

casa italia

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Image looking towards the historic town in Taranto (Mia Fleming)

Introduction

Since 2018, Mammalian's work in Italy has been focused on a consistent group of young people, The Mammals of Milano, engaged through the company's relationships with the Triennale Milano and ZONA K, as well as partnerships with organizations in neighbouring regions including Modena's Periferico Festival and Bologna's Emilia Romagna Teatro, one of Italy's National Theatres.

What links Mammalian with these organizations is that we all share an interest in the evolving role that arts and culture can play in communities, specifically through socially-engaged artistic works that create participatory performances in direct collaboration with local populations. Additionally, alongside the Italian government's long term one-euro housing scheme, a recent initiative led by them also aims to foster a comprehensive network of residencies dedicated to the performing arts. This proposed an exciting research and exchange opportunity, to investigate what a socially-engaged residency model could look like, seeking to form deeper and longer-term international connections for socially-engaged artists.

This research project, focusing on developing a feasibility study for a future project aimed at community regeneration through easily accessible plots of land. This initiative seeks to encourage connection through design, as we face increasing social isolation, polarisation, and a global mental health crisis, and a body of evidence that suggests connection and community might hold some of the key to solving this problem.

"The number of new cases of depression worldwide increased 50 percent between 1990 and 2017. The highest increases in new cases were seen in regions with the highest socio demographic index (income), especially North America"

*from the book Dopamine Nation,
Dr Anna Lembke (2021).*

Introduction

Positive mental health outcomes aligns directly with one of the natural byproducts of Mammalian's work: fostering a sense of "trait belongingness," which is the sense of belonging that transcends any given situation, and functions in a more stable lasting sense, so rather than the sense of belonging to this or that group, there is the sense of belonging more generally. Trait belonging tends to predict for more positive mental health outcome.

"The so-called "need to belong" has been observed at both the neural and peripheral biological level, as well as behaviourally and socially. Indeed, a sense of belonging may be just as important as food, shelter, and physical safety for promoting health...a meta-analysis of 70 studies concluded that the health risks associated with social isolation are equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day and is twice as harmful as obesity"

- From the paper, "Belonging: a review of conceptual issues, an integrative framework and directors for future research" by Allen et al (2021)

Through hands-on research with artists from diverse disciplines and locations we aim to establish potential future collaborations, harness new design possibilities for addressing regional isolation, and investigate the feasibility of socially-engaged artistic residency as part of addressing some of the challenges of so-called "dying towns".

This research is ongoing, driven by a desire to find new, long-term and meaningful ways to engage artists, architects, urban planners, presenters, collaborators and audiences, who are able to find new and unusual ways of being together.

We lovingly call the research project 'casa italia'. If you're interested - get in touch!



who is Mia Fleming?

Mia Fleming is an architectural graduate who completed her Master of Architecture from the University of Melbourne in 2022. Within her professional practice, she holds a strong belief that architecture has the transformative ability to shape the way we live and cultivate thriving communities through culturally and environmentally responsive design.

In 2014, Mia undertook a self-initiated exchange with Raumlabor, an architecture collective based in rural Germany, where she delved into the concept of 'space' and its impact on community building. Following the successful completion of her degree, Mia was awarded the esteemed MGS Women in Architecture Travelling Scholarship from Monash University. This scholarship provided her with the opportunity to travel to Europe and America, where she conducted research on how architecture effectively communicates with the general public. Mia currently combines her artistic research with her employment at Architectus.

who is Chiara Prodi?

Chiara Prodi is an Italian-based Artistic Associate and Co-Researcher at Mammalian Diving Reflex. Chiara's work started with academic studies of visual arts including sculpture, painting and multimedia installations. Through the years, her interests shifted towards planning phases, practices, people and social dynamics.

In 2016, Chiara started a partnership/collaboration with artist Veronica Billi. Their works concentrate on pedagogical workshop methods and on the research around the stratification of stories connected to a specific place, wanting to enlighten scenographic devices, and interactive installations, which activate cooperation games among authors, performers and audience.





View in the Historic District in Taranto. (Mia Fleming)

Lead Researcher's *Introduction*



Over the late summer of 2022, as part of my own research, in collaboration with Mammalian Diving Reflex, we began research into a feasibility study, to understand the context of “dying regional towns” - with an Italian focus. Together with a handful of local artists and producers, the goal was to explore whether a cross-pollination of participatory art, visual art and spatial art could work to fuel change and connection for the better.

