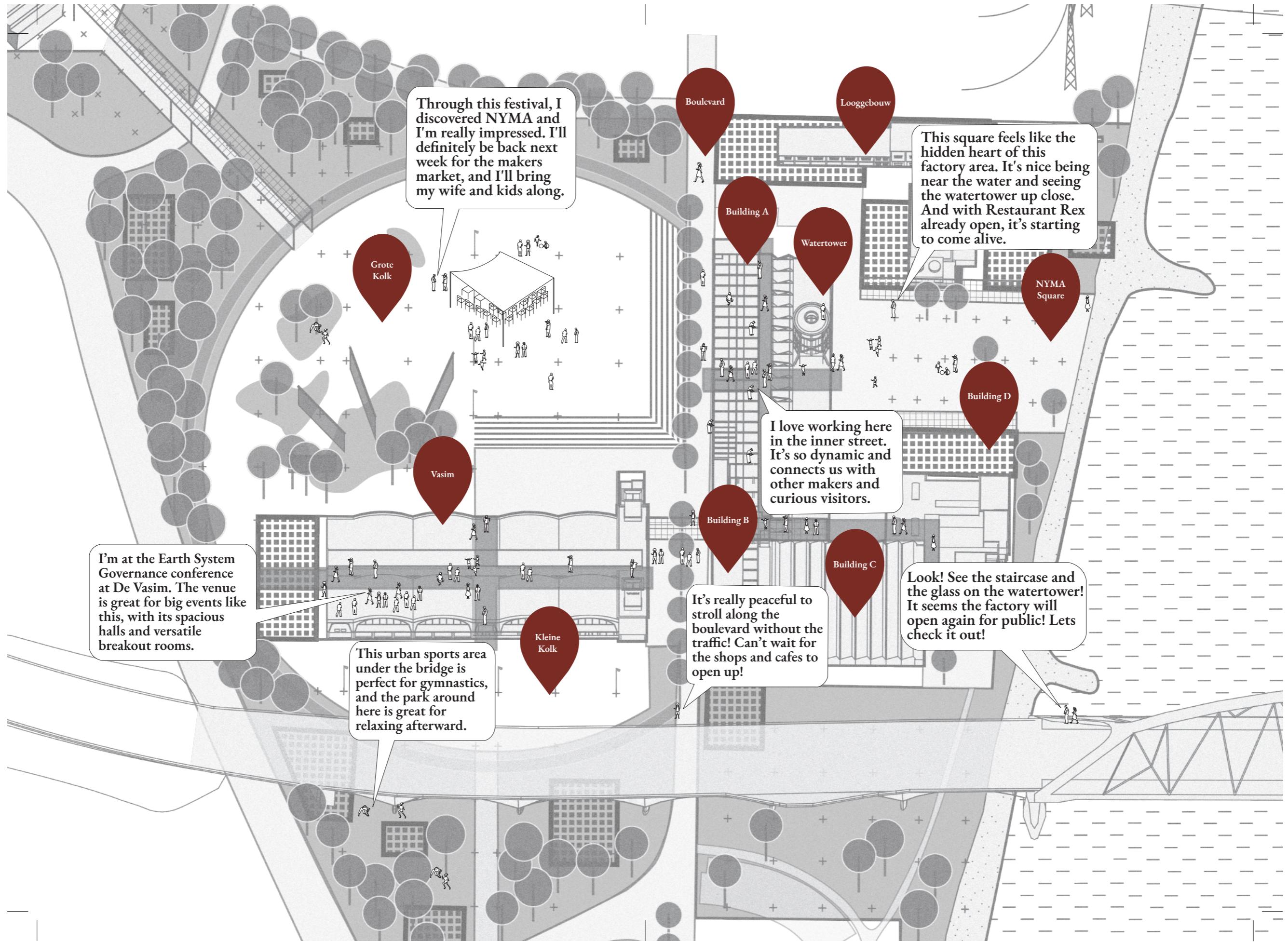
Funding

NYMA utilizes a financial engineering model (FE model) made for complex, long-term developments, optimizing the value of buildings and land. The NYMA makerspace is funded 60% by Triodos Bank and 40% by Ontwikkel-en Herstructureringsmaatschappij Gelderland (OHG). Additionally, ownership is shared through the sale of certificates, which expands support without negatively impacting the balance sheet.

Phasing

In 2019, the development plan for NYMA was established. The first buildings were sold in 2020, initiating renovations for NYMA AB. Vasim's renovation began in 2021 and was completed in 2023. Tenants from De Smeltkroes in De Honig started moving into building B, which required only minor interventions due to being in better condition compared to building A. Currently, Phase 1, including the workshops and exhibition spaces in building AB, has been completed. Phase 2 involves the spoelenbleek area, a new waalpassage, and a concept store. Phase 3 covers the former C3 area, located east of the passage, and Phase 4 will feature a rooftop bar in the watertower.





A Street for Encounter

The NYMA building is designed as a flexible, creative hub with a variety of shared workshops and spaces for makers. It features a covered inner street that connects two main sections, providing accessibility from all sides. The ground floor on the Waal side hosts public-facing designers, while the dike side accommodates production-oriented companies. The upper floor houses service-oriented sectors like graphic design and app development. Clusters of similar disciplines share common facilities, encouraging collaboration. The inner street serves as a vibrant meeting point, enhancing interaction between visitors and creators.

wood construction separation walls



shared workshop being built by the makers

ground floor: product oriented designers manufacturing companies

A Stage for the Makers

The AB building, the oldest of the former NYMA complex, embodies the industrial character that defines the site's atmosphere. Its concrete structure has been preserved and exposed through a glass facade, highlighting the building's history and the creative makers who occupy it. Designers Eek and Dekker, in close collaboration with founders Bas, Wimke, and Bauke, have focused on minimal necessary interventions to ensure the building functions well. This includes using the roof as a source of energy generation and ensuring the structure is thoroughly insulated. The rest of the project lies in the hands of the founders and makers, who are constructing much of the space themselves, mainly using wood that complements rather than competes with the existing concrete factory structure.

The Watertower as a Landmark

The watertower, a municipal monument, is undergoing transformation by Eek and Dekker and will become the landmark and orientation point of NYMA. It will retain its historic exterior while enhancing interior quality. A vertical glass strip on the exterior allows views into the tower, and from inside, occupants will enjoy the view of the Waal and surrounding landscape. A modern, freestanding steel staircase will be added to distinguish itself from the tower. Accessible from the inner street, the tower will include meeting spaces. At the top, beneath the original masonry ring, a restaurant and bar will provide a dynamic, elevated experience.

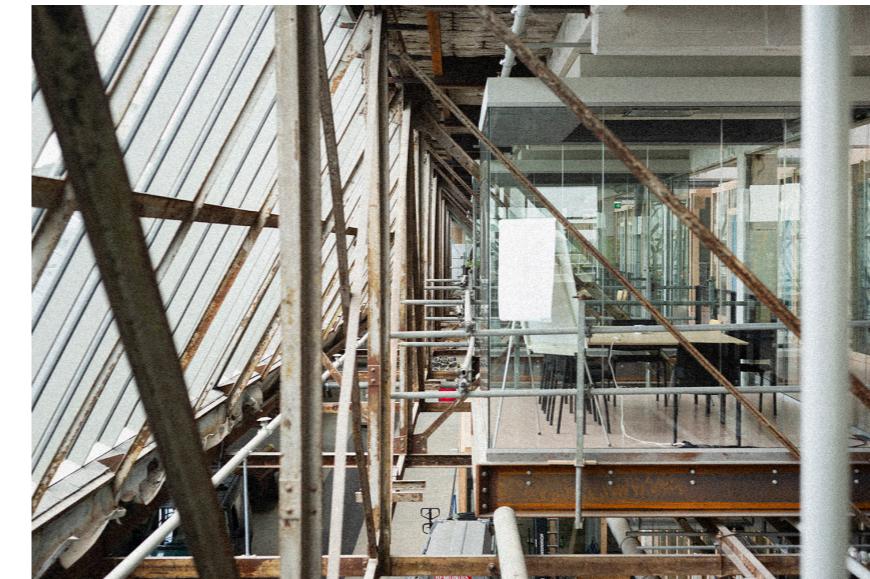
landmark of NYMA, will become an observation tower

visible concrete structure



makers visible behind glass facade

meeting rooms enhance the shed roofs and construction



view on inner street

top floor: graphic designers filmmakers writers photographers app developers ...

Blackhorse Workshop

Blackhorse Workshop is an open-access workshop and community center in London, located in a repurposed warehouse with a large front yard. Established in 2014, it draws on the neighborhood's rich craft and industrial heritage, serving as a space for practical making and cultural activities. The project was initiated, developed, and built by the Turner Prize-winning collective Assemble in collaboration with members of the local community.

Assemble Studio. "Blackhorse Workshop 2014." <https://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects/blackhorse-workshop>.

Pietsch, Susanne, Eireen Schreurs, Sereh Mandias, Dolf Broekhuizen. "Blackhorse Workshop." In *The New Craft School*. Japsam Books, 2018.

Initiator:
Assemble

Users:
Entrepreneurs, hobbyists, artists, designers, and the wider community

Type:
Open-access community workshop with café-bakery and brewery

Architects:
Designed and managed by Assemble

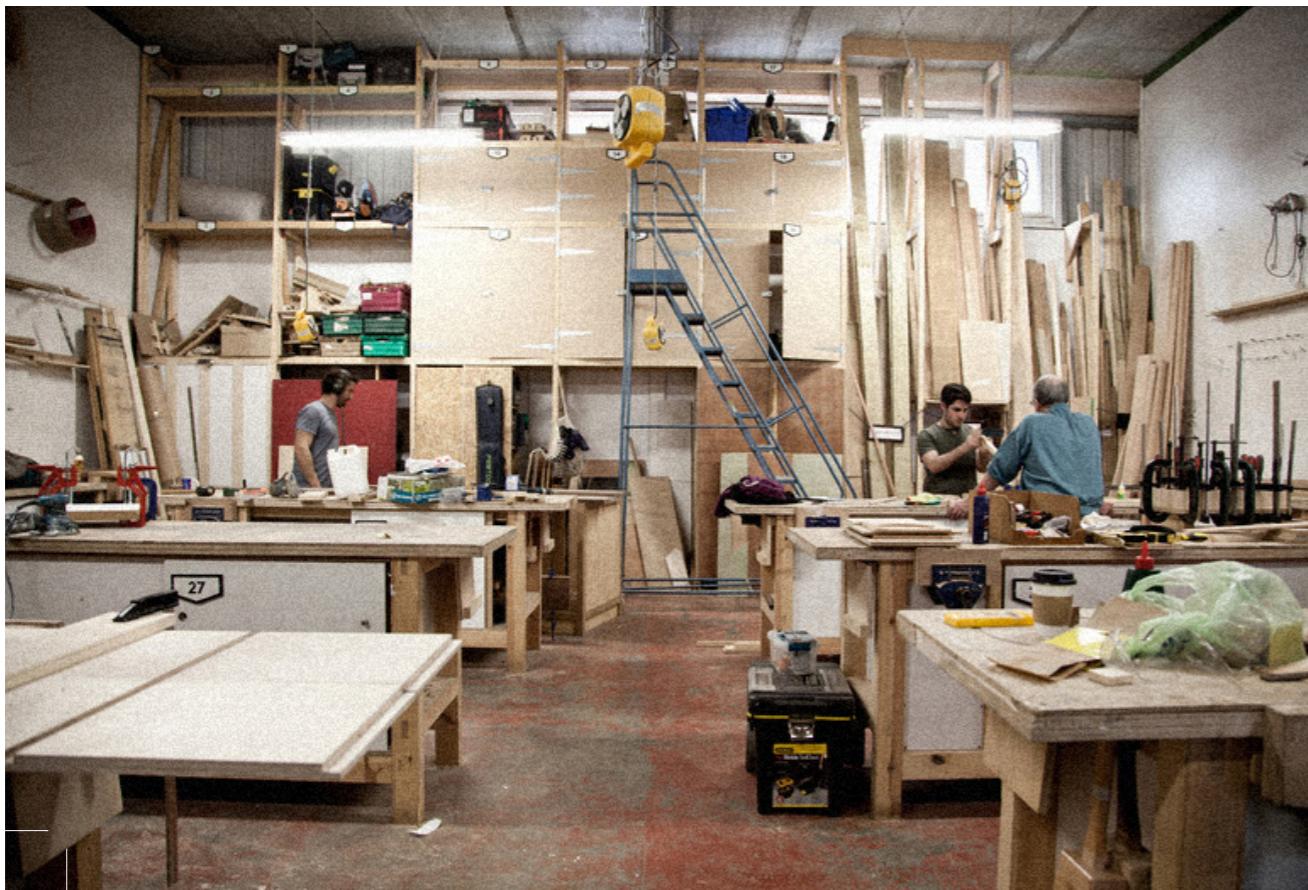
Completion:
2014, with subsequent expansions in 2017

Location:
Blackhorse Lane, Walthamstow, London

Regeneration strategy:
a new communal node, stage for the makers

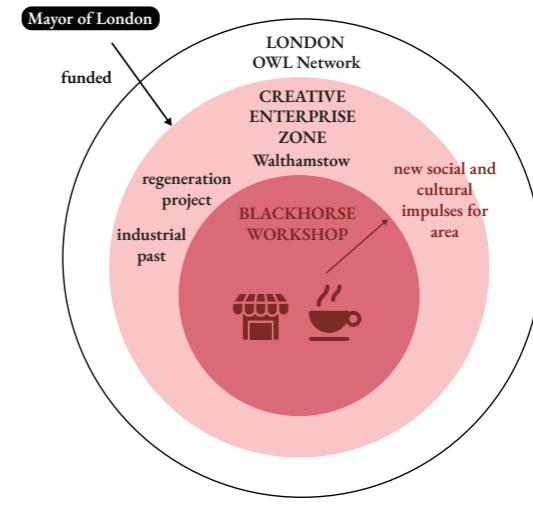
Blackhorse Workshop transforms a former warehouse into a new communal node, offering accessible tools, workspace, and resources for makers.

Commons criteria:
Solidarity and collective responsibility
Accessibility and open access

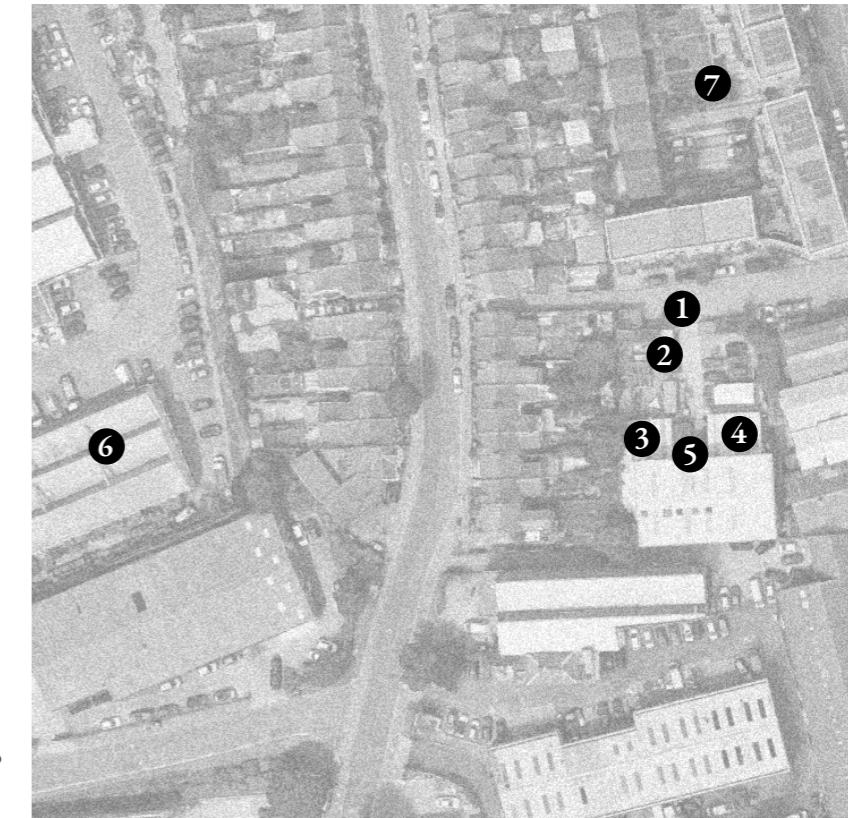


A New Communal Node

Blackhorse Workshop is part of the Open Workshop London (OWL) Network and plays a pivotal role in the regeneration of Walthamstow, a historically industrial area in London now designated as a Creative Enterprise Zone. This designation aims to stimulate local economy and cultural development, attracting both new residents and visitors. Located in a former white goods distribution warehouse, the workshop is a modern reinterpretation of the area's industrial heritage. It provides accessible tools, machines, and workspace to a diverse range of users, from amateurs to professionals, thereby fostering a strong sense of community and supporting local craftsmanship. The initiative received significant support from the Mayor of London's Outer London Fund, emphasizing its strategic importance in linking the neighborhood's past to its evolving identity. By providing affordable access to resources, hosting a variety of community events, and featuring a public café-bakery and brewery, Blackhorse Workshop has established itself as a driving force for local creative and economic activities, significantly impacting the cultural and social fabric of the region.



ROLE IN REGION



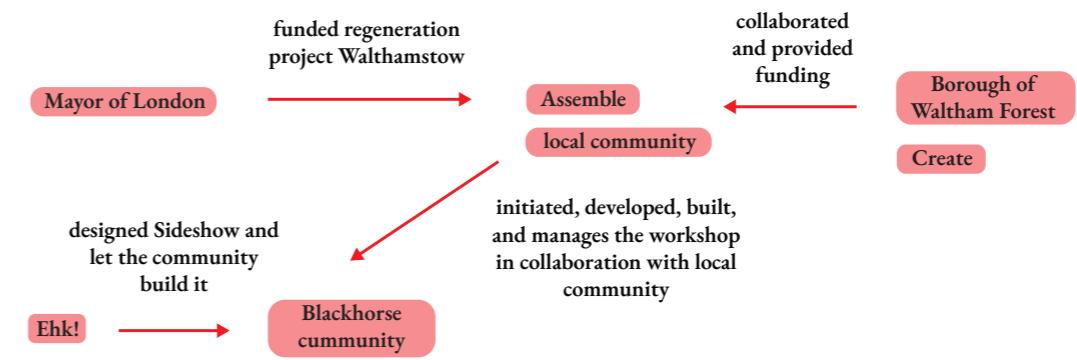
1. Entrance
2. Yard
3. Canopy
4. Café
5. Entrance to Workshop
6. Industrial Estates
7. Housing Area



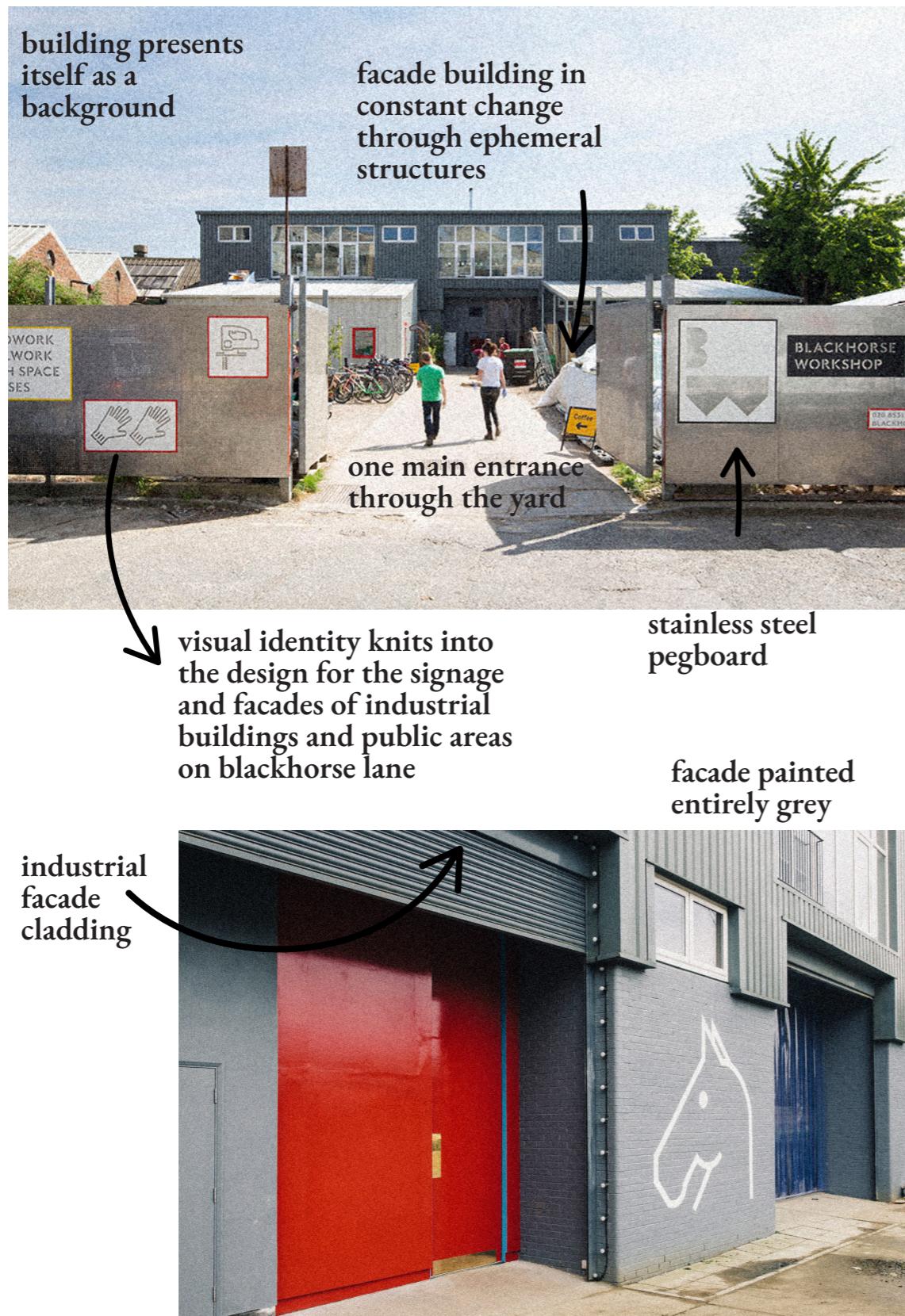
Assemble's Legacy

Established by Assemble in collaboration with the London Borough of Waltham Forest, the Mayor of London, and Create - who also provided crucial funding - the workshop was initially conceived as a pilot project. Over time, it has evolved into a permanent community hub. The organization operates on a membership basis, with users paying fees for access to tools, studio space, and educational classes. This approach provides a steady stream of income that helps cover operational costs, maintenance, and further development, while being accessible to a broad audience.

The phased development of the workshop included initial setup in 2014 and subsequent expansions in 2017, adding new spaces for a café, office, and covered outdoor workspace. In 2017, the Sideshow, a colorful satellite venue designed by Ehk! and built by workshop members, was also established to showcase activities and engage with the site's industrial heritage. Assemble continues to play an active role in the strategic management and governance of the workshop, ensuring its ongoing relevance and alignment with community needs.



ACTOR-NETWORK DIAGRAM



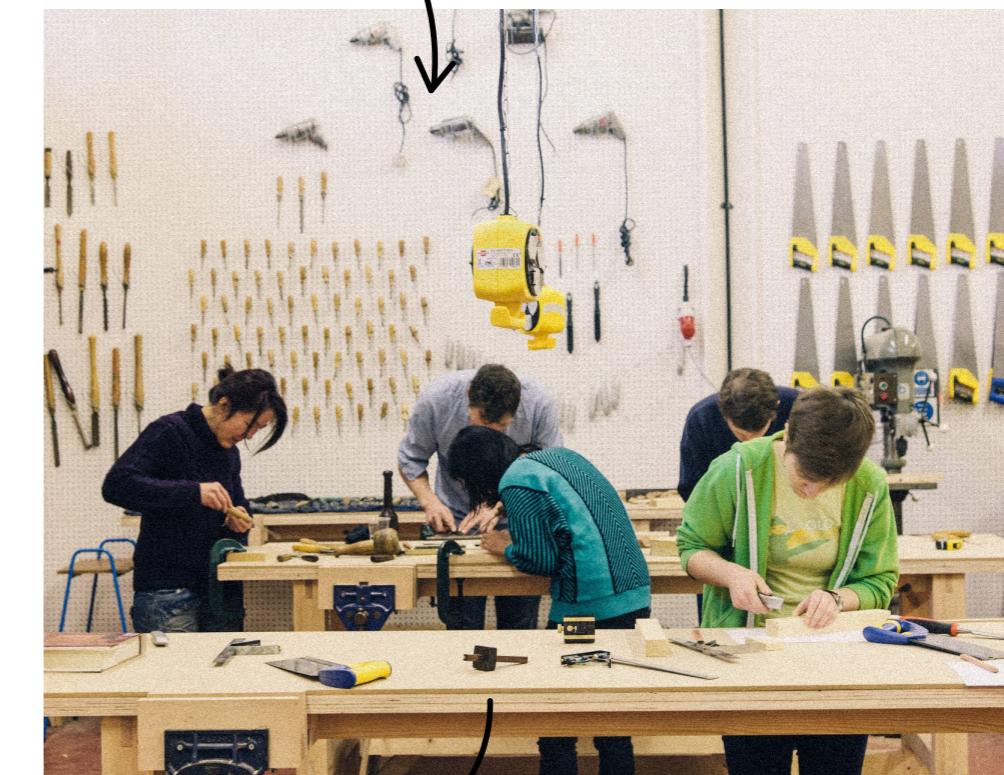
A Stage for the Makers

Architecturally, Blackhorse Workshop blends utilitarian design with custom craftsmanship. The building's exterior, featuring signal-colored doors against a grey façade, acts as a dynamic stage for the varied activities within its yard. This façade evolves with the temporary structures erected for different projects and events, reflecting the workshop's vibrant and evolving nature.

