



**BOLOGNA ITALY**

**It's a living lab!**

*How Bologna transformed Via Zamboni into an open experimentation lab*

**BOLOGNA  
ITALY  
390,636 INHABITANTS  
(2018)**



The University of Bologna, situated in the historic centre of the city, is one of the oldest in Europe. This provides many opportunities but is also challenging as different communities (students, residents, tourists, business owners) are crossing paths without always understanding each other.

Bologna's objectives in ROCK are to recognise and strengthen the specific identity of the University district of Zamboni as a cultural, creative and sustainable district by improving safety, mitigating social conflicts, increasing accessibility and attracting visitors and tourists, entrepreneurs and private investment.

Within ROCK, Bologna aims to increase the perception of the city and its heritage as a common good to which every citizen must have access, contributing to knowledge, governance, conservation and transformation.

The goal is to co-design cultural and sustainable initiatives and to create ownership over the governance of the Zamboni area, empowering students and residents and regenerating the area through culture. It is also to test a wide set of technologies to increase the potential of the area. The approach is a systemic one that connects cultural initiatives in the Zamboni area and other initiatives previously developed by the city or by independent structures. By combining conservation of cultural heritage, innovation and environmental protection, ROCK in Bologna is developing shared actions between those who live in, those who visit and those who enliven the Zamboni area, mixing visions, knowledge and skills.

In fine, the project will improve knowledge about the area, enhance participation of all stakeholders and physically transform spaces.

## The case study's approach

U-Lab is a ROCK Bologna living lab, specialised in collaborative practices targeting the University district of Bologna. The main goal is to link different experts and sectors for the regeneration of the area, developing new ideas and experimenting with new methods of using public spaces and services.

Through U-Lab, a workshop of participatory practices, Bologna launched a season of observation, conception and co-production with students, residents and stakeholders active in the area as protagonists of the initiative. During this first phase, the emphasis was on accessibility, sustainability, and collaboration for new productions.

To have a clear picture and tailor the activities, U-Lab performed sociological and ethnographic surveys on the area's residents and visitors and mapped the key elements (institutions and cultural buildings, productions, initiatives, actors) that characterise the area. This created a precise knowledge base, continuously updated and relevant to the actions in the area. The results of this mapping are featured in the ZONA-U Atlas, a constantly updated map describing the heritage, the transformations taking place and the key players in the process.

The living lab actions started, when ROCK began, with a mapping of the local stakeholders. Firstly, U-Lab organised a series of public meetings on key issues affecting residents and actors in the university district to listen and collect ideas and proposals.

To experiment with direct actions and events in the area, but also create new uses, U-Lab launched an open call for proposals targeting associations, collectives of citizens, informal groups etc. to propose activities, initiatives and events. U-Lab received 47 proposals after this first call. The 16 winners enriched the cultural and public spaces of Zamboni during the spring 2018 with 60 experimental events.

Four places were selected to host and test urban regeneration actions: Piazza Scaravilli, Piazza Rossini, Piazza Verdi and the area surrounding the Municipal Theatre, and Via delle Moline. The first actions have been realised in the transformation of Piazza Scaravilli: the former parking space has been turned into a green, open and co-designed public space for students of the university district. The transformation was conducted via a participatory process, calling for students' inputs and creativity. A new public space has been opened: foyer Respighi of the Municipal Theatre is now constantly open for reading, listening or studying.

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## Within ROCK, Bologna aims to increase the perception of the city and its heritage as a common good

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## Impact and results

More than 200 citizens and stakeholders have been involved in the first phase of the project

Thanks to the ROCK actions, the Zamboni district has become a permanent laboratory focused on the care of cultural heritage as a common good. More than 200 citizens and stakeholders have been involved in the first phase of ZONA-U LL.