Not only is this study worthwhile in its immediate aspirations to reinvigorate a chosen town through sincere connections to art, place and societies, the shift in normal processes of procurement and network allow for a quiet revolution of design process to embed key stakeholders from the outset. The implication that this may have for towns, communities and individuals in similar states of need - whether that be from dying communities, natural disasters, intransigent poverty or other - can deliver connected, active and growing participants and actors of change.



1. Old town, Ostuni (Mia Fleming)
2. Housing condition from San Giovanni (Mia Fleming)

This booklet provides a summary of active arts/cultural organizations that Mammalian can engage with in future development. There is also a shortlist of two towns I have selected that provide two varying sets of relationships between community and capacity and therefore would alter the direction of the project in two different ways. I have selected both as a means for Mammalian to direct the next steps and I welcome further engagement as this project develops.

by Mia Fleming (Aus)

Overview of Casa Italia:

A summary of our research

A handful of towns participating in the One Euro housing scheme were sought out, often on-the-go and in response to the challenges of a country not overly-reliant on technology and 24/7 connection. These towns were visited and studied in conjunction with collaborating Italian artists Chiara Prodi, Fjoralba Qerimaj, and Austrian artist Melika Ramic, by engaging locals, assessing accessibility, noting existing communities - particularly artistic ones - and understanding and providing context to general ways of life. These differences could be severe from one location to the next and the value of attending these in person with collaborating Italian artists can't be understated.

This in-person knowledge was bolstered both by opportunities to meet creators of similarly focused projects, such as Favara Cultural Park in Sicily and Wonder Grottole in Basilicata, and by the continuing conversations with some lead artistic producers in Italy - Linda di Pietro of BASE Milano and Silvia Bottiroli of Emilia Romagna Teatro ERT. These connections aided in understanding the socio-geo-political pressures that led to the initial struggles of these towns throughout the country, but also the subtleties and nuances required to feed change.

by Mia Fleming (Aus)



1. Cino Zucchi housing development from 2003, Venice
2. Exhibition curated by Carlo Scarpa at Palazzo Abatellis (Mia Fleming)



Aerial image of Taranto. Sourced from Google Maps

Town Snapshots

This is a list of towns that form part of this feasibility study, and includes property sizes; nearby artistic organizations; history of the town's/region's funding and interest in the arts; engagement in the One Euro housing scheme; and accessibility. It also notes the self-sufficiency of these areas for those living there.

TARANTO

status:

Taranto is the main city of Puglia and a large port/coastal city. A centre island holds the centro storico, which was the centre of the town until the unification of Italy, before building and life moved across the shore, leaving many abandoned buildings. There are approximately 300,000 people in the town, with an offshoot of the University of Bari occupying land in the centro storico area.



accessibility:

Taranto has an airport, a main railway station and key highways passing through and around the town. It is a sixty minute drive to Bari and a sixty minute drive to Matera. There are also ferries to Sicily and Greece.

context:

The purchase of One Euro houses have taken place, though it is not apparent that any renovations have taken place as of yet.

Please see 'One Euro Towns' for more information.

VETRICETO



status:

Ghost town, with 779 residents in the surrounding 'Vergemoli.' Province of Lucca, in Toscana region. Currently not participating in the One Euro housing scheme due to a shortage of houses. There were forty properties under construction in 2021.

accessibility:

It is seventy minutes from the city of Lucca, and ninety minutes from the beaches just south of the famous Cinque Terre. A train and bus terminal, along with a supermarket and other basic shops are a 30 minute drive away in Galliciano.

context:

"A huge farmhouse abandoned for more than 40 years has been sold for 1 Euro. A draft project was presented for five apartments for tourist purposes that will also bring employment benefits to the territory." - leurohouses.com

PIGNONE

status:

Located in the Liguria Region, Pignone has One Euro houses, 600 inhabitants and is shrinking.

