



Article

Social Bottom-Up Approaches in Post-COVID-19 Scenario: The AGOGHÈ Project

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Abstract: The AGOGHÈ Project aims to produce innovative and entrepreneurial models following the global socioeconomic changes caused by COVID-19. Its objectives include (i) generating awareness, education and social skills through dedicated ethical workstations and workgroups; (ii) developing a novel figure called “Social Trainer” who represents a professional opportunity for young graduates, able to discuss, explain and guide others through the maze of active citizenship rules. The project was developed in the Quartieri Spagnoli of Naples (Italy). The current manuscript reports preliminary data from the local community collected between November and December 2020. Results provide an insight into the neighbourhood, where the lockdown produced an increment in school dropouts and irreparable economic damage. In conclusion, the approach proposed with the AGOGHÈ Project, fully described here, is predicted to be beneficial in increasing social, cultural and economic aspects in the local area and in facilitating a dialogue between people, stakeholders and governments engaging in novel resolutions for post-COVID-19 crises.

Keywords: sociology; COVID-19; education; pedagogy; criminal risks; health; wellbeing; tourism; third sector; NGO



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1. Introduction

The following manuscript aims to describe a bottom-up approach developed in the Metropolitan City of Naples (Italy), along with a brief discussion of the theoretical framework upon which the project was developed, a tailored evidence-based questionnaire (Smith 2010) and the conclusions that will inform the project's next steps.

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), sustainable tourism development is possible when it involves economic, social and aesthetic needs while maintaining the local culture (Inskip 1998). A strategy to obtain these results, already used and validated, is the bottom-up approach (Hudson et al. 2017). The approach, sometimes referred to as community-based tourism (CBT), seeks to create a positive, balanced collaboration between local communities, stakeholders and governments in order to plan strategies that increase economy and education while decreasing criminality and illegal economies, maintaining the local traditions and habits (Lama 2000). Previous authors have reported the importance of keeping the local community involved in the decision-making process, favouring the discussion of tourism and environmentally friendly alternatives rather than focusing on investors (Bryer 2007; Cooper et al. 2014; Fung 2003; Mansbridge et al. 2010; Theerapappisit 2012). The AGOGHÈ Project is currently underway in the challenging area of the Spanish Quartiers (i.e., Quartieri Spagnoli) in the Metropolitan City of Naples (Italy); see Figure 1.

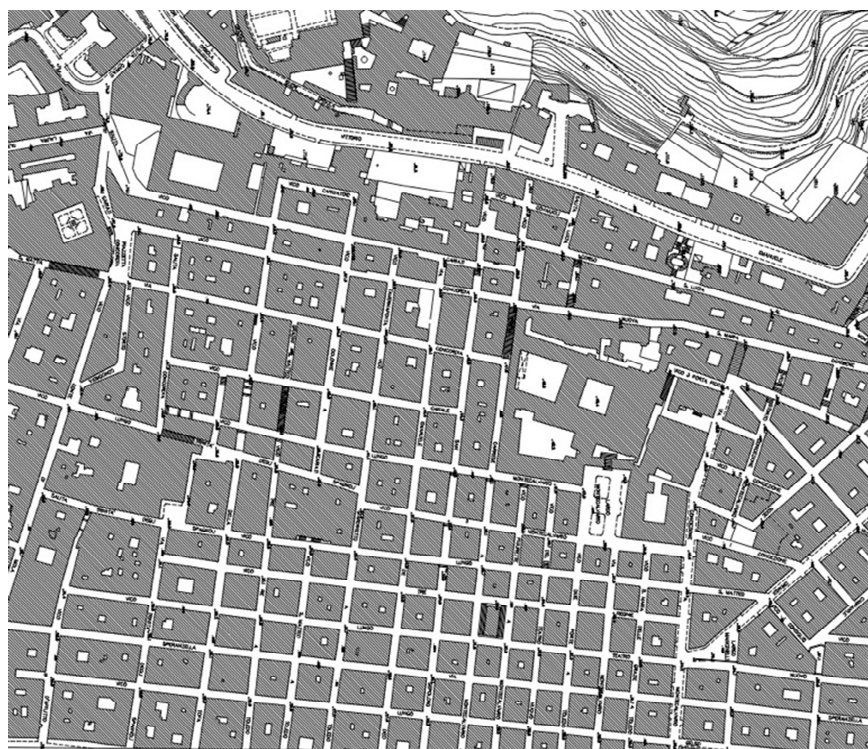


Figure 1. Map of the Quartieri Spagnoli. The area dates back to around 1533–1536 (Theerapappisit 2012); the image shows the maze-like urban structure composed of alleys. (Modified from www.iconografiacittaeuropea.unina.it, accessed on 15 January 2021).