Internally, the use of perforated white panels (pegboard) enhances functionality by allowing tools and objects to be hung for storage or display, while also providing sound absorption. The furniture, crafted from untreated wood beams and panels, embodies the workshop's practical and economical approach. This careful integration of standard elements and custom craftsmanship highlights the workshop as a stage for makers.

The layout includes workshops for wood and metal on the ground floor, with an upper floor featuring studios and communal workspaces. The expansions, which include a new café and outdoor workspace, have been designed to accommodate the growing community and its needs.

pegboard absorbs sound and allows for objects to be hung from it for storage or display



Common Ground

The Brick Factory, Prishtina's largest post-industrial site, has undergone a remarkable transformation. Built in 1947, the factory once played a central role in Kosovo's development, producing the bricks that shaped the city's urban fabric. After years under the management of the Kosovo Privatisation Agency, it was reclaimed by the Municipality of Prishtina in 2021, and laid in the hands of the citizens, sparking discussions about its future.

During Manifesta 14, the European nomadic biennial, the site was one of 25 locations involved in the ambition to reclaim public space across Prishtina. Raumlaborberlin, a collective of experimental architects and urbanologists, led a 100-day eco-urban learning laboratory, "[Working on] Common Ground." Together with local and international collectives, they reimagined the space, transforming it into a common ground. Using the factory's iconic bricks, participants of the two-week summer school kickoff built a kitchen, bar, auditorium, and a swimming pool.

The program connected the site's layered history to contemporary challenges like sustainability, decontamination, and circular economies. People of all ages and backgrounds were invited to join in the many activities, ranging from storytelling and archaeology to gardening and cooking, complemented by music, film, and visual arts from local creators.



Rabeyrin, Eddie. "Legacy of Manifesta in Public Spaces of Prishtina." *Prishtina Insight*, June 20, 2023.
<https://prishtinainsight.com/legacy-of-manifesta-in-public-spaces-of-prishtina-mag/>.

Raumlaborberlin. "[Working on] Common Ground." 2022.
<https://raumlabor.net/working-on-common-ground/>.

Manifesta. "Brick Factory." 2022.
<https://manifesta14.org/event/brick-factory/>.

Initiator:
Manifesta 14

Participants:
Local citizens, former factory workers, artists, architects, and other collaborators

Type:
Participatory urban regeneration project, cultural hub, eco-urban laboratory

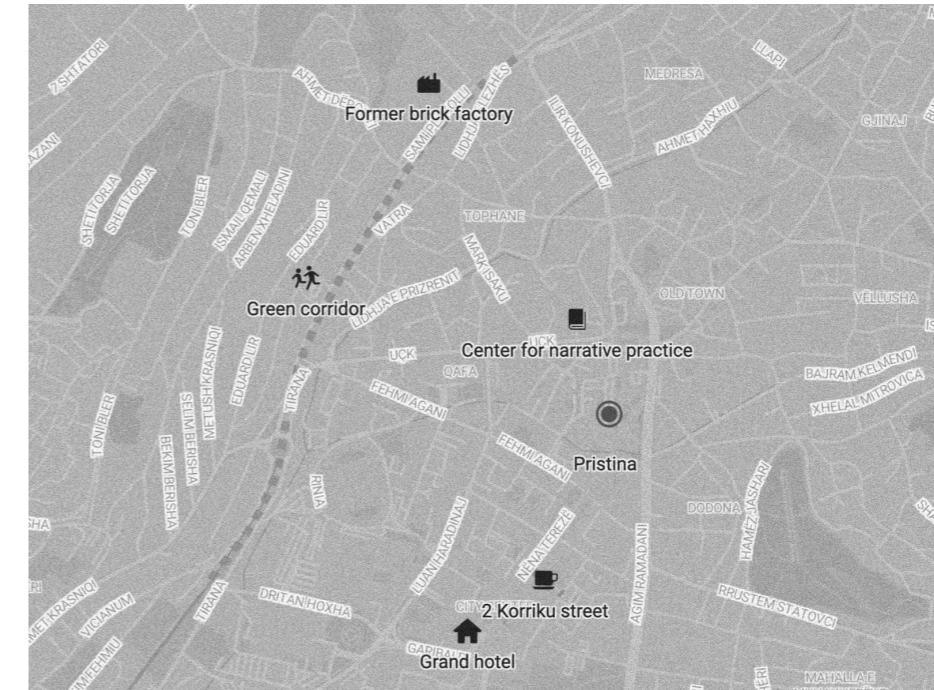
Architects:
Raumlaborberlin

Completion:
100-day laboratory as part of Manifesta 14, 2022

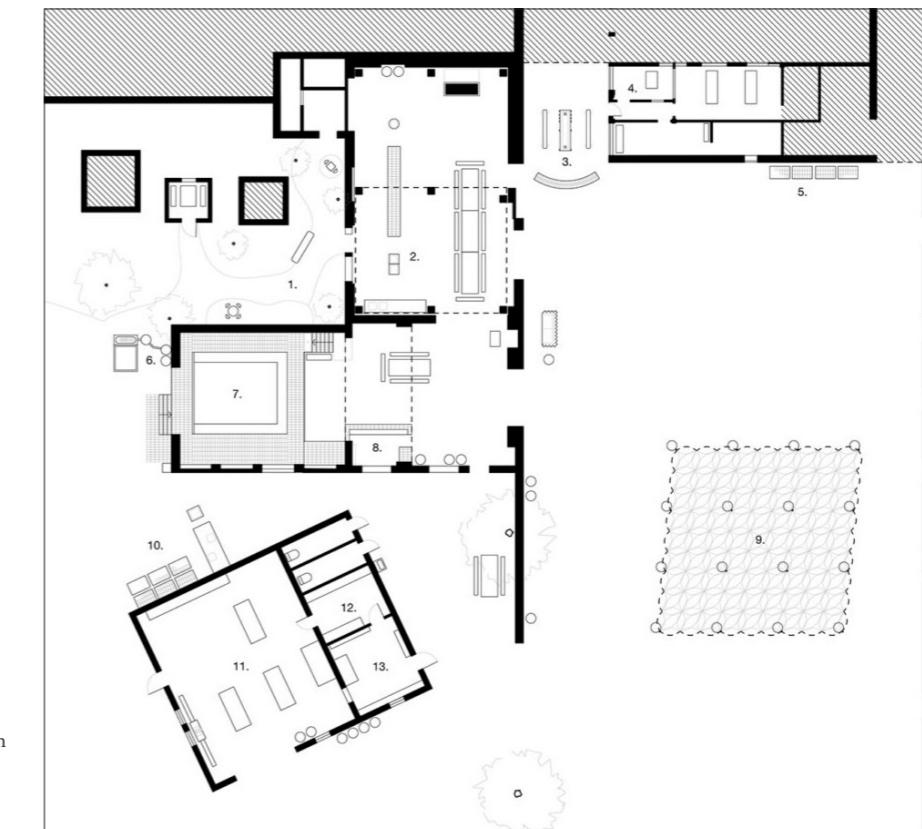
Location:
Prishtina, Kosovo

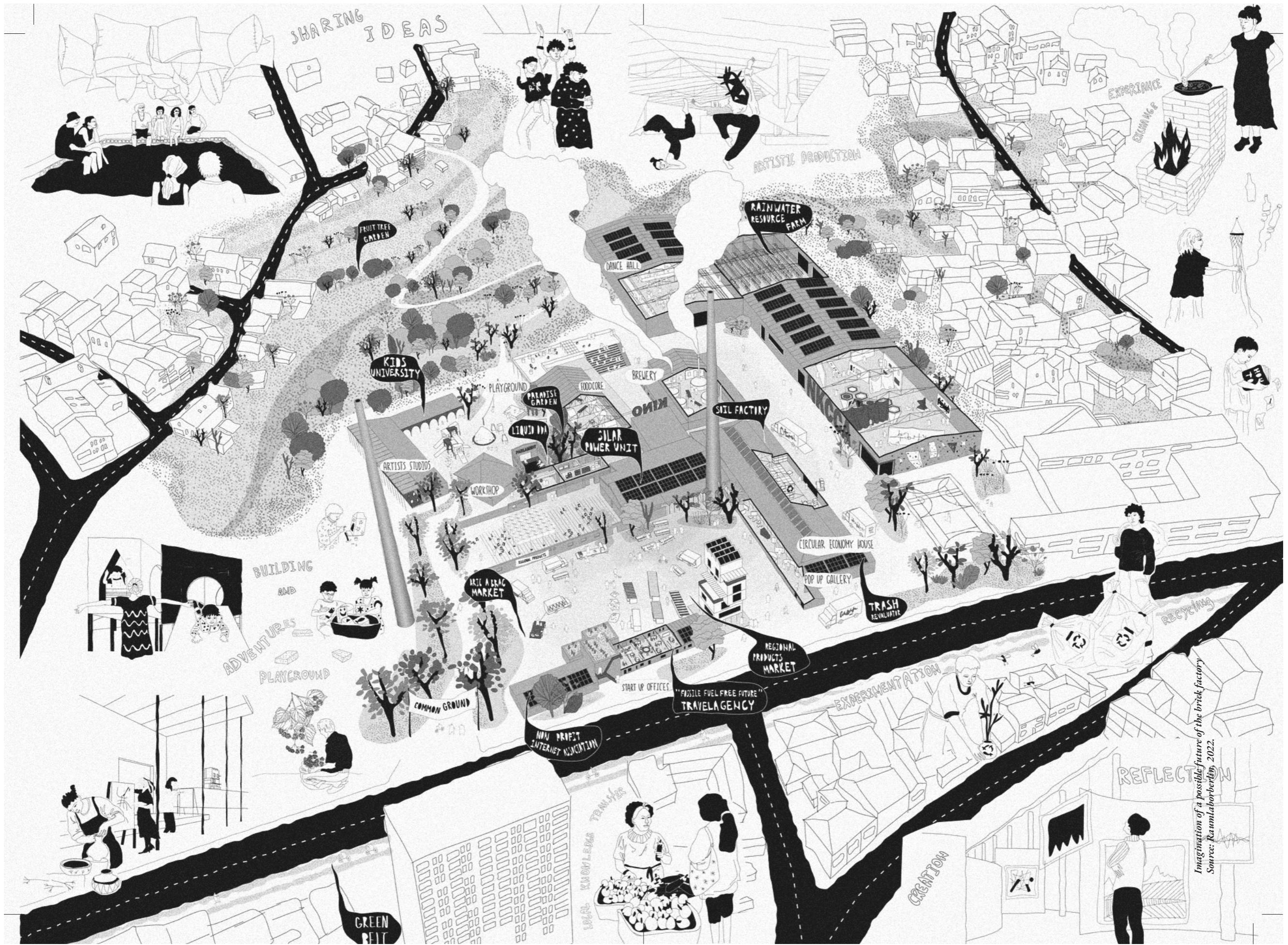
Regeneration strategy:
participatory and experimental regeneration
Common Ground reclaims a former brick factory, returning it to public ownership and allowing citizens to shape its future through workshops, storytelling and art, as part of a traveling European biennial of contemporary art and urbanism

Commons criteria:
Decentralisation of power
Freedom of creation and autonomy



25 locations across Prishtina transformed during Manifesta 14. These 5 locations continue to reflect the impact of the biennial.
Source: Eddie Rabeyrin, 2023.







Round table conference on the future of the Brick Factory.
Source: Tea Marta, 2022.

Bar construction of bricks harvested from the abandoned kiln as part of “The Adapter” workshop led by raumlaborberlin (Jan Liesegang and Kipras Kazlauskas).
Source: raumlaborberlin, 2022.



The “Site as a Living Archive” workshop, led by Millonialiu (Klodiana Millona and Veronika Zaripova): exploring the Brick Factory’s history through oral histories, mapping workers’ experiences, ethnic dynamics, and the stories of the bricks that shaped Prishtina.
Source: raumlaborberlin, 2022.

“The Sources” workshop led by STEALTH.Unlimited (Marc Neelen and Ana Džokić): rethinking de-centralized energy systems by hacking the city away from climate crisis and into energy independence.
Source: Ana Džokić, 2022.



Programmatic Conclusions

The long-term success of the industrial reactivation strategies implemented by NYMA, Blackhorse Workshop, and Common Ground is difficult to measure, as NYMA is still under development, and the Common Ground project had a temporary approach in its essence. Its emphasis was more on dreaming and testing possible futures for the factory rather than establishing a permanent plan. However, now that the festival has concluded, the entrance to the former industrial site remains guarded, and recent activity suggests that something is indeed happening.

All three projects are situated within larger cities and are positioned in strategic locations on the peripheries, in former industrial areas close to a main road. These sites have an important role in the regeneration of these post-industrial areas and are set to become creative epicenters in their cities. The projects represent a modern reinterpretation of the former factory production processes. NYMA and Blackhorse provide a fertile ground for creative entrepreneurship through shared workshops, ateliers, and other collaborative spaces, while also serving as communal nodes for the neighborhood with a café, events, and workshop spaces that are also intended for amateur purposes. Common Ground also played a broader role within Manifesta's ambition to reclaim public space across Prishtina and was centered on making through creative workshops, engaging local residents in the process of transformation.

An important observation is that these former factory ruins, with their historical significance and vast spaces, offer a unique environment perfectly suited for experimentation and the testing of possible futures.

Programmatic strategies for the reactivation of an industrial site:

- Complement the existing offerings of the city.
- Serve as a **communal node** for the neighborhood providing opportunities for social connection (eg., through a café, events, open workshops).
- Cultivate a **fertile ground for creative entrepreneurship** (eg., through workshop spaces, ateliers, co-working spaces).
- Offer **informal learning opportunities** to engage the community in skill development and knowledge-sharing (eg., through partnerships with local schools, mentorship opportunities for young entrepreneurs).
- Heal the environment, addressing both pollution and the negative associations shaped by industrial activity, while promoting **sustainable manufacturing and local production**.
- Embrace **temporariness and experimentation** (eg., through laboratories, markets, and events).

Spatial Conclusions

At the urban level, NYMA and Blackhorse Workshop function as magnet objects that attract people and generate a network of activities around them contributing to the broader regeneration of their neighborhoods. Both NYMA and Common Ground (in a more temporary way) integrate a boulevard that connects these sites to the surrounding city. This element plays an important role in opening up and inviting pedestrians into previously more isolated, gated industrial areas. NYMA takes it a step further with the transformation of its tower, acting as a prominent landmark visible from afar. Blackhorse Workshop takes a different, more subtle approach, inviting people through a visual identity that integrates into the signage of the surrounding streets and public spaces.

All three projects have a yard or large open area that is used for events and as an outdoor extension of the activities of the makers. These areas are constantly changing, with temporary structures being assembled and disassembled. On the interior both NYMA and Blackhorse Workshop have a clear separation between visitors and makers, providing the privacy makers need and ensuring the safety of visitors, while still enabling and encouraging interaction. In both projects, the lower floor houses the workshops, while the upper floor has a more private character with studios.

In terms of materialization NYMA and Blackhorse Workshop both have a similar approach that blends utilitarianism and craftsmanship. NYMA's architectural approach highlights the existing structures without competing with them. The architects made only the minimal interventions necessary to ensure usability and meet technical requirements. The makers build the rest, mainly using timber for its ease of use and its contrast with the existing concrete structures. Similarly, Blackhorse Workshop's architectural interventions on the exterior blend in with the surrounding industrial area, becoming more of a stage for the activities taking place in the yard. In preparation for the 100-day lab of Common Ground, only the essential work was carried out to make the site safe and accessible for participants. During the lab itself, the site became a playground for experimentation, focusing on materials and processes, with participants transforming and reworking materials on-site.

Spatial strategies for the reactivation of an industrial site:

- Function as a **magnet object**, make use of its strategic location, and act as a catalyst for broader regeneration.
- Establish a **boulevard or path** connecting the site to the surrounding city, playing an important role in opening up and inviting pedestrians into the previously isolated industrial area.
- Establish a strong **visual identity** through clear wayfinding elements (e.g., signage, landmarks) that attract attention and signal activity.
- Provide a **yard** or large open area as a flexible space for events, serving as an outdoor extension of the activities inside.
- Ensure a clear **division between makers and visitors**, while still allowing open access and interaction.
- Organize **clusters of similar disciplines** to share common facilities, encouraging collaboration.
- Balance **pragmatic interventions with crafted details**.
- Ensure that new interventions do **not compete** with the existing structures.
- Encourage **hands-on construction** to empower users to shape and design their own spaces, strengthen community bonds, and foster a sense of responsibility and agency.
- Experiment with **on-site materials and resources**.

Organizational Conclusions

The reactivation strategies of NYMA, Blackhorse Workshop, and Common Ground stem from the municipality's vision to revitalize post-industrial areas, yet they are not top-down initiatives. In the case of the NYMA terrain, which is the largest of the three projects, the municipality plays a "fade-in, fade-out" role and is part of the development team. At the start of the project, a gathering of ideas took place involving citizens, and an entrepreneurs' cooperative was formed. This cooperative has been part of the development team from the beginning, reflecting the needs and desires of the community. Similarly, Assemble worked closely with the local community in developing Blackhorse Workshop, while Common Ground engaged citizens and former factory workers by collecting oral histories and hosting discussions in a former swimming pool that functioned as a parliament.

Each project has a core management team. At NYMA, a development team oversees the project, with a transformation framework by ZUS to ensure architectural consistency. Assemble continues to manage Blackhorse Workshop, while Raumlaborberlin's ongoing involvement after the municipality's takeover of the Common Ground factory site remains unclear.

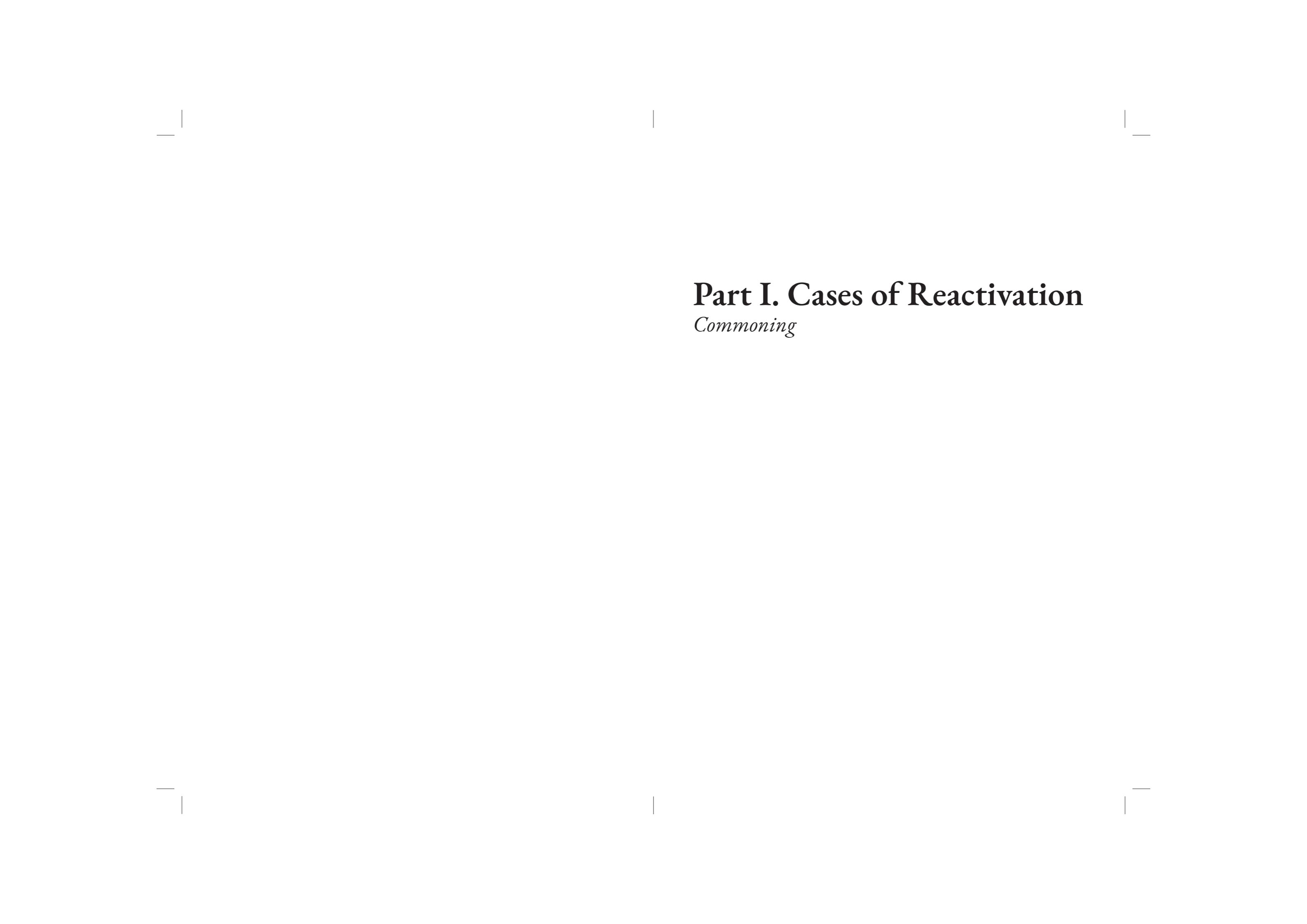
Funding and ownership models vary across the projects. NYMA AB uses a hybrid ownership structure with developers and entrepreneurs, while the municipality retains land ownership. It's funded by entrepreneur certificates, the developers, and external sources like Triodos Bank. Blackhorse Workshop was initially funded by the Mayor of London's regeneration project and is now sustained by membership fees and café income, with municipal ownership likely. Common Ground was mainly funded by Manifesta. In all cases, funding and ownership seem to prioritize social and cultural value over financial gain, ensuring that the projects remain accessible and beneficial to the communities they serve.

The projects follow an organic, phased approach. They all started in a more temporary or experimental way: Honig before NYMA, Blackhorse as a pilot, and Common Ground had a temporary nature before transitioning to a more permanent solution.

At NYMA, the first tenants moved from the Honig into the building in the best condition, revitalizing the site and generating rental income. Restoration works began in the heart of the site, the oldest part of the factory with the tower, which carries the heritage and identity of the place. In all cases, placemaking through events and markets is part of the strategy to attract new visitors and build connections with the local community.

Organizational strategies for the reactivation of an industrial site:

- Involve all stakeholders in decision-making processes early on.
- Develop a **transformation framework** to ensure consistency, guiding all interventions and designs to align with the overall vision.
- Establish a dedicated **management team** to oversee the project, ensuring its long-term functionality, managing maintenance tasks, and adapting to the evolving needs of the community to maintain its relevance.
- Secure **diverse funding** sources that prioritize social and cultural value over financial gain, ensuring the capacity to withstand external challenges, and create self-sustaining revenue streams (e.g., from cafes, membership fees) to cover operational costs, maintenance, and further development.
- Ensure **shared ownership** models that allow for a fair distribution of power and collective responsibility (e.g., through selling certificates).
- Implement **organic phasing**, starting with temporary uses to allow for gradual, adaptable development, reducing risk and aligning with the evolving needs of the site and community.
- Start by occupying the buildings in the best condition, and **prioritize the restoration of the heart of the site**, which holds the identity and heritage of the area.
- Organize events for placemaking, attracting new stakeholders and building connections with the local community.



Part I. Cases of Reactivation

Commoning

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Prinzessinnengarten

Prinzessinnengarten (Princess Garden), located in Berlin's Kreuzberg district, began in 2009 as a community-driven initiative to transform a state-owned brownfield site into an urban garden that fosters collective learning, local food production, and social engagement. The project is rooted in the belief that sustainable, alternative models for urban life can emerge through collaborative practices and is supported by an economic model in which a bar and restaurant generate income to maintain the garden and provide fair wages for their staff.

The Neighborhood Academy, established in 2015 within the garden, functions as a self-organized platform for knowledge-sharing and skill-building, hosting

workshops, events, and programs that go beyond the established educational system. Central to the academy's activities is Die Laube, an open wooden structure open to all non-commercial uses, built collaboratively by volunteers, students, and craftsmen. This space is designed to evolve over time, reflecting the organic and participatory nature of the garden itself.

