

BAUHAUS OF THE SEASAILS

The
Impact
of Inclusive Digital
Storytelling in Genoa

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Cover page: *Human Portrait of Dino Gesino, inhabitant of Sturla-Vernazzola (Former owner of historic restaurant La Conchiglia), 24th November 2024. (Source: Davide Busetto, 2024.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0*

Back page: *Human Portraits, 23rd November 2024. (Source: Davide Busetto, 2024.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0*

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The views stated in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the entities they represent.



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Fig. 1: Human Portraits, 23rd November 2024. (Source: Davide Busetto, 2024.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

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¹ These include members of the following organizations: Unione ecologica sportiva Ciappeletta; Circolo Urania; Circolo Vele Vernazzolesi; Associazione i ricostruttori; Club Pesca Quarto; Bagni Santa Chiara; Comitato Residenti Vernazzola e Comitato residenti Sturla; Municipio IX Levante.



Fig. 2: Human Portrait of Rossella Quolantoni, inhabitant of Sturla-Vernazzola (Unione Sportiva Ecologica la Ciappeletta), 23rd November 2024. (Source: Davide Busetto, 2024.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Introduction

This report discusses the impact of a pilot project implemented in Genoa as part of the Horizon Europe project Bauhaus of the Seas Sails (2022–2025).² Bauhaus of the Seas Sails (BoS) is a New European Bauhaus (NEB) project that tests solutions for more beautiful, sustainable and inclusive cities and neighborhoods in Europe, with a focus on seven coastal and waterfront cities (Hamburg, Venice, Malmö, Rotterdam, Lisbon, Oeiras, Genoa) and a nature park straddling the Dutch-Belgian border (Grenspark Groot Saefinghe). Each pilot has tested innovative solutions (“drops”) that aim to create ripple effects (“ripples”) and ultimately generate long-term impact (“waves”) (fig. 3).

The Genoa pilot was led by the Municipality of Genoa and Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia (IIT) and tested one solution according to the BoS typology: Inclusive Digital Storytelling (box 1). All pilots including Genoa also applied the Zoöp drop (‘BoS-Zoöp’) as a method to adopt regenerative perspectives and guide regenerative action locally.

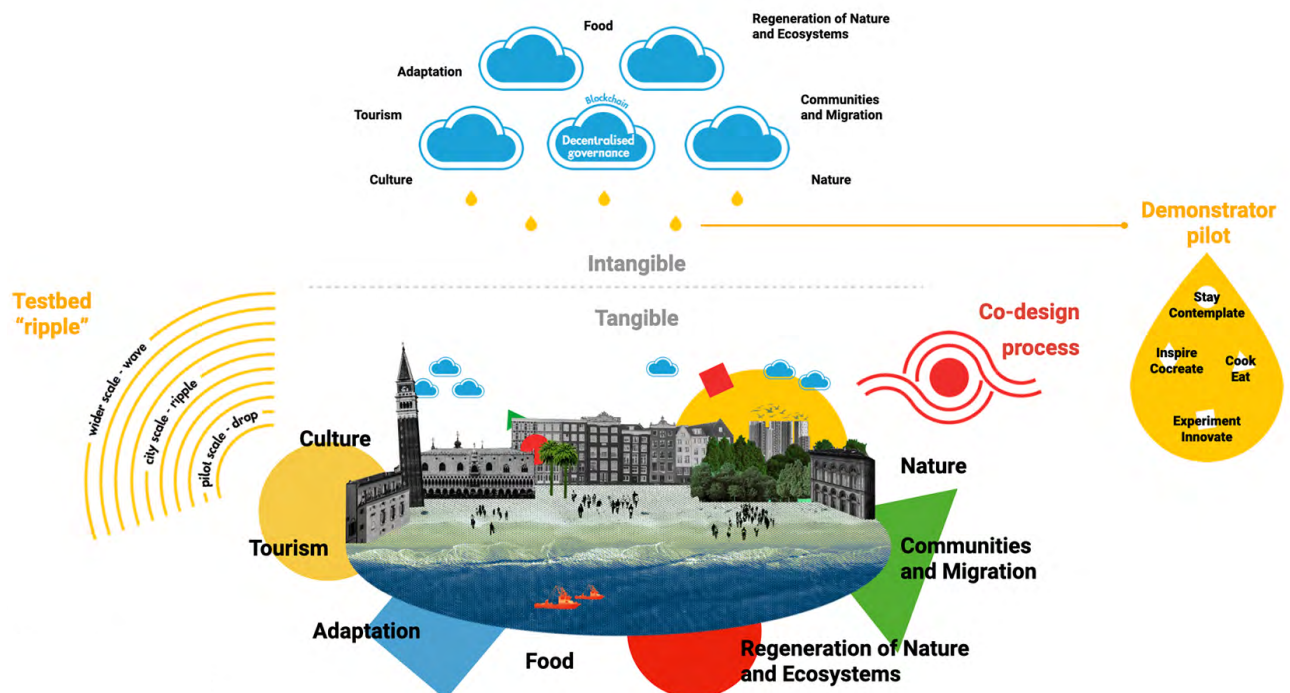


Fig. 3: Visualization of the Bauhaus of the Seas Sails approach. (Source: European Commission, 2024³; Visual identity ©José Albergaria.)

² More information can be found on the project website: <https://bauhaus-seas.eu>

³ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101079995/reporting>

The drop typologies Inclusive Digital Storytelling and Zoöp

The drop typologies were defined in the initial stages of the BoS project. In the Description of the Action, they were described as follows:



The **Inclusive Digital Storytelling drop** was inspired by the MEMEX project⁴ created by IIT and IST-ID. It “explores the use of digital storytelling as a co-design strategy for community building and intercultural polyvocal dialogue, serving as a strategy to co-create with communities at risk of exclusion and non-humans whose voices are rarely heard concerning our living spaces.” The drop aimed to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies to develop a digital storytelling platform that advances social inclusion and cultural participation.



The **Zoöp drop** (‘BoS-Zoöp’), created by Het Nieuwe Instituut and practiced by other consortium members, was initially defined in the project as ‘multispecies assemblies’. It was inspired by the ‘zoöp’ concept⁵ and organizational model which supports collaboration between human and other-than human life to safeguards the interests of all life. The model appoints an independent Speaker for the Living as a human spokesperson with ecological knowledge and the ability to empathize with the experiences of other-than-human life. This Speaker for the Living ensures that the interests of other-than-human life are included, and supports organizations or projects through a learning process with the aim to become increasingly life-supporting (regenerative) within the ecosystems they participate in. All BoS pilot teams adopted key elements of the Zoöp model.

Box 1: *The drop typologies Inclusive Digital Storytelling and Zoöp*

4 See: <https://memexproject.eu/en/>

5 Zoöp is short for Zoöperation and refers to a ‘coöperation with zoë’, the Greek word for life. See <https://zoop.earth/nl/>

The drop typologies were adapted to the context of Genoa, capital of the Ligurian region and largest port city in Italy (see box 2 below for more context information). The pilot focused on the Sturla-Vernazzola area, formed by Vernazzola, a traditional fishing village, and Sturla, a small district of Genoa. The area is home to popular beaches which are threatened by erosion. Vernazzola has been incorporated into the city of Genoa as a result of urban expansion and housing development, and has a rich cultural heritage connected to water that its inhabitants want to preserve.

- **The Inclusive Digital Storytelling in Genoa** involved citizens and local associations of the Sturla-Vernazzola area in a participatory storytelling process about the area, its cultural heritage and connection to the sea. The participatory process used creative methods, promoted environmental awareness and produced artistic “Human Portraits” combining testimonies, photos, videos and sound recordings. Human portraits were shown in an immersive exhibition and integrated in the PAVIS AR app which was adapted to enhance the tangible and intangible heritage of the area, using Augmented Reality.
- **The Zoöp drop** introduced the Zoöp model and method which worked with three elements: the Zoöp baseline workshop; installing and working with a Speaker for the Living⁶ within the pilot; and embedding a focus on the regeneration of (human-inclusive) ecosystems. In Genoa, this process provided opportunities to bring pilot partners together (e.g., baseline workshop) and strengthened the Speaker from the Living’s communication strategy and role as an environmental advocate in Sturla-Vernazzola.