Since its construction, the Quartieri Spagnoli has reported high levels of delinquencies and anti-social behaviour. (Alvino 1993; Atlas 2005; Laino 1984; Milano 2016; Romano 2013; Sánchez 1987). Nowadays, the area is defined as a working-class neighborhood (Cavola et al. 2010; Laino 2012) that hosts people living at social–economic margins through irregular economic activities (Wagenaar et al. 2015). Nevertheless, in the past 5 years, many restaurants have opened, fostering a healthy economy in the area (Borrelli and Stazio 2018; Galletti 2020). However, there are still many neighbourhoods in the Quartieri Spagnoli that are extremely dangerous for locals and tourists, as these areas are important hubs for the organised crime (Gribaudo 2008; Romeo 2014). Many non-governmental organisations (NGO) and cultural associations, such as the Associazione Quartieri Spagnoli (Laino 2015) or ARTUR (Adulti Responsabili per un Territorio Unito contro il Rischio) (Iavarone and Trocchia 2020), work to eradicate organised crime by producing job opportunities and cultural events targeted towards increasing positive economy. Indeed, a recent review reported an increment in third-sector associations operating to eradicate criminality, favouring hospitality in the area (Gaeta et al. 2020). In this context, the Association Filosofia Fuori le Mura (www.filosofiafuorilemura.it) has been active for the past 13 years, with activities in prisons (Ferraro 2001, 2010b), schools (Ferraro 2000, 2010a) and in the streets of the Metropolitan City of Naples (Ferraro 2017). The activities are focused on increasing cultural, educational and social aspects of life, leading to an increase in job opportunities. By merging together approaches of modern sociological pedagogy (Iavarone and Iavarone 2004) and ancient Greek philosophy (Reale 1985), the association aims to build social and ethical spaces; facilitate participatory citizenship; develop a circular donation economy; promote alliances with places of knowledge (such as universities, schools and laboratories); and create a network of neighbourhood artists as a place of expression of creativity. In this context, in the Spring of 2021, the association developed the AGOGHÈ Project with the aim of producing innovative entrepreneurial models following the global socioeconomic changes caused by COVID-19 (Baldwin and Mauro 2020; Giovannella et al. 2020; Lakhan et al. 2020; Nicola et al. 2020; Sher 2020). The idea is based on previous

association experiences and the need to increase healthy social behaviour while countering organised criminality and illegal economic activities. The project's objectives are (i) to generate awareness, education and social skills through dedicated, ethical workstations and workgroups; to develop "social guides" (called Social Trainers), who represent a novel professional profile for young graduates and non-graduates that can discuss, explain and guide others through the rules of active citizenship; (ii) to produce a mobile and interactive digital platform that allows virtual visits to museums and expositions; (iii) to implement street community practices along with stakeholders, institutions, laboratories, shops and resume the local culture of the "alleys economy", in order to generate communities and job opportunities (Ancil 1994). A bottom-up approach is followed for the entire project, with the association headquarters based in the Quartieri Spagnoli, and all the people involved to be Social Trainers hired from the local area. The success of AGOGHÈ needs to be built on a solid and robust relationship between stakeholders, governments and the local communities. The bottom-up approach was chosen firstly, as reported by A. Fung and T. Bryer, to increase citizen participation, fostering democratic governance, effectiveness, legitimacy and social justice (Cooper et al. 2006; Fung 2009, 2015), and secondly because the community would not have accepted a top-bottom approach as it would have been perceived as an institutional invasion. It is indeed important to consider that the area does not trust the governments and the institutions; indeed, some parts of the Quartieri Spagnoli are utterly inaccessible to those coming from outside the community (Romeo 2014, Hardiman and Lapeyre 2010, Saviano 2010). The following manuscript aims to describe the Project and report the data collected from the first exploratory questionnaire in the area. The authors intend to share their ideas and their works, which is having a positive effect on the challenging area of Quartieri Spagnoli, hoping that it can open a discussion and inspire others to produce innovative social projects following the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Materials and Methods

The AGOGHÈ Project was first developed in August 2020 and submitted to the two-stage national grant award programme named "EU Programma Operativo Nazionale (PON) Innovation Quarters". The project was accepted to the first stage and subsequently submitted for final review by the EU PON funding panel. The project aims to produce innovative and entrepreneurial models following the global socioeconomic changes caused by COVID-19. In order to achieve this aim, the project's ambition is to generate awareness, education and social skills through (i) ethical workstations; (ii) "social guides" (i.e., Social Trainers); (iii) a mobile and interactive digital platform that allows virtual visits to museums and cultural heritage to those who have never experienced them before; (iv) the implementation of street community practices along with stakeholders, institutions, laboratories and shops to resume the ancient culture of the "alleys economy" and reformulate it as a "social bond economy". To increase the project's impact on the local territory before submission to the second stage of the EU PON Innovation Quarters, the Association Filosofia Fuori le Mura developed a questionnaire to distribute among the people of Quartieri Spagnoli between November and December 2020. Following a people-centred approach, it was indeed necessary to review and interrogate the population about their needs and determine whether the project was perceived positively or if additional work was required to meet people's expectations and needs. Data were anonymised and collected according to the 1975 Declaration of Helsinki guidelines, revised in 2013 (Holm 2013), and treated in accordance with the ethical principles presented by the European Educational Research Institute (EERA Educational European Research Association, 2011), as part of the EU PON Grant Application. Prior to data collection each participant received full details about the project with sufficient time to ask questions. A consent form was then completed in accordance EU ethics regulations. The questionnaire is fully reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Questionnaire developed by Filosofia Fuori le Mura for the AGOGHÈ Project.

Questions	Answers
Do you identify yourself as	Male Female Other
What is your age range?	16/18 19/24 25/30 30/35 35/40 40/50 60/70 70/90 +
What is your family status?	Single Married Divorced Widower/ow
Do you have children? And if yes how many?	Yes No
How many are living together in your household?	<<open answer>>
What is your annual income?	Low Medium High Prefer not to answer
What is your employment status?	Permanent contract Fixed-term contract Illegal contract Unemployed
What is your level of education?	Elementary School Middle School Graduated None
How many books have you read in a year?	Less than 5 Between 5 and 10 More than 10 None
Do you have a computer? Or Tablet?	<<open answer>>
Do you have an internet connection?	<<open answer>>
List between 1 and 5 problems of the Quartieri Spagnoli	<<open answer>>
What do you think is the most serious problem in the Quartieri Spagnoli?	<<open answer>>
How do you think you can solve the problems of the Quartieri Spagnoli?	<<open answer>>
What do you think is the best thing about the Quartieri Spagnoli?	<<open answer>>
What have you already tried to do for the Quartieri Spagnoli?	<<open answer>>
What are you willing to do for the Quartieri Spagnoli?	<<open answer>>
Do you think it is useful to have a Social Trainer that helps, explains, addresses and guides citizens through the streets of the Quartieri Spagnoli?	Very important Quite important Important Not very important
What would you expect from the Social Trainer?	<<open answer>>

Table 1. *Cont.*

Questions	Answers
Would you be willing to become a Social Trainer to the Quartieri Spagnoli?	Yes No I do not know
How useful do you think is a listening and advice ethical station in the Quartieri Spagnoli?	Very important Quite important Important Not very important

The questionnaire was distributed by hand (since not all participants had access to a computer or tablet) to the people that lived and worked in the Quartieri Spagnoli, with an highly inclusive approach without any limitation on gender, culture or working status. Data were analysed with NVivo and SPS (Bazeley and Jackson 2013; Bryman and Cramer 2009). The questionnaire had the aim of producing initial qualitative/quantitative baseline of the local territory. To see the questionnaire framing within the project's development, refer to Figure 2.

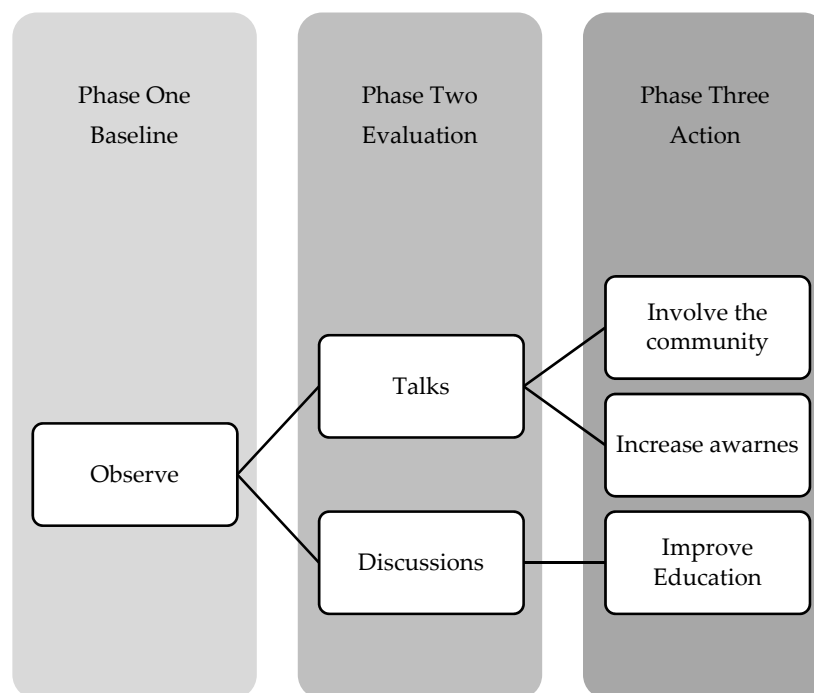


Figure 2. The first three initial phases of the AGOGHÈ Project. Firstly, the questionnaire allowed the collection of information about the community and the current situation and needs in the territory. The data reported in the present manuscript will then open up discussions and talks about the local needs, following consultation with the locals, governments, stakeholders and scientific communities. The third phase will see the beginning of the project, with activities and actions built to involve the community, increase awareness and foster education.

3. Results

A total of 30 participants completed the questionnaire (13 female, 15 male and 2 agender). Age range, marital status, number of children and people living in the same household are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. First set of responses from the preliminary investigation.

	Answer	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	43.3
	Female	50.0
	Agender	6.7
Age	16/18	3.3
	19/24	6.7
	25/30	3.3
	30/35	3.3
	35/40	10.0
	40/50	56.7
	60/70	6.7
	70/90+	10.0
Marital status	Single	33.3
	Married	50.0
	Divorced	13.3
	Widower/ow	3.3
Children	None	36.7
	1 Child	3.3
	2 Children	43.3
	3 Children	16.7
People living in the same household	1	3.3
	2	3.3
	3	16.7
	4	16.7
	5	40.0
	6	10.0
	7	6.7
	8	3.3

Annual, job contracts, level of education, number of books read in a year and usage of technologies are reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Set of responses from the preliminary investigation that focused on income and education.

	Answer	Percentage (%)
Income	Low	50.0
	Medium	26.7
	High	6.7
	Prefer not to answer	16.7
Employment contract	Permanent contract	36.7
	Fixed-term contract	20.0
	Illegal contract	30.0
	Unemployed	13.3
Level of education	Elementary School	6.7
	Middle School	53.3
	College School	30.0
	University Graduate	6.7
	None	3.3
Book in a year	Less than 5	40.0
	Between 5 and 10	36.7
	More than 10	13.3
	None	10.0

Table 3. *Cont.*

Answer		Percentage (%)
Possess a computer or tablet	Yes	100.0
	No	0.0
Possess an internet connection	Yes	80.0
	No	20.0

The perceptions and utility of the Social Trainer and the projects proposed in AGOGHÈ are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. Set of responses from the preliminary investigation that focused on the role of the Social Trainer.

Answer		Percentage (%)
Utility of the Social Trainer	Very important	50.0
	Quite important	13.3
	Important	30.0
	Not very important	6.7
Agree to become a Social Trainer	Yes	26.7
	No	43.3
	Do not know	30.0
Utility of advice ethical station	Very Important	60.0
	Quite impotent	13.3
	Important	16.7
	Not very important	10.0

From a qualitative perspective, the answers can be summarised as follows:

- When asked to mention at least five problems in the Quartieri Spagnoli, the most common answers were: lack of education (7%), street rubbish (14%), criminality (6%), lack of institutions (16%).
- When asked about the most serious problem in the neighbourhood, the majority mentioned: lack of education (57%).
- When asked what can solve the problems in the area, the majority did not answer (30%) or answered by saying that there is nothing that can be done (27%).
- When asked about the best aspects of the Quartieri Spagnoli, the majority mentioned: the people (56%).
- When asked what they had done for their neighbourhood, none of the respondents interviewed mentioned that they had performed any actions to improve the quality of the area. However, when asked what they would be willing to do, they all mentioned: “to help”.
- Finally, when asked what a Social Trainer should do, the most common answer can be summarised as: they should share information about social services and rights and should always be present and help those in need (85%).

