

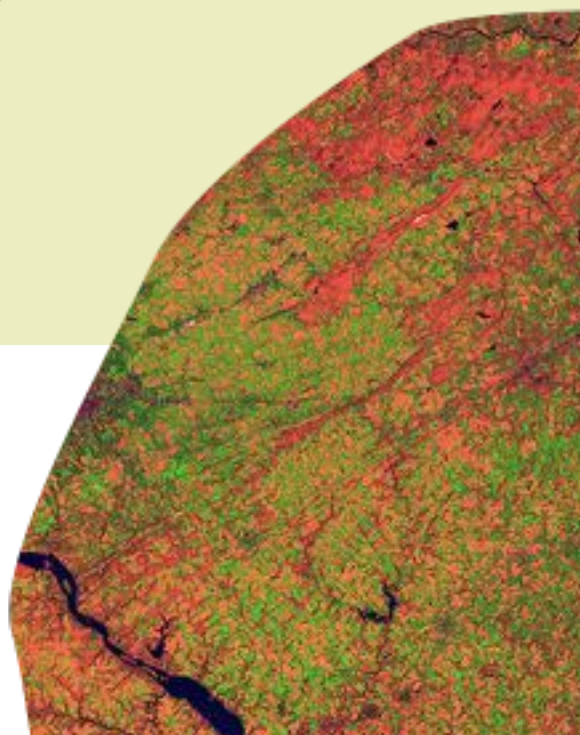
Title: II Giardino / The Garden. Common Good in Porto
Torres

Author:

**Occupy Climate
Change (OCC!)**
*Grassroots initiatives
entry*



FORMAS



Il Giardino / The Garden. Common Good in Porto Torres (Sardinia, Italy).

Matilde Silvia Schirru

Published June 13, 2025

Where this grassroots initiative is implemented? Who are the promoters?

Il Giardino / The Garden, in english, is an initiative based on the horizontal coordination of a group of people.

It includes artists, teachers, technicians and professional gardeners, among others. Angela Louise Pudda introduced me to the Il Giardino, telling how *"it promotes 'intersectional paths' dedicated to the concept of active peace and caring for (bio)diversity: powerful tools are observations, playing, studying, art and music, for everyone and all ages"*. Angela co-founded Il Giardino with others. Sardinian by origin, she was born and grew-up in Germany, but chose to come back to Sardinia where she pursued her career as an artist at the Sassari's Academy of Fine Arts. She settled in Porto Torres, actually she studies Education Sciences at the University of Sassari, she works and has her own family here in Porto Torres.



Porto Torres (Sardinia, Italy). View from the top of "sixty steps" project The rainbow and the salmon swimming upwards for their spawning are symbolic representations for life and resilience. Image licensed under the permission of Il Giardino for the uses and purposes of Atlas of the other Worlds.

Who are the beneficiaries?

"Beneficiaries of the initiative are all citizens: from children to adults, from the disabled to the elderly. Every activity is designed to be inclusive". I met Angela during the participatory process for the design of a new green public area of "Via Gobetti", in Porto Torres. The project is supported by the Parco Nazionale dell'Asinara, Municipality of Porto Torres, and the 'Educando Asinara' guides and environmental educators's network. During the meetings, Angela introduced herself as a contact person for a group of people carrying out 'secret green actions', designing and creating green spaces.

How does this initiative engage with climate? Does it tackle mitigation, adaptation, both or other dimensions of climate change?

Actions promoted by Il Giardino group engage citizens to take care of common goods as well as to implement action of climate empowerment, through open discussion, technical training and tactical urbanism, towards climate mitigation and adaptation actions, thanks to the chances to create and/or take care of green public spaces, using bottom-up approaches.

What are the main objectives? What are the main values?

Il Giardino defines itself by manifesto as *an informal and spontaneous group of free active citizenship, which studies and puts into practice ways of caring for green spaces - public and personal - in order to offer planetary citizens an environment in which to promote relationships based on sustainability and the Common Good.* The importance of these issues cannot be questioned, but to fully appreciate their significance here, in Porto Torres, it is necessary to at least reread the processes that have affected the territory over the last 50 years.

Porto Torres, a town of about 20,000 inhabitants, overlooks the Gulf of Asinara on the north-western coast of Sardinia island. Founded as Turris by the Romans, it has maintained its port vocation over the centuries, becoming today the island's main passengers and cargo port.