The body of the report provides an in-depth assessment of the pilot’s key results, lessons and impact. We focused on the Inclusive Digital Storytelling drop while integrating mentions of the Zoöp method throughout. The report is structured along three main parts. First, it analyzes the process of the Genoa pilot from drop, to ripples, toward potential waves (long-term impact). Second, it assesses the impact of the pilot on the 4 BoS themes: Aesthetics, Sustainability, Inclusion, and Local grounding. The third and final section about ‘Takeaways’ highlights key factors (context, stakeholders, resources) that influenced the pilot’s implementation and impact, and provides areas for improvement and future development.

6 <https://zoop.earth/en/page/576/speakers-for-the-living>

Key facts about Genoa

- Genoa is the **capital of the Ligurian region** and one of Italy's main cities with a population of about 560.000 inhabitants. The city is located on the Ligurian coast facing the south and developed from the first settlements located in the port area of Mandraccio, close to the natural **gulf**.
- The city has a strong port identity. Yet it has historically been quite **disconnected from the sea**, as the large port and customs barriers block residents' access to the shore. The efforts to re-establish this connection only began in the 1990s. Starting from the 14th century the city became one of the most influential financial and trade hubs in Europe.
- The city is renowned primarily for its **port, which is the largest in Italy** and one of the most important in Europe and the Mediterranean basin. The Genoese are deeply attached to the presence of the port and the sea. However, the port represents a major barrier to the experience of the sea.
- Genoa still remains deeply characterized by a significant working-class presence amounting to about 20% of the workforce in 2020 (Comune di Genoa 2021). However, due to extensive redevelopment and enhancement plans for the old waterfront and the historic city center, a **gentrification** process is now affecting large areas of the historic center.
- The **historic center** of Genoa is one of the largest and best-preserved medieval centers in Europe. Since 2006, the "Strade Nuove and the system of the Palazzi dei Rolli" in Genoa have been included among UNESCO's World Heritage Sites.
- The city of Genoa, like other areas in the Ligurian region, is situated in a territory dangerously susceptible to climate change. The city has experienced several **major floods** in recent years (2010, 2011, 2014) with severe consequences. The most significant occurred in November 2011, resulting in the loss of six lives (Città di Genoa 2011).
- The port development to the west of the city during the 20th century resulted in the **loss of extensive coastal areas and coastal marine habitats**, such as *Posidonia oceanica*, *Coralligenous*, and *Cymodocea nodosa* (Regione Liguria 2024 and 2024b). The Municipality of Genoa has set goals for environmental protection and enhancement, establishing a Center for Environmental and Sustainability Education in 2006.



Fig. 4: Vernazzola, Genoa, 12th February 2006. (Source: Patano via Wikimedia Commons.) CC BY-SA 3.0 < <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en> >

Box 2: Context of Genoa



Fig. 5: Human Portrait of Giuliano Gattorno, inhabitant of Sturla-Vernazzola (Sportiva Sturla), 22nd November 2024. (Source: Davide Busetto, 2024.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Methodology

The impact assessment of all Bauhaus of the Seas Sails pilots was conducted by a team at Delft University of Technology as part of the project consortium. We developed a unique analytical framework to assess the impact of the project. This impact framework helped translate high-level EU ambitions, rooted in the New European Bauhaus (NEB) Compass (2022) and its core values of Aesthetics, Sustainability and Inclusion, into locally aligned impact tools and indicators (in line with the project-wide Bauhaus of the Seas Sails approach; fig. 6). It provided a strategy and mixed-methods approach to guide evaluation, learning and comparative analysis within the project.

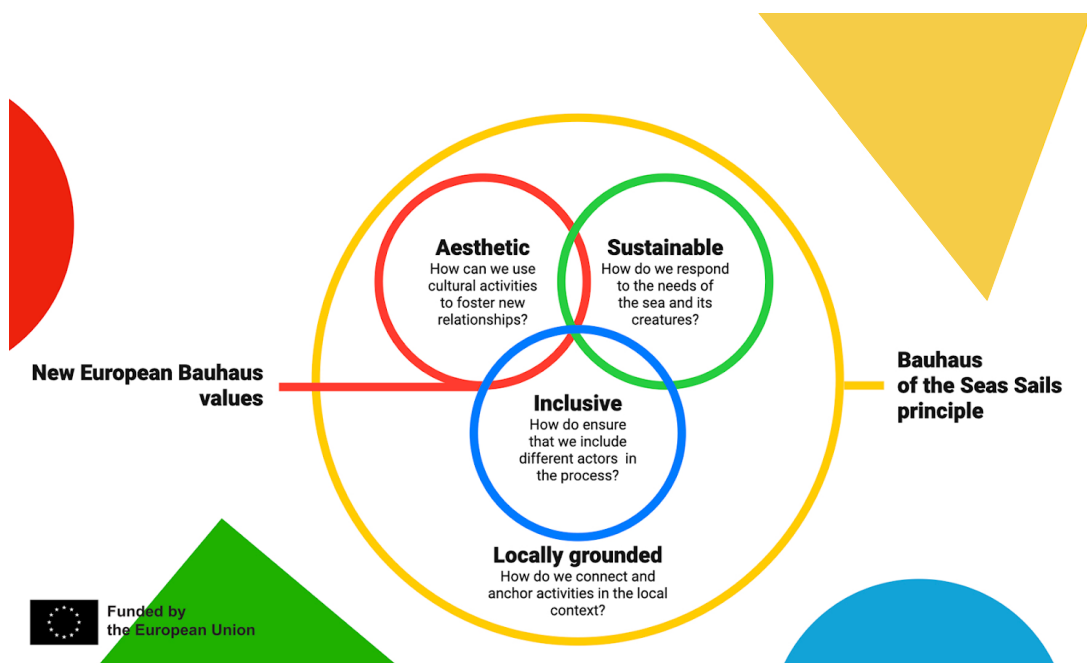


Fig. 6: Visualization of the Bauhaus of the Sea Sails approach to NEB principles. (European Commission, 2024; Visual identity ©José Albergaria.)

The strategy and methodology considered current knowledge about impact assessment and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) and the challenges involved in putting them into practice. Fig. 7 shows the five key elements (in capital letters) that shape our analytical framework to impact assessment and the related concepts, approaches and tools (in blue) as well as challenges (in red) the team has reflected on and sought to address. The authors and references for the concepts, knowledge and tools mentioned in fig. 7 are listed in annex 2.