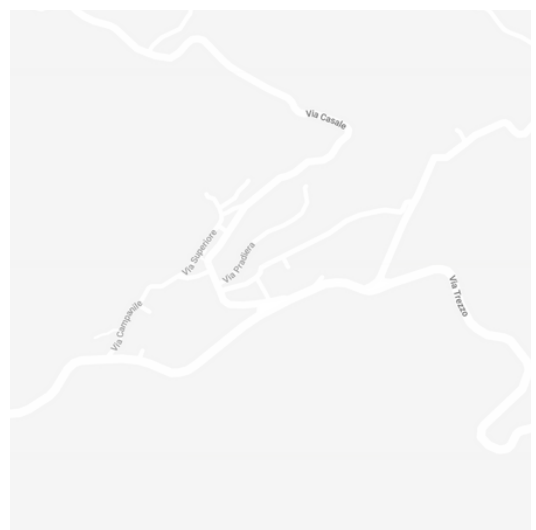
accessibility:

Genoa is the closest airport and is a ninety minute drive away.

context:

There are houses greater in value, though there are four bedroom properties in relatively good repair within the town at a value of €50,000. An example of this is:

<https://www.immobiliare.it/en/annunci/95664488/>





Estimated population of 2,487 inhabitants.

Candela is a town and commune in the province of Foggia in the Apulia region of southeast Italy. It is quite isolated and accessible only by car or bus, which would take approximately seventy-five minutes. It is also close to other satellite towns like Ascoli Satriano and Zona Industriale San Nicola.

"A huge farmhouse abandoned for more than 40 years has been sold for 1 Euro. A draft project was presented for five apartments for tourist purposes that will also bring employment benefits to the territory." - 1eurohouses.com

SAN GIOVANNI IN GALILEO

San Giovanni in Galileo is a small region in Emilia-Romagna, in the Rimini Province. The houses are not part of the One Euro scheme and they are not abandoned. This town was recommended by an Italian architect for its beauty and proximity to Bologna/Modena. There are 57 inhabitants.

Accessible by car only.

San Giovanni in Galileo was recommended to us as a place to do interesting projects, as it's located in Emilia-Romagna, where culture is held in high regard. We were told by an Italian architect that *"people do not think twice before jumping in a car or train to travel an hour to visit a festival or see a show or whatever."*

Located around the Rimini province, there are four-to-five bedroom, 2 bathroom, properties at the €50,000 mark needing renovation but livable. An example of this is: <https://www.immobiliare.it/en/annunci/54955742/#map>





MATERA/WONDER GROTTOLE

status:

Wonder Grottole is a small town with 2,100 inhabitants.

accessibility:

Matera is accessible by car, train and bus. Wonder Grottole is thirty minutes drive from Matera and sixty minute drive from Bari. They are currently testing a car-pooling service to and from Grottole.

context:

Matera is not currently a participant in the One Euro scheme.

Please see 'Case Study' for more information.

CAPRARICA DI LECCE

status:

Caprarica di Lecce was a key participant of the One Euro scheme since at least 2019, however, the town is no longer participating, but has properties available for sale on the lower end of the price scale in the centre of town.

accessibility:

A fifteen minute drive or seventy-five minute bus ride from Lecce. The town has basic shops and restaurants and would not require a car.

context:

€83,000 for 8 rooms in liveable condition, but requiring renovations before reselling.

<https://www.idealista.it/en/immobile/25169304/>





Case Study 01:

Wonder Grottole

"Wonder Grottole is a social enterprise that works to revive the historic centre of the village of Grottole, through the regeneration of abandoned houses and the creation of a new community."

Wonder Grottole began as an experimental project to engage and connect people and energies from all over the world. A visionary project that has captured the attention of Airbnb, and together, since January 2019, they have promoted the Italian Sabbatical project."

- Wonder Grottole team

Grottole's historic centre has 300 inhabitants, and 629 abandoned houses.

Wonder Grottole is a project in the historic area of Grottole, a town of only 2,000 residents, which involves people from all over the world to rehabilitate the historic centre of Grottole in Basilicata, that is only 30km from Matera and the European Capital of Culture 2019.

The town is not an immediate participant in the One Euro housing scheme but is prone, like most regional towns in Italy's south, to a declining population and increased isolation. The project has been going for over ten years and is in a state of incremental and steady growth and participation.

Silvio Cryptulae, one of four creators of the project and local to the town, is seeking to transform the quality of social interactions and connection in the town through access to hospitality, in the truest sense of the word. This is done by engaging with artists and architects for boutique initiatives.

At the core of the project is an investment in tourism to spark a cultural shift in Grottole. Part of its early success came from the interest and investment in Airbnb who were able to globalise the small town and encourage activation through the company's own marketing initiatives, such as Airbnb Experiences.

