



THE INSTITUTIONAL DIALOGUE PROJECT OF THE GREEN LIVING AREAS MISSION

PARTICIPATORY REGENERATION THROUGH INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION

POLICY BRIEF

ABSTRACT

This policy brief presents key lessons from the BAUHAUS4MED participatory regeneration model implemented in Minucciano (Lucca, Italy), which translates New European Bauhaus (NEB) principles into a formalised inter-institutional governance framework.

The model demonstrates how participatory design processes, when embedded in structured cooperation between regional authorities, municipalities, universities, private stakeholders and citizens, can evolve into policy-relevant instruments for sustainable territorial regeneration. It is particularly relevant for Mediterranean inner, rural and small territories facing depopulation, limited administrative capacity and constrained access to traditional funding mechanisms.

The brief highlights practical insights on governance design, citizen participation and possible alternative financing mechanisms, showing how institutional continuity, trust-building and multi-level cooperation can enable long-term regeneration beyond project cycles. By translating participatory experimentation into a formalised governance framework, the BAUHAUS4MED model provides concrete policy lessons and a usable reference for public authorities seeking to embed community-driven regeneration into institutional planning and decision-making processes.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Apply a multidisciplinary approach to sustainable innovation
- Formalise participatory regeneration through inter-institutional cooperation
- Strengthen the role of universities as long-term innovation partners
- Combine alternative financing with strong community trust
- Ensure institutional continuity beyond project cycles
- Support capacity building and peer learning across Mediterranean territories

Keywords: Participatory Regeneration, New European Bauhaus, Inter-Institutional Cooperation, Community Engagement, Territorial Regeneration, Rural Development, Multi-Level Governance, Alternative Financing, Sustainable Territorial Development, Mediterranean Regions

DISCLAIMER: This policy brief is pending final approval by the Managing Authority of Interreg Euro-MED, and it might still be slightly revised.



INTRODUCTION

Small and inner Mediterranean territories face a combination of structural challenges that limit their capacity to pursue sustainable development. Depopulation, ageing communities, reduced access to services, limited administrative and technical capacity and constrained public budgets are common features across many inland and peripheral areas. Traditional planning and funding tools often prove insufficient in these contexts, as they tend to be sectoral, top-down and dependent on large-scale investments that are difficult to mobilise locally.

In response to these limitations, participatory regeneration approaches have gained increasing relevance, reconnecting spatial planning with local needs, social inclusion and cultural identity. The New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative reinforces this shift by promoting sustainability, inclusion and aesthetics as integrated principles for territorial transformation, particularly in places where conventional development models have failed to deliver long-term results.

This policy brief builds on discussions held during the “2nd Institutional Policy Dialogue” of the Green Living Areas Mission, where the BAUHAUS4MED model from Minucciano was discussed as a transferable governance approach for participatory territorial regeneration. The dialogue highlighted the need for policy instruments capable of translating bottom-up processes into durable governance frameworks, particularly in territories facing limited capacity and structural constraints.

Within this context, this BAUHAUS4MED model emerges as a policy-relevant response. Rather than focusing solely on physical interventions, it proposes a governance-based approach that embeds participatory design into formal institutional cooperation. By linking regional authorities, municipalities, universities and communities, the model demonstrates how bottom-up processes can be translated into durable policy frameworks that support long-term territorial regeneration.



POLICY IN THE SPOTLIGHT: THE BAUHAUS4MED MODEL IN MINUCCIANO

How BAUHAUS4MED's Italian pilot is located in Minucciano (Lucca) a small municipality located in Garfagnana, an inner area of the Tuscany Region facing depopulation and socio-economic decline. There, the BAUHAUS4MED project initiated a collaborative process for the sustainable and inclusive revitalization of the area, bringing together regional and local institutions (the Region of Tuscany and the Municipality of Minucciano), the academic community (the Department of Architecture – DIDA – of the University of Florence), local private enterprises (Garfagnana Innovazione and Mi.gra srl), and citizens. This model successfully tested innovative, NEB-oriented approaches to support green transformation in inland and rural areas, reinterpreting local development through a green, circular, and locally based economy, while valuing cultural and historical heritage and empowering local communities, particularly younger generations, to become agents of change.