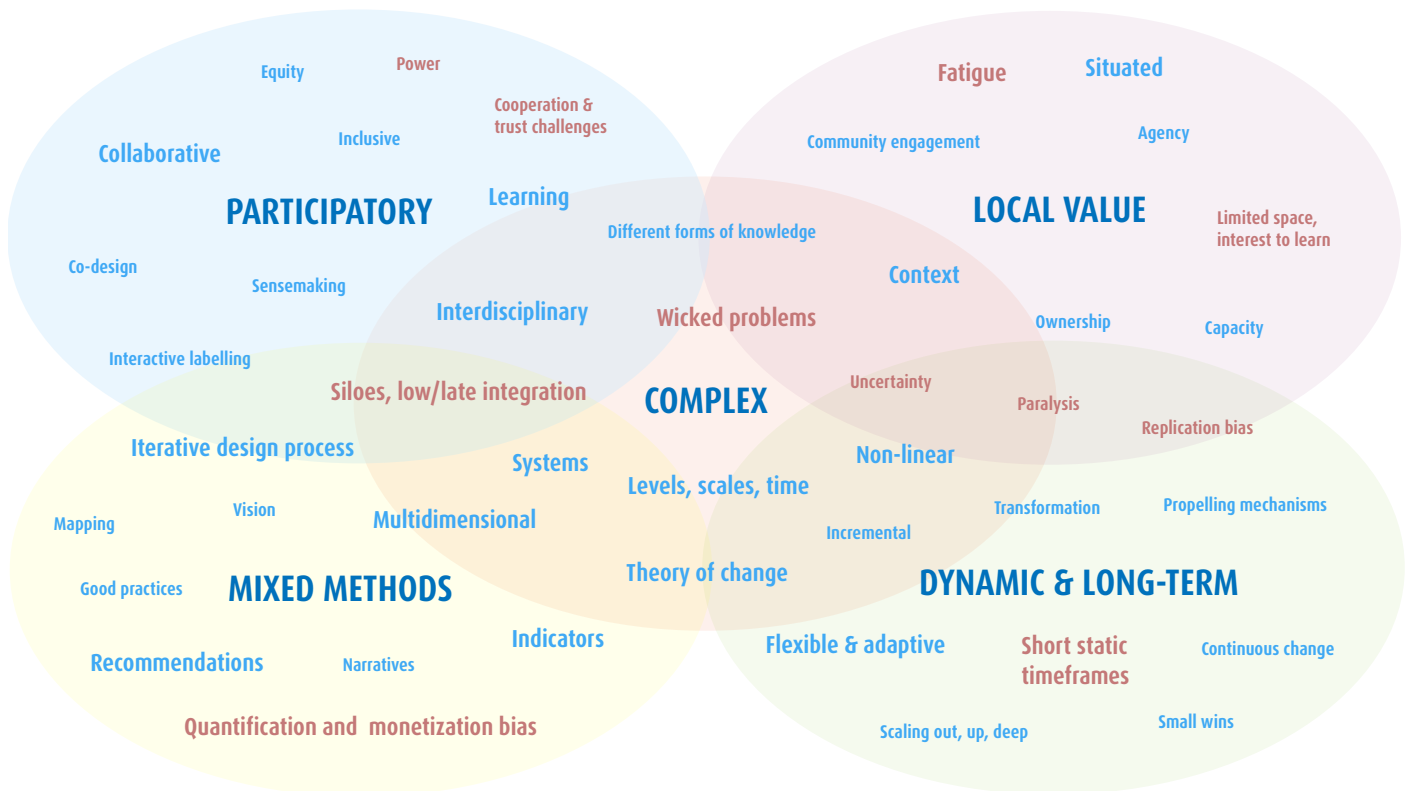


Fig. 7: Overview of core considerations underpinning the Bauhaus of the Seas Sails Impact Framework, CC-BY-4.0

Complex

The team developed an impact framework that accounted for complex, cross-sector, interconnected challenges impacting coastal and waterfront cities (e.g., climate change, biodiversity loss, socioeconomic inequality, threats to cultural heritage). The impact framework included various dimensions, levels, scales and timescales of impact in its selection of indicators and in its data collection strategy. The team developed a **Library of Indicators**, which provides a common structure to make sense of complexity and compare the different pilots and drops

Mixed methods

Our approach to impact assessment used **different methods and tools** (context analysis, Theory of Change, indicators) to capture the range of impacts generated by pilots and drops and their evolution over time. These methods enabled data collection and fostered dialogue, reflection, and a deep exploration of impact through different lenses (thematic, process-oriented, long-term thinking). Methods were refined over time based on partners' feedback and learning from other WPs.

Participatory

Our approach prioritized collaboration in the impact framework development, context analysis, data collection and comparative analysis. The team developed **participatory sessions with pilot teams and local partners** (online and in-person) that informed the development of context-sensitive impact tools and enabled collective learning and sensemaking.

Local value

Our approach sought to generate value for pilot teams and local actors involved in the impact assessment process. The team organized **learning and cross-exchange** moments for pilots, identified good practices and made recommendations for the projects' future development.

Dynamic and long term

Our approach was rooted in the understanding that impact is a non-linear, long-term process toward transformation. The team organized **Theory of Change sessions** with pilot teams to reflect on their impact pathways and scaling strategies to turn drops into ripples and waves. Considering the need for adaptive and context-sensitive approaches, the Library of Indicators provided a structured catalogue that pilot teams could use in a flexible and dynamic way to assess their impact over time.

Additionally, our work considered and connected with other concepts used in the project such as the '**Ocean Ambassadors**' and '**Sea Forums**' as actors who took part in co-designing, implementing and evaluating the work of the pilots (Seravalli, Light & Emilson 2022; Zumbrink et al. 2024). We considered the perspectives of these actors to be essential to assess the impact of the pilots.

- Ocean Ambassadors focused mainly on building bottom-up engagement for the ocean among citizens and grassroots actors, which helped disseminate the work of pilot teams.
- Sea Forums provided a collaborative platform for planning, evaluating and sustaining activities by building institutional commitment and mobilizing resources and knowledge across disciplines and organizations.