Dan Kidson, a local resident bought an old Sunday school church with eight rooms and is collaborating with an architect. He estimates that so far the whole exercise has cost less than €100,000 and he expects to spend over €100,00 for renovations. He hopes to start building in a few weeks. He will source the builders and other necessary resources through the networks he has already established in the town.

"There is no Google, there's no phone book, it's really local knowledge that makes something like renovating or purchasing a house possible."

- Dan Kidson

Case Study 01:

Wonder Grottole

“In Italy alone, 5,500 small villages (those with 5,000 or fewer inhabitants) have been declining; in Spain, 3,500; in Serbia, 4,700 – to name just three of the countries represented in this project.”

- Village Host website



1. Image of 20,000 euro property within town.
2. View from proposed property (Mia Fleming)

Wonder Grottole hosted the European Training of the Open School for Village Hosts with CasaNetural and others as part of the Village Hosts' initiative. These initiatives enable community members from all over Europe to gain new perspectives, analysis and develop networks and ideas for social, economic, and ecological growth in small villages. Researchers, and companies like Mammalian, interested in innovative community building can learn from Village Hosts, CasaNetural, and Wonder Grottole's work in successfully connecting communities to their local environments in ways that have a significant amount of buy-in from locals, and artists. For Mammalian, we share their interest in fostering inclusive and engaged community connections, which overlap with how design, architecture and artists can be an important part of the process..

“According to a report by Legambiente in 2016, there are about 2,500 depopulated Italian rural villages, some semi-abandoned and other ghost towns. These places represent the essence of Italian history and the craft tradition of the country.

It is for this reason that Wonder Grottole aims to experience the possibility of recovering the memories of this territory and repopulate the village of Grottole through the creation of a new community in harmony with the resident population.”

- Wonder Grottole team

Case Study 02:

Favara Cultural Park

Favara Cultural Park is in an area of five One Euro houses that were developed into a park and gallery space, located in the town of Favara, Sicily. It is one of many ongoing cultural projects spearheaded by locally-born lawyer Florinda Saieva, and Andrea Bartoli from the neighbouring town of. They bought several buildings in the semi-abandoned city center, and renovated them creating a cultural center.

Favara is large for a One Euro town, home to 30,000 residents and sprawling, though its historic town has been left vacant and crumbling, along with other mid-twentieth century housing and infrastructure, leaving 60% of homes unoccupied in particular areas. Due to the scale of the project, some streets and areas feel undersurveilled and unsafe, a difficult challenge to overcome

“Politically, cities are similarly different with agendas and pushing certain things. There are written and unwritten rules in Sicily.”
- Anonymous

The significance, then, of a section of town whose project boundary is unclear, but is freshly painted and meandering in nature, is important. While the art exhibitions on offer were under-utilised on our visit, the breadth of projects that the owner-producers have available for the public at any time could suggest a constantly revolving door of activity throughout the year.

The project has been financed largely from private investment, though there is now a buy-in from key decision makers nationally and internationally, with programs like the School of Architecture for Children, and uptake at the local community schools. Further collaboration between the Favara Cultural Park and Mammalian could provide deeper, specific community impact with locals, in combination with their other programs, which serve as outreach beyond the immediate area.



1. Favara Cultural Park
2. A property adjacent to the Favara Cultural Park
3. A secondary project run by the couple in Favara (Mia Fleming)



One Euro Towns 01: Taranto

overview

Taranto is a small port city to the south coast of Puglia, in Italy's south. It has a population of around 200,000 people and sprawls out in low and medium density housing. The city is the largest participant in the One Euro housing scheme, with available properties clustered within the labyrinthine old town, itself on a water-locked isle between two harbours with a single road out at either end.

Centro Storico, in the middle part of the island, feels completely empty, and surrounded by many run-down old buildings. Although there were no people around at the time we were researching, it is close to the police station, which is part of the small square, and has general thoroughfare, with some possibilities to interact with the general public.



Diagram of typical abandoned living quarters in Taranto, facing a civic square.



Image of an existing building at the edge of Taranto old town.

Reliable access to a vehicle would be necessary in order to transport materials and people into the main part of the island.

Despite its physical separateness from the new town of Taranto, a series of public, civic and institutional programs operate from and within the old town. A city tourism building is situated to the north, the University of Bari has a campus centrally located in the middle of the strip, and there are ancient ruins to the south, which attracted tourists while we were visiting. A variety of small community arts businesses were also operating in the vicinity.

