



Stronger



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# Supporting the ecological transition in an Italian rural area



## SUMMARY

The project Eyes Hearts Hands Urban Revolution (EHHUR) works on the **sustainable energy transition** in the Nepi rural area. It aims to achieve the energy refurbishment of public buildings and create integrated social centres and energy communities, while developing and showcasing replicable models of sustainable development.

It is implemented by a consortium between the bio-district Biodistretto della Via Amerina e delle Forre, RIMOND, an integrated design, construction and consultancy company, and the Roma Tre University, in collaboration with the Nepi municipality. Biodistretto is a non-profit organisation founded in 2011 in central Italy. It includes farmers, residents, tourist operators, associations and public administrations in a rural area of approximately 10 000 hectares, of which 42% is agricultural land. Currently representing 13 municipalities, it aims to foster rural ecological transition and community well-being through public-private cooperation.



## CONTEXT

Nepi is a rural area with a rich cultural and natural heritage which is experiencing depopulation and an ageing population. The majority of its workforce is employed in agriculture and small local businesses focused on the food industry. The area faces difficulties with embracing innovation and identifying local models of combining traditional methods with innovative solutions sustainably and qualitatively.

Energy management and production carry the potential of becoming such a sustainable model and a driver of growth in the rural area. However, expert support to align the territory's interests and resources in a holistic action plan is necessary.

## OBJECTIVES

- > **Renovate several public buildings** in Nepi, according to the New European Bauhaus principles, to host a range of activities in its low-density rural context;
- > Create a **social centre** that serves as a social hub in the area, open daily to the entire community for gatherings and exchanges;
- > Set up a **local energy community** that has the potential to become a replicable model;
- > Introduce a **fair and participatory energy transition** as a way of tackling climate and social crises.

**Theme(s):** Democracy and participation; Research and innovation; Energy; Climate; Nature and environment; Tourism and heritage; Agriculture and food; Value chains

**Country:** Italy

**Organisation(s):**

- Biodistretto della Via Amerina e delle Forre, non-for-profit organisation
- RIMOND, private company
- Roma Tre University

**Start & end date:** 10/2022 – 09/2025

**Budget:** EUR 4 994 902.25

**Funding sources:** EU funding: Horizon Europe (2021-2027) under Grant Agreement ID: 101079948 – EHHUR, HORIZON-MISS-2021-NEB-01

**Website:**

- EHHUR project website: [www.eyesheartshands.eu](http://www.eyesheartshands.eu)
- Biodistretto website: [www.biodistrettoamerina.com](http://www.biodistrettoamerina.com)

**Contact:**

- Biodistretto: Andrea Ferrante: [ferrante@biodistrettoamerina.com](mailto:ferrante@biodistrettoamerina.com)
- RIMOND: Gabriele Roselli: [gabriele.roselli@rimond.com](mailto:gabriele.roselli@rimond.com) and Giulia Mazzi: [giulia.mazzi@rimond.com](mailto:giulia.mazzi@rimond.com)
- Roma Tre University: Stefano Converso: [stefano.converso@uniroma3.it](mailto:stefano.converso@uniroma3.it)
- Icons, Community Engagement for EHHUR: Camilla Mele: [camilla.mele@icons.it](mailto:camilla.mele@icons.it) and Denise Venere: [denise.venere@icons.it](mailto:denise.venere@icons.it)



## ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The project has carried out several activities to renovate a demo site:

- > Data collection from local stakeholders, focusing on both technical and social aspects;
- > Management of an 'as-is' energy model to analyse the current energy consumption and forecast potential future consumption;
- > A pre-feasibility study, setting out different scenarios and providing a basis to engage with public authorities and consult citizen committees;
- > Organisation of workshops and participatory meetings to share the project's objectives, address doubts, provide advice, support decision-making processes, and foster community ownership of results;
- > Definition of sustainable funding models, involving energy service companies and outlining equity crowdfunding;
- > Preparation of a public tendering process for the construction and renovation work.



## RESULTS

- > **Energy refurbishment of a public building complex** that houses the local health unit, an elderly people's centre and a non-profit organisation catering to disabled people, through **active stakeholder involvement** in the co-design.
- > **Sustainable resource use and economically viable solutions** are incorporated in the renovation processes. An **energy performance contract**, including public incentives and crowdfunding models, and prepared in collaboration with energy service companies, is incorporated in the project funding model.
- > Lightweight, innovative **photovoltaic (PV) technologies**, a shadowing tent, garden space equipped with ready-to-use furniture, a rain garden and an enhanced vegetable garden are included in the design. The plan further includes a **public laundry facility**, suggested by the community, to make use of the new 70 kilowatts peak (kWp) of photovoltaic (PV) energy field. The solution features an **innovative control room** connected to a facade-mounted screen to display data on the consumption and production rates of the entire energy community.
- > A **new, integrated social centre** with renewed spaces for community use, along with **creation of the town's first energy community** through innovative, lightweight renewable production technologies. These are strategically developed to work in synergy with the nearby public park, combining a range of uses and services, which is highly valuable in sparsely populated rural areas.



## SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

Innovative technologies and participatory processes promoting inclusivity and sustainability are central to achieving the project objectives. Raising public awareness to encourage active community participation is a success factor.

Challenges such as bridging generational, digital and technological gaps are overcome through collaboration with public administrators and broad community engagement. The nature of the project consortium, involving partners with complementary expertise – Biodistretto members familiar with the area, RIMOND's engineering and innovation knowhow, and the research capability of Roma Tre University – brings added value to the project implementation.

The project aspires to serve as a replicable manifesto for public epicentres of innovation and represents a starting point for the entire Biodistretto community. Tapping the potential of the building complex will enable an exchange of initiatives and achievements in environmental, social and sustainable practices, engaging citizens and local stakeholders.