In the 1960s, unlike other Sardinian localities that focused on tourism, Porto Torres was chosen to host the SIR, later ENI, petrochemical hub. This decision led to rapid urbanisation, but also to the degradation of the environmental resources present, with impacts on the health of the soil, aquifers, and marine ecosystems, and a considerable impact on the surrounding agricultural and fishing systems, as well as on human health in the area. The bankruptcy of SIR in 1981 marked an economic and social crisis, aggravated by pollution and unemployment. The area is a Site of National Interest (SIN) for industrial reclamation from 2003.

A first sign of rebirth came in 1997 with the establishment of the Asinara National Park, which transformed the former prison island into a protected area, opening up new opportunities related to environmental conservation and sustainable tourism. However, Porto Torres remains a city of contrasts: on the one hand the ark and the protected marine area, on the other the industrial legacy with the ongoing reclamation.

A strong civic energy has developed in recent years, with associations engaged in social work, care of the territory and environmental education. Many operate in the House of Associations, while some, while remaining informal, collaborate and engage in taking care of

the common good, after some reflections on how to mend the link between people and the environment, in the light of new models of sustainable coexistence.

Porto Torres has experienced expropriations, wars and industrial crises: from the ban of shepherds and fishermen from Asinara island in 1885 (due to the necessity to build a Lazaret for cholera's patients and an agricultural penal colony), to the military traffic of the port in the world wars, to the workers' protests for the closure of the petrochemical plant, culminating in the symbolic occupation of the Asinara former prison in 2010. The need for care, in favour of public enjoyment, emerges disruptively in this context, between collective reflections and the need to feed minds through new ideas, relationships, visions and collective actions. And it is here that Il Giardino begins to take root.

What is the timeline? Are there already visible effects?

Il Giardino has been active in Porto Torres since 2019. In the '20s of this millennium, remote communication tools and social media often allowed a metamorphosis, from communication channels into virtual places to meet people, and debating, over communicating. Il Giardino is a local-based network of people who, while sharing virtual spaces for dialogue such as an instant messaging chat, have chosen not to have a social profile to meet or engage people. Among the reasons is the lack of willingness to manage these tools to communicate constantly to an audience of users, or followers, but it is also a concrete action of wanting to exist off the monitors, live, and to occupy real spaces. A first visible effect induced by Il Giardino is to make people meet. After the COVID-19 pandemic, some groups of people in Porto Torres needed it greatly.

It is in the collective and inclusive dimension of Il Giardino's actions that Angela dwells to explain why places for actions and activities are not only public spaces, but also 'personal' ones. Personal spaces in fact *"must be distinguished from 'private' ones, which by their nature are exclusive (in the sense of 'private of'), and which have nothing to do with the commons: democratic spaces based on the quality of human relationships"*. Angela thus also introduces me to the inspiring thoughts of Ugo Mattei, and his milestone work 'Beni Comuni. A Manifesto' (2011).

Il Giardino, in this sense, is itself a common good. Its 32 members have given themselves a rule: *"they listen to each other, and if a proposal for action put forward by another member is not accepted, they express this clearly"*. Involvement in organising and structuring expertise is mainly spontaneous and entirely voluntary.

The informal group of common good makers stems from the previous experiences of some of its founding members, consolidated in other informal contexts, such as the Pangea collective, active in Porto Torres from 2012-2017, with residence in occupied spaces of the former municipal bowling alley.

Il Giardino's promoters are used to discuss initiatives within the assembly of members, and their promotion takes place through the communication channels of associations, groups and partners Il Giardino collaborates with. The accessibility of places and/or spaces in the city of Porto Torres also defines the dimension of the initiatives, mainly local.

Among the most recent initiatives carried out, Il Giardino collaborated with the Scouts's

Associations of Porto Torres to plant future trees of Mediterranean species in an area designated for municipal greenery, in collaboration with the local authorities. This action is also important for another reason, Angela specifies *"it was real climate change adaptation action. In order to guarantee the plants' summer water needs, without any irrigation support, Il Giardino promoted plant care as a common good, activating a network of citizen volunteers who in turn provided water to support the trees' growth, using their own means (buckets, watering cans, bottles) especially during the hot summer days"*, Angela said. In the summer 2024, Porto Torres town, despite being on the coast, reached maximum temperatures of over 36 °C for several days.