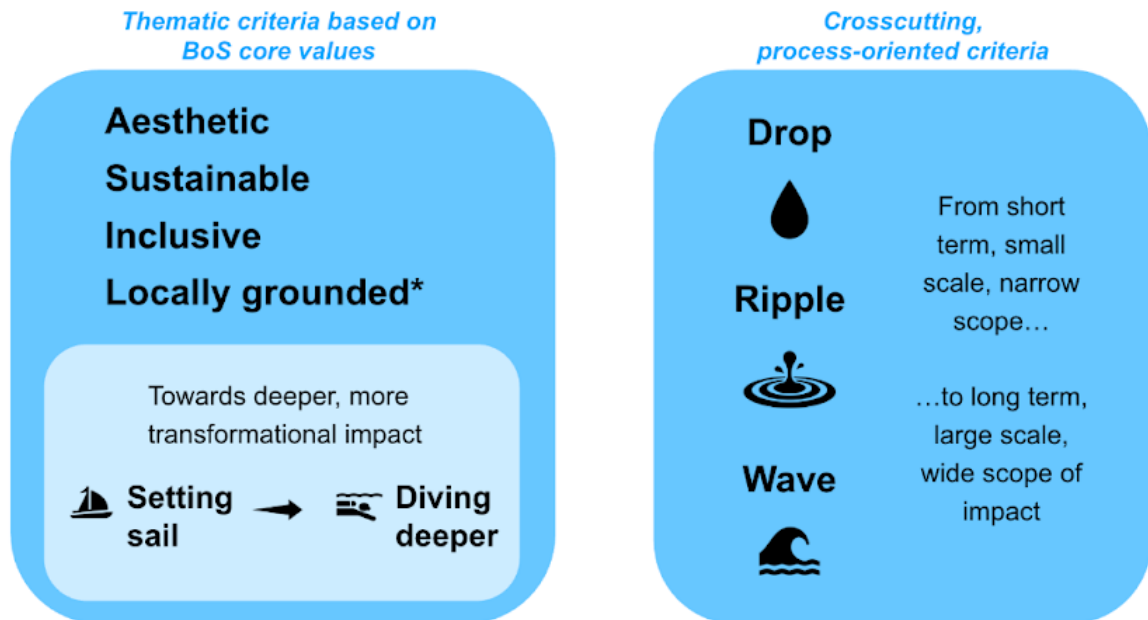


Fig. 8: Snapshot of the Library of Indicators' structure⁷

Fig. 9 (opposite): Theory of Change of the Genoa pilot as of 26th May 2025⁸

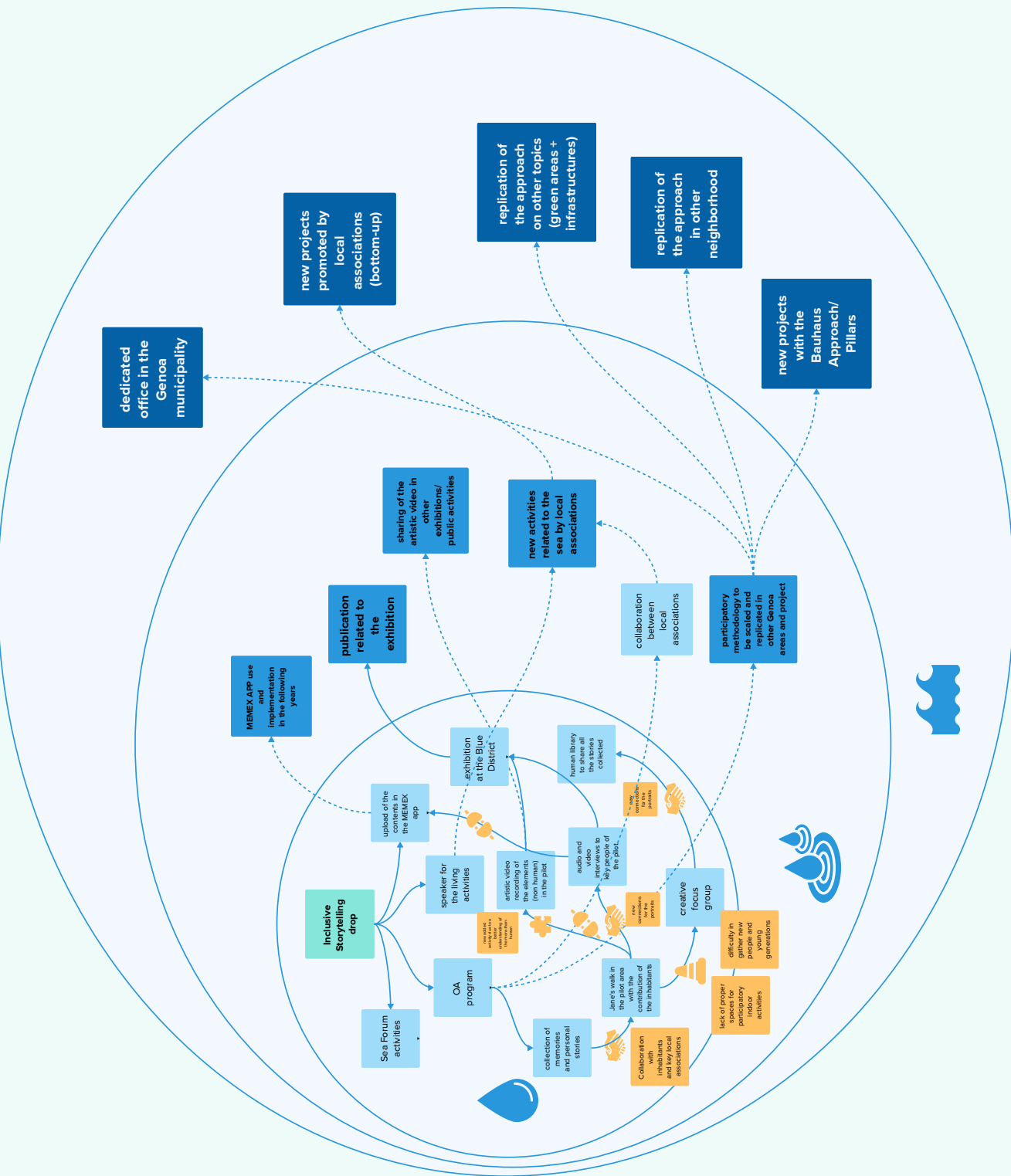
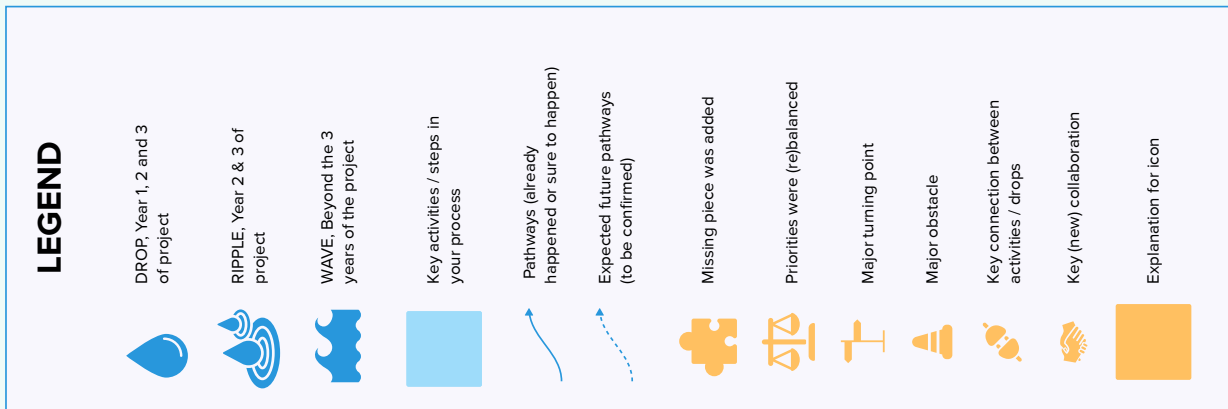
The following impact analysis follows the structure of the Library of Indicators (fig. 8) and focuses on criteria and indicators that were co-selected by the impact assessment team and the Genoa pilot team. The analysis uses data collected by the pilot team and BoS work packages, which organized participatory sessions with pilots (detailed in annex 1) and shared research results in project reports and academic publications.⁹ We collected and triangulated useful information during the sessions on **context analysis, theory of change** (fig. 9), **deep-dives** into aesthetics, sustainability, inclusion and local grounding; as well as an **in-person evaluation** led by the Genoa pilot team in collaboration with TU Delft, during which 18 participants (project partners, residents, public entities, Ocean ambassadors, Speaker for the Living, local associations)¹⁰ shared valuable insights. These insights were added to an impact assessment board designed by the Genoa pilot team (fig. 10).

⁷ Local grounding, or "locally grounded" was added as a fourth core value by the BoS project. It is a crosscutting value, meaning that it applies across the three themes of Aesthetics, Sustainability and Inclusion.

⁸ This infographic was co-developed with the pilot team, using Mural. The information was collected on 12/03/2025. The pilot activities and long-term plans have evolved since. This figure should be seen as a step in the reflection and evaluation process, rather than a definite Theory of Change of the Genoa pilot.

⁹ See <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101079995/results>.

¹⁰ The following organizations took part in the final evaluation: Genoa municipality, StudioWiki, Ideazione, IIT, Municipio IX Levante, Circolo Vele Vernazzolesi, UES Ciappeletta, Fishing Club Quarto, Committee for the Sturla District, GOA Consortium.



The impact analysis also discusses the potential of the Genoa pilot to generate long-term impact in the section “Toward waves? Hypotheses”. Considering the three-year duration of the BoS project, we focused on pilots’ ability to develop **‘seeds’ for long-term impact** (waves). We understand seeds as elements that constitute a strong foundation for waves to unfold. Bennett et al. 2016 defined “seeds of a good Anthropocene” as ways of doing and thinking that are materialized in initiatives or prototypes, are not currently dominant or prominent, and that begin to have transformative impacts as they spread. We were also guided by the concept of **‘small wins’** that captures how relatively small changes, in the sense that they initially arise at the micro- or local level, can generate “deep” effects that alter routines, values, frames and logics (Argyris and Schon 1996, in Termeer and Dewulf 2019). Termeer and Dewulf (2019) stress the importance of using dedicated propelling mechanisms to ensure that small wins (or seeds) turn into transformative change (or waves). Our analytical framework and methodology for impact assessment are further detailed in upcoming publications.

Fig. 10 (overleaf): Impact assessment board of the Genoa pilot, March-June 2025¹¹

¹¹ This board was translated from Italian to English. It was used at the “Tra il dire e il mare: Immersive storytelling exhibition” on 21-22th March, and completed during the Final Impact Evaluation on 14th June 2025.

Part 1

Process toward impact: drop, ripple, wave

This section discusses the process toward impact of the Genoa pilot and its drop. It summarizes the **key outcomes** of the drop, assesses its **ripple effects** and formulates **hypotheses about its long-term impact** based on available evidence. The impact categories (Drop, Ripple, Wave), criteria and indicators used for this analysis come from the Bauhaus of the Seas Sails Library of Indicators. The text below is a summary of the more detailed analysis that was conducted per criterion and indicator by the impact assessment team in collaboration with the Genoa pilot team.

1.1 Drops



The criteria we analyzed focused on the extent to which the pilot:

- engaged and connected relevant local actors;
- imagined, developed and tested solutions.

For each criteria, we used detailed indicators to guide the analysis.

Key insights from developing & testing the drop:

Inclusive Digital Storytelling

The drop developed an Inclusive Digital Storytelling **methodology that delivered a strong participatory creative process and immersive outputs** about the local heritage and relationship with the sea in Sturla-Vernazzola, Genoa. Key elements of this methodology included:

- Open meetings and clear communication with the community to build engagement;
- A cultural agent (selected via an Open Call) experienced in participatory processes to facilitate creative activities (Heritage Walk, Creative Focus Groups) with community members;
- The development of a “human library” (the stories are accessible at <http://13.79.0.34:7373/>) and immersive exhibition (21-22 March 2025 at the Blue District in Genoa) to share the stories in an artistic, engaging manner. The exhibition was attended by around 200 visitors;
- The collection of multiple forms of media (audio, photo, video) to illustrate and contextualize the stories enabled the development of different means of dissemination, namely the PAVIS AR app and the immersive exhibition

The PAVIS AR app, launched in the second half of 2025, uses Augmented Reality to provide an immersive dive into the local environment and its stories.

- It is based on a preexisting version that was enriched with a new user interface, possibilities to showcase stories with audio, video and multiple images, as well as a new functionality showing the stories as elements in a cartoonized version of Sturla and Vernazzola, to create an immersive experience for app users away from the pilot location.
- The app provides an **opportunity to preserve the stories of inhabitants** in the long-term and disseminate them widely, provided that the app is easily accessible and that potential users are informed.
- The app was tested by 5 contributors to the participatory storytelling process at

the final restitution event on 14 June 2025, which shared the pilot's results with community members and gathered their feedback on the process, impact and potential future developments.

The participatory process has involved **30+ consistent participants** (inhabitants, local culture and sports associations, local municipality)¹² and has fostered an improved understanding between them. According to a participant in the final restitution event, "Contacts have been established between associations and individuals in the area, creating a first real network".

The process of engaging grassroots actors to co-design the stories about their area generated learning on how to engage community members in participatory processes and how creative methods can stimulate new feelings (curiosity, excitement), perspectives and learning experiences for citizens. This process made residents and grassroots actors in Sturla and Vernazzola **feel seen and considered** while the opportunity to share their memories, personal stories and perceptions in a creative way had a strong emotional impact on them.

The Zoöp concept was introduced in Genoa, which supported the co-design of the drop and gave the Speaker for the Living (a local marine biologist with a long-term commitment for environmental education) an increased role and local visibility. The Speaker for the Living has helped ensured that more-than-human perspectives were included in the participatory process and has reported an **improved ability to communicate about the value of ecosystems** and regenerative perspectives, through empathy and considering humans as part of the ecosystem rather than as outsiders benefitting from its "services" (i.e. ecosystem services).

The pilot has generated an improved awareness of the landscape, ecosystem, and past relationship with water in Sturla and Vernazzola among participants, with a focus on the sea and local beach. It has **revived a feeling of cultural belonging and emotional attachment** to the area that may contribute to future environmental preservation.

¹² The following organizations took part, as reported by the pilot team: Unione ecologica sportiva Ciappeletta; Circolo Urania; Circolo Vele Vernazzolesi; Associazione i ricostruttori; Club Pesca Quarto; Bagni Santa Chiara; Comitato Residenti Vernazzola e Comitato residenti Sturla; Municipio IX Levante.

1.2 Ripples



The criteria we analyzed considered whether:

- **relevant actors took part;**
- **the pilot monitored and replicated solutions to aid learning.**

Main ripples generated by the pilot:

Inclusive Digital Storytelling

The pilot increased its communication and dissemination during the ripple phase by sharing its experience in various local and regional networks (Genoa University, Genoa Blue District's Blue Festival,¹³ Liguria region, network of 14 Italian municipalities, scientific conferences). From 23 October until 2 November 2025, the pilot and Speaker for the Living are conducting a series of workshops and ocean literacy activities at the Festival della Scienza in Genoa.¹⁴ The main goal is to **reach more students and young people and raise awareness of local species.**

The **Speaker for the Living has taken a growing role** within the pilot, by developing her pedagogical skills on ecosystem regeneration and conducting various activities with citizens that promote their participation in the monitoring of the local ecosystem. She has developed workshops, a survey, and has maintained contact with inhabitants so that they can report the flora and fauna they observe. She has conducted additional ocean literacy activities at local schools and beaches, helping the pilot to reach more children and young people. As of early October 2025, 50 schoolchildren aged 3 to 5 were reached by the Speaker for the Living's ocean literacy activities.

Feedback from the final restitution and evaluation (14 June 2025), attended by citizens, local associations and institutions, suggests that:

- new awareness and perspectives about local species were gained ("I didn't know the importance of Posidonia, which everyone criminalizes. I want to learn more about it");
- the project also conveyed the value of the neighborhood and its culture beyond tourism, contributing to a more holistic vision.

The project has convinced the municipality and local partners of the **value of participatory and creative processes** to engage citizens, revive cultural heritage and foster (re)connection with local ecosystems. The pilot team noted that the methodology of the storytelling process shows potential for replication. The municipality has applied for funding (EU, private banking foundation) to replicate the participatory process with neighborhoods, associations, artists, environmental scientists and schools in the western part of Genoa.

¹³ <https://www.genovabluedistrict.com/cosa-stanno-facendo-i-progetti-europei-per-il-clima-e-il-mare/>

¹⁴ <https://www.festivalscienza.it/>

The digital research centre IIT that developed the app has used technical insights from PAVIS AR development (app structure, backend, server) in its other project RAISE,¹⁵ which also developed an app using Augmented Reality.



Fig. 12: Ocean literacy activities with the Sturla-Vernazzola nursery school and the Speaker for the Living from Cooperative Dafne, October 2025. (Source: Comune di Genova, 2025.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

¹⁵ <https://www.raiseliguria.it/>

1.3 Toward waves? Hypotheses



The criteria we analyzed considered whether:

- **relevant actors took over and sustained efforts;**
- **solutions were disseminated widely.**

Hypotheses about potential waves from the pilot in the coming years:

Inclusive Digital Storytelling

The Genoa pilot has developed two main long term goals:

- continuing participatory processes that engage citizens at the neighborhood level;
- fostering a culture of living with the sea in Genoa

The pilot has created a strong foundation toward this long-term impact through two core elements. First, the pilot initiated an **informal local network** around participatory sea culture and heritage in Sturla-Vernazzola via the participatory storytelling process. It includes established local actors such as sports clubs (e.g. sailing association) and the local municipality, which have the potential to carry forward some of the projects' insights and activities. **The Speaker for the Living** is committed for the long-term via her association, has gained pedagogical skills on ecosystem regeneration, and has become better known among inhabitants and schools. This network of actors could continue collaborating, for instance in promoting the use of the PAVIS AR app for visitors, highlighting local stories and organizing environmental actions such as cleanups at the local beach. Participants in the immersive exhibition and final restitution event expressed an intention to stay involved and provided ideas to increase interactions with marine life, for instance via diving activities and nature guided tours. The continued presence of a NEB facilitator to keep collaborations going was suggested by a pilot team member as a potential way forward.

Second, the pilot developed an **effective, replicable methodology** to engage citizens and grassroots actors in a creative storytelling process around sea culture, and partners that can continue to support this process (StudioWiki and Ideazione). The pilot team is convinced of the value and success of the approach, which fostered emotional connection and local pride based on participant feedback. The digitalization of the stories can enable their long-term preservation. The municipality has disseminated the project among various actors and networks that could support continuation (Genoa Municipality, University, Blue District, other EU projects, network of Italian cities) and has **applied for funding** (EU, private banking foundation) to replicate the participatory process with neighborhoods, associations, artists, environmental scientists and schools in the western part of Genoa.

Going forward, the pilot could refine its replication plan by clarifying the role that digital technologies and app development can play in supporting Genoa's participatory

sea culture in the long-term. Further, securing municipal commitment to co-finance the future work would raise political ownership and the likelihood of generating long-term impact on cultural relationships with the sea in Genoa. More broadly, the Genoa municipality can integrate BoS values, learnings and methods into existing or upcoming policies & programmes related to the sea, waterfront regeneration and citizen engagement.



Fig. 13: Human Portrait of Titti Arena, inhabitant of Sturla-Vernazzola, 23rd November 2024. (Source: Davide Busetto, 2024.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Part 2

The Impact on the Four Themes of Bauhaus of the Seas Sails

This section discusses the impact of the Genoa pilot and its drop on four key dimensions: Aesthetics, Sustainability, Inclusion and Local grounding. These dimensions are based on the New European Bauhaus and were recognized by BoS consortium partners as the **core values** driving the project's design, implementation and evaluation (Zumbrink, Seravalli, Emilsson and Light, 2024). As in the previous section, the impact categories, criteria and indicators used for the analysis come from the BoS Library of Indicators. The text below is a summary of the more detailed analysis that was conducted per criterion and indicator by the impact assessment team in collaboration with the Genoa pilot team.

2.1 Aesthetics



The criteria we analyzed considered whether the pilot had:

- sparked pleasure, wonder or connection;
- enabled sensitization and learning;
- inspired a commitment to change and action.

For each criteria, we used detailed indicators to guide the analysis.

Key achievements of the pilot:

Inclusive Digital Storytelling

The pilot has involved 30+ consistent contributors and community members of Sturla-Vernazzola in a **participatory storytelling process, culminating in an immersive exhibition in late March 2025** as well as the development of an Augmented Reality app featuring local stories, images, videos and sound. The storytelling process and in particular the exhibition were met with positive feedback from participants who highlighted “an excellent experiment in participatory oral history”.

- The storytelling process incorporated creative activities (heritage walk, creative focus groups, photo portraits as part of the human library) and exercises (mind maps, writing postcards from the point of view of the sea) that stimulated participants’ **curiosity, interest and new ways of reasoning** that they had not experienced before.
- The immersive exhibition was described by participants as “relaxing”, “engaging” and “powerful”. The visual and sensory elements **enhanced the stories of inhabitants, helping them come alive and reach a wider audience at Blue District** (a venue outside of the Sturla-Vernazzola neighborhood), which was exciting for participants seeing the result of their engagement. The use of artistic methods, multiple media and digital tools were useful in creating the immersiveness of the exhibition and app.
- The storytelling process and exhibition gave inhabitants the opportunity to share their perception of the area and their personal ties with the sea, reinforcing a **sense of belonging, emotional connection and shared heritage**, and amplifying local perspectives via the exhibition and app. The experience showed participants and the pilot team that storytelling is a powerful way to engage communities and reflect on relationships with the sea.

Storytelling provided an effective way to **initiate dialogue about sustainability and the relationship with the sea** between local actors that hold different perspectives. Stories allowed different viewpoints to coexist and be represented without needing to arrive at a consensus or prioritize one viewpoint. This was useful considering the local context where tensions exist, for instance on the use of the local beach between residents, visitors, sports associations



Fig. 15: Vernazzola Beach, Genova, 5th April 2023. (Source: Comune di Genova, 2023.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

2.2 Sustainability



The criteria we analyzed considered the extent to which the pilot:

- raised awareness and enabled learning;
- inspired a commitment to change and action.

Key achievements of the pilot:

Inclusive Digital Storytelling

Genoa's urban expansion has reduced room for the beaches, natural environment (93% of the coastline is urbanized) and the traditional fishing village of Vernazzola. Protection from erosion and nature restoration are needed. In this context, the pilot helped **shift perceptions of the sea to the foreground** at the level of the neighborhood.

This focus on the inhabitant's relationship with the sea allowed participants to reflect on different aspects such as cultural heritage, leisure, socialization, livelihoods, environmental challenges. This revealed interconnections that could pave the way for **future solutions in the area**, such as restoring the local beach as a public space for social gatherings and for environmental protection (e.g. communal beach clean-ups). This could bring mutual social and environmental benefits for the community and marine life.

The **Speaker for the Living** played an important, and growing role, in including more-than-human perspectives at each step of the participatory storytelling process and in reaching younger generations through ocean literacy activities at schools and public events during the ripple phase. Being part of the Zoöp process helped her develop **more impactful communication skills** when conveying the value of marine species and ecosystems. She shifted her discourse from one emphasizing ecosystem services to one that frames humans as part of the ecosystem, highlighting humans' ability to empathize with marine life. According to the Zoöconomic Institute, the role of Speaker for the Living gave her more agency and supported her long-term commitment to environmental education.

Participants' feedback highlighted an **increased awareness of the natural landscape and species** of their area. Several mentioned a desire to further learn about, interact with, or spread knowledge about, the sea and marine life (e.g. "I didn't know the importance of Posidonia, which everyone criminalizes. I want to learn more about it"; "There is a new knowledge and a desire to share and tell others about it"; "Involve diving schools in the project so that participants can see the marine ecosystem first-hand(...)"; "Investigate more the damage done by humans to the sea.").



Fig. 16: Ocean literacy activities with the Sturla-Vernazzola nursery school and the Speaker for the Living from Cooperative Dafne, October 2025. (Source: Comune di Genova, 2025.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

2.3 Inclusion



The criteria we analyzed considered the extent to which the pilot:

- **connected with diverse groups;**
- **valued and integrated alternative forms of knowledge.**

Key achievements of the pilot:

Inclusive Digital Storytelling

The pilot's **participatory methodology** enabled the inclusion and participation of different community members in Sturla-Vernazzola. The pilot team reports 30+ consistent participants including inhabitants, local culture and sports associations, and the local municipality. They were highly involved in the identification and selection of the stories and photographic portraits. Moreover, around 200 visitors from different parts of Genoa attended the immersive exhibition, and 50 schoolchildren aged 3 to 5 were reached by the Speaker for the Living's ocean literacy activities.

Through a series of **free open activities** (Heritage Walk, Creative Focus Groups) and clear communication (emails, one-on-one calls with different participants), the pilot built engagement and enabled **new local relationships** between people and organizations that had not met before ("Contacts have been established between associations and individuals in the area, creating a first real network" as noted in the final restitution event). The Ocean Ambassadors facilitated the organization of the meetings in different locations of the neighborhoods, giving local associations the opportunity to host and share what they do with other participants.

The focus of the activities on local heritage, personal stories and creative exercises sparked the interest and excitement of the participants in continuing to engage in the process. The immersive exhibition as well as the final restitution event were important because they delivered a **tangible output to participants**, allowing them to see the results of their engagement. They also provided opportunities to gather participants' feedback about the project's successes, areas for improvement, and future possibilities. Five participants tested the PAVIS AR app and gave feedback on 14 June 2025, before the official launch of the app



Fig. 17: Impact assessment session with local partners of the Genoa pilot, June 2025. (Source: Comune di Genova, 2025.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

As mentioned previously, the nature of the activities (participatory process, personal stories) made **space for different voices** (e.g. fisherfolk, marine biologist) without the need to prioritize one perspective or find consensus, according to the pilot team.

The pilot amplified alternative forms of knowledge that are usually underrepresented:

- The pilot highlighted inhabitants' knowledge of place, traditional practices related to the sea as well as personal stories. This sparked feelings of emotional connection, belonging and pride in their neighborhood ("The change it [the project] can bring about is the discovery and promotion of a region that has a lot to offer" according to one participant in the final restitution event). According to participant feedback, the stories can help preserve the local heritage, revive a **shared memory of the neighborhood that goes beyond the dominant narrative of seaside**

tourism, and pass on this memory to future generations.

- The pilot also amplified **more-than-human perspectives** through the active involvement of the Speaker for the Living at each step of the participatory process, and in the ripple phase. Her contributions enabled other participants to learn about marine life, local species and their ecological value as part of the ecosystem, aiming to build a more empathetic relationship with the sea. She also played an important role in **reaching more schoolchildren and young people, initiating an intergenerational dialogue**. This filled a gap in the storytelling process which mainly highlighted past stories of elderly persons that have lived in Sturla-Vernazzola for a long time.

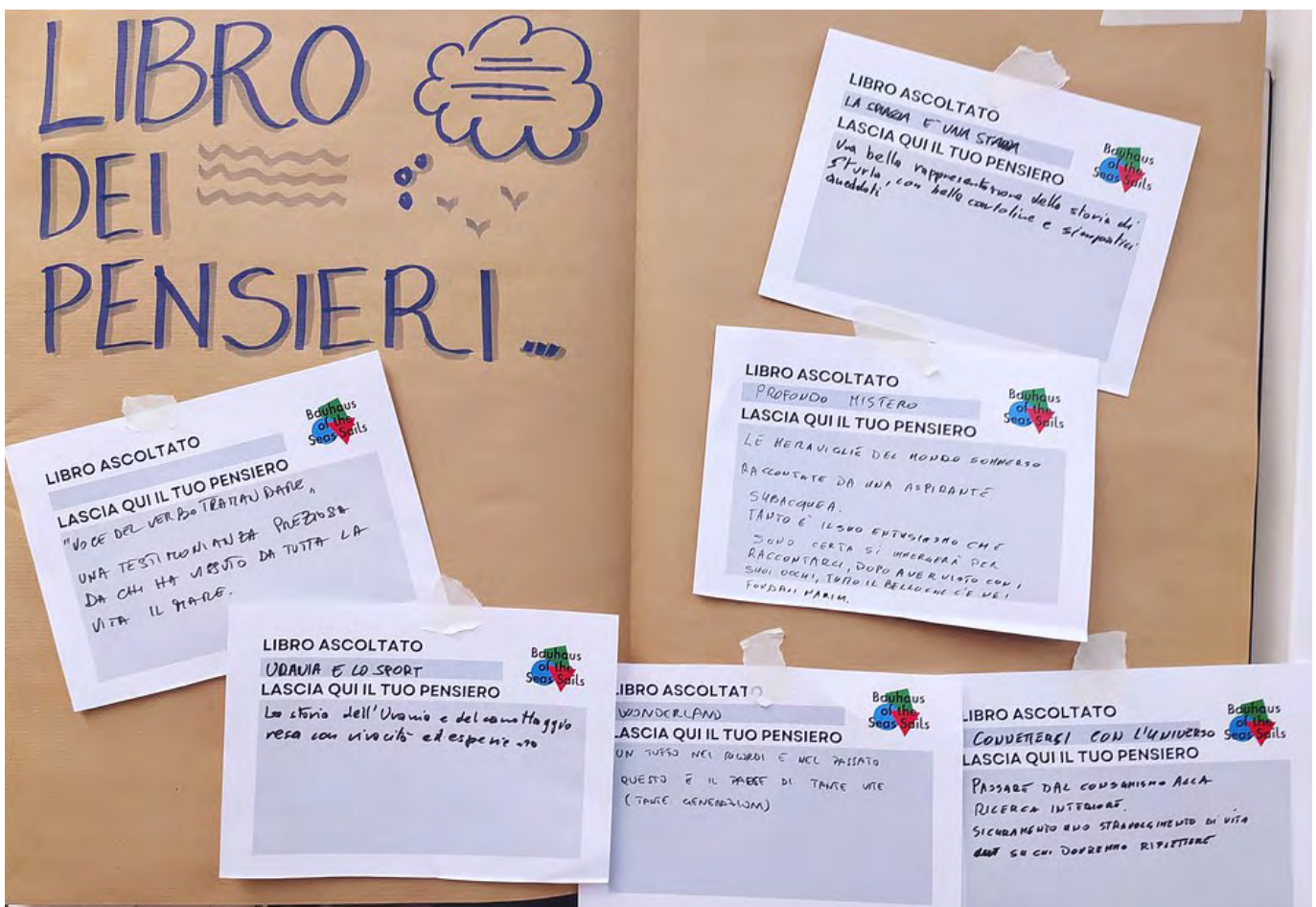


Fig. 18: Human Portraits from Sturla-Vernazzola, December 2024. (Source: Comune di Genova, 2024.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

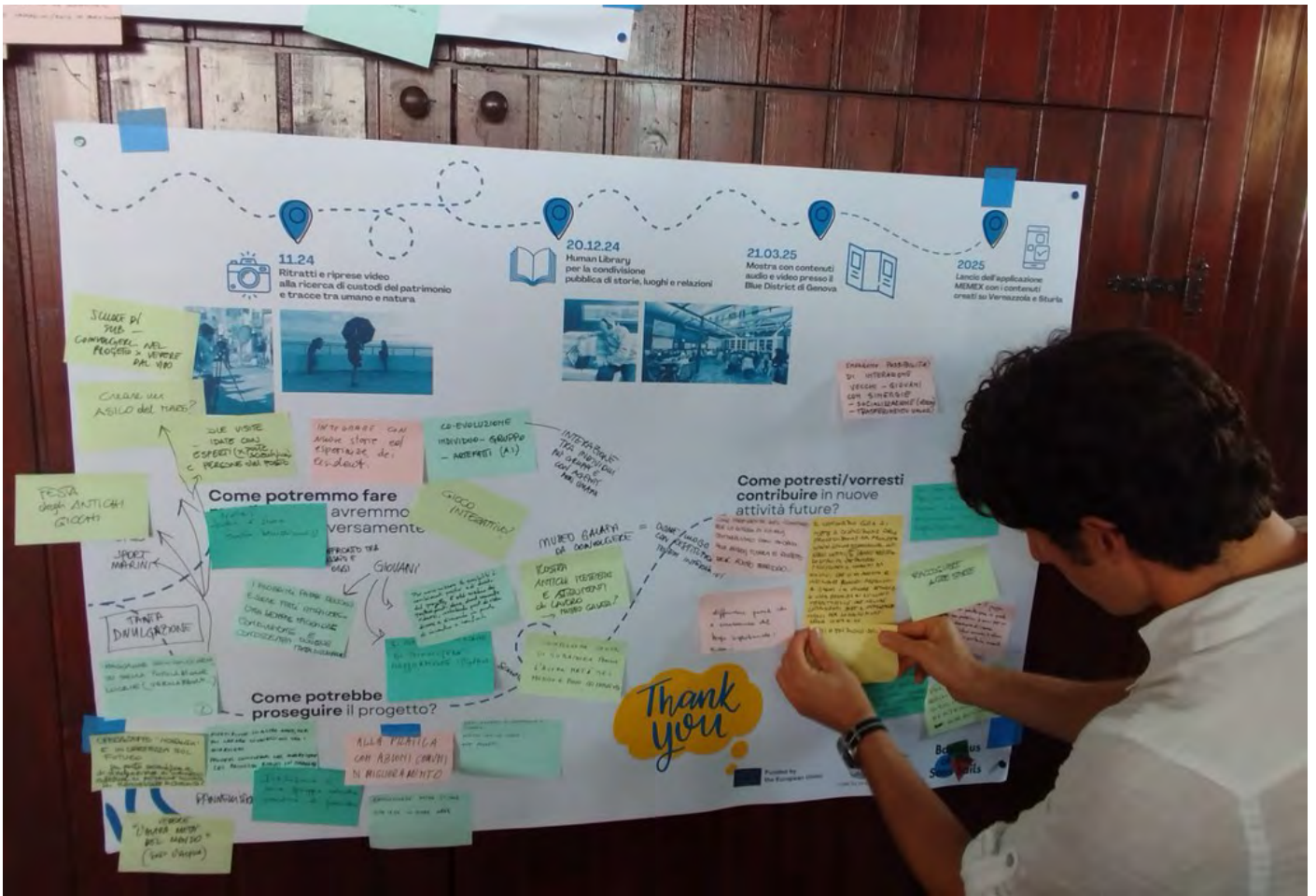


Fig. 19: Impact assessment session with local partners of the Genoa pilot, June 2025. (Source: Comune di Genova, 2025.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0



Fig. 20: Human Portraits. Sturla-Vernazzola, Genova, 24th November 2024. (Source: Davide Busetto, 2025.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

2.4 Local grounding (crosscutting value)



The criteria we analyzed considered the extent to which the pilot:

- **engaged and connected local actors;**
- **valued and integrated local knowledge.**

Key achievements of the pilot:

Inclusive Digital Storytelling

Vernazzola was traditionally a fishing village, but past knowledge and practices of living with the sea are at risk of disappearance due to Genoa's rapid urbanization. Therefore, **valuing and amplifying local knowledge** was a core goal and impact of the pilot. The stories and human portraits highlighted how inhabitants view the area, and how traditional practices (fishing, marine sports) have shaped the relationship to the sea over time.

Feedback from participants in the immersive exhibition and final restitution event suggests that they felt represented by the project's outputs. They expressed a **consolidated sense of belonging and local pride** (stressing the area's "beauty", "uniqueness", and "potential" in their feedback), as well as a desire to continue sharing memories and stories to ensure that these will be preserved and passed on to future generations.

The pilot initiated a **new, informal local network in Sturla-Vernazzola** by bringing together different organizations that do not usually meet (marine sports and cultural associations, fisherfolks) around a common goal of highlighting the area's unique heritage and relationship with the sea. Doing so through the exchange of personal stories helped build mutual understanding between participants.

The immersive exhibition was organized at the Blue District, located outside of Sturla-Vernazzola) and attracted participants from other parts of Genoa. As such, it **made the area better known to other inhabitants** of the city and highlighted its value beyond seaside tourism. Participants in the storytelling process describe being particularly impressed by the level of interest in their area ("I was struck by the interest in this area, which is beautiful and full of potential"; "Impressed by how many "strangers" were interested in our neighborhood").

The pilot team sees a strong potential for replication of this participatory approach focused on neighborhoods in other parts of Genoa and potentially beyond, (e.g. other Italian cities, other European countries). As such, the drop methodology is adaptable to other contexts and could help build an improved understanding of the relationships between communities and the sea at a higher level.

Part 3

Takeaways

This section summarizes the key factors – including context, stakeholder situation and resources - that shaped, enabled or hindered the pilot's ability to create impact. These factors played a role in the co-design and implementation of the pilot and its drops, but also have implications for its sustainability and long-term impact. Such factors should be considered when examining possibilities to replicate, or draw inspiration from the work of the pilot for other contexts. We identified two main types of factors, related to people and the setup of the project (box 3) and to the context for community engagement in Sturla-Vernazzola, Genoa (box 4).



Fig. 21: Human Portrait of Giovanna Bonsignore, inhabitant of Sturla-Vernazzola, 23rd November 2024. (Source: Davide Busetto, 2024.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

3.1 Key factors that influenced pilot impact

People and project setup



- **The interdisciplinary pilot team** (Genoa Municipality, IIT, Ideazione, StudioWiki) and its Speaker for the Living, with experience spanning local policy, community engagement, participatory processes, art, marine biology and digital technologies were key to the drop's development.
- **The Speaker for the Living** possessed essential qualities for her role: a background in marine biology, pedagogical skills and a long-term commitment to environmental education as part of Cooperative Dafne.
- Although there were limited initial contacts between the Genoa municipality and the **local municipality** in Sturla-Vernazzola, the latter became a key enabler of community participation for the pilot based on their knowledge of the territory and local actors. The Genoa municipality partners in BoS had limited prior experience with participatory and regenerative approaches.
- **Delays** in the pilot's early phase provided less time for building public participation, developing ripple effects and planning for the long-term. The app was not developed with a clear dissemination plan including target audience, communication tools and sustainability mechanisms. The digital partner favoured app research and development over long-term maintenance and scaling. Nonetheless, the municipality and Ocean Ambassadors gradually embraced a long-term plan focused on the participatory storytelling process.