The garden, the Neighborhood Academy, and Die Laube work together to nurture the exchange of know-how and ideas, based on the belief that social, material, and mental transformations go hand-in-hand, making Prinzessinnengarten a living example of commoning.



Initiators:
Prinzessinnengarten - Nomadic Green
Neighborhood Academy - Marco Clausen and Åsa Sonjasdotter

Users:
Local residents, volunteers, activists, and visitors from various backgrounds, including schools and kindergartens

Type:
Urban garden, community hub, and neighborhood academy

Architects:
Die Laube planned by Quest
Prinzessinnengarten planned by Common Grounds e.V. and Nachbarschaftsakademie

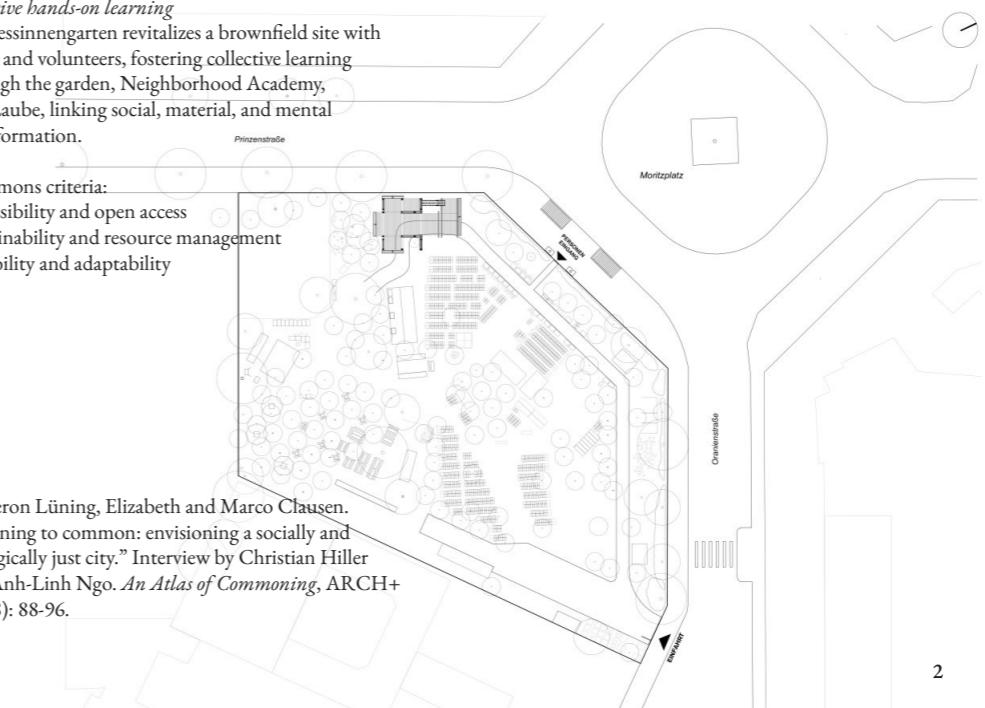
Completion:
Garden - established in 2009
Die Laube - established in 2015

Location:
Berlin, Germany

Project area:
6,000 m²

Regeneration strategy:
collective hands-on learning
Prinzessinnengarten revitalizes a brownfield site with locals and volunteers, fostering collective learning through the garden, Neighborhood Academy, and Laube, linking social, material, and mental transformation.

Commons criteria:
Accessibility and open access
Sustainability and resource management
Flexibility and adaptability



“We cannot change the world with these small interventions, but we can shift people's perspectives, in that they experience first-hand that there are places that function, despite being different.”
Marco Clausen



The ground floor of the Laube hosts workshops and events.
Source: dielaube.org, 2016.

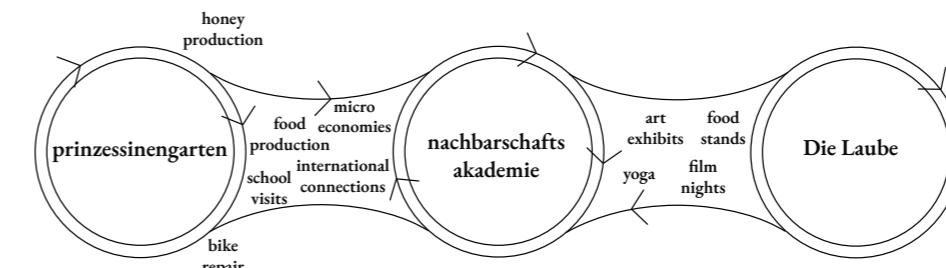


The bar and restaurant serve seasonal dishes made from garden-grown produce and locally sourced ingredients, reflecting the garden's principles of ecology and solidarity economy.

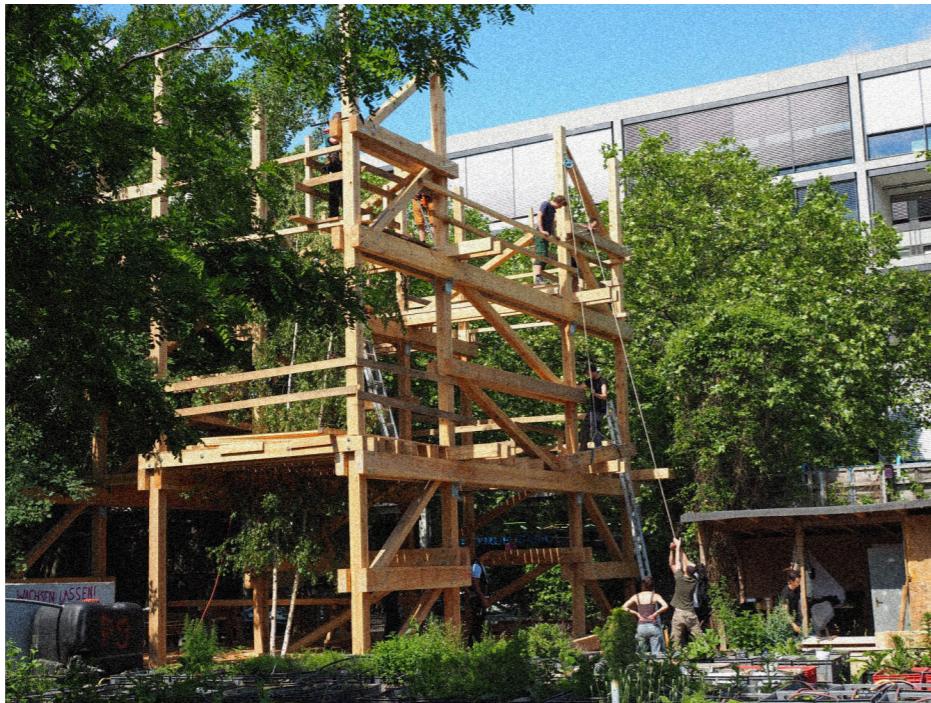
Source: Marco Clausen, 2010.



People work together in the garden, gaining practical skills through hands-on activities like growing vegetables, producing honey or repairing bikes.
Source: Prinzessinnengarten, 2013.



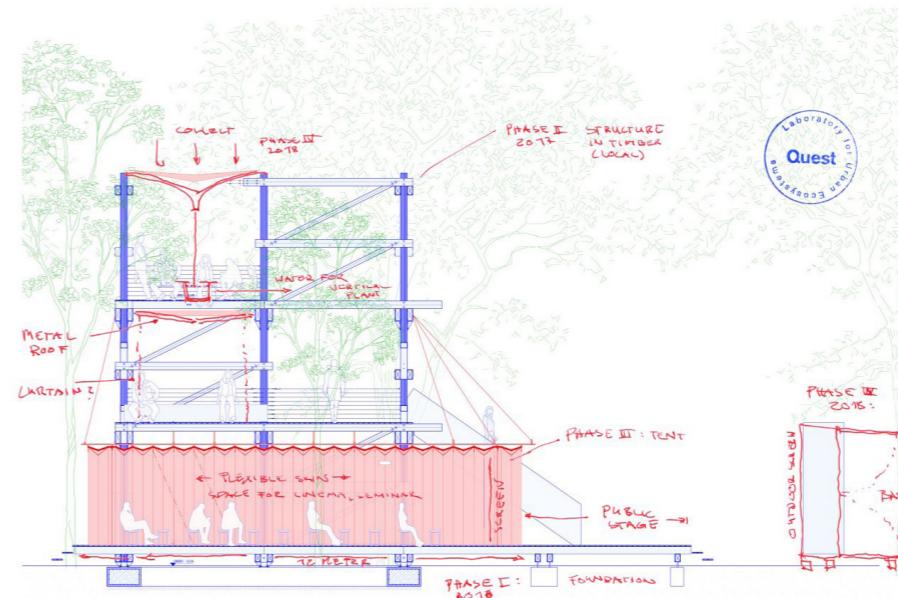
ACTOR-NETWORK DIAGRAM



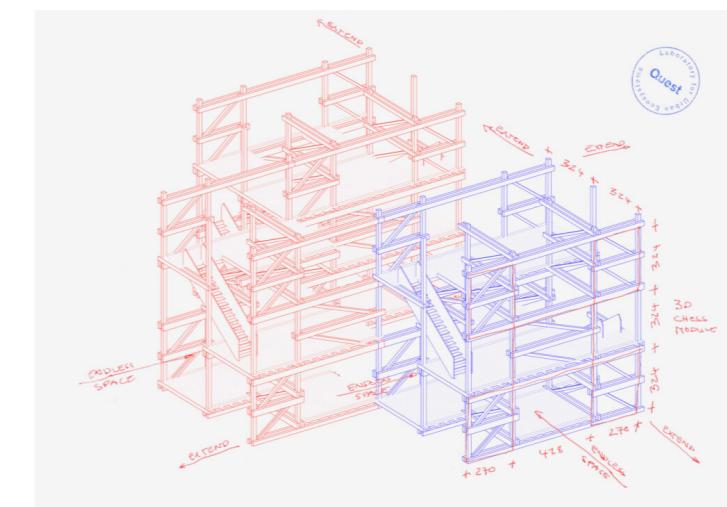
The construction of Die Laube was a collaborative process, planned by users and experts, and self-built by volunteers, trainees, and carpenters, making it a meaningful experience of community building.



The structure was built using traditional carpentry methods, without large machinery. Pine wood, threaded rods, bolts, and Geka dowels secure the elements, allowing for easy assembly and disassembly.



Die Laube is a flexible, DIY-inspired structure, that invites users to transform and expand it over time, making architecture an ongoing process. The solid foundation makes a clear statement: We are here to stay
Source: Quest, 2015.



Expandability of the structure
Source: Quest, 2015.

Stad in de Maak

Based in Rotterdam, Stad in de Maak (City in the Making) is an association transforming vacant buildings into affordable housing and communal spaces managed collectively. The project targets areas where real estate markets fail, leasing buildings from developers for three to ten years in exchange for restoration and maintenance. Instead of capital, temporary users invest sweat equity, fostering a circular economy that supports alternative living and working spaces. Established after the 2008 financial crisis by Erik Jutten, Piet Vollaard, and Stealth.unlimited, Stad in de Maak aims to decommodefy housing and create long-term, collectively owned spaces. Initially addressing temporary needs, the initiative is now exploring permanent solutions inspired by Community Land Trusts in the UK and the US, and Mietshäuser Syndikat in Germany.



Founders:

Erik Jutten, Piet Vollaard, and Ana Džokić, Marc Neelen (Stealth.unlimited)

Users:

Temporary residents, artists, and small business owners

Type:

Redevelopment of vacant buildings into affordable housing, workspaces, and community spaces

Completion:

Network of 7 properties 2014 - 2017 (still active today)
Pension Almonde 2019 - 2021 (demolished)
Vlaardingen Commons - ongoing

Location:

Rotterdam and Vlaardingen, Netherlands

Regeneration strategy:

sweat equity and micro-economies
Stad in de Maak transforms vacant buildings into affordable housing and communal spaces, run by residents through sweat equity and micro-economies.

Commons criteria:

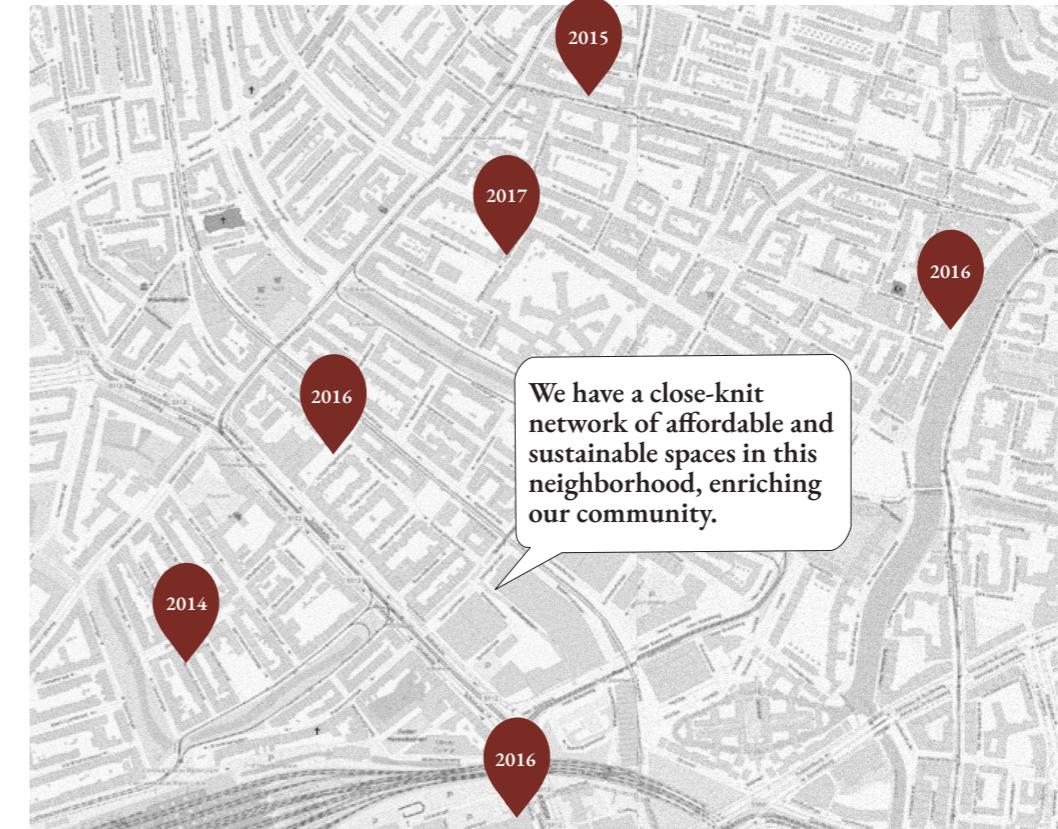
Solidarity
Collective responsibility

Revitalizing Rotterdam's Neighbourhoods

Stad in de Maak transformed vacant houses into affordable housing, creating a network of seven buildings in Rotterdam North from 2014 to 2017. These spaces remain active and constantly evolving, with new additions like the independent bookstore KIOSK, which opened in one of the buildings in 2023. Another project, Pension Almonde, operated from 2019 to 2021, offering temporary housing for diverse urban nomads in 53 soon-to-be-demolished homes. Currently, the Vlaardingen Commons project is in development, providing spaces for short-term newcomers and continuing the initiative's focus on innovative, community-driven use of space.

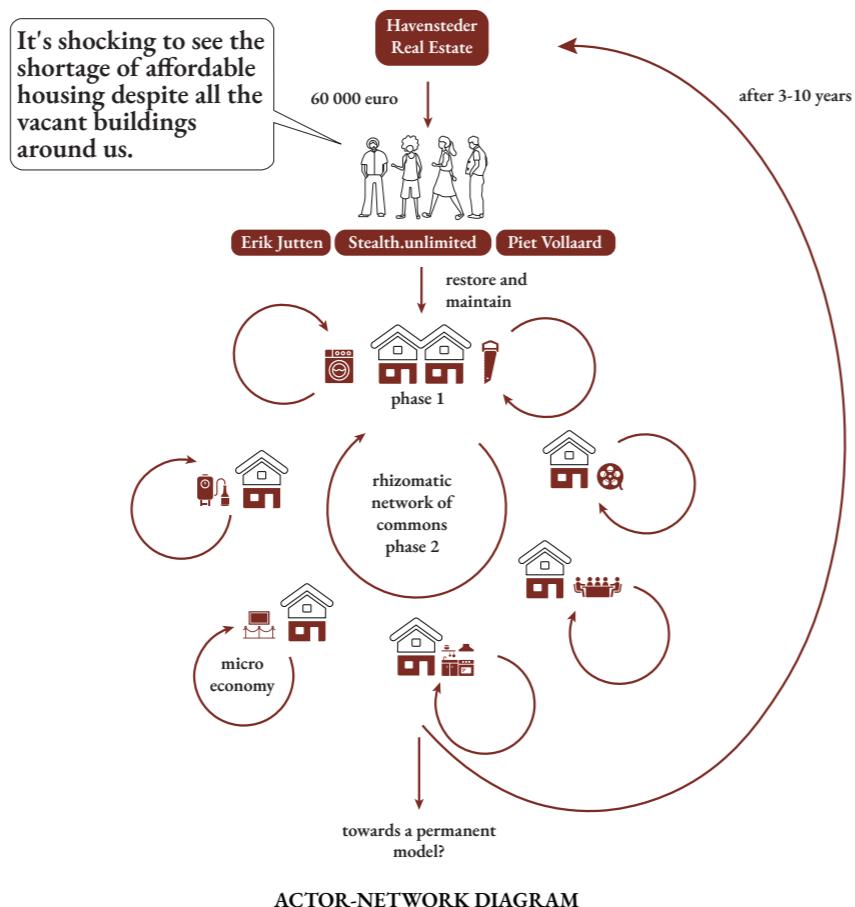
Gatti, Mirko, Stefan Gruber, Christian Hiller, Max Kaldenhoff, Elke aus dem Moore, Anh-Linh Ngo, Christine Rüb. "Stad in de Maak: Unlocking property through temporary lease, sweat equity, and circular economies." *An Atlas of Commoning*, ARCH+ (2018): 80-81.

Stichting Stad in de Maak. "Stad in de Maak." 2018. <https://www.stadindemaak.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018-SidM-NL-A5-web.pdf>.



Sweat Equity and Micro-Economies
 In 2008 Erik Jutten, Piet Vollaard, and Ana Džokić, and Marc Neelen of Stealth. unlimited partnered with not-for-profit housing developer Havensteder. Faced with the prospect of losing 60,000 euros over 10 years to maintain two vacant buildings, Havensteder allowed the group to use these buildings and funds for restoration. Thus, Stad in de Maak was born, initially revitalizing two buildings on Pieter de Raadtstraat in 2014. The initiative expanded to manage a network of seven buildings in Rotterdam North.

Stad in de Maak operates on a model of sweat equity, where participants contribute labor instead of capital. Each building fosters its own micro-economy, utilizing the skills of inhabitants for maintaining and improving the spaces while creating community-oriented facilities. For example, a carpenter used to operate a woodshop on the ground floor of one of the buildings, providing a communal resource while living and working rent-free for two years. While each building is managed autonomously, collectively they form a commons-based support system.



'MEENTREGELS' (rules for the commons)

From the practical experiences gained with its common spaces, Stad in de Maak has developed its own set of rules (not definitive yet, if ever). In the particular case of Schiestraat building and its workshop (basement) and event space (ground floor), these could be as of December 16, 2017 (e-mail from Piet Vollaard):

- The commons are freely accessible for use to the entire Stad in de Maak collective and external users, and they are free from 'rent'. However, a small contribution is requested from external users (non-tenants) for the use of electricity and maintenance.
- It is an unobstructed space (in essence the space is kept as empty as possible, and is available to different users for temporary occupation by and for various functions). There is no exclusion of use, as long as the particular occupancy falls within the limits of the commons.
- The commons are governed by the users on the base of a consensus democracy and without any hierarchy, boss or company/institution in command (however, there will have to be a steward to ensure the safe use of machines and the fair distribution of space, but this steward is overseen by the collective).
- The use of space by one individual must not frustrate others who wish to use it (this is a crucial rule: equality forms the basis). Nobody can claim space for themselves in the long-term (this leads to the depletion of the collective; or a 'tragedy of the commons', google it if you want to know what it is).
- Anyone using the space must (if possible) leave it empty and clean – a 'Clean Space Policy' – and where possible better-looking than it was before use.
- Each commons has its limits and rules. Physical limits (what does and what does not belong to the commons?), limits of use (what is not possible to do?) and property limits (specific items are personal property and may not be used by others – lock them away if you are not there, others may be used by everyone or are in any case collectively owned).

These rules are fluid and are set and/or adjusted by the assembly of users (in particular those rules regarding the limits and the rules of usage).



large
industrial
shelving
unit
for kitchen
and
everything
that needs
to be
temporarily
removed

every event is an opportunity
to contribute something new
(donation of a floor, furniture,
railing, paint...)



carpentry
workshop
helped with the
renovation of the
building in return
for two years' free
rent

Embracing Flexibility and Reuse

Stad in de Maak reimagines urban living and working by integrating diverse living arrangements and adaptable workspaces. On the ground floors of the buildings, commons are designed with open layouts and open access. The spaces are adaptable, with features like industrial shelving for temporary setups and façades that can be opened for various events.

In terms of material use, Stad in de Maak adopts minimal design interventions and repurposes materials creatively. For example, multiplex sheets from an old attic were used to build temporary housing units, and kitchen components were crafted from street waste. This approach reduces waste and reliance on new resources. Materials were also acquired through donations, with community contributions continuously enhancing functionality.

De Stokerij
space used for
meetings, lectures,
filmscreenings
and now hosts
independent
bookshop KIOSK



façade
can be
fully
opened

Poortgebouw

Poortgebouw was completed in 1879 as the headquarters of Lodewijk Pincoffs' trading company. This striking structure, constructed over a main road along the Maas river's south bank, later achieved national heritage status. Following the departure of its last tenant, Rotterdam's port authority, in 1977, the building faced plans for conversion into a brothel, leading to local protests. After a three-year vacancy, it was squatted in 1980. The squatters rejuvenated Poortgebouw, transforming it into a lively communal space. Today, it hosts around 30 residents and features a give-away store, a people's kitchen, and diverse event spaces.



Initiators:
Squatter group

Users:
30 residents

Type:
Squatted residential and community building

Architects:
Originally designed by J.S. C. van der Wall, adapted by tenants

Completion:
1879 (initial construction); squatted in 1980; legalized in 1984; currently maintained by private owners

Location:
Rotterdam, Netherlands

Regeneration strategy:
collective management
Squatters revitalized Poortgebouw into a vibrant communal space, where rent funds cover maintenance, utilities, and savings. Monthly meetings allow for democratic decisions, and interest-based groups assist with management.

Commons criteria:
Solidarity and collective responsibility
Decentralisation of power

Boer, René, Marina Otero Verzier and Katia Truijen. "Poortgebouw." In *Architecture of Appropriation: On Squatting as a Spatial Practice*. NAI, 2018.

SQEK CONFERENCE
18-23 MAY 2016 . ROTTERDAM

RESIST - RISE TO CENTRAL - FIGHT

THE SQUATTING EUROPE KOLLECTIVE (SQEK)
IS A RESEARCH NETWORK FOCUSING ON THE SQUATTERS' MOVEMENT. OUR AIM IS TO PRODUCE RELIABLE AND FINE-GRAINED KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THIS MOVEMENT NOT ONLY AS AN END ITSELF, BUT ALSO AS A PUBLIC RESOURCE, ESPECIALLY FOR SQUATTERS AND ACTIVISTS.
[HTTPS://SQEK.SQUAT.NET/](https://sqek.squat.net/)

THE CONFERENCE
IS A RESEARCH NETWORK MEETING WITH DISCUSSIONS AT THE POORTGEBOUW. ALONGSIDE THIS, A FEW PUBLIC EVENTS SUCH AS A FILM NIGHT AT WORM, A SEMINAR AT THE ERASMUS UNIVERSITY, A DEBATE AT V2 AND A BICYCLE TOUR OF SQUATTED ROTTERDAM WILL TAKE PLACE.