Given the scale and diversity of the town, Taranto felt like a city with great potential for the purchase of a One Euro house and the opportunity to encourage connection and exchange between people in the town.



opportunities

The image on the opposite page shows the typical build on the area - low rise, medium density properties with select, paved outdoor space. Entry into most properties is via an internal courtyard, accessed from a single street entryway.

A property like the one highlighted in the image below is beneficial in terms of the building's internal organization, its scale and its proximity to civic life:

- The internal organization mediates direct access between street and home through the implementation of an internal courtyard that is used building wide. This offers the potential for outdoor workshops or activities, placement of vehicles and whole-of-building community. This last point aligns with Mammalian's objectives to concentrate sincere and strong connections to a small but significant group of people.
- The properties are multi-floor apartments with organizations typically stacked one atop the other, and vertical circulation sitting towards the centre of the building. The scale allows for multiple programs to operate internally, for instance, accommodation, office/work space and workshop/makerspace. This relieves pressure on external arts or community organizations to provide spaces when required by Mammalian.
- In a physical sense, the immediate adjacency to a piazza means that public intervention can occur in immediate proximity to the artistic residency space. In a broader sense, thanks to the size of the city and diversity of its location, there are several community groups and primary, secondary and postsecondary schools that Mammalian could connect with during the course of the residency. The University of Bari campus has a small library that is three stories high with a small interior courtyard. There is potential to partner with them, and relate it to their visual art, theatre performance and/or social studies courses, or offer a base for some form of exchange between the centre of the old-island and the slightly more populated area of the island.



1. A view of scaffolding supporting the facade of an abandoned building
2. Looking towards the central university square from the street (Mia Fleming)

Due to the scale of the town and degree of access for connection and transformation should an arts residency be placed here, Taranto should be considered as a core contender in any future development.

One Euro Towns 02: Favara

overview

Favara is a small town of about 38,000 people located in the central south of Sicily. A large portion of the town is mid-twentieth century, medium rise buildings of 3-4 storeys. An old town is also present, where most One Euro housing options are located. While the population is large, the city is larger. There were few people on the streets and many buildings and apartments appeared bordered up and abandoned.

The recent work of the Favara Cultural Park organization has started to connect the town globally and pockets of gentrification have occurred, though it does not have a strong presence unless immediate to the place. Given the focus of the organization to aspire to connect outside of the region, Mammalian has the opportunity to claim their own network and community with citizens of the town itself.



The visual connection between a new exhibition space and the neighbourhood in the background. (Mia Fleming)

opportunities

Favara, while large, presents strong opportunities to connect with the existing artistic community, which is itself growing exponentially, and with national reach. The residences for sale that were immediately adjacent to the activated Favara Cultural Park courtyard present a strong opportunity for collaboration, though these are not specifically a part of the One Euro housing scheme.

These buildings are typically three-storey lots with a near square internal plan and immediate street access. It should be noted that the Favara Cultural Park is situated in an area that has low to medium density residential buildings with extremely low density. Few people were around on our visit and questions of access, ease of living and sense of safety should be considered.

An alternate option to review is the purchase of a property close to the existing community, leveraging the network of the Favara Cultural Park while exploring different/new means of connection.

Opportunities Beyond the One Euro Housing Scheme

Early in our travels, it became clear that there are various other property options available to produce similar, if not greater, degrees of physical and cultural change within communities in need.

Nearby to many areas where the One Euro housing scheme was taking place, there are other houses in better states of repair. These properties are occasionally in areas that are more accessible. Additionally, purchasing a property outside of the scheme would result in the removal of administrative hoops required to buy and restore these properties.

There is also a pronounced economic and cultural schism between the north and the south of Italy - one that was mentioned by nearly everyone in the pre-trip research, and which was further confirmed in tangible ways once in situ. The southern towns such as Ostuni, Matera, Candela and Grottole are self-sufficient, with the citizens of the town less likely to travel beyond the limits of their settlement walls.

Often, people own two properties - one residence within the town limits and one agricultural plot just beyond, allowing for a degree of self-sufficiency. These towns are very much focused inwards and already connected to neighbours and beyond. The degree of change and connection that Mammalian can facilitate may be limited.

It's worth considering engaging the north of Italy, with its higher degree of financial stability and a stronