

From Confiscated Assets to Living Laboratory

The Case of Suvignano and the Role of Universities in Co-Design

How universities can turn confiscated assets into living laboratories of change

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Introduction

Universities as Catalysts of Shared Administration

- Confiscated assets are powerful sybols of legality and civic regeneration, yet risk remaining underused
- Co-design (*co-progettazione*)—enshrined in Italian law (Art. 55, Third Sector Code)—requires structured procedures, inclusive participation, and transparent governance
- Universities can act as **neutral facilitators**: educating, mediating, monitoring, and enabling alliances between institutions, civil society, and local enterprises

Confiscated assets are not only against crime.
They must become for communities



Universities are not neutral spectators.
They are catalysts of civic alliances

How can universities, through Circle U., transform confiscated assets such as Suvignano from symbolic spaces into living laboratories of legality, sustainability, and civic innovation?

1. Case Study

Tenuta di Suvignano

- 700 hectares confiscated (2007) and then assigned to Ente Terre Regionali Toscane (2019)
- **Vision**: organic agriculture, cultural centre, civic hub for legality, student and research hostel
- **Investments**: €1.8M in infrastructure, €80k/year in cultural activities

3. Lesson Learned

- Transparency and procedures matter: asset assignment alone is not enough
- Local enterprises and vulnerable groups must be active partners, not passive beneficiaries
- Civil society organisations (e.g. Libera) can mobilise communities and strengthen participation
- **Narrative investment** is crucial: assets must become for communities, not just against crime

2. Challenges

- Limited productivity, underused structures
- Scarce evidence of structured co-design with Third Sector, local communities, and enterprises
- Lack of systematic **impact monitoring** (empowerment, cultural regeneration, economic development)
- Negative local perceptions (“more jobs under the mafia”), revealing the absence of a positive shared narrative

4. CU Added value

- Service learning & training modules (e.g. Tenuta Lab)
- **Facilitation role**: universities as visible anchors in multi-actor alliances
- **Impact evaluation**: shared indicators for outcomes, not only outputs
- **Ecosystem creation**: connect universities, family-based enterprises & NGOs
- **Scalability**: Suvignano as a European pilot model for social reuse

Roadmap

- **Mapping**: assets, community needs, enterprises, NGOs
- **Multi-actor working group**: students, academics, institutions, Third Sector, local enterprises
- **Participatory co-design**: structured labs with governance tools
- **Shared monitoring**: indicators for social, cultural & economic impact
- **Dissemination**: from Suvignano to Europe

Conclusion

With the involvement of universities and Circle U., Suvignano can transform into a **living laboratory** of legality, sustainability & civic innovation.

Without co-design,
Suvignano risks being a symbolic totem.
With co-design, it can be a living laboratory