MORE DETAILS AT: ROFFASQEK.WORDPRESS.COM
POORTGEBOUW / WORM / V2 /ERASMUS UNIVERSITY - ROTTERDAM - THE NETHERLANDS

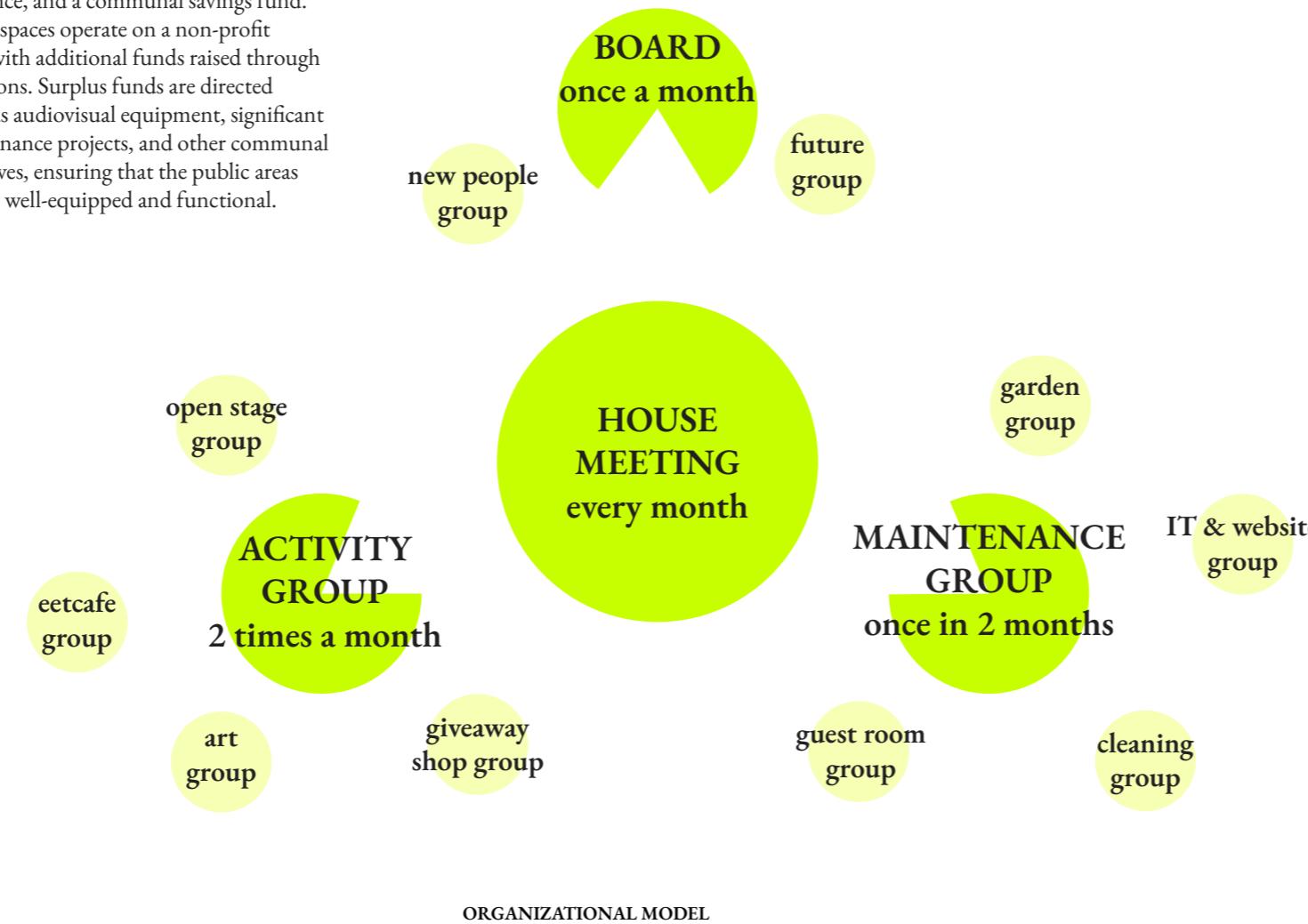


A Symbol of Resistance and Innovation
The Poortgebouw squat in Rotterdam became a powerful symbol of resistance and urban innovation. It was legalized in 1983-1984 after negotiations with the municipality, which allowed the squatters to manage the building while maintaining a reduced rent. This decision reflected the community's commitment to affordable, collective living. In 1986, Poortgebouw was designated a national heritage site, cementing its cultural and political significance.

The 2016 SqEK (Squatting Everywhere Kollektive) conference and the 2018 Architecture of Appropriation exhibition at Nieuwe Instituut highlighted Poortgebouw's role in discussions on squatting, alternative housing, and architectural transformation. The community continues to engage with the local neighborhood through various events, maintaining its visibility and support while managing ongoing discussions about its future.

Economic Structure

Residents of Poortgebouw pay rent to the Poortgebouw Association, which is allocated to various needs. Approximately 40% of the rent goes to the building's owner, while the rest is used for utilities, cleaning, maintenance, legal and financial assistance, and a communal savings fund. Public spaces operate on a non-profit basis, with additional funds raised through donations. Surplus funds are directed towards audiovisual equipment, significant maintenance projects, and other communal initiatives, ensuring that the public areas remain well-equipped and functional.



Organizational Model

The Poortgebouw Association, established in 1982, represents the residents and plays an important role in the building's management. Decision-making within Poortgebouw is highly democratic. Monthly house meetings are held where decisions are made by consensus. The community is organized into formal groups such as the board, maintenance team, activity coordinators, and a future planning committee, which each meet monthly to oversee various aspects of the building's operation. Informal groups focused on specific interests like IT, art, or gardening meet when needed. New residents are chosen through a voting process after participating in organized meetings with potential members, ensuring that each newcomer aligns with the community's values and needs.

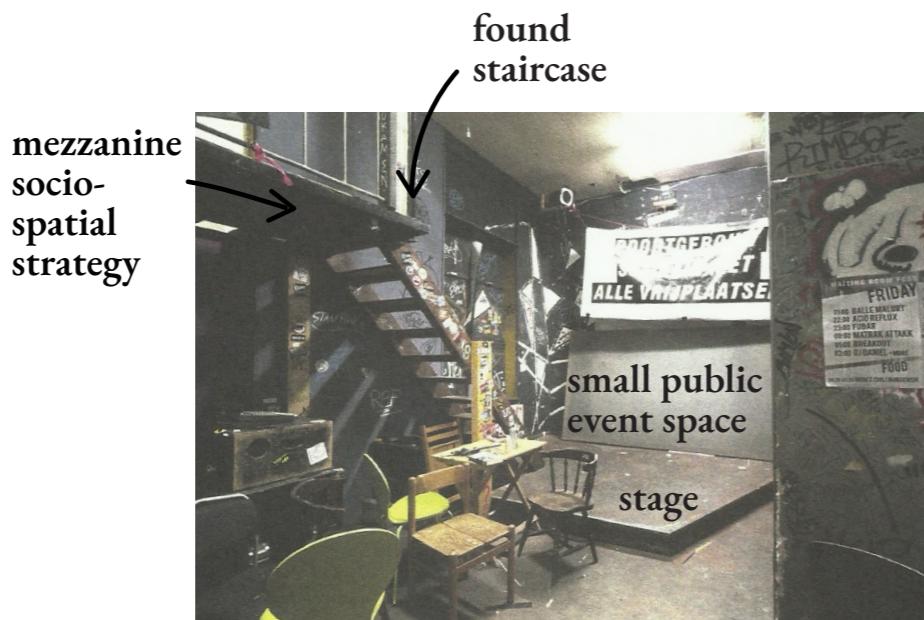
Community Engagement

The participatory culture at Poortgebouw encourages active involvement from residents in decision-making, maintenance, and project management. At the same time, the community respects the choices of those who prefer to remain less engaged, referring to them as "ghosts." These individuals value their privacy, and the broader community respects their choice to not attend communal activities. This balance of engagement and privacy helps maintain a harmonious and functional living environment, demonstrating the adaptability and inclusivity of the Poortgebouw model.

Squatting as a Spatial Practice

The Poortgebouw's architectural features showcase a combination of adaptability and historical layering. The high ceilings of the former office building have facilitated the insertion of mezzanines into almost all bedrooms, enhancing their functionality by creating distinct living and sleeping areas. This addition also strategically maximizes usable space, which is essential should the community need to negotiate for a larger area in a new building.

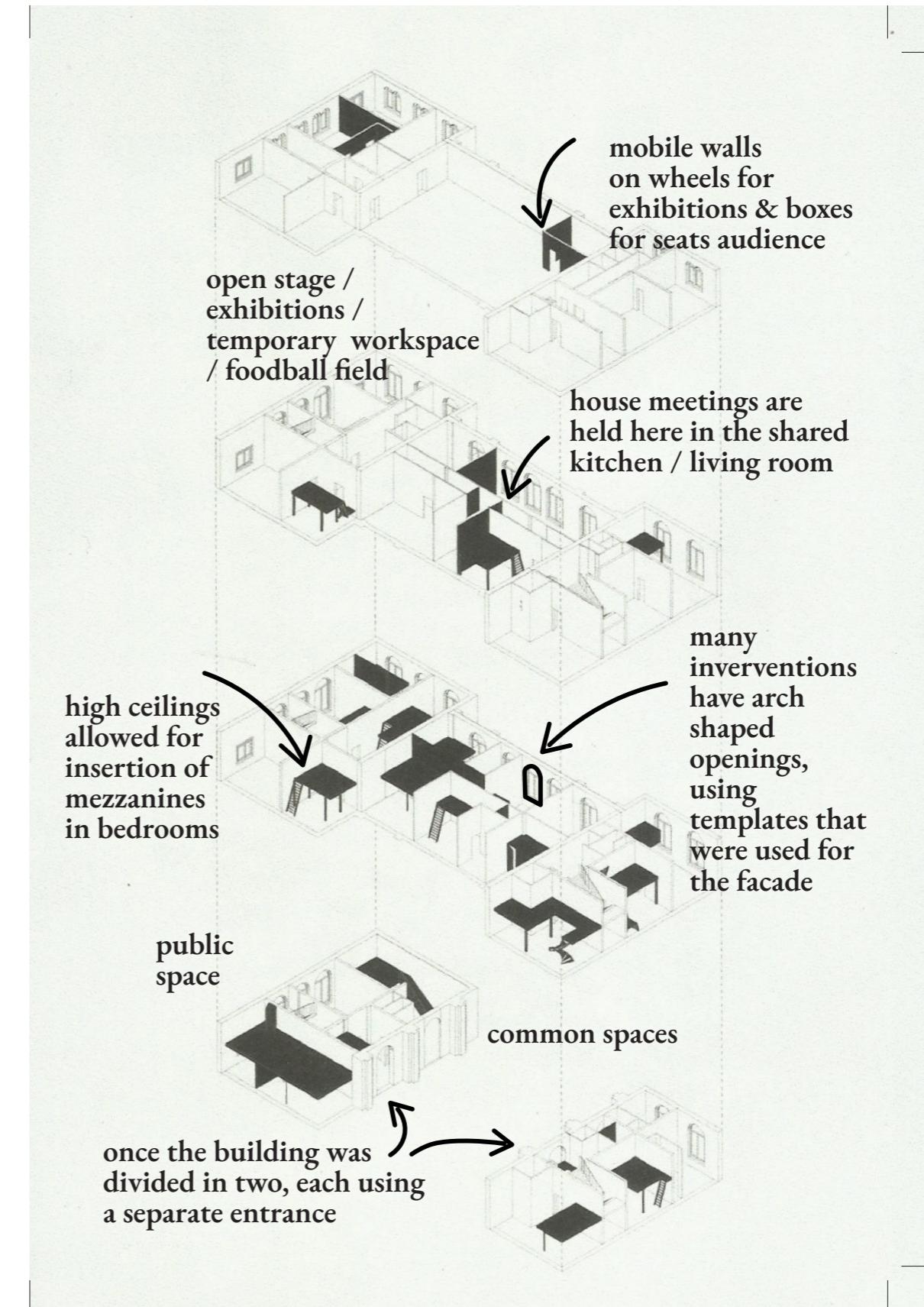
The building's evolution is marked by shifting divisions and uses. Initially segmented into artistic and anarchist wings with separate entrances and kitchens, these divisions have since faded, demonstrating the flexibility of the space. The attic, once a designated safe space for women, exemplifies the building's responsiveness to the community's needs over time.



17

Arches play a significant role in the building's design. Created from templates discovered in the basement, these arch-shaped openings were originally intended for façade renovations but are now repurposed within the interior, linking historical elements with contemporary uses.

The Poortgebouw effectively integrates private, shared, and public spaces. The ground floor accommodates a café, a give-away store, and an event space, while the top floor's vaulted space serves as a venue for various activities, including dinners and exhibitions.



Programmatic Conclusions

Prinzessinnengarten, Stad in de Maak, and Poortgebouw represent different approaches to commoning in an urban context.

Prinzessinnengarten focuses on urban gardening and knowledge-sharing, while Stad in de Maak and Poortgebouw focus on affordable housing. What they share is the reactivation of derelict or vacant sites for community-driven purposes, reflecting the *right to the city* - the idea that urban spaces should serve the collective needs of residents. These projects are small interventions with big intentions, shifting perspectives and proposing alternative models for how spaces can be reimagined and lived in, by allowing people to experience firsthand that there are places that function, despite being different. They contribute to social and political discussions on urban privatization, displacement, food supply, and affordable housing. Prinzessinnengarten, in particular, emphasizes education, engaging with schools and the wider public on social and ecological issues.

Prinzessinnengarten and Stad in de Maak exemplify small weaving strategies from the chapter on the Italian "Landscape," developing local production and distribution networks through interconnected, small-scale spaces. Prinzessinnengarten supports local food production, while Stad in de Maak fosters diverse micro-economies like laundromats, amateur breweries, meeting spaces, and community-run initiatives. These common spaces offer free access, making them accessible to all, and strengthening neighborhood community

ties. Similarly, Prinzessinnengarten is open every day and to everyone, creating an inclusive environment. The garden plays an active role in the neighborhood and the Neighborhood Academy initiated a process of desiring-production with the entire street. Poortgebouw maintains strong connections with the local neighborhood through various events. Thus, these projects are not islands, as they actively engage with and integrate into the surrounding neighborhood.

Programmatic strategies for reactivation through commoning:

- Provide opportunities for **social connection** (e.g., communal kitchen, co-working space, independent cinema, organize workshops, events).

- Support **local production** and **micro-economies** by providing space for small-scale manufacturing (e.g., urban farming, wood workshop, bakery, restaurant).

- Offer **informal learning opportunities** that go beyond the traditional educational system, empowering individuals to develop practical skills and share know-how.

- Ensure **free access and non-commercial nature** of the common space, guaranteeing that it remains accessible to everyone, with no commercial interests driving its use.

- Play an **active role in the neighborhood**.

- Engage with **broader societal issues**, fostering awareness and dialogue on social, political, and environmental matters.

Spatial Conclusions

The spatial approach of Prinzessinnengarten, Stad in de Maak, and Poortgebouw starts with working with what already exists. They provide common spaces that can be actively used and adapted by their users. Die Laube in Prinzessinnengarten, as well as the ground floors of Stad in de Maak and Poortgebouw, are designed with open layouts and adaptable features, allowing for flexible configurations and continuous reinterpretation by their users. Die Laube is explicitly designed as an expandable structure, where the architecture serves as a stimulus for an open-ended process of appropriation and engagement, rather than a conclusive product.

In terms of material use, Stad in de Maak and Poortgebouw primarily rely on materials found on-site, reclaimed from the streets, or received through donations. Their practical approach focuses on only the necessary interventions, reducing waste, limiting dependence on new resources, and keeping costs low - often leading to unique and creative solutions. Die Laube differs in that a new structure had to be built, using locally sourced wood from a forested region in northern Germany. The design allows for easy assembly and disassembly, facilitating future reuse and flexibility.

These projects all reflect how collaborative hands-on construction processes can foster meaningful community building and knowledge exchange. In Stad in de Maak, the initiative began with a carpentry workshop, which played a central role in renovating buildings, demonstrating how construction processes are often integral to commoning practices.

Spatial strategies for reactivation through commoning:

- Start **working with what already exists**
 - the ruins, the derelict plots, the materials found on-site.

- Provide common spaces with **open layouts and adaptable features** (e.g., flexible walls, expandable structures, storing systems) allowing for a continual redefinition of the space.

- Ensure that common spaces are **easy to access** by placing them on the ground floor.

- Adopt a **practical approach** by focusing on necessary interventions.

- When new construction is needed, prioritize **locally sourced materials** that can be easily assembled and disassembled, supporting future reuse and flexibility.

- Integrate **collaborative, hands-on construction** processes as a means of community building, knowledge exchange, and increasing agency.

Organizational Conclusions

Prinzessinnengarten, Stad in de Maak, and Poortgebouw have more to do with organizational processes than with traditional architectural practices. In Stad in de Maak and Prinzessinnengarten the architects act more as bricoleurs, emphasizing the social, cultural, and economic aspects that are part of the design process. These two projects began with small groups of individuals who recognized existing challenges, saw the potential for transformation, and had a strong vision and plan that successfully engaged a diverse range of participants, turning the idea into reality.

Prinzessinnengarten and Stad in de Maak combine commons oriented learning with the possibility of commercial activities. They developed a business plan that allows to operate in an economically sustainable way.

Prinzessinnengarten generates income through its bar and restaurant to cover rental costs, build infrastructure, and provide staff wages. Stad in de Maak fosters its own-microeconomy in each building and uses a sweat-equity approach, where labor is exchanged for paying rent.

In Stad in de Maak, each common space is managed autonomously by the inhabitants of the building, with all common spaces following a shared set of rules. The Neighborhood Academy is the driving force behind Prinzessinnengarten, amplifying its role as a collective learning space with various activities in the garden and extending into the digital realm through initiatives like the Mazi project.

Poortgebouw Association plays an important role in management through monthly house meetings and formal and informal groups take care of maintenance, activities, and IT. These structures are essential for the long-term functioning of the commons.

Despite their temporary origins, Prinzessinnengarten, Stad in de Maak, and Poortgebouw have demonstrated a remarkable capacity for permanence, though they are still facing ongoing negotiations. The social and ecological functions of these spaces are often unrecognized, and they require an urban development policy to secure their permanence.

Organizational strategies for reactivation through commoning:

- The architect acts as a **bricoleur**.
- Start with a **small group that can engage a wider range of participants** over time.
- Develop a business plan that fosters a sustainable **micro-economy** (eg., restaurant, bakery, workshop) and creates the capacity to withstand external challenges and pressures.
- If not owned by the community itself, the project should preferably be owned by a **non-profit** organization.
- Implement a **sweat-equity model** to reduce financial barriers and build community engagement.
- Establish a non-hierarchical **management** structure that ensures collective-decision making and long-term functionality (eg., association, platform, working groups).
- Define a set of **shared rules** for the use and maintenance of the common spaces.
- Explore ways to institutionally embed the initiative for the **long term**.

Position

Having analyzed nine case studies focused on the reactivation of towns, industrial sites, and reactivation through commoning practices, I have learned that successful revitalization efforts involve working with what already exists, both programmatically, spatially, and organizationally. This is the lens through which I will approach my project in Angera:

I focus on using and revitalizing what already exists, look for a narrative that resonates with the community by drawing from their stories, festivals, traditions, economic flows, and industrial past.

My research of Angera is divided into three parts, each guided by a set of underlying questions:

Region/Town:

What was the historical role of Angera in the region, and how has it evolved over time?

What are the local typologies and historical elements that define the town's character?

Are there abandoned or underused buildings or areas that have lost their original function?

Community:

Who are the key figures and potential stakeholders in the community and its surrounding areas?

What are the current needs of the community?

Which traditions, stories, and festivals shape the town's cultural identity?

Industrial Heritage:

What forms of local knowledge or expertise exist within the community?

What is the history of industrial activity in Angera, and what role has it played in the community?

What is the current state of industrial sites in Angera?

Part II. Angera

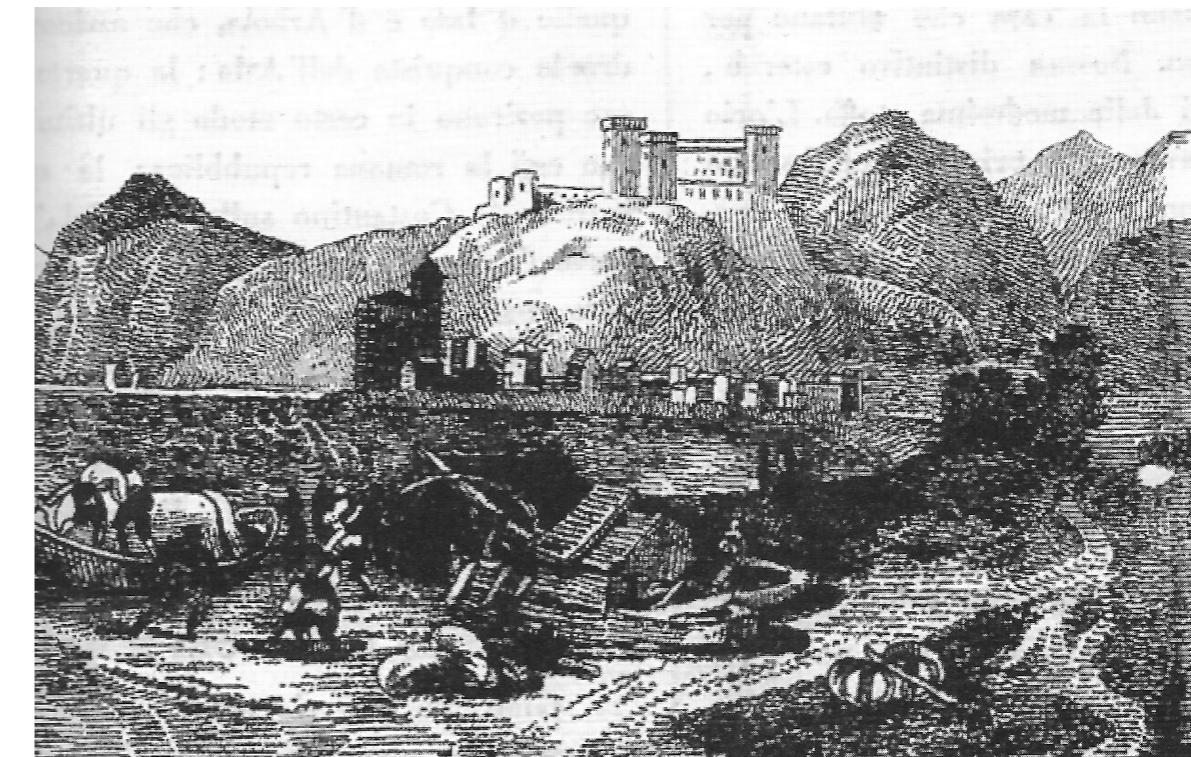
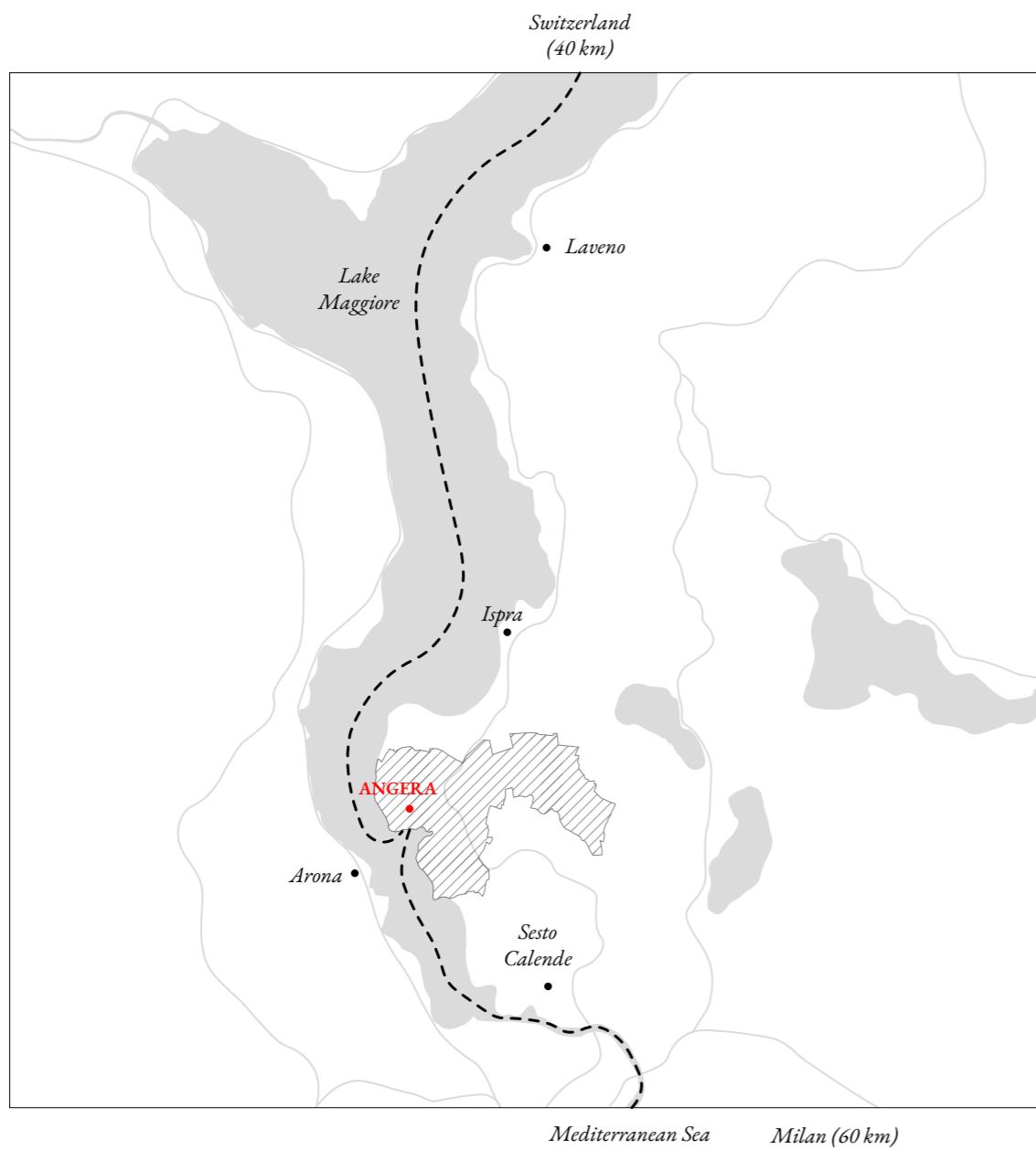
Region / Town