Box 3: *People and project setup*

Context for community engagement in Genoa



- The participatory storytelling process of the drop benefitted from the area's dynamic local associations (e.g., sport clubs) and inhabitants who have lived in Sturla-Vernazzola for a long time and could share multiple stories. Although, elderly participants were overrepresented in the human portraits due to an **aging population**.
- The pilot team and Speaker for the Living worked to redress the age imbalance through ocean literacy and dissemination activities with students and schoolchildren. These efforts were supported by the Speaker for the Living and by the existence of the Blue District in Genova as a physical space focused on the sea and innovation. Overall, **intergenerational dialogue** about maritime heritage and sustainability remains limited.
- The local beach is a well-known place that fostered dialogue and stories during the pilot. It also highlighted **conflictual issues** around diminished public access and social activities at the beach due to economic activities (tourism, boat storage) and municipal regulations. This highlighted the need to better balance housing, leisure, environmental preservation and cultural heritage in an area undergoing urban regeneration.
- The Genoa municipality has commitments, operational plans and programmes about climate resilience, soft skills, the blue economy, biodiversity and marine protection, such as the EU Mission "Restore Our Oceans and Waters". However, Sturla-Vernazzola residents' perceptions of the **coastal regeneration plan** PON Metro Plus (2021-2027) led by the Genova Municipality are marked by uncertainty and fear that the local heritage is under threat. This context made the project's focus on local knowledge preservation particularly relevant.
- The municipality partners in BoS saw the project as a way to preserve intangible heritage in Sturla-Vernazzola. However they did not have direct influence over the regeneration plans which are managed by another municipal department, with a different timeline. This suggests a certain **disconnect between municipal departments** in terms of how EU-funded projects are managed and the extent to which they can inform or influence municipal policy and programming decisions. This has implications for communicating about the (expected) impact of EU projects with citizens before, during and after implementation, as discussed overleaf.

3.2 Areas for improvement and future development

This section provides potential avenues to improve and further develop the work of the Genoa pilot in the future. These suggestions and ideas are based on the in-depth analysis conducted above, and combine reflections from the Impact Assessment team, and from the pilot team and their partners. Overall the suggestions point to different ways the pilot team could refine its co-design and long-term planning (box 5), deepen its impact along BoS values (box 6), and scale up its impact on policies (box 7).

Improve early co-design for long-term impact



- The two core elements of the pilot, the participatory process and the app, could benefit from a more collaborative design and planning process. More dialogue at an early stage in the project could have helped establish joint goals, timelines and sustainability mechanisms.
- The experiences of other pilots suggest that having an (adaptive) long-term vision for the pilot early on, aligned with municipal plans, helps identify suited local partners and generate long-term impact. Regarding the app, this would entail identifying the expected users of the app, involving them in co-design and ensuring that the app can be used durably.
- The Genoa pilot team could increase outreach to potential users of the app such as local guides and cultural/heritage centers. A long-term or permanent QR code could be visible at the Blue District to ensure that the stories of Sturla-Vernazzola inhabitants stay alive.
- The pilot could seek follow-up funding to make a documentary that contextualizes inhabitants' stories within the social, cultural and ecological context of Sturla-Vernazzola and the wider coast. It could reuse the multiple forms of media mobilized in the project and disseminate the participatory storytelling methodology within and beyond Genoa. The documentary could include more stories from diverse inhabitants including young people.

Box 5: *Improve early co-design for long-term impact*

Deepen impact by embracing the BoS core values



- Participant feedback suggests that stories mainly consolidated inhabitants' sense of place and cultural heritage. Few of them emphasized environmental awareness and their relationship with the sea.
- The selection of stories could have placed **more emphasis on the sea and marine life**. Including stories about the present and future, with the participation of young people, could help address this limitation and reconnect past, present and futures of living with water in Genoa.
- As experimented by other pilots, combining pleasing sensory experiences with some **disruptive elements** (e.g., sound pollution, striking facts about biodiversity loss and climate change) through artistic methods might have fostered more environmental awareness and stewardship.
- The term "Human Library" used to describe the stories from Sturla-Vernazzola reflects the valuable knowledge of human inhabitants. But terms such as **"Living Library"** would encompass more-than-human life and be more aligned with BoS regenerative principles.
- Follow-up activities could move from dialogue to **regenerative actions** that bring tangible local benefits. For instance, participants suggested more direct interactions with underwater life (e.g. diving activities) and collective beach cleanups, to be organized with local associations.
- The participatory storytelling process did not substantially **include young people** from Sturla-Vernazzola (they were involved in ocean literacy activities at a later stage). Involving them from the beginning could have led to more dialogue and diverse stories, reflecting on local traditions but also implications for future inhabitants. This could increase intergenerational dialogue and mutual understanding while helping to pass on the local heritage to future generations, a wish that was formulated by several storytelling participants.

Scale up impact and amplify citizens' perspectives to policymakers



- Storytelling participants' feedback reveals some of their expectations and desires regarding the project's impact. This includes hope that the project continues and that the local memory is preserved ("We hope for an improvement of the village and the preservation of its traditions.").
- Project teams should ensure that they **communicate clearly** to participants about the possible outcomes and impact of activities. They should set up mechanisms and align timelines so that project results are used to feed into policy and programming decisions (e.g., about coastal regeneration and heritage preservation), for instance by co-designing projects with relevant policymakers and keeping them engaged.
- Particular attention should go to ensuring that **the stories are accessible to those who contributed** and remain accessible in the future.

Box 7: *Scale up impact and amplify citizens' perspectives to policymakers*

Annex



Fig. 22: Human Portrait of Titti Arena, inhabitant of Sturla-Vernazzola, Genoa, 23th November 2024. (Source: Davide Busetto, 2024.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Main data collection activities

This impact assessment used data collected via various activities in collaboration with, or led by, the Genoa pilot team. These include activities organized by the impact assessment work package (WP5) led by TU Delft as well as other work packages focusing on co-design (WP2 led by Malmö University), implementation (WP3 led by TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary) and replication (WP4 led by Ca' Foscari University of Venice) within the BoS consortium. TU Delft took part in the activities organized by other work packages, as co-organizer or attendee.

Activities used to gather data and analytical insights:

- Session on pilot Sea Forums, online, 17 January 2025 (led by WP2)
- Benchmarking session 'Water telling,' online, 28 January 2025 (led by WP4)
- Benchmarking session on context, in-person, 13 February 2025 (led by WP4 and WP5)
- Theory of Change session, online, 12 March 2025 (led by WP5)
- Impact assessment boards, Immersive Storytelling Exhibition (voluntary feedback from visitors), 21-22 March 2025 (led by the Genoa pilot team)
- Session to update the Genoa implementation report, online, April 2025 (led by WP4)
- Matrix activity, 09 May 2025 (led by WP4)
- Reflection session on aesthetics and impact, online, 26 May 2025 (led by WP5)
- Theory of Change update, online, 26 May 2025 (led by WP5)
- Reflection session on sustainability and Impact, online, 06 June 2025 (led by WP5)
- Zoöp discussion with WP5 and WP2, in-person, 23 June 2025
- Ocean Ambassadors meeting in Rotterdam, in-person, 23-24 June 2025 (led by WP2)
- Final evaluation using the impact assessment boards, in-person, 14 June 2025 (led by the Genoa pilot team). Attended by residents, public entities, ocean ambassadors (Ideazione and Studiowiki), the Speaker for the living, project partners (IIT), and local associations, for a total of 18 participants.¹⁶

¹⁶ The following associations/public entities took part in the final evaluation session: Genoa municipality, Municipio IX Levante, Circolo Vele Vernazzolesi, UES Ciappeletta, Fishing Club Quarto, Committee for the Sturla District, GOA Consortium.

- Reflection session on inclusion and impact, online, 4 July 2025 (led by WP5 and WP2)
- Reflection session on local grounding and impact, online, 05 September 2025 (led by WP5 and WP2)
- Seminar on replication proposals, online, 08/10/2025 (led by WP4)



Fig. 23: Human Portrait of Ilaria Bavazzano, inhabitant of Sturla-Vernazzola (Club Sportivo Urania), 22nd November 2024. (Source: Davide Busetto, 2024.) CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

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