Citizenship involvement was managed to encourage training sessions for participants of all ages involved, on methods of optimizing water resources in the emergency irrigation of seedlings, including tips on the use of agronomic techniques, such as mulching. There is no bottom-up adaptation for communities, without engagement and adequate information.

Who are the actors involved? What is their background?

The broader community involved in the Il Giardino activities include people from other associations such as the Clean- Up Association of Porto Torres, citizens and often the biodiverse people engaged from the Cooperative Il Risveglio and Progetto Filippide, local and national initiatives aimed at social inclusion for fragile subjects and sport for all.

In 2022 this last partnership focused on the regeneration and re-appropriation of an area of the city. The project '60 Steps', takes its name from a public staircase connecting different parts of a quartier. Here flowerbeds were frequently overrun with waste. Through the involvement of a young graduate in social sciences, social studies were approached to map the behaviour of residents and young attendants towards an area adjacent to the building. These were used to irresponsibly abandon garbage - including domestic ones - in the midst of the plants – mostly palms (*Chamaerops humilis*) and some oaks (*Quercus Ilex*) present. The study highlighted the lack of waste bins in the area and more generally inefficient waste management for the residents of the neighborhood.

Subsequently, it was decided to beautify the area by painting the walls of the staircase, with the involvement of the community: the meetings allowed the action to be co-designed and, thanks to the support of Il Giardino, participants learnt how to use brushes and paints to carry out street-art work. The area, cleaner and more colourful, returned to the community.

Among the most recent initiatives, Il Giardino has been mapping the city's green spaces, analyzing urban planning standards and reflecting on shared planning on the possible uses of public green spaces. Not only green as a tool to address climate change in action and information, but also public debates on sustainable mobility and the use of renewable energy sources. *"The biggest challenge right now is not to let ourselves be dazzled,"* Angela comments, perhaps referring to “light”, understood as “energy”, and the many debates accompanying the energy transition season in Sardinia at the moment, committed as the rest of Europe by the New Green Deal to the construction of numerous plants for the production of energy from renewable sources. Currently the national electricity bodies received only for Sardinia, applications for the construction of wind and photovoltaic plants by private companies for about 57 GW of power, exceeding the quota of 6.7 GW expected by 2030 for Sardinia’s renewable energy productions as contribution to national production targets. (Does it look like a new assault on the common good? [Editor’s note])



Activitst projecting drawings. Picture by Il Giardino ©

Which limits does it encounter? Are any shortcomings or critical points visible? What other problematic issues can arise from its implementation?

I ask Angela what limits or obstacles Il Giardino's path finds in her daily walk: *'The sense of impotence before the actions of the current socio-economic and political system, in which environmental sustainability is not or does not seem to be a priority.* The road to the commons starts from the bottom. I also take courage and trust that new ways of re-accessing to commons, such as land, places and nowadays, even energy, starting from those we know how to put together to defend democratic spaces, can be there. In this perspective, collaboration and networking among people of good will, are crucial.

"Il Giardino informally supports institutional initiatives" (such as the creation of the Via Gobetti Park) and collaborates with institutions in its *mission to promote the common good*. Although it operates as *'a subordinate organization of clandestine actions'*, according to Angela, there is no shortage of collaborations and projects with other local associations and structured realities, to which Il Giardino makes its expertise available.

How would it be potentially replicable in other settings?

There are currently contacts with similar initiatives in the region, considering the city dimension of Il Giardino's initiatives, but the *modus operandi* and objectives are certainly highly replicable.

Is this initiative conducive to broader changes? If yes, which?

Through cleaning actions, the raising of residents' awareness concerning common good care is tangible. Thanks to the support of the local authorities, among changes, bins have been installed and the number of waste gathering points in the neighborhood by the service provider has increased, tangibly improving the quality of use and livability of the neighborhood, as well as the residents' participation in the care of

collective spaces. This contribution has been realised thanks to the warming smile and contagious spirit of the activist Angela Louise Pudda, as contact reference for the Il Giardino's (Porto Torres, Sardinia) initiative.



*Stairs with regenerated walls and garbage bin, on the first floor (left). Picture by Il Giardino ©
Young citizens painting wall' stairs (right). Picture by Il Giardino ©*

References

Angela Luise Pudda, personal communication, 2024