4. Discussion

The AGOGHÈ Project aims to produce innovative and entrepreneurial models following the global socio-economic changes caused by COVID-19. The project's objectives are to generate awareness, education and social skills through dedicated, ethical workstations and workgroups and to develop “social guides” (i.e., Social Trainers), who represent a novel professional profile for young graduates and non-graduates, able to discuss, explain and guide others through the rules of active citizenship. The term AGOGHÈ comes from the Greek word ἀγωγή, a pedagogic term that combines education and training practice. It was used mainly by ancient Spartan citizens trained for military practices, hunting, dancing

and in preparation for society and civil activities (Casertano 2011; Gastaldi 1984; North et al. 1895; Settis 1968; Spina 1985). However, the term is adopted here for its philosophical aspects that focus on ethics, education, and positive social behaviours. To increase the project's efficiency and quality regarding the local territory, the Association Filosofia Fuori le Mura developed a questionnaire to distribute among the community between November and December 2020, following the project framework shown in Figure 2. The questionnaire aimed to collect qualitative and quantitative information about education, employment, marital status, the strengths and weaknesses of living in the area and what has been already done to improve the quality of life, increase job opportunities and favour socio-economic strategies. Our results agreed with one of the issues previously reported in the Metropolitan City of Naples: its overpopulation (Iovino 2014). Indeed, the majority of the participants reported living with at least five other people in their household. Interpretation of these data must take into account the Quartieri Spagnoli's architecture. Indeed, the area is characterised by very narrow alleys, with residents living in small houses, of one single room, at the ground level, called the "*vascio*", with an area of about 10 to 30 m² (Argiulo 1997; Serao 2011).

Although very characteristic, the "*vascio*" does not represent a healthy, safe environment, where antisocial behaviours and domestic abuses often occur (Anselmo 2020). Another interesting result is the high level of illegal activities that were reported (30%). These high levels of illegality are in accordance with reports on organised criminality in the area, where there is an active hub of racketeering and drug trafficking (Eriksson 2017; Saviano 2010). The crime level is also boosted by the very low income per person reported, where half of the population explained receiving a minimum wage income. These phenomena might also be linked with the low education levels. Indeed, our data show that most participants did not go to college and only completed middle school, reading none or less than five books in an entire year. The lack of education, high level of criminality and uninhabitable, overpopulated households have helped to increase the socio-cultural gap favouring the expansion of criminal organisations. Interpretation of these data also must take into consideration the current situation of lockdown. In March 2020, the Italian government imposed substantial restrictions nationally to prevent the spread of COVID-19, with significant socio-economic impacts on restaurants, hotels and small artisan businesses (Armocida et al. 2020; Giovannella et al. 2020), which are disappearing from the Quartieri Spagnoli, leaving the area even more isolated. The high level of school dropouts should also be noted. Many studies have already reported that between the South and the North of Italy there has been a significant gap in students' ability to follow classes in distanced learning (The Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT); Save The Children 2020). The most industrial regions (in the North) provided their students with laptops and a safer environment to study and learn, whilst the poorer regions (in the South) could not offer the same standards, leaving the students to self-manage their study experiences (Ambra et al. 2020; Ferraro et al. 2020a). In the near future, projects that focus on socio-economic improvements must consider the challenging nature of working in the post-COVID-19 era (Wagner 2020; Zahra 2021), where in-person meetings and events might not always be possible and novel information and communications technology (ICT) must be adopted and adapted to the specific situation (Tropea and De Rango 2020). Additionally, it is important to consider that the post-COVID-19 generation has been subjected to more than one year of isolation with direct effects on their cognitive experiences (Ambra et al. 2020). According to the embodied cognition theories (Wilson 2002; Wilson and Foglia 2011), this emotional, physical and cognitive deprivation directly affects younger generations' ability to learn and build positive, healthy relationships with adults and peers (Ambra et al. 2019; Ferraro et al. 2020b; Iavarone and Iavarone 2004; Iavarone et al. 2010). To cope with the current isolation, the AGOGHÈ Project will integrate into its objectives Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) museum visits (Huhtamo 2010; Walczak et al. 2006), aiming at increasing curiosity and inclusivity fostering culture and education. The museum visits, as the other cultural events, will be managed by the Social Trainers, which will be