The local cooperation, embedded into formal governance through a strategic inter-institutional agreement, was designed to respond to a set of interconnected policy and territorial objectives:

- to test NEB solutions (sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics) in an inner area context,
- to promote sustainable regeneration and resilience in Minucciano's inner area to counteract depopulation, foster socio-economic development and encourage innovation,
- to build a multi-level governance model connecting the Region, Municipality, University and local enterprises,
- to engage the local community through participatory co-design processes for locally tailored solutions and for strengthening civic participation,
- to create replicable models for other Mediterranean inner areas.

Over the course of one year, these objectives were operationalised through a structured participatory design process aimed at rethinking public spaces and services to make them more sustainable, inclusive, beautiful and aligned with NEB values. The process brought together academic expertise, territorial knowledge, and the everyday experiences of residents, all with the common goal to promote regeneration and economic development. The main steps can be summarized as follows:

- Citizens and associations were involved in multiple public meetings to share local needs, provide views, and identify challenges, strengths, and opportunities; this was done through the "World Café" meeting methodology, which helped foster open discussions, collect a high number of responses and suggestions, and build a sense of community.



- University students majoring in Architecture, specialising in Design for Sustainability, were involved to turn community input into innovative, NEB-oriented project ideas offering concrete solutions for the future of Minucciano; developed proposals considered key themes such as creative reuse of waste materials, social inclusion, and the environmental and cultural enhancement of the area.

Throughout the process, the Region of Tuscany and the Municipality of Minucciano acted as key facilitators and enablers, engaging key stakeholders, and providing the formal framework where experimentation and collaboration could happen. This cooperation was made possible by the supporting policy framework put in place by the Region, notably the two regional resolutions forming the strategic inter-institutional agreement. The first document, signed at project start, set up the collaboration between the Region and University to implement NEB-oriented activities in the Municipality of Minucciano within the BAUHAUS4MED framework. The second, signed at the conclusion of the co-design process, took the form of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Region, the University, the Municipality and two local private enterprises, with the aim of ensuring institutional continuity, long-term legitimacy and the viability of the actions developed.

By anchoring participatory design within a formal inter-institutional framework, the Minucciano experience demonstrates how experimental, NEB-oriented processes can gain legitimacy, continuity and policy relevance beyond the duration of a single project.

PARTICIPATORY REGENERATION

Participatory design and co-creation activities are often supported through project-based funding. However, the long-term implementation and sustainability of regeneration actions require financial solutions that extend beyond the individual project lifetime. For small and inner territories, in particular, this remains one of the most critical bottlenecks in translating participatory visions into concrete outcomes.

In Minucciano, this challenge was addressed through a diversified and locally grounded financing approach enabled by inter-institutional cooperation. While the agreement itself does not provide direct public funding for implementation, it enables the mobilisation of alternative resources, notably contributions from local private enterprises. These enterprises, strongly rooted in the local territory, were engaged as partners willing to support community initiatives as part of their broader social and environmental responsibility.



The Minucciano experience demonstrates that crowdsourcing can be an effective instrument in small communities when it is supported by clear communication, transparency and visible local commitment. Public events, such as festivals, exhibitions or community gatherings, play a crucial role in creating momentum, increasing visibility and building trust. In this sense, crowdsourcing can be seen as a mechanism to strengthen participation, ownership and collective responsibility for regeneration outcomes. The BAUHAUS4MED project tested the CROWDVOCACY platform as a digital civic engagement and participatory decision-making tool within the Minucciano pilot. The platform was used during the local co-design process to support a public voting phase on the proposed regeneration projects, in parallel with a paper-based ballot system. This hybrid approach enabled both digital and in-person participation, allowing citizens to vote, contribute feedback and actively engage in shaping local regeneration priorities. Citizens were given the opportunity to submit their project proposals either through the online platform or by using the paper-based submission option.

The use of the CROWDVOCACY platform illustrates how digital tools can complement local governance arrangements by increasing transparency and broadening participation. The Minucciano experience shows that such tools are most effective when embedded within broader participatory and institutional frameworks, and when combined with physical engagement formats that reflect local social dynamics.

ENHANCING REPLICABILITY AND UPSCALING POTENTIAL

The BAUHAUS4MED experience demonstrates that replicability depends less on transferring specific design solutions and more on adapting the governance frameworks and participatory processes that enable them. In this respect, the inter-institutional agreement developed in Minucciano plays a central role, providing legitimacy, coordination and continuity for participatory regeneration beyond the timeframe of a single project.