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Angera's Evolution

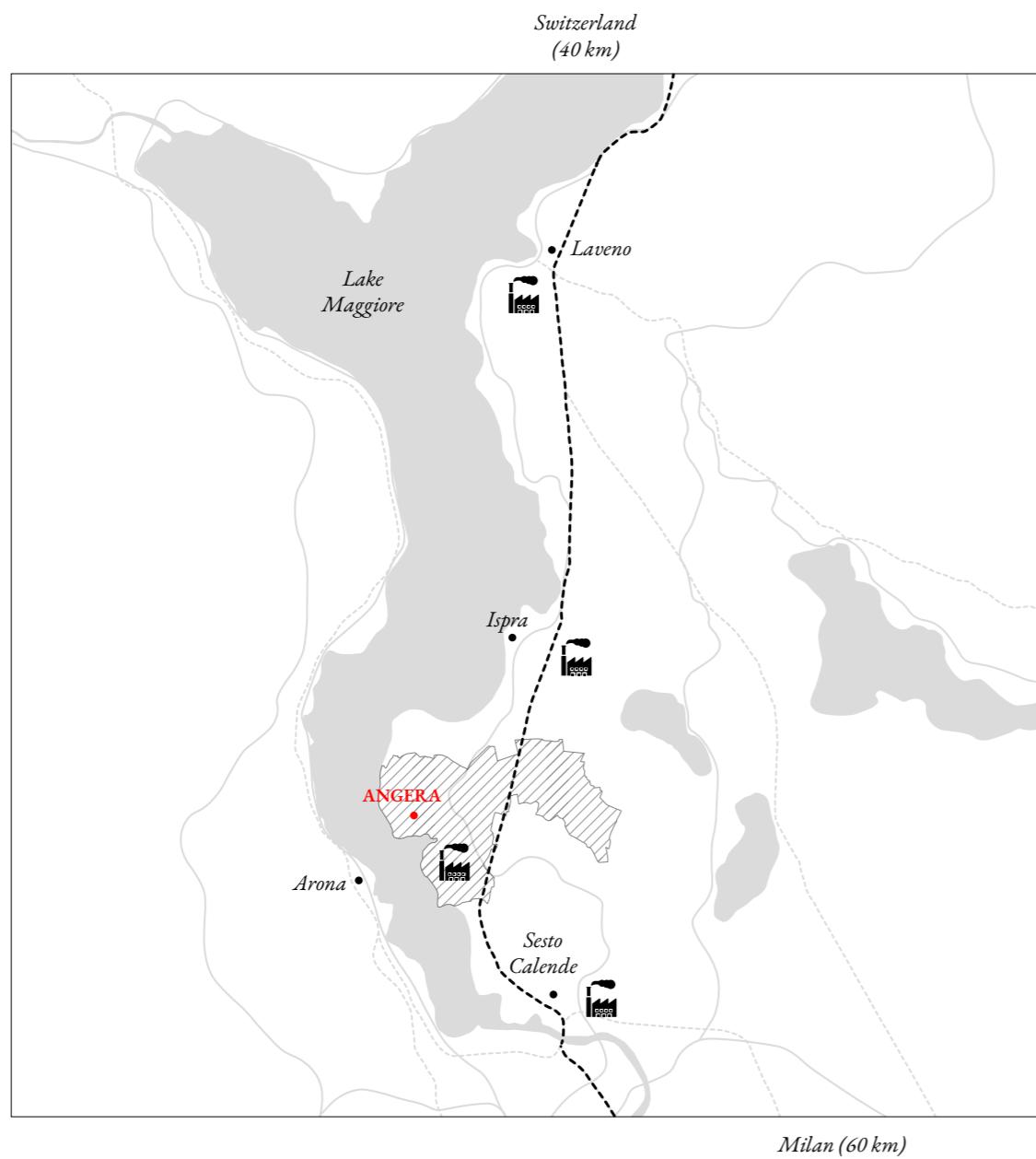


Roman and Medieval Commercial Port, < 1900

Angera's history goes back to the Paleolithic era, with evidence of early human activity found in the nearby Tana del Lupo cave. By Roman times, the settlement, known as Stazzona (a term indicating its role as a commercial port), was already an important commercial hub due to its strategic position on The Verbano, also known as Lake Maggiore, which has long been a crucial communication route, connecting the Mediterranean to Central Europe through the Alps along the historic "salt routes." During the Middle Ages, Angera, then called Angleria, continued to be a key location for territorial control. The Rocca di Angera, a prominent fortress built in the late 12th century, symbolizes this flourishing era.

Macchione, Pietro and Alberto Bertoni. "Prefazione di Paolo Lamberti." In *La Sponda Operosa: Società, industria e arte da Sesto Calende a Maccagno*. Macchione Editore, 1995.

Macchione, Pietro and Alberto Bertoni. "Angera." In *La Sponda Operosa: Società, industria e arte da Sesto Calende a Maccagno*. Macchione Editore, 1995.

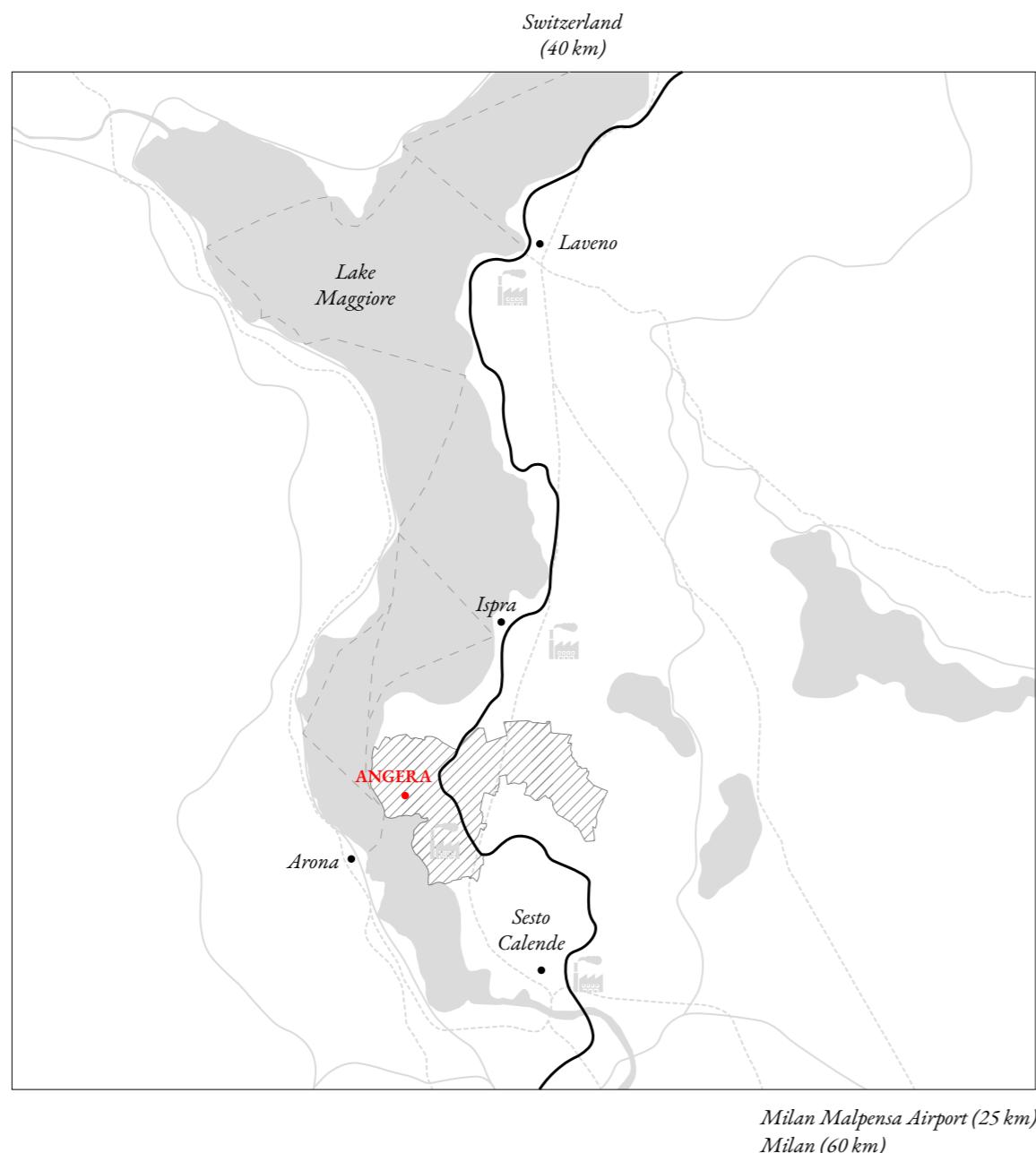


Industrial Emergence, 1900-1990

The construction of the railway and the opening of the Simplon Tunnel diminished Angera's role as a commercial node, leading to emigration and forcing the town to reinvent itself. New industries emerged, and the Lombard shore of Lake Maggiore became a cradle of Northern Italy's industrialization. In Angera, these industries focused on textile manufacturing and the processing of dolomite rock and magnesium. The establishment of the Soara factory, along with various textile mills, boosted the local economy and created new employment opportunities.

Besozzi, Luciano. "Industria, l'artigianato e il commercio." In *Angera (1900-1926)*. Partegora, 2018.

Macchione, Pietro and Alberto Bertoni. "Angera." In *La Sponda Operosa: Società, industria e arte da Sesto Calende a Maccagno*. Macchione Editore, 1995.



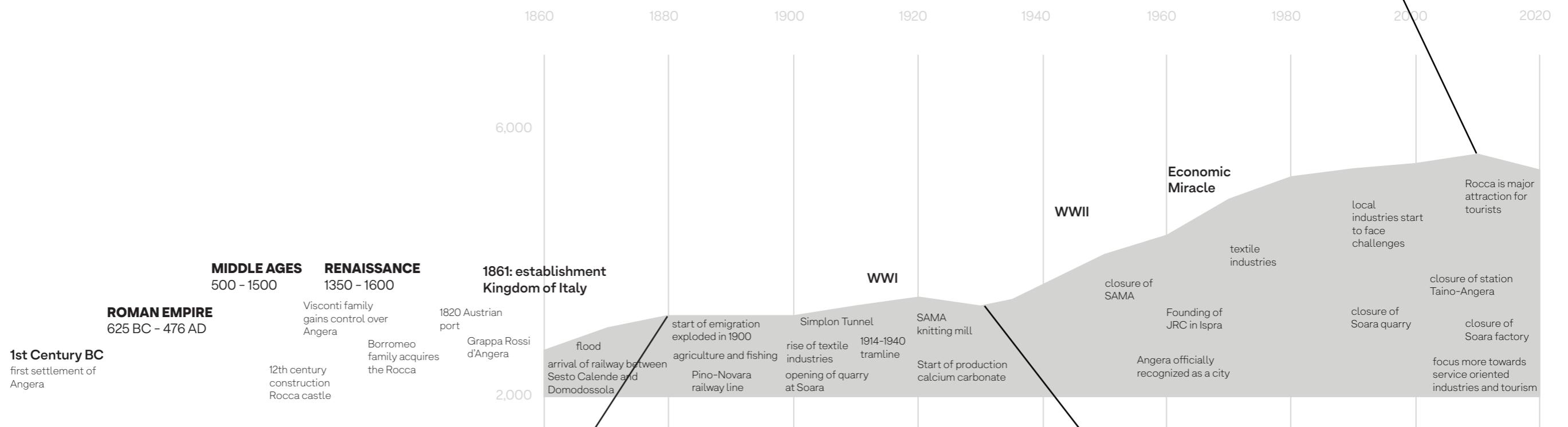
Lack of Attraction and Loss of Identity, >1900

After World War II, industrial decline and resource depletion shifted Angera's focus to tourism, capitalizing on its rich history, the medieval castle, and the lake. Angera's strategic position near Milan, Malpensa Airport, Lake Maggiore, Switzerland, and the Joint Research Centre in Ispra, which attracts many expats, highlights its unique location. However, limited job opportunities, deteriorating infrastructure, and a declining town center make it difficult to retain and attract young residents. Isolation from major roads make it a town you don't accidentally pass by, but must really choose to visit, highlighting both its weakness and its unique charm: unlike Arona, which attracts the masses, Angera is more quiet, offers privacy, beauty, and rich biodiversity.

Del Torchio, Andrea. *Interview by author*. Angera, November 13, 2023.

Macchione, Pietro and Alberto Bertoni. "Angera." In *La Sponda Operosa: Società, industria e arte da Sesto Calende a Maccagno*. Macchione Editore, 1995.

Zingaro, Maria Pia. *Interview by author*. Angera, November 15, 2023.



Emigration

From around 1880 until the end of the century, population growth in Angera halted and even saw a slight decline, likely due to emigration.

Increasing Population

Starting in the 1930s, Angera's population grew as a result of post-WWI economic recovery and increased industrialization, which attracted people seeking job opportunities. The post-WWII baby boom further boosted birth rates. Additionally, Italy's Economic Miracle during the 1950s to 1970s significantly improved living standards, contributing to further population growth.

Evolutionary graph showing Angera's population and historical transformation.
Data sourced from ISTAT and Besozzi, 2010.

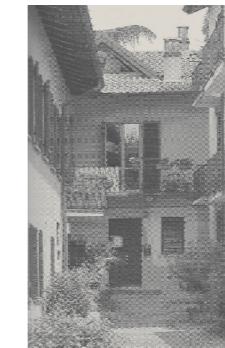
Besozzi, Luciano. "La popolazione." In *Angera nell'Ottocento. Vol. 1: Dalla Rivoluzione francese al 1900*. Magazzino Storico Verbanese, 2010.

Architectural Heritage

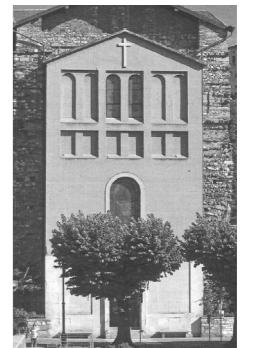
STONE CONSTRUCTION



HISTORIC CENTER



LAKESIDE



FARMHOUSES



VILLAS



CASTLE



Urban Structure



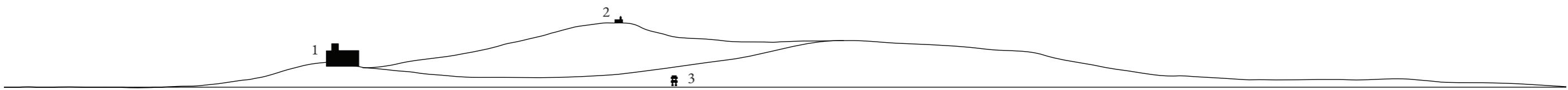
1 Rocca di Angera castle



2 Church of San Quirico forest hill



3 Former Soara factory tower







Structure and Road Network

The overlaying of the 1722 map of Angera on the current one reveals that the town's layout has remained largely unchanged over time. The structure consists of four regular rectangular areas bordered by via Paletta, via Marconi, via Greppi, and piazza Garibaldi, with a fifth, more irregular rectangle to the south. Historian Francesco Ratti suggests this layout reflects either a Roman plan or a Roman-era restructuring of an earlier Celtic village.

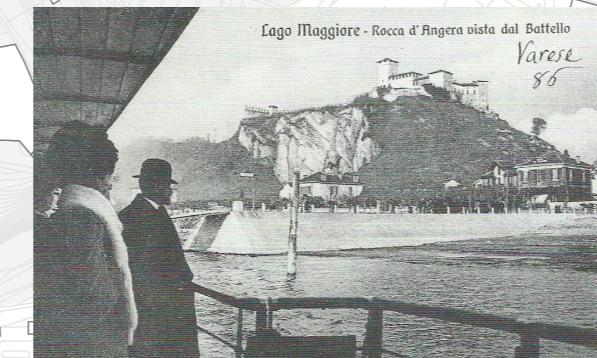
Even today, we see three main horizontal lines parallel to the lake, connected by a network of vertical streets. From east to west, these horizontals are the current Via Piazz, Via Mario Greppi, and Piazza Garibaldi along the lakefront.

Besozzi, Luciano. "Il Borgo." In *Angera nell'Ottocento. Vol. 2: Dalla Rivoluzione francese al 1900*. Magazzino Storico Verbanese, 2011.

Regional Links

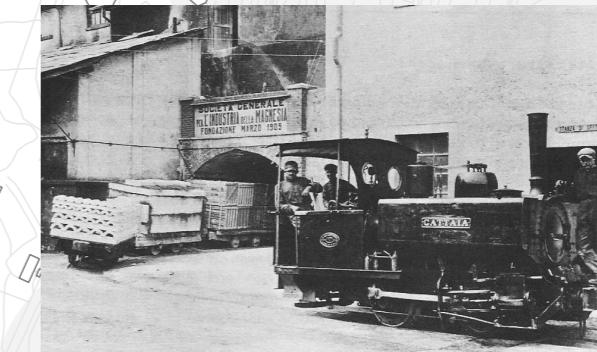
Imbarcadero

The Angera embarkation point was initially served by small boats for passenger transfers until 1881, when a proposal for a dedicated pier was made. By 1894, a solid pier was built with contributions from the navigation company and local authorities, and it was completed in early 1896. This revitalized Angera as a lake port. Today, the pier remains a key transit point for commuters traveling to Arona and offers access to the Borromean Islands and Switzerland. Boat services generally run until around 19:00. Recently, the tourist information center relocated to this site, enhancing its role for visitors.



Station Taino-Angera

Opened in 1882, the station had three through tracks and one track for goods, including shipments for the Soara factory. The Soara built a railway with a picturesque coal locomotive connecting it to the Taino-Angera station. The station was downgraded to a stop in 2007 and ceased passenger services in 2013, following the suspension of the Luino-Novara line.



Soara factory

Porto Asburgico

The Angera port, fully funded by the Austrian government, was completed by 1820. Porto Asburgico played a crucial role in Angera's maritime and commercial activities in the 19th century. It was also used for various events, including water polo matches and the Madonna della Riva festivity, which is still celebrated today. This festivity consists of a procession of illuminated boats traveling from the port to the island Partegora. Porto Asburgico remains operational and continues to serve as a port on Lake Maggiore.

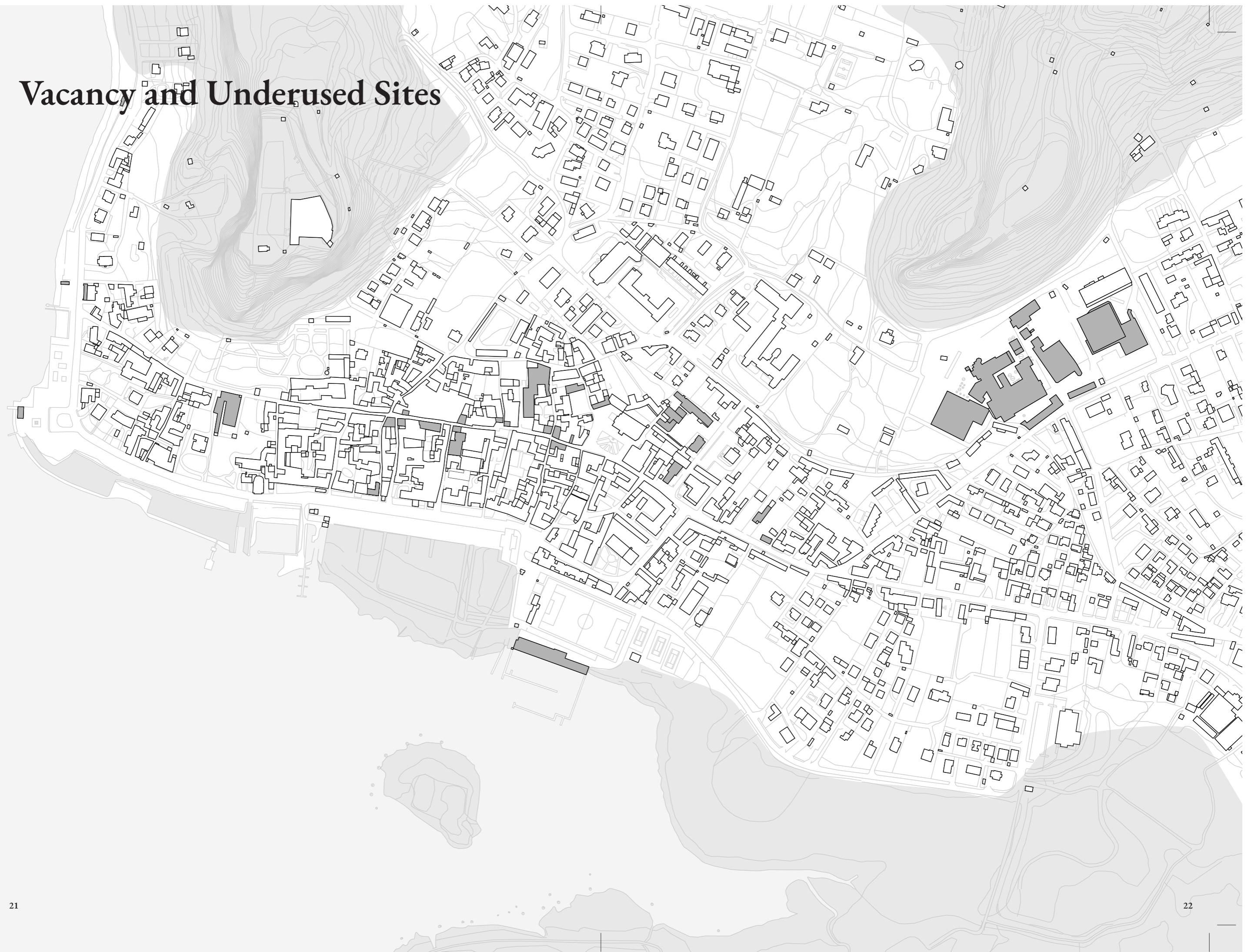


Tramline Varese-Angera

The idea of a tramway from Varese to Angera was first discussed in 1905. After years of planning and negotiations, the Società Anonima Tramvie Orientali del Verbano (SATOV) was established in 1912, and construction began. The tramway was inaugurated in 1914, enhancing connectivity and commerce. However, by 1939, the decision was made to replace the tram with bus services, and the tramway ceased operations in 1940.

Besozzi, Luciano. "Le Grandi Opere Pubbliche." In *Angera nell'Ottocento. Vol. 1: Dalla Rivoluzione francese al 1900*. Magazzino Storico Verbanese, 2010.

Vacancy and Underused Sites





Signs of Decline

Angera's economic and demographic challenges are evident in vacant or underused community spaces, villa's, industrial sites, and the empty shopping street, Via Mario Greppi.