hired in the local area, trained by university-level professors and experts in philosophy, ethics, equal opportunities, history, psychology and research methods. Their role will facilitate dialogues towards active citizenship through monthly gastronomic tours, music, and social and cultural events that will help the Quartieri Spagnoli to be reborn, creating a positive, healthy economy. In regard to the Social Trainers, when participants were asked whether they would help in supporting the neighbourhood, only 6.7% said “no”. Similarly, only 10.0% reported that it would not be useful at all when asked about the ethics station. However, these data show a contradiction. When we asked whether participants would like to become a Social Trainer, only 26.7% replied “yes”, indicating a potential scepticism toward the project’s novelty. This attitude toward the project is also evident in the qualitative analysis. The Quartieri Spagnoli’s five problems according to our cohort were lack of education, street rubbish, criminality and lack of institutions, with the most severe problem in the neighbourhood being the lack of education. However, when asked what could solve the area’s problems, the majority of the participants did not answer or answered by claiming that there was nothing that could be done. Similarly, when asked what they had done for the neighbourhood, none of the people interviewed mentioned that they had participated in any activity to improve the quality of the area. This phenomenon shows a sort of resignation and acceptance of the current condition. Resignation that can be described as social resignation or exclusion syndrome (Sallin et al. 2016; Santiago et al. 2019) in which the population is used to living at the fringes of society and therefore feels that nothing can be done to improve their status and consequently the area in which they live (Glennister et al. 1999; Townsend 2002). It is a sort of Chomsky’s effect (Chomsky and Foucault 2015). The contradiction is evident also in their answers regarding the best aspect of the neighbourhood, for which the participants answered: “the people”. To some extent, their response goes in the opposite direction of the problems, underlining the potential closure of the local community toward innovation, quite common in other poorer neighbourhoods (Barnes 2003, 2012). For these reasons, the Social Trainers will be hired from the local area, as they will be trusted and familiar with the local community, their traditions and their language (i.e., Neapolitan) (Erwin and Bello n.d.), increasing the possibilities of interaction and facilitating events.

The Education of Social Trainer

As anticipated in the Discussion, the novel role of Social Trainer will be created locally in the area of intervention by university-level professors, with an inclusive, multidimensional approach. The education of the Social Trainer will be performed prior to their active role in the territory, for a total of 3 months, during which they will study the following disciplines: psychology, information and communications technology, literature, economy, law, toponymy, social ethics, civic education, equal opportunities and arts and traditions. These courses will be structured to provide the Social Trainer with additional information and tools to navigate the maze of civic laws and at the same time be able to satisfy the social-economic demands, learning how to relate with different cultures. The aspect of education is extremely important for the success of AGOGHÈ. The area of Quartieri Spagnoli registers amongst the highest level of school dropouts in Italy and the use of culture as a countermeasure against antisocial behaviour and organised crime in the past year has been extremely effective, with more and more associations promoting tailored pedagogic approaches to build a better socio-cultural environment (Erwin and Bello n.d.; Walczak et al. 2006; Wilson 2002).

5. Limitations

The study presents some limitations. Firstly, the questionnaire could have been standardised, with the same information collected at different times. However, due to the practical difficulties of conducting interviews (enforced lockdown) and local scepticism, this was not possible. Future studies could develop a questionnaire adapted to different communities to examine similarities and differences between other areas.

6. Conclusions

We described the current situation in the area of intervention, with full description of the rationale behind the project and the potential benefits that a social bottom-up approach can produce. The next step is to work with the collected information and return to the community, tailoring the intervention to best meet people's needs, in collaboration with the governments and stakeholders, following the most recent EU guidelines in terms of social sustainability and social inclusion (Kardung et al. 2021; Malek et al. 2021). The proposed intervention will produce, via high educational standards, long-lasting effects on the territory to cope against the current lack of education and high level of antisocial behaviour, fostering a community-based circular economy structured upon social-inclusion and integration. The long-lasting effects are predicted by producing dedicated free higher education, firstly distributed to the Social Trainers, who then will assist and help their community, leading to a sort of domino pedagogic effect that will give to the population new role models to counter the current lack of institutional figures. It is indeed important to show that an alternative to the lack of education, criminality and antisocial behaviour does exist and can be achieved with knowledge and inclusivity (Buarque et al. 2006; Miller 2021; Tilak 2010). The present manuscript represents the first introduction and presentation of the novel bottom-up approach proposed by the Association Filosofia Fuori le Mura for the EU PON Innovation Quarters grant application. The AGOGHÈ Project has been designed to help in affecting positive socioeconomic responses in a marginal area in Naples's city centre (Italy). To understand people's needs, the association designed and distributed a questionnaire to the local community. The questionnaire showed the reality of the situation in Quartieri Spagnoli, where people live with low income and poor education in overpopulated households and the research suggests that a bottom-up approach should be fostered.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data are fully available under request.

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