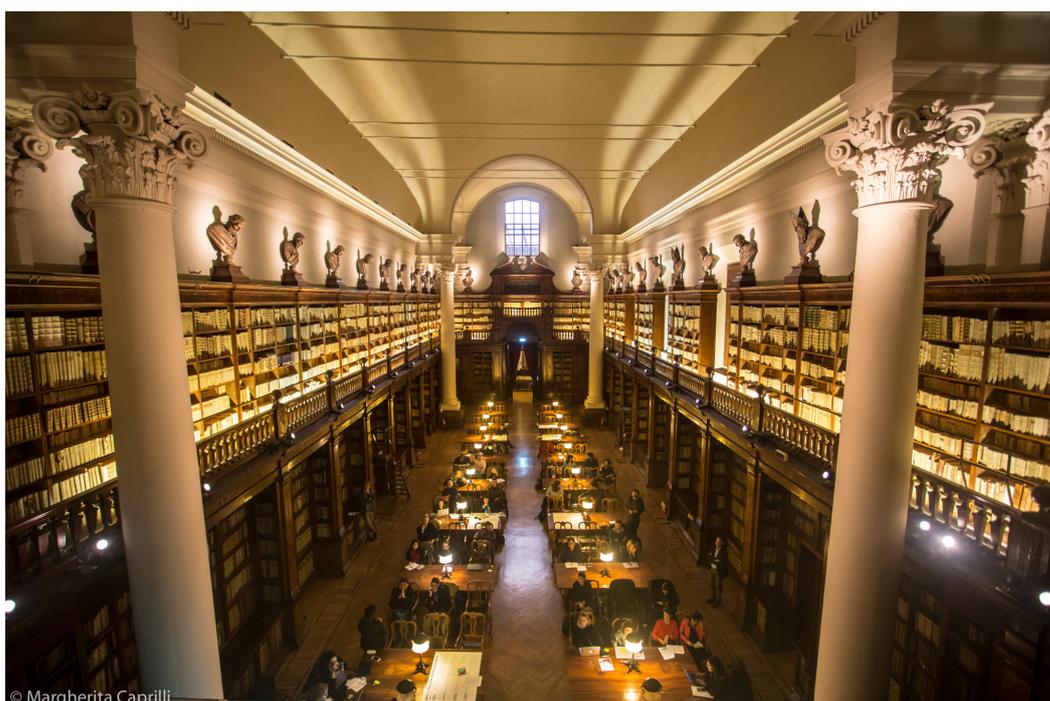
Initiatives taken a few months ago through ROCK have already started to show some effects. Civic engagement in the Zamboni area is on the rise, as demonstrated by the high participation both in workshops and events; the university and the municipality are working together on a regular basis thanks to the ROCK office, and the area is now part of the events calendar of the city, with more and more events scheduled, especially in the spring and summer time.

## Planning and sustainability

The second phase started on March 2019 with U-Area for all, a process to create and experiment with a service of guided tours which should be inclusive and easily accessible to both tourists and people who live the area daily. The objectives are to involve an even wider number of citizens, especially students and minority groups, and sustain the community built during the first phase.

The idea is to make the area accessible and open to new forms of discovery, through the use of the five senses. To this end, a call for proposals has been opened for legal subjects that will collaborate with the ROCK team, together with ROCK partner Eindhoven University, in a process that is already involving students, institutions, stakeholders, citizens and persons with disabilities, to map the paths existing in the area. The results of the mapping and co-design phases will be used to construct the guidelines to realise the guided tours service that, in turn, will be promoted by Bologna Welcome, the tourist agency of the city of Bologna.

Moreover, projects in the public spaces will be finalised, and an international competition will be launched for the renovation of the Municipal Theatre. To boost the innovation process in the district, technological partners will be more involved in this second phase, in the effort to help build stronger public-private cooperation.



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## Transferability

The U-Lab experience could be considered as a test for a bigger challenge to be faced by the Foundation for Urban Innovation, in charge of coordinating the local living labs and connected activities. The foundation itself aims to become the biggest cultural and collaborative place in Europe where new services and forms of cultural interactions will be tested and made concrete, by regenerating and connecting a wide range of institutional public spaces located close to the main square of Bologna, Piazza Maggiore.

Moreover, as requested by the ROCK project, the U-Lab process represents a best practice to be replicated both in Lisbon and Skopje, replicator cities in the ROCK project, according to their respective social, cultural and urban needs and peculiarities.

## Management level and partners

The whole U-Lab process in the university district is managed by the Foundation for Urban Innovation, in collaboration with the Municipality and University of Bologna. The Foundation is the evolution of the former Bologna Urban Centre, which was the first of its kind in Italy and an example for many other cities. In the ROCK Living Lab process, the urban agency of Bologna acts as a megaphone, antenna, arena and factory, planning and organising initiatives in collaboration with the different actors of the area (among which the Municipal Theatre, which hosted many of the U-Lab events), then monitoring and disseminating the results of the different actions taking place in the Zamboni district.



## Budget and financing

The budget comes from the ROCK project, financed by the Horizon 2020 programme of the European Union.

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### Useful links

<http://www.fondazioneinnovazioneurbana.it/ulab>  
<https://bologna.rockproject.eu/>