Part II. Angera

Community

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Conversations with Locals



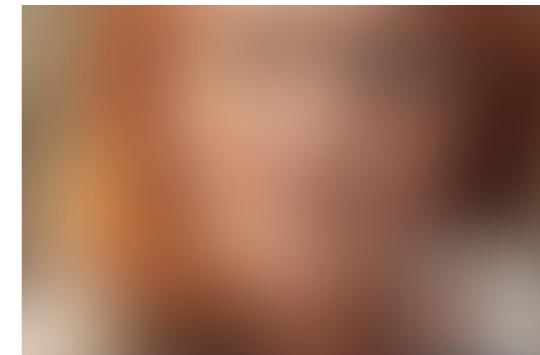
Gastronomer



Mother of two



Woman who lived in Soara



Theater maker and primary school teacher



Elderly couple



High end tailor



Retired artist in wheelchair



Woman who lived in Soara



5th generation of Rossi d'Angera



Saffron farmers



Carpenter



Artist



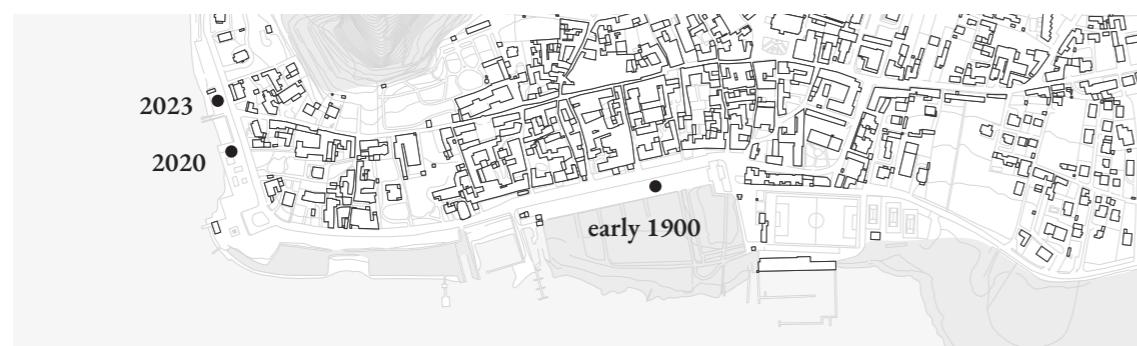
The Allea as a “Green Salon”

The Pensioners of the Allea

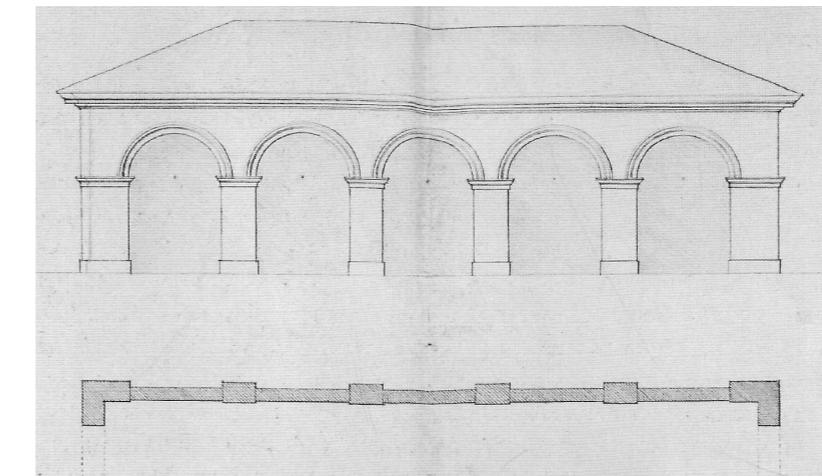
The Allea has long been Angera's “green salon,” a tranquil lakeside alley that offers shade and a space for leisurely strolls. It has always been a place of chatter, news, and local commentary. The weekly market is held here, and events take place on the adjacent lawn. I was particularly fascinated by a bench where the pensioners regularly gather (pictured on next page).

The first day I arrived in Angera for my fieldtrip I heard that a poem just came out about this bench. My old neighbor told me they meet every day at 15h when the weather is good and that I should come and ask for the writer. The writer translated the poem for me from the dialect to Italian. The pensioners told me about a performance on Saturday of the Pioott company, a group that performs in the dialect of Angera. I didn't manage to go, but one of the members of the group filmed it for me.

When I met with the pensioners at 15h I was surprised to see that they had changed their location for the gatherings, and they explained that they are the younger generation and that almost no one is left of the older generation. In the book *Angera early 1900* I found out that at that time the pensioners used to gather even more southwards of the Allea. I think it is fascinating how each generation hops a little more North up the alley and how they keep the same customs of being punctual, meeting every day at the same time and discussing news, politics and everyday matters.

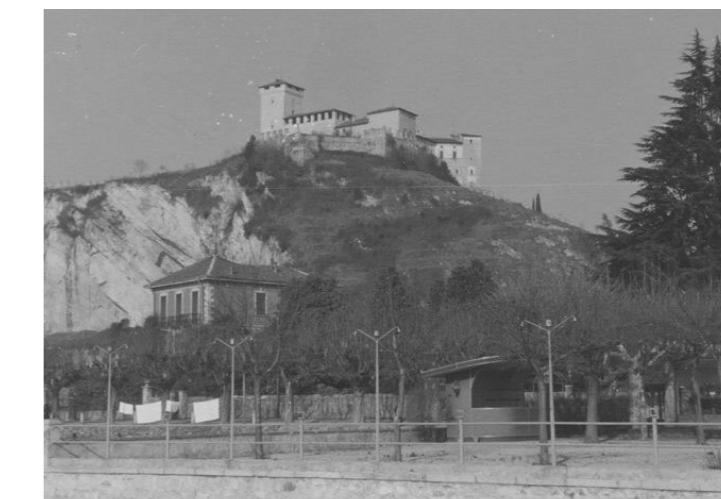


Hopping of generations of pensioners on the Allea.



The Communal Portico

The structure was originally built in 1592 and was located next to the Porto Asburgico. It served as a central gathering space for market activities and community meetings. Over the centuries, it was used for various purposes, including selling meat and boat construction. By 1826, plans were made to rebuild it, but financial issues and delays led to its demolition in 1833. Despite the efforts to replace it, the new portico was never constructed.



Former dance floor “Balera” near the pier

Besozzi, Luciano. *Angera nell'Ottocento. Vol. 2: Dalla Rivoluzione francese al 1900*. Magazzino Storico Verbanese, 2011.

Colombo, Gianfranco. “...i vecchietti dell'Allea”. In *Angera primo 900: prosa e poesie*. Biblioteca Civica di Angera, 1985.

Social Infrastructure

Associations

Angera has around forty associations listed on the town's official website. These groups focus on cultural and sporting initiatives and work towards enhancing the local community, with funds often directed to charitable causes. However, many of these associations function independently, operating as isolated entities rather than collaborating.

La Società Operaia di Mutuo Soccorso

The Società Operaia di Mutuo Soccorso of Angera, founded in 1867, is an organization that supports local workers. Its main goal is to provide financial assistance in case of illness, injury, or death, and to promote education and cultural activities among its members. The society is governed by an elected council and holds regular meetings. Among its achievements are the creation of a health fund, literacy programs, and cultural events. Today, it continues to operate, adapting to modern needs while maintaining the principles of mutual support and community well-being.

Il Circolo Operaio

Founded in 1898, Il Circolo Operaio di Angera provided a communal space for workers to relax and socialize. It offered members quality wines at low prices and promoted intellectual and moral development. Membership was open to professionals, workers, farmers, and shopkeepers, but excluded family members of tavern and café owners, and those involved in certain political societies. Members paid an entrance fee of three lire and a monthly fee of 25 cents. Today, the building is no longer in use.

Municipal Council

The Municipal Council members, including the Mayor, are elected by citizens every five years, with no limit on re-election. Unlike in other countries, Mayors in Italy are active figures who come from the local community (eg., the current Major in Angera, Marcella Androni, is a local doctor). The current priorities for the Council include making the town more attractive by addressing parking issues and organizing small and larger-scale events to boost tourism and attract new inhabitants, which will help create the critical mass needed to support thriving commercial activities. Additionally, there are plans to create a "City for Children" to promote children's autonomy and improve the town's overall livability.



Androni, Marcella. "Elezioni Angera 2023." Malpensa, May 11, 2023. Video, 6 min. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHZNgkcWUME>.

Besozzi, Luciano. "La società Operaia di Mutuo Soccorso." In *Angera nell'Ottocento. Vol. 2: Dalla Rivoluzione francese al 1900*. Magazzino Storico Verbanese, 2011.

Colombo, Gianfranco. "Il Vecchio Oratorio". In *Angera primo 900: prosa e poesie*. Biblioteca Civica di Angera, 1985.

Centro Anziani

The senior center next to the parochial church is a community space for the elderly, offering reading rooms, social areas, and language courses. Due to a lack of enthusiasm, difficulty finding volunteers, and poor cooperation among four local associations, the center is underused. Today, many elderly residents feel overlooked, and those who are capable and seek activities like dancing travel to Casa Rosa, a nearby community center in Taino.



Oratorio

The old Oratorio in Angera was a cherished gathering place for children, offering activities by the Church. Surrounded by ancient walls, plane trees, and linden canopies, children played bocce, swung on swings, and played soccer. The Oratorio also featured a small library, a cinema, and lessons on life from Don Giovanni.

Today, things have changed. Andrea Del Torchio, active member of the local church, notes that the Oratorio, once a center of culture and learning, now sees the younger generation staying home and connecting through social media. Priests have become more intellectual and less engaged with the children.





Library

The library in Angera hosts events like book presentations and creative workshops, but with very limited opening hours, it's more of a place to visit briefly rather than stay. A recent development in Angera is the Kapannone dei Libri, a contemporary book warehouse on the town's outskirts. Housed in a former industrial shed, this unique space connects with Milan's Kasa dei Libri. Unfortunately, the Kapannone also has limited opening hours and is only accessible during the summer months.

<https://www.angera.it>

Besozzi, Luciano. "Le Proprietà Comunali." In *Angera nell'Ottocento. Vol. 2: Dalla Rivoluzione francese al 1900*. Magazzino Storico Verbanese, 2011.

Grimaldi, Paola. "Risorge il cinema che fu chiesa." *Prealpina*, December 19, 2022.



Archeological Museum

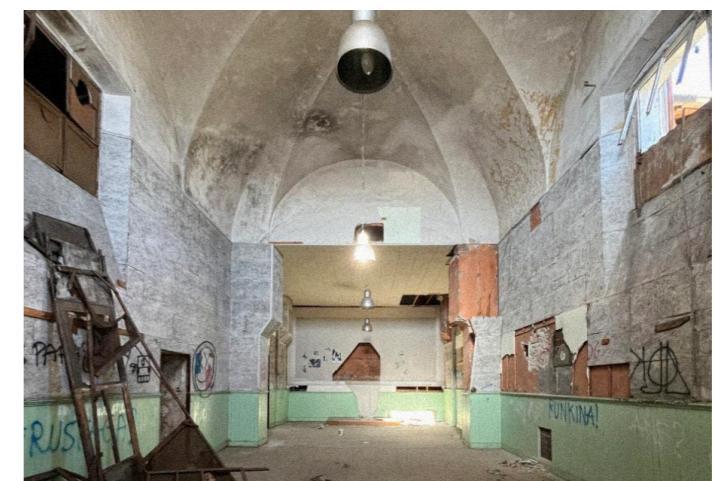
The Archeological Museum of Angera is housed in the historic Palazzo del Pretorio, a 15th-century building that once served as a school, courthouse, and venue for public assemblies. It continues to fulfill this last role, with one of its ground-floor spaces still used for events and public gatherings.

The museum showcases a rich collection of artifacts from the prehistoric to the Roman era, reflecting Angera's historical importance. It also features the MABA, a child-friendly section designed to engage young visitors with interactive displays and educational activities.

In addition, the Museo Diffuso di Angera is a recent initiative that connects 57 historical, artistic, and natural sites throughout Angera, creating an open-air museum experience that reveals the town's diverse heritage.

Ex Cinema Roma

The Cinema Roma in Angera, originally a 1700s church with a convent and later a cinema, has been vacant for years. The municipality has acquired the building and is transforming it into a multifunctional structure to meet the city's need for a cultural venue. With a €1 million grant from Lombardy for historic town revitalization, this is a very promising project to revitalize the heart of Angera and enhance its cultural offerings.



Casa Rosa, Taino



My conversations with Angera's residents revealed a lack of spaces for the elderly since the Centro Anziani closed. An older couple now travels to senior center Casa Rosa in Taino for dance classes, and I met an active participant of the place who gave me a lift and introduced me to the head organizer, a female architect, and the president, Pier Carlo Moscatelli. They showed me around and I was surprised by the large amount of elderly playing cards in the main community space. The architect explained about the main multipurpose space that is used for dance classes of all different kinds and for different age groups. Two days a week the hall functions as a cantene for school children. A wall is used to hang artwork that is changed constantly. There is even a bar where prices are kept very low to keep it affordable and accessible. A glass of prosecco is € 1,20 and a coffee 40 cents. The members have to pay € 10 each year to be able to come to the activities. The association organizes many events and trips that are open to anyone. It's mostly elderly that participate, but that's mainly because they have the most free time. They showed me around the different spaces:

Main Room: dance classes/evenings, school cantene, bar, exhibition wall, playing cards.

Earth Room: the place of memory, a small museum on the history of Taino.

Doctor's practice: the doctor of Taino retired and this space is used for the temporary doctor of the village.

Forest Room: used for the civil protection. Parent committee meetings are held here and Italian language courses are given.

Sun Room: adaptable room used for painting classes and conferences.

Lake Room: picture gallery of Arturo Bavo. He donated his work to Casa Rosa. Some of the work has been sold and used for the association.

Garden: used for playing bowls and outside events.

They explained to me that they have been lucky and that it might be a unique senior community center in the region as the municipality pays for the venue and all the costs associated with it. Casa Rosa runs on volunteers and any extra money they need they earn through their own initiatives. I asked them what happened with the senior community center in Angera and they told me that in Angera there are four associations and they don't work together at all. They said there is less enthusiasm in Angera for such a place and that it got hard to find volunteers. Now the pensioners of Angera come to Taino because there is nothing in Angera.

Key points of the document: Participation in the municipal announcement to take advantage of the loan for use of the premises.

Associatio Aim

The association pursues, on a non-profit basis, purposes of utility and solidarity and enhancing their role in the social context. Our proposal, while aimed primarily at the elderly, is open to relationships and systems of collaboration and exchange with younger generations through recreational and cultural activities.

Activities

Recreative activities: bar, lunches/dinners, card games, music nights, dancing nights

Cultural activities: social tourism (trips to the sea or spa trips, rediscovery of the beauty of the territory), concerts, theater performances, art exhibitions, beginners computer courses

Events: women's day, 85 year old members day, 1st of May...

Sports activities: postural gymnastics, zumba, yoga, T'ai-Chi-Chuan, Jin Shin Jyutsu

Partner network: Pro Loco, parents association, Ulmin bowls association, primary school, secondary school, History Museum, Municipality, church, associations for disabled kids...

Finance

The municipality covers the costs of the venue. The association autofinances itself through a 10 euro yearly contribution of the members and paid activities such as the painting classes.

Volunteers

The formation of the volunteers is given by a group of volunteers that are already experienced and obtain the role of a tutor. Besides, security, first aid and food safety courses are given periodically for the new volunteers.

Traditions and Festivities

Festa dell'Uva (Festivity of the grapes)





Noci d'Oro, 1902



Madonna della Riva

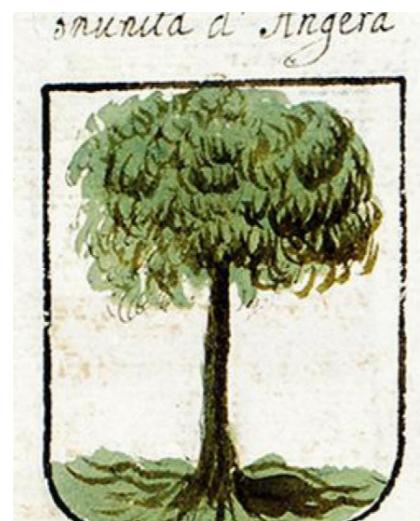


Giro d'Italia



Presepe Vivente

Stories and Legends



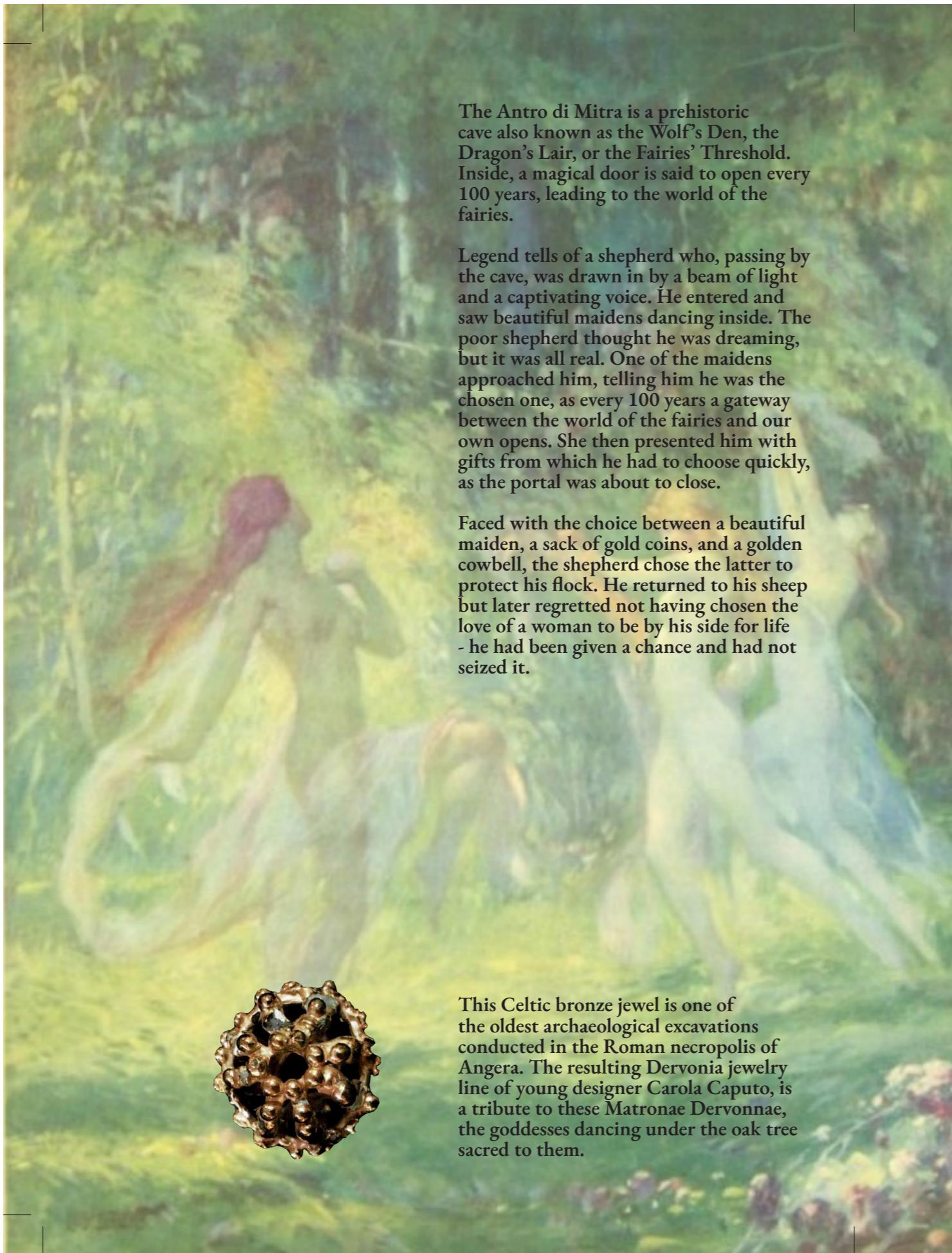
Poetry

Angera's original coat of arms depicts a beautiful sacred oak tree, symbolizing life, strength, wisdom, and the connection between heaven and earth.



Power

The current coat of arms features the Visconti serpent, a symbol of power and legacy from Milan's rulers. With legendary ties to crusades and dragons, it reflects Angera's historical link to the Visconti dynasty and its enduring influence.

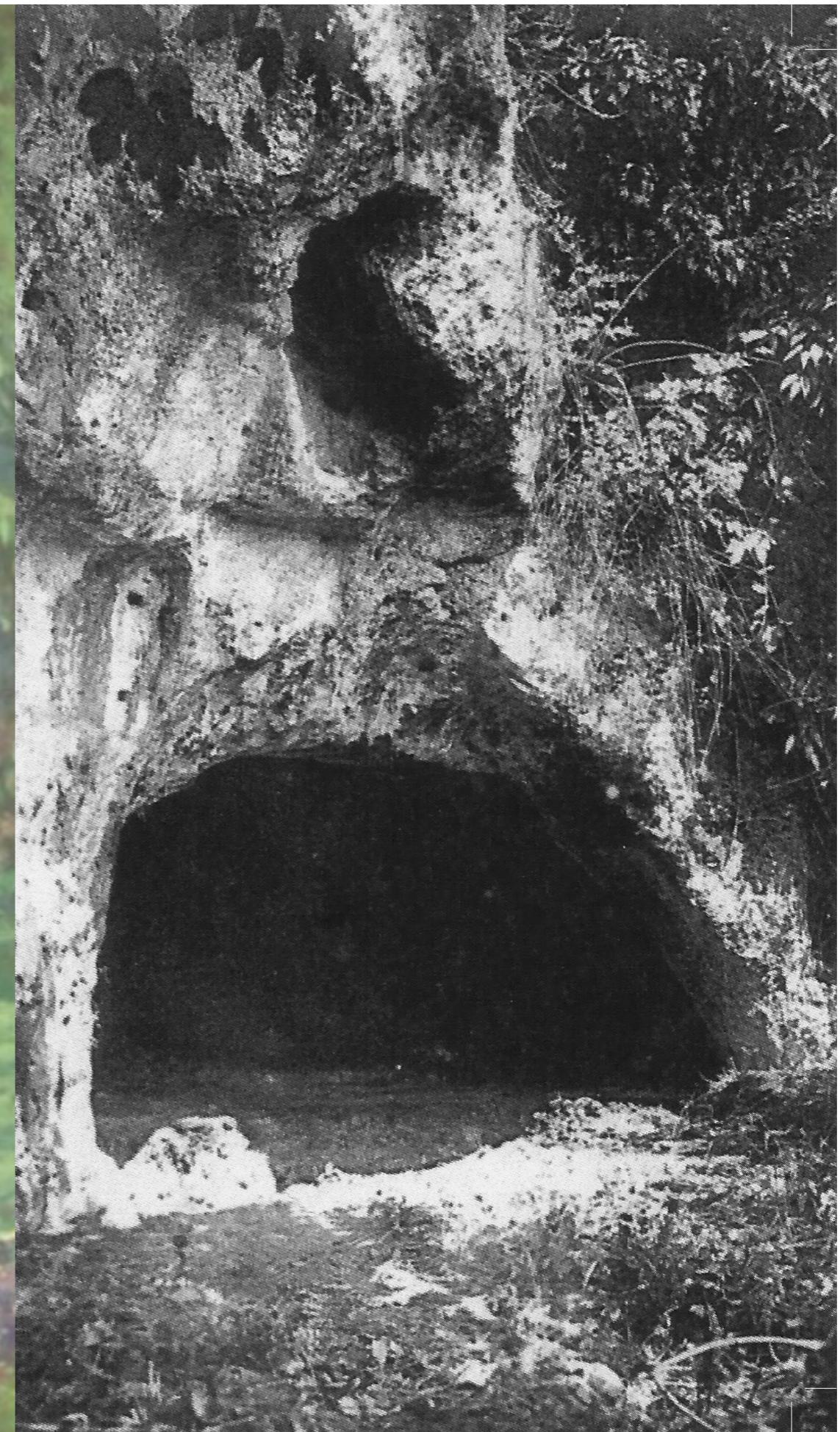


The Antro di Mitra is a prehistoric cave also known as the Wolf's Den, the Dragon's Lair, or the Fairies' Threshold. Inside, a magical door is said to open every 100 years, leading to the world of the fairies.

Legend tells of a shepherd who, passing by the cave, was drawn in by a beam of light and a captivating voice. He entered and saw beautiful maidens dancing inside. The poor shepherd thought he was dreaming, but it was all real. One of the maidens approached him, telling him he was the chosen one, as every 100 years a gateway between the world of the fairies and our own opens. She then presented him with gifts from which he had to choose quickly, as the portal was about to close.

Faced with the choice between a beautiful maiden, a sack of gold coins, and a golden cowbell, the shepherd chose the latter to protect his flock. He returned to his sheep but later regretted not having chosen the love of a woman to be by his side for life - he had been given a chance and had not seized it.

This Celtic bronze jewel is one of the oldest archaeological excavations conducted in the Roman necropolis of Angera. The resulting Dervonia jewelry line of young designer Carola Caputo, is a tribute to these Matronae Dervonnae, the goddesses dancing under the oak tree sacred to them.



The Tale of Radegonda: Long ago, Radegonda, the daughter of a noble lord in the Rocca castle, fled to the small island Partegora whenever the tyrant Marquis Margolfo raided the village. When Margolfo demanded her hand in marriage, Radegonda was heartbroken. The Prince of the Clouds appeared to comfort her, but when Margolfo tried to chase her, the prince struck him down, turning him into a boulder that sank into the lake. Years later, during a drought, the boulder surfaced, and an inscription on it warned: “When you see me, you will weep.” And weep the Angeresi did, for no grass grew that year due to the drought. Even today, when the rock rises, the meadows remain dry and withered, as if still haunted by Margolfo’s raids.

The Tale of St. Arialdo: Arialdo, a deacon dedicated to charity and prayer, lived in poverty and opposed corruption in the church. He criticized the Bishop of Milan for his wrongdoings, leading to his imprisonment and brutal execution on the small island Partegora around 1150. After being mutilated and drowned, the lake glowed with a strange light. His death sparked outrage, and he became a symbol of courage, justice, and honesty. A memorial stone was later placed on the island in his honor. Every year, on the last Sunday in June, the town commemorates his martyrdom with a procession of illuminated boats between Madonna della Riva and the island Partegora.

The Tale of the Monster of the Lake: Long ago in Angera, a fisherman’s children played by the lake despite their mother’s warnings about a dangerous serpent. The creature emerged, breathing fire, but the children managed to hide behind a large oak tree. Just as they were about to be devoured, knight Uberto Visconti arrived. After a fierce battle, he defeated the serpent, and the sun returned. The serpent’s image was added to the Visconti family’s coat of arms, and the children of Angera could safely play by the lake again.

Part II. Angera
Industrial Heritage

Content

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Industries and Trades



Farming

Agriculture was once the predominant economic activity in Angera and harvests, particularly the grape harvest, were community events. Farmers were self-sufficient, producing their own food and caring for various crops and animals. Life was demanding, but there was a sense of harmony and self-reliance. Technological advancements eventually transformed agriculture, introducing machinery that reduced manual labor and changed the farmer's relationship with the land. Today, many elderly residents still maintain small private plots of land, remaining self-sufficient, though fewer than 200 people are employed in agriculture. Cereal and flour crops have largely disappeared, replaced by maize and forage crops, mostly grown near Ispra and in Capronno and Barzola. Viticulture continues in the terraced hills of the Castellana Valley and near S. Quirico hill, a resource that is being rediscovered and revitalized. Local saffron and beans are also being brought back to life by the farmers of Sinergie.



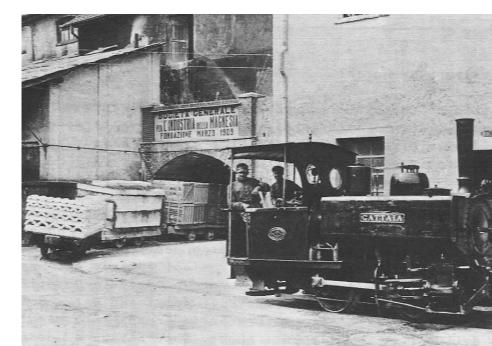
Fishing

Besides agriculture, fishing has long been an important part of Angera's economy. Historically, it was a hereditary profession involving careful net maintenance and night fishing. In 1623, King Philip IV granted fishing rights to Angera and Ranco, a privilege that continues today. While traditional fishing has decreased, semi-professionals and amateurs still engage in the practice.



Textile and Knitting Industry

In the early 20th century, Angera's knitting industry flourished, starting with the Maglificio Forni & Piona, later SAMA, providing jobs to hundreds, mostly women. Other notable factories included those by Francesco Felasi and Mr. Folli, which later became Maglificio SAIM. Post-WWII, Angera saw a boom in knitting factories, marking an important era in its industrial history. Around the same time, the Bernocchi Textile Mill also played a key role in local industrial expansion and employment. Today, the remaining industrial areas in the region consist of a few small firms in the textile sector.



Soara

Established in 1898, the Soara quarries in Angera produced lime, magnesia, and gravel. By 1905, Engineer Emilio Rodolfo expanded the business into the Società Generale per l'Industria della Magnesia, employing hundreds and using its waste for local infrastructure. In 1990, it was acquired by the Solvay Group, which modernized operations. However, due to market shifts and environmental challenges, the company ceased production in 2009.

Colombo, Gianfranco. *Angera primo 900: prose e poesie*. Biblioteca Civica di Angera, 1985.



Distillery and Wine Production

Founded around 1847 by Bernardo Rossi, the Rossi Distillery in Angera began with grape pomace distillation. Initially a small family business, it grew and was officially recognized by the early 1900s. Now in its sixth generation, it is Angera's oldest business with an international reputation for quality grappa and liquors.

Viticulture in Angera has deep roots dating back to the Middle Ages. The 2005 IGT Ronchi Varesini marked a revival, with Cascina Piano leading the way. They produce refined wines such as San Quirico white and Sebuino red. Along with Sinergie's saffron and Angera's Roman bread and jewelry, Cascina Piano's wine has received the De.Co. (Municipal Denomination of Origin) recognition, highlighting the excellence of Angera's local craftsmanship.



Market

Angera's weekly market, established in 1497, faced numerous interruptions, notably by the Borromeo family in 1587. Despite repeated efforts by local residents, the market experienced only brief revivals over the centuries. In 1914, the Unione Sportiva Pro Angera gained renewed hope with the upcoming tram line to Varese, leading to the market's reestablishment. Although it reopened in 1915, its operation was suspended by Italy's entry into World War I. Today, Angera hosts a weekly market every Thursday. However, recent interviews reveal that entry into the market remains competitive and exclusive, with claims of nepotism and limited opportunities for new vendors.



Annual Fairs

In the past, Angera didn't have a weekly market but held two livestock fairs annually. Farmers showcased their best animals, with a municipal committee awarding the finest. Besides livestock, agricultural tools and various goods were displayed. Held in June and September, these fairs attracted visitors from various regions, including Switzerland. Continuing into the early 20th century, the fairs ceased around the 1930s due to economic challenges and changing times.



Shops

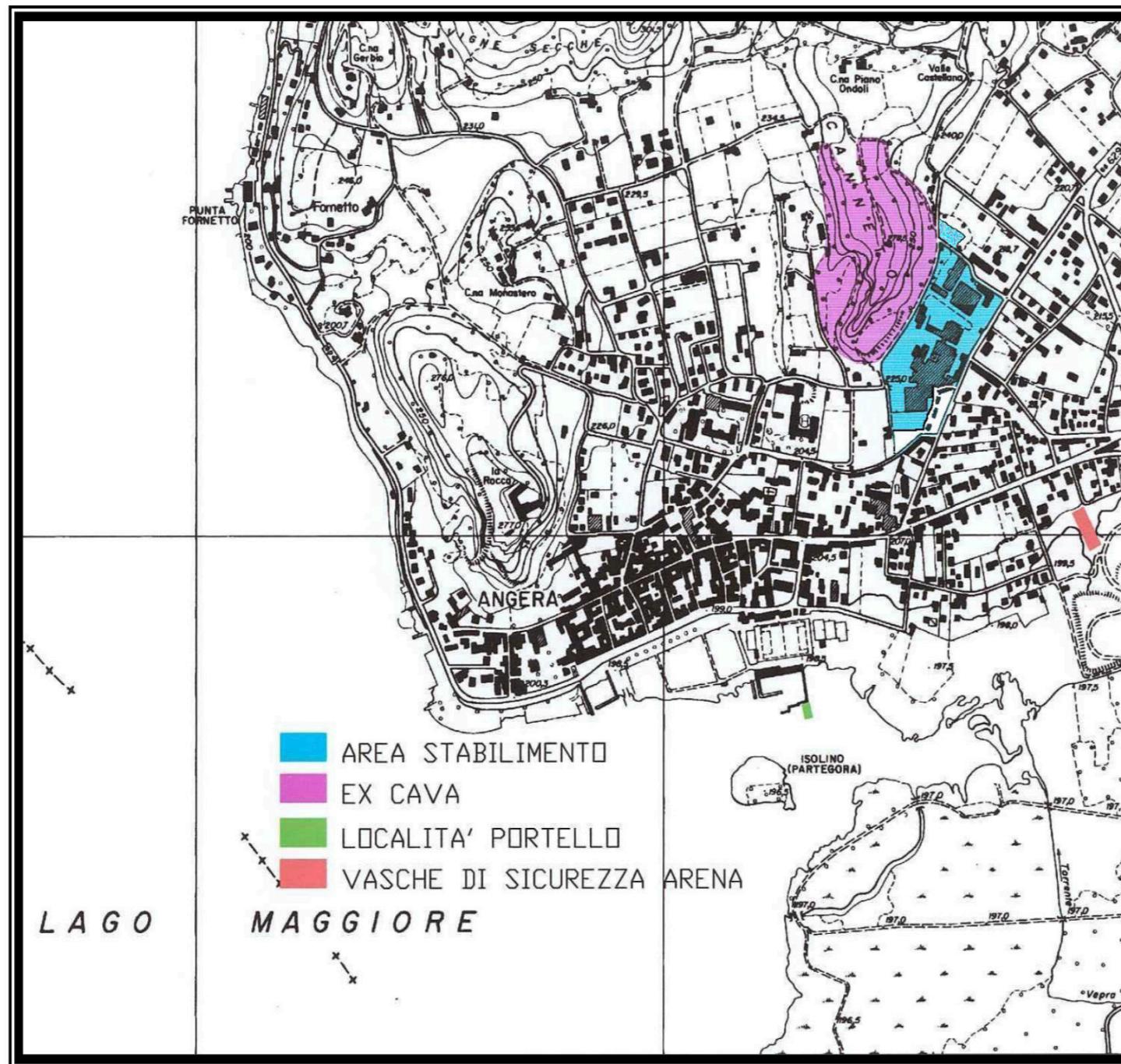
Angera once had 34 shops, but today only half remain. The traditional model of having shop owners live above their businesses contributed to many shops closing when their owners retired or passed away. To combat this, the municipality introduced a tax-free year for new shop owners. Despite these efforts, many spaces remain empty due to a lack of critical mass. I was curious about what makes family businesses like Jewelry shop A.M. ORO and Del Torchio gastronomy so resistant. From my interview with Andrea Del Torchio, I learned that the secret lies in adaptability and a strong balance between quality and price.

Besozzi, Luciano. "Le piccole imprese, gli operai e gli artigiani." In *Angera nell'Ottocento. Vol. 2: Dalla Rivoluzione francese al 1900*. Magazzino Storico Verbanese, 2011.



The Soara Factory





Aerophotogrammetry of the territory on which the factory is located.

Factory Area
53.210 m²

Former Quarry

Mineral was extracted from the dolomite quarry adjacent to the factory.

Portello

In the Portello area is the pumping point for the lake water, that was used for the operations of the factory.

Safety Basins

Containment basins in the Bruschera marsh designed to prevent the spread of hazardous materials in the event of a spill or leakage, helping to reduce potential environmental risks.

Site History

The history of industrial activity in Angera traces back to the documented operation of lime furnaces as early as 1527. However, a significant turning point came with the establishment of the Soara quarry in 1898. This quarry, located in the Soara area, revealed rich deposits of high-quality limestone, ideal for producing lime, magnesia, and gravel.

In 1899, Carlo Luigi Rodolfo obtained permission to build a lime furnace in the Soara area, setting the foundation for what would become a major industrial enterprise. By 1905, his son, Emilio Rodolfo, had taken over the operations and, together with engineer Giuseppe Rossetti, formed the "Società Italiana per la Produzione del Carbonato e dei Coibenti di Magnesia in 1909". This company quickly grew, employing about twenty workers initially, but the workforce expanded rapidly as the company diversified its products and increased its production capabilities.

The Soara factory became one of only two Italian companies dedicated to producing magnesium salts (carbonates and oxides) and thermal insulators based on these salts. The factory's strategic location near the Taino-Angera station facilitated the transportation of goods via a railway, which connected the facility to the broader rail network.

During its peak, especially during and after the World Wars, the factory saw significant growth, with the workforce expanding to several hundred employees. The company developed and patented numerous processes to optimize fuel consumption and improve product quality, including high-purity magnesium oxides known worldwide.

However, challenges emerged in the latter half of the 20th century. The factory faced issues related to fuel shortages, competition, and the environmental impact of its production processes. The 1970s oil crisis and the 1976 ban on asbestos - a key component in the company's thermal insulators - led to a decline in production. The factory was acquired by the Solvay Group in 1990, but despite efforts to modernize and reduce its environmental impact, it struggled to adapt and ultimately ceased operations by 2009.



Besozzi, Luciano. "Industria, l'artigianato e il commercio." In *Angera (1900-1926)*. Partegora, 2018.

Colombo, Gianfranco. "...La Soara." In *Angera primo 900: prosa e poesie*. Biblioteca Civica di Angera, 1985.

Ravasi, Alvinio. *Società Generale per l'Industria della Magnesia alla Soara di Angera*. Exhibition and publication Vol. 1 and 2.



Aerial photograph, Swiss Confederation LUBIS, 1953.

Oral Histories

With the two daughters of the former director of the Soara, they used to live on site

BASINS

WORKSHOP SHEDS

FIFA HOUSE (HOUSE OF FEAR)
GALLERY FOR CHEESE
STORAGE

FORMER OFFICES

THERE
USED
TO BE A
BRIDGE

THE ELDEST
SISTER GOT VERY
EMOTIONAL HERE

USED TO BE VIOLETS,
MUSHROOM AND GREEN

TUNNEL TO
CROSS THE
HILL

FORMER STABLES

MINE STORAGE SHED AND
PLACE FOR EXPLOSIONS
ON TOP OF THE HILL

“THE GRINDING OF
THE MACHINES WAS A
CONSTANT LOUD NOISE
YOU HAD TO GET USED
TO.”

HOUSE
CARPENTRY

FORMER
ENTRANCE
WITH
PORTER

“WE WERE ALL ONE
BIG FAMILY AT THE
SOARA.”

“AT EACH TURN
OF A SHIFT YOU
WOULD HEAR THE
HORN.”

CANTENE
AND OFFICES
IN THE 70s

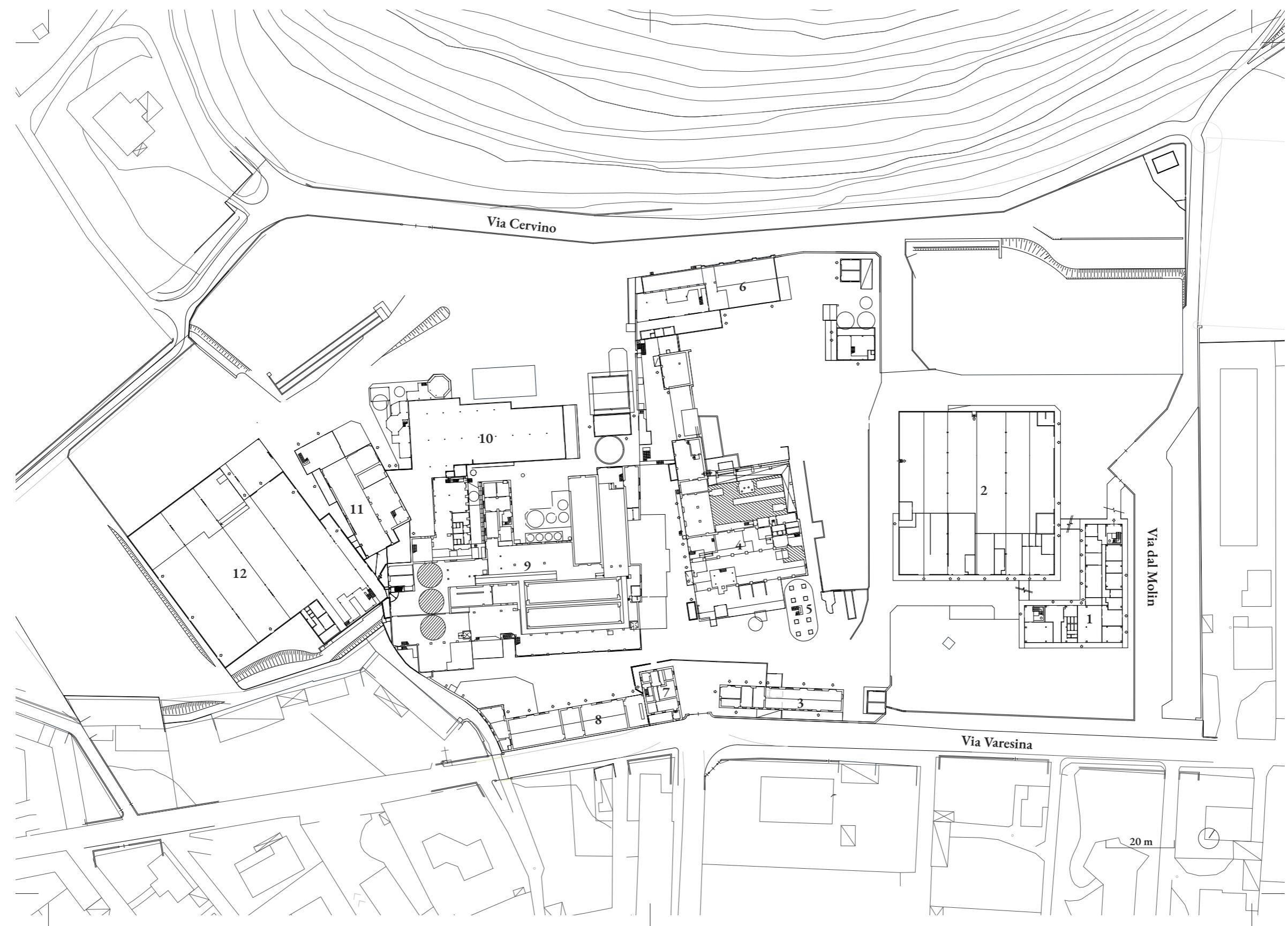
CHAPEL OF THE
MADONNA, USED TO BE
NEAR THE MINES, NOW
HERE
RUMOURS THAT THE
SOMEONE STOLE THE
STATUE??!

SAINT MICHEL
CHAPEL

“WE WERE SELFSUFFICIENT;
EVERYTHING USED TO BE HERE.
IF WE NEEDED SOMETHING OR
HAD TO REPAIR SOMETHING
WE COULD DO IT OURSELVES.”

“MARIA USED TO WORK IN
THE CANTENE. EACH YEAR TO
CELEBRATE SANTA BARBARA
SHE USED TO MAKE A BIG PAN
OF SAFFRON RISOTTO.”

“THE SOARA USED TO BE
A MEETING PLACE FOR
THE NEIGHBOURHOOD.
WE WATCHED THE GIRO
D’ITALIA TOGETHER.”



Ruin Classification



Building 6, ruin 1



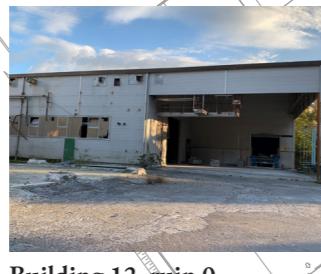
Building 11, ruin 2



Building 10, ruin 1



Building 5, ruin 1



Building 12, ruin 0



Building 9, ruin 2



Building 8, ruin 0



Building 7, ruin 0



Building 3, ruin 0

0. Ready for use

Fully operational with all systems functioning (lighting, plumbing, electricity, etc.), minor interventions needed such as repainting and insulating

1. Obvious repair work needed

Core structure is intact, but major interventions are required, such as replacing the roof, asbestos removal, and implementing safety measures

2. Extreme damage

Structure still standing, but not safe to enter. Requires further structural investigation

3. Not repairable

Complete destruction



Building 2, ruin 0

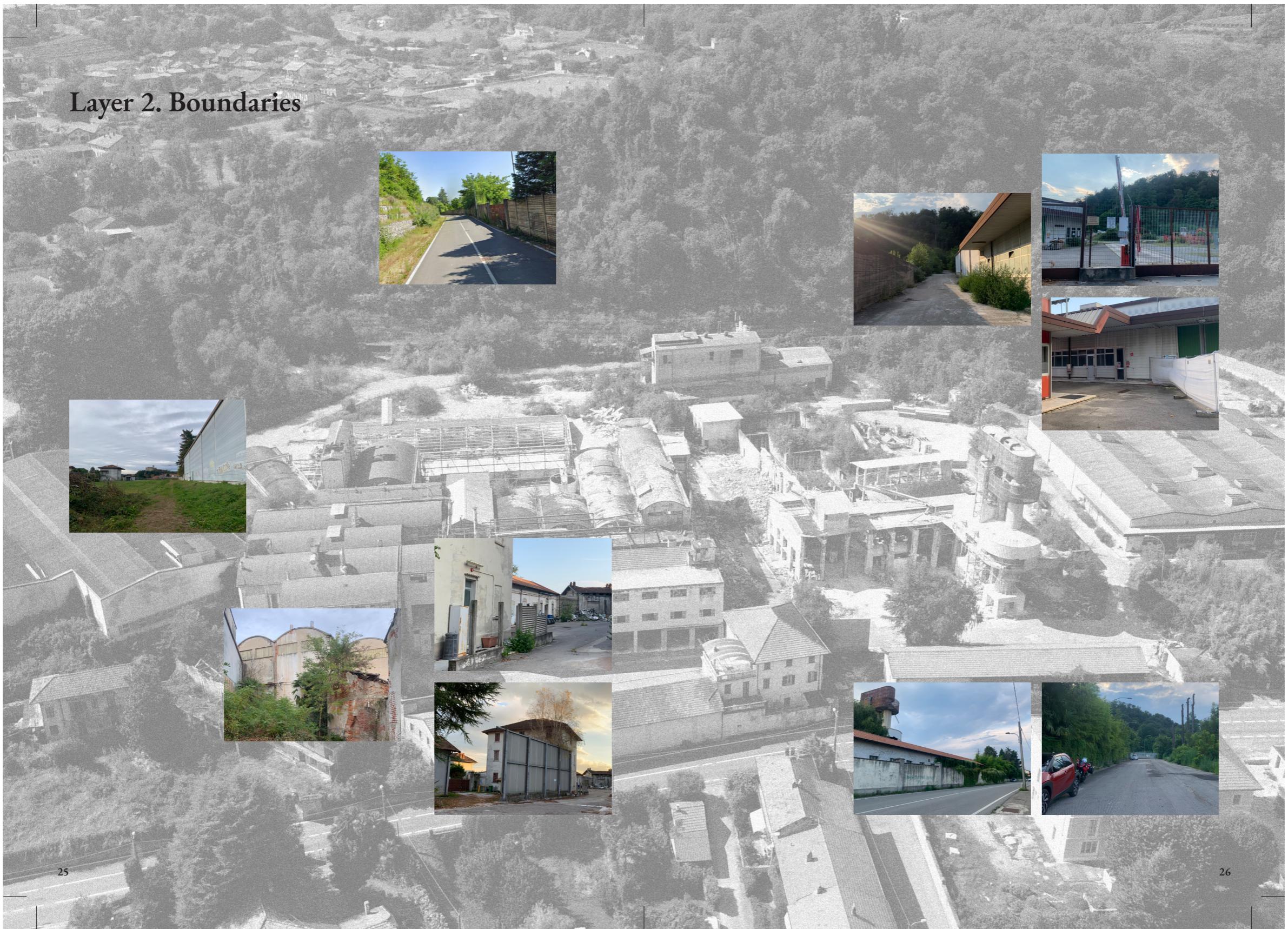


Building 1, ruin 0

Layer 1. Memories



Layer 2. Boundaries



Layer 3. Passageways



Layer 4. Signs of Life



Layer 5. Views



1. Programmatic Conclusion

The main challenge in reactivating Angera is to find a solution that makes the town attractive, not just to tourists or occasional visitors, but to attract people willing to settle and build their lives here.

Through an analysis of nine case studies on reactivation strategies, each with detailed conclusions in the accompanying booklets, I have identified insights that, combined with a deep understanding of Angera, form the foundation of this approach.

Unlike in Monte Carasso, where the focus was on redeveloping the town center as a focal point, Angera's existing town structure isn't the issue. What's needed is something larger - a focal point that brings new energy to the town, creating fertile ground for local entrepreneurship, cultural, and social engagement. It should be a place where people can experiment and organize themselves, testing possible futures for the town. However, relying solely on volunteer work and local goodwill won't suffice. This initiative needs to be supported by larger players to provide funding and attract the critical mass necessary for local initiatives and businesses to succeed.

Drawing from the lessons learned in the Favara case study, where a cultural institution acted as a main revitalization driver, a similar strategy can be implemented in Angera. The approach is to introduce a major educational institution. Conversations with local artisans, architects, and entrepreneurs have revealed a growing gap in hands-on skills, with the traditional craftsman disappearing as there has been a devaluation in manual labor and education increasingly focuses on theoretical knowledge. The gastronomer refers to this shift as producing "engineers in nothing," emphasizing that even specialized roles will become obsolete as AI takes over. He argues that jobs like therapists, gardeners, plumbers, and repair workers, which cannot be industrialized, should be prioritized. It is precisely these crafts, jobs rooted in immediate needs of the town, that we must focus on. This shift, along with the philosophy behind commoning - that social, material, and mental transformations go hand in hand - makes a vocational school a fitting choice, fostering practical skills and empowering new generations. This school is part of a larger organism - a new communal node that fosters collaboration and acts as a catalyst for entrepreneurship and know-how. It supports emerging start-ups and established businesses (e.g., Rossi d'Angera Distillery), shared workshops, ateliers, partnerships with local schools, a democratic theater, and a bio supermarket selling local products, among other local, community-driven initiatives. Since such a space cannot be accommodated within the existing town center, there is a need for a large site outside the town itself, one that can alleviate current parking problems, yet is not too isolated so that it can be woven into the fabric of the town.

When looking back at Angera's flourishing eras, its decline began after its industrial peak. Today, we are left with the spatial remnants - the Soara factory, standing as a relic of Angera's industrial past, a symbol of a moment when the town had to reinvent itself. Its strategic position near schools, the hospital, the historic center, nature areas, and the main road, along with its vast spaces and deep connection with the community, presents a unique opportunity. Today, the town faces the challenge to reinvent itself once again. As Jane Jacobs wrote, "New ideas must use old buildings," and the Soara factory walls offer the perfect foundation for experimentation and testing possible futures, building on the town's heritage.

This new node at the Soara factory will serve as a crucial step in reweaving the fabric of Angera, creating a renewed sense of community and identity that can drive the town's revitalization. Simultaneously, vacant spaces throughout the town will be reactivated to support communal activities. The reintroduction of the grape festivity is a key first step, uniting the community and laying the connection between the town and the Soara factory, where past echoes and future dreams collide, inviting the community to collectively shape its future.

Program

The Soara site is divided into three sections, functioning together as an organism:

Commercial

- Affordable hotel rooms for artists in residence, guest lecturers, weekend visitors etc.
- Bio supermarket selling local produce
- Bike-repair and rental service engaging with surrounding nature reserves and encouraging sustainable mobility through the town
- Rental spaces for care practices (e.g., physiotherapists), local retail and artisanal businesses (e.g., bakery, handmade goods store)
- Large parking area with electric vehicle charging stations, powered by locally sourced solar energy

Community

- Democratic theater for storytelling, discussions, lectures, etc.
- Canteen offering affordable, locally-sourced produce
- Community garden for healing and sharing know-how
- Rental spaces for community initiatives, after-school activities, exhibitions etc.
- Outdoor sports area (bouldering, skating)
- Covered outdoor event space with a bar counter, indoor toilets, storage (for tables, chairs, etc.), and community kitchen
- Development team / management team office
- Publicly accessible lookout tower

Education/Entrepreneurship

- Classrooms for vocational school
- Administration offices of vocational school
- Yard for material storage (e.g., stones, drying timber) and outdoor extension for indoor activities
- Showroom open to private and professional clients
- Warehouse for materials that cannot be stored outside
- Workshops shared between school, entrepreneurs, and local community (e.g., recording studios, woodworking, textile workshops)
- Permanent ateliers and workspaces for entrepreneurs, start-ups, and established businesses (e.g., Rossi d'Angera Distillery)
- Flexible co-working, study, and meeting spaces with open access

Relation with town center

- Pedestrian and cycling path that connects the factory with the town center
- Collaboration with existing institutions and local businesses (e.g., archeological museum, the gastronomer's wine bar, the carpenter's wood workshop)
- Reactivation of vacant sites to support communal activities
- Revitalization of local stories and traditions (e.g., reintroduce Festa dell'Uva, execute Michele De Lucchi's floating temple project proposal)

2. Spatial Conclusion

This transformation framework guides the organic redevelopment of the Soara site, ensuring unity amid changing uses, renovations, and new developments. In my role as architect, I adopt the approach of a *bricoleur*, reflected in how I engage with the urban context and architectural design.

Urban Ensemble

The original plan has gradually been altered through additions and demolitions that took place mainly in the 1970s. These changes are reflected in the wide range of constructions and materials, such as prefab buildings, industrial steel structures, reinforced concrete, and brick constructions, resulting in a varied state of decay across the site. However, the two main historical vertical and horizontal axes remain intact, with the intersecting node - the piazza with the tower - forming the heart of the site. The vertical axis, along with the ramp parallel to it, and the existing morphology of the terrain - characterized by significant differences in height - divides the site into three areas. The approach is to make use of this division to accommodate programs for *Commercial* functions, *Community* and *Education/Entrepreneurship*.

The eastern part of the site is well-suited for commercial functions due to its large hall and direct access from the main road, which has a bus stop, as well as its large open space for parking. This parking area will help alleviate parking pressure in the town center, and together with its dedicated paths, encourage walking and cycling to and from the town center, as well as nearby natural areas. The vehicle entrance will be located on this eastern side where the current entrance gate already serves as the access for the sculpturer's exhibition. The mesh fence in front of building 1 will be removed to give it a more inviting appearance.

The central axis is the oldest part holding the most memories. Together with the buildings along the horizontal axis, it will house programs focused on community activities. This area will serve as a connector between the other two zones, with a garden and main piazza for events. The buildings along the horizontal axis have a town-like character, which resonates with the community, offering a sense of familiarity and accessibility. The main entrance of the site, historically located at the intersecting node and once guarded by a gatekeeper, is no longer suitable due to its close proximity to the main road, limited parking space, and lack of pedestrian access. However, it will be kept as the official postal address. To improve accessibility, the existing reinforced concrete wall on the north side will be gradually interrupted along the pedestrian and cycling path, forming a new entrance. This intervention will transform the site's boundary into a threshold, enhancing access and strengthening the connection with the surrounding nature and landscape.

The area assigned to the vocational school and the various entrepreneurs is situated at a higher elevation on the western side of the site, giving it a more secluded character. The numerous barrel-roofed halls with high ceilings, including the large 1970s hall, along with the courtyard and yard next to the gate, make this part of the site particularly well-suited for this program. The agglomeration of buildings in this part has become less readable over time due to various alterations. It should be cleaned up, for example by removing non-characteristic additions. This area will make use of the existing logistical entrance and has a smaller parking area for designated users. The site will be mostly car-free, with the ramp and horizontal axis occasionally used for loading and unloading.

While each area has its own characteristics, the entire site functions as a single organism in various aspects, reflected in the interconnected flow of resources and energy, working together to create a healing ecosystem.

Architectural Approach

The overall architectural approach can be defined as *magic rationalism*, reflecting the cultural spirit of Italian design, and implying a balance of pragmatic interventions with poetic, crafted details. The project builds upon the existing, using what is already there as a starting point rather than treating it as secondary or elevate it to cultural heritage. Instead, a middle ground is sought, where existing structures are preserved, repaired, and reinforced where necessary, with simple interventions that transform them into ornaments, giving them new value. The old and new become intrinsically linked, each reinforcing the other, reflecting the core value of the project.

The project seeks to inspire others to take part in the process, encouraging collaborative hands-on construction as a means of community building. Local craftsmen are engaged in creating crafted details (e.g., doorhandles, curtains), turning these pieces into "jewels" that reflect local pride and skill. Materials are sourced locally, including reclaimed elements from the site and wood that will be collected from the San Quirico forest, which is currently overgrown and almost inaccessible due to poor maintenance. Timber is dried on-site and a workshop is set up where the timber is worked and experimentation with other materials takes place. This includes the production of bio-based panels (for insulation and exterior cladding), recycled ceramic tiles, and the reclaiming of materials found on-site. New additions reinterpret the existing structures on site (e.g., steel construction dimensions, corrugated sheets), embodying a contemporary industrial character.

Where the eastern and western areas have a more modest and pragmatic approach, the central area becomes a space for encounter and collective dreaming, that is reflected in its architecture. This central strip acts as a parallel world to the town center and the Rocca castle, as a "castle of the people," with a touch of royalty, expressed through simple materials, and reflecting the taste and traditions of the people in Angera. The landscape is a reinterpretation of renaissance castle gardens, with its symmetry axes, secluded seating areas, illusions, and ruins, evoking a sense of mystery and wonder. At the same time, plants have a healing function for the polluted environment and filter grey water, combining poetic refinement with pragmatic solutions. The Soara tower is an iconic robust relic, however, currently unsafe to climb. Safety measures are taken that, at the same time, enhance its presence and reinforce its appearance as a castle tower.

The indoor and outdoor community spaces have an open layout and adaptable features, with the architecture serving as a stage for the people, allowing for the continual redefinition of the space. The theater building, situated at the highest point of the site along the vertical axis with the garden in front, embodies this democratic approach, blurring the line between audience and actor. It responds to the community's needs of a place for storytelling, tying into the concept of worldmaking that underpins the entire project.

I have chosen to further develop the design of this theater building, along with smaller interventions, as a practical example of how *magic rationalism* can be applied, inspiring and encouraging others to take agency. A set of guidelines and recommendations (not definitive yet, if ever) has been developed for each building, offering a fluid framework for others who take on the project (as outlined in Appendix 1).

3. Organizational Conclusion

Organizational Structure

My role as an architect includes acting as a dreammaker, taking on the role of a quartermaster (originally a military term for troops sent ahead to make preparations before the rest of the military arrives), by coming up with a vision and preparing the groundwork for its implementation, designing processes, and bringing together the right groups and people to bring it to life. A development team is formed by the quartermaster initially to refine the proposal, assess the site's potential, establish connections with people and institutions, and explore funding options.

In the summer of 2023, I met the municipal councillor, the mayor, the owner of the site, a former factory worker of the Soara, and a local architect. These individuals had already been involved in early discussions on the future of the Soara, and the last three gave me a tour of the site. They are all part of the development team, which includes key figures from the town, each contributing their own perspective and expertise (further elaborated in Appendix 2).

This diverse team sets the project to be a true Gesamtkunstwerk. Its non-hierarchical structure ensures collective decision-making, physically reflected in the organic shaped sculptural table that the sculpturer currently staying on site will craft for their first gatherings on the site. While the core team consists of around 13 people, a broader network of participants will be involved through smaller subgroups focusing on specific aspects. Within the development team, smaller working groups are also formed based on specific tasks.

Local residents will have opportunities to contribute ideas, stay informed, and provide feedback, ensuring transparency and community involvement. To facilitate this, the currently vacant rowing club building on the lakeside alley, known as Angera's "green salon," will serve as an info point, sharing updates on the factory site and upcoming activities. The Pensioners of the Allea, who regularly meet at the sculptural bench right next to it, will act as informal living archives and news spreaders.

A transformation framework has been established (as outlined in the spatial conclusion), which the development team continuously refines and consults, ensuring ongoing coherence throughout the process. The development team not only plays a central role in transforming the site but also serves as the driving force behind the Festa dell'Uva, a community celebration that is revived as an integral part of the revitalization process.

An entrepreneurs' cooperative will be formed and in collaboration with the vocational school, it will take responsibility for managing the western area of the site. This cooperative will be part of the development team early on, with the local carpenter as its representative, and will gradually grow in number.

The development team may evolve over time as institutions become involved, while the municipality gradually reduces its role based on the fade-in/fade-out principle. Eventually, a management team will emerge from the development team, taking responsibility for overseeing the long-term functionality of the project. This includes maintenance, organizational tasks, and adapting to the evolving needs of the community to maintain its relevance. A platform, inspired by Prinzessinnengarten's Neighborhood Academy, will become an integral part of the management team. Its aim is to create a space for knowledge exchange between craftsmen, artists, the local community, and across generations, offering skill-building through workshops, events, and programs that go beyond the established educational system.

Finance

The foundation of the project is a self-sustaining business model, initially leveraging existing subsidies and funds (such as municipal, PNRR and regional contributions), but ultimately focusing on a balanced, non-profit commercial model, where income and expenses are aligned. The main challenge is prioritizing social value over financial gain, while allowing the project to operate in an economically sustainable way.

In addition to external funding, the municipality and the current site owners will invest in securing the site and improving its infrastructure. Inspired by the gastronomer's strategy for his enduring family business, which focuses on keeping costs low to ensure accessibility while generating additional revenue through complementary services, the community project will similarly benefit from partnerships with a vocational school and a bio supermarket that provide essential funding. Where possible, a sweat equity model will be employed to reduce financial barriers and increase community engagement, offering tenants discounts in exchange for their time and labor.

Revenue will come from renting out spaces, membership fees, hospitality, events, and programming, which will cover costs for maintenance, salaries, administrative expenses, and energy. Investments in sustainable energy production and water management systems will have higher initial costs but lead to long-term savings.

Ownership

Currently, the entire site is owned by private entities. To ensure fair power distribution and collective responsibility, the ownership structure will be decentralized over time. Initially, the municipality will hold ownership of at least the central strip of the site to safeguard community interests, but may eventually transition to a Community Land Trust, with the community taking ownership. The western part of the site will be managed by an entrepreneurs' cooperative and the vocational school, which will acquire or rent the space from the owners through certificates. The current owners may retain ownership of the eastern part of the site, either renting out the spaces or eventually stepping out entirely.

Phasing

The Soara is an old industrial area with many buildings in poor condition, requiring an organic, adaptable phasing approach (see proposed outline in Appendix 3). The transformation framework will act as guiding principles in this unpredictable process.

The project will begin with minor maintenance and occupancy of the buildings in the best condition (e.g., renting out spaces of building 1 to generate income for the development team, use the large halls for workshops and material storage purposes).

The heart of the site will be prioritized for restoration as it holds the area's identity and heritage. Making the tower accessible again is an important step in sparking local enthusiasm and establishing it as a landmark marking the site's transformation.

The introduction of the Festa dell'Uva will be an important first step before transitioning to a more permanent approach, a gentle kiss to reawaken the Sleeping Beauty. The event functions as a form of placemaking, and its temporary nature allows room for community involvement and imagination, hence the "Echoes and Dreams" theme.

Appendix 1 Transformation Guidelines and Recommendations

A classification has been made of the current state of each ruin (as presented in the brochure on Angera's industrial heritage, page 21), and based on this, guidelines and recommendation have been outlined, ranging from minor repairs to more extensive interventions, guided by the program for each building and the principles of *magic rationalism*.

Commercial

Building 1. Hotel and Services

- Minor maintenance, such as the removal of suspended ceilings or the replacement of weathered sandwich panels with bio-based alternatives made on-site.
- Reuse and repair the existing 1970s interior furnishings.
- Create an outdoor seating area in the planted area to enjoy the morning sun.

Building 2. Bio Supermarket

- Clear hall.
- Install solar panels on the large, slightly inclined sawtooth roof.
- Add electric car charging stations on the parking area next to the building.
- Partly replace roof panels with glass to let natural light in.
- Build a timber shelving structure, integrated into the existing metal framework, while also stabilizing the structure, inspired by current improvised techniques.
- Create holes in the concrete slab for the introduction of plants (e.g., herbs, for customers to pick themselves).
- Strip the damaged canopy and let plants grow over it.
- Replace vandalized doors with glass to create a welcoming entrance.

Community

Buildings 3, 7, 8. Community Facilities

- Remove debris and waste surrounding the buildings.
- Repaint window frames.
- Clear and repaint buildings' interior, reuse metal racks and other types of furniture.
- Clad the walls partially with pegboard to absorb sound, provide some thermal insulation, and offer storage or display space for objects.
- The common spaces should be unobstructed so they are available to different users for temporary occupation and various functions; therefore, it's important to provide enough storage options.

Building 4. Ruin Garden

- Collect and sort waste materials.
- Use larger concrete slabs to create pathways throughout the garden.
- Coat the ruined walls with white stucco, a nod to a common practice in Angera to cover up fragmented stone walls.
- Add a layer of earth and demolition waste to the existing basins to grow shallow-rooted plants such as almond bushes and herbs (eg., Juniper, Wormwood, Pine Buds), as well as plants that can be used in experimentation with natural dyes and insulation materials, and create a sequence of secluded gardens.
- The garden has a healing function and filters greywater through a helophyte filter.

-Integrate the existing water drainage channels into the garden design, using them as a starting point. For example, remove their metal grid, expand the channels, and incorporate them as part of the garden landscape for aesthetic and irrigation purposes.

-Reinterpret the structure of a renaissance garden, incorporating the symmetry, and architectural elements such as statues, pergolas and secluded seating areas, made from objects and materials found on site.

-Incorporate lighting elements to illuminate paths and seating areas, ensuring that the garden is also visible as a decorative backdrop for the theater in the evenings.

-The small building in the ruin garden functions as a teahouse or meeting place for volunteers and school children, as well as storage for materials used in maintaining the garden.

-Create an organic-shaped, monolithic structure on the blind wall of building 9, using materials found on-site, inspired by the barbicans in the town center, with seating areas and plants growing between the rubble. Parts of the blind wall could also be transformed into a bouldering wall, reconnecting to the site's magnesium industry past and offering a space for sport and recreation.

-The large open space, parallel to the ruin garden, can be used for skating, with elements like ramps and obstacles made from found materials, rocks, and debris. Together with the bouldering wall, this area offers a space for recreational activities, particularly for young people, while also serving as a place for markets and other events.

-On the higher level next to the theater, large deep beds are placed for growing vegetables and fruit, which are used by the canteen.

Building 4. Piazza

-Replace roof with a simple timber structure that weaves into the existing steel trusses and secure prefabricated roof panels.

-The small corrugated metal structure on the roof is repurposed and combined with timber, forming a folly that serves as a bus stop. It is positioned on the side of Via Varesina mirroring the water kiosk and sparking curiosity.

-Reinforce the existing walls with timber shoring.

-Reinforce brick columns by steel jacketing, transforming them into ornamental features while providing structural support.

-Enhance or open up the sections of the walls where the original arch construction is visible, creating a new connection between the piazza and the ruin garden.

-Fill the basins with water lilies.

-Plant a large tree in the center of the piazza, surrounded by stones and rubble. The space around it allows for dancing, reminiscent to the evenings that took place on the Piazza Parrocchiale, a tradition no longer permitted due to noise complaints. The tree symbolizes the rebirth of the site and references the town's historic coat of arms, as well as the dancing matronae goddesses mentioned in several local legends.

-Incorporate anchored elements (with plug connections), made of large magnesium waste bricks inspired by the tower's foundation blocks, that can serve multiple functions, such as a stage, seating, table, or bar. When, for example, Cascina Piano winery or a local event organizer want to serve their drinks, they simply need to register and bring in their own portable equipment. Equipment such as glasses and a fridge can also be borrowed from building 3.

Building 5. Tower

-Secure to ensure public accessibility with a timber structure woven into the existing railings.

-Transform the existing staircase into a theatrical experience, with multiple routes and platforms that can also serve as stages for music performances.

- Incorporate seating areas and tables where people can enjoy an aperitivo while taking in the views over the site, the town, and the lake.
- Explore ways to reuse the oven for cooking purposes or as a kiln for ceramics.
- Add elements to enhance visibility from afar, such as a flagpole.
- Ensure lighting elements are integrated along the staircase route and illuminate the entire tower from below.

Building 6. Theater and Canteen

- Professional removal of asbestos, leaving skeletal structure and foundation.
- Add a new insulated facade to one volume of the building, maintaining the existing industrial appearance and functionality, with a playful and contemporary interpretation. The other volume retains its skeletal structure, using glass panels to create a greenhouse-like effect.
- Use large openings to blur the boundary between inside and outside, establishing a connection with the garden in front.
- The masonry volume in front of the building functions as the main entrance for both actors and visitors to the theater and canteen, housing the reception, wardrobe, toilets, technical rooms, and dressing rooms. This space, functions as a threshold, a space between the outside world and the world of imagination, reflected in the backstage atmosphere (eg., using burnt wood cobbles, dark colours, steel elements), blurring the line between audience and actor, as if inviting the visitor to take on the role of the performer before stepping onto the stage.
- Replace the deteriorated slanted roof of the entrance building with wooden mono trusses, inspired by the steel trusses of the main building. Instead of a pitched roof, the new flat roof will allow for natural light to enter through glass panels. The roof will also serve as an outdoor extension of the theater floor above.
- The masonry wall extends all the way down to the ruin garden on the south side, benefiting from the sun exposure. This offers the possibility of creating a Trombe wall (a passive solar heating system), which will be painted black and framed with glass to capture heat.
- A grand staircase is placed at the center of the building, leading up to the theater floors. The height difference in terrain at the rear of the building offers a simple, cost-effective solution for wheelchair access, providing direct entry to the theater floor level without the need for a lift.
- The greenhouse part of the building is, among other things, used as a lobby for the theater, featuring a bar and a light, open atmosphere. It includes plants and trees, such as citrus trees, which grow through openings made in the concrete floor slabs.
- The tunnel beside the building, once used for industrial purposes, leads to the other side of the hill. According to Marzia and Ele, a different cave nearby was used for cheese storage. The tunnel will be repurposed for this function, echoing the stories of the site, along with the legend of the cave beneath the Rocca castle. The terrace in front functions as an outdoor extension of the lobby and offers a space for tastings and outdoor gatherings.
- The restaurant, located on the ground floor of the western side of the building, takes inspiration from traditional Italian trattorias, offering a simple, affordable menu that fills a gap for locals who desire a casual dining experience. It also serves as a place where school classes can gather for lunch on a weekly basis. The space features large clay tiles on the floor, made from materials found on-site, and wooden paneling that provides insulation while partially exposing the masonry walls. A long table in the center invites community gatherings and new encounters.

-The theater embodies a democratic character, where architecture collaborates with the performance, blurring the boundaries between stage and audience. Positioned in lateral galleries across three levels, the audience becomes part of the spectacle. The building is honest and theatrical in its construction, with exposed elements such as sheep wool insulation in red nets hanging from the ceiling, large metal bolts becoming ornaments, and visible mechanical systems like the fly system and manual gears, letting the inner workings of the theater become part of the experience. Crafted details, such as the knobs, wheels, and large curtains, are made by local craftsmen, reflecting local pride and skill. Large round wheels are manually turned to open the gates, allowing the terrace to become an extension of the stage and the garden to be part of the decor.

Education/Entrepreneurship

Buildings 9, 10, 11. Vocational School

- Initially, a structural investigation is conducted, the buildings are secured, and access is restricted to authorized individuals during the construction phase.
- The ensemble of buildings 9 is refined by removing non-characteristic additions, such as the flat roof between the buildings, and replacing it with glass to create a covered passage that leads to the workshops, allowing natural light to filter in. This passage connects to the original circulation cores with elevators on either side of the building ensemble. The accompanying staircases are preserved where possible and enhanced to be more visible and welcoming, reinforcing intuitive navigation through the space.
- The large, interconnected halls with their varying heights are used strategically, with workshops located on the ground floors and classrooms, workspaces, and ateliers on the upper levels, housed in transparent freestanding units that provide both sound and thermal insulation, and clustered by specialization. Workshops are visible through glass walls from the passage, allowing visitors to observe the activities inside, but access is restricted to authorized individuals.
- The school's administration offices and main entrance are located on the south side, opposite building 8, at ground level. Adjacent, there is space for a shop selling construction materials, tools, and products made by the students and entrepreneurs. From this point, the stairs or elevator provide access to the various floors, or the ramp leads directly to the courtyard of the vocational school with the adjacent classrooms, and a makerspace that is open to all users of the site but also to the public.
- Building 10 is primarily used as a warehouse for materials that cannot be stored outside.
- Building 11, with its distinctive arches featuring both an open and a closed section, and its location between the school and the large hall, lends itself to functioning as a central entrance area. The open section could be used as a covered bicycle parking area, while the closed section includes facilities such as restrooms, a cloakroom, a meeting room, and a coffee corner.

Building 12. Companies

- The large hall is designated for several larger, more established companies, divided by brightly colored lines. For example, Rossi d'Angera Distillery could move its premises here, taking advantage of the central location and proximity to the Soara tower for hosting tastings with a view over Angera and Lake Maggiore. This benefits smaller businesses as well, attracting visitors and creating opportunities for collaboration and growth.
- If space allows, a showroom could be added, open to both private and professional clients.

Appendix 3 Proposed Development Process

Community involvement	Study and identification of underused lots	Conceptual vision proposal	Development team is formed Local community representatives (e.g., school teacher, mayor, church representative) are individualized and take part in collective decision-making groups. Individual of institutions that align with project vision (e.g., vocational schools, big supermarket) and potential funding options (e.g., PNRR, regional funds) are explored.	Collective design discussions and workshops	Draft project proposal and action plan
				Building 1 prepared and rented out to generate initial income	
First execution phase	Material collection	A local contractor is hired to handle specialized tasks (e.g., asbestos removal) Local wood is sourced and waste materials are collected and catalogued.			
			Workshop and safety measures Workshop is set up and waste materials are restored. Safety measures (e.g., stability elements, protective barriers) are constructed. The factory site is prepared for the festival.	Planting workshop (e.g., planting of hemp seeds for future insulation production)	Festa dell'Uva The parade begins in the historic center and weaves through the town to the factory. The festival theme is 'Echoes and Dreams' and celebrates the connection between people, nature, and eras.
Second design and execution phase	Weaving connections	Meanwhile other underused lots in the town are prepared for use, hosting discussions, workshops, exhibitions, and events. One lot serves as an info point for updates on factory site and a program of upcoming activities. Initial meetings are held with interested parties and institutions.			
	Site purchase	The site is partially purchased by the municipality (and later a Community Land Trust) and an entrepreneurs' cooperative, ensuring fair power distribution.		Design development and construction drawings Acquire building permits	
Maintenance and community engagement	Collective design discussions and workshops		Material sourcing and experimentation Wood and forest waste are sourced, timber dried on-site, and biobased experimentation takes place. Waste from site and urban mining is restored.	Workshops biobased materials, timber, and planting	First residents moving in and gradual opening of the community facilities
					Weaving new opportunities Meanwhile, selected lots in the town remain in use, adapting to changing needs and undergoing restoration when needed. New residents from the factory (e.g., students, artists in residence) become involved in the town, while locals become engaged with the factory, fostering cross-pollination.

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