A key element of this framework is the involvement of universities and research institutions. When engaged as long-term partners rather than short-term project contributors, academic actors can support municipalities through design laboratories, applied research, student fieldwork and structured knowledge transfer. This role is particularly valuable for small municipalities, which often lack the internal technical and interdisciplinary capacity required to manage complex regeneration processes.

¹ More information about submitted project proposals is available on the inCOMMON PROJECTS CROWDVOCACY platform: <https://b4m.space/processes/PROGETTIinCOMUNE>



Capacity building therefore emerges as a critical condition for upscaling. Many local administrations face constraints related to limited staff, administrative burden and procedural complexity. Regional authorities and EU-level programmes can play an enabling role by providing simplified cooperation frameworks, clear guidance and targeted technical assistance. Such support helps reduce administrative barriers and allows local actors to focus on implementation, coordination and community engagement.

At the same time, the BAUHAUS4MED model shows a high degree of adaptability across different territorial contexts. While rural and urban areas face distinct challenges, the core principles of multi-level cooperation, participatory governance and institutional anchoring remain widely applicable. This flexibility makes the model particularly suitable for replication across diverse Mediterranean territories seeking to combine local ownership with policy continuity.

ENABLERS AND BARRIERS

Regeneration in inland, rural, or peripheral areas faces a distinct set of challenges compared to urban centres, primarily driven by demographic decline, physical isolation, and economic marginalization. While cities battle overcrowding, inland areas often struggle with the downward spiral of depopulation, aging communities, limited access to basic services and transportation, lack of employment opportunities and limited attractiveness for investors.

These challenges are further compounded by barriers common to many participatory regeneration projects, including citizens' general scepticism towards new initiatives, complex bureaucracy and administrative procedures, lack of technical expertise, and the difficulty to access steady sources of funding to implement interventions.

To be possible and effective, regeneration in inland areas requires a multidisciplinary approach that blends sustainability with socio-economic innovation. Key enablers in this sense include integrated planning approaches that combine spatial, social and economic dimensions, providing a stronger basis for regeneration than isolated, sectoral interventions. Strong and proactive political commitment and governance are essential to ensure continuity and legitimacy beyond project cycles. Community engagement supports trust and local ownership, while the adoption of new, sustainable economic models helps translate efforts into long-term, viable development.



Academic partnerships further strengthen these processes by bringing innovation, interdisciplinary expertise and evidence-based perspectives that many small municipalities lack internally.

Overall, the Minucciano case demonstrates that, while barriers to regeneration in inland areas remain significant, they are not insurmountable. Through integrated approaches, strong institutional alliances and flexible governance tools, participatory regeneration can become a viable pathway even in contexts affected by depopulation and limited capacity.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The BAUHAUS4MED model in Minucciano illustrates how participatory regeneration can evolve from local experimentation into a transferable policy approach. By embedding NEB principles into a formal inter-institutional governance framework, the model successfully bridges regional vision, local action and academic innovation.

For Mediterranean territories facing demographic decline and institutional capacity constraints, the key lesson is that sustainable regeneration depends on continuity, cooperation and trust. Formal governance arrangements, such as inter-institutional agreements, can provide the stability needed to sustain participatory processes beyond individual projects, while alternative financing mechanisms can enhance local ownership when combined with transparency and effective communication. In this context, digital civic engagement and crowdsourcing tools developed within BAUHAUS4MED illustrate how participation and governance can be strategically aligned to support long-term regeneration beyond project funding cycles.

Looking ahead, scaling up similar approaches will require clearer national and regional guidelines, simplified administrative procedures and stronger peer learning across territories. Platforms such as the Green Living Areas Mission can play a critical role in supporting this exchange, enabling Mediterranean regions to adapt and replicate participatory regeneration models in line with their own territorial specificities.



PROJECT SUMMARY

The Institutional Dialogue Project of the Green Living Areas Mission seeks to enhance policy transfer through dialogue among policymakers and public stakeholders. It focuses on continuous policy improvement and transformation and aims to establish long-term cooperation on public policy instruments at the Euro-Mediterranean level, ultimately improving citizens' quality of life.

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For further information on the Bauhaus4Med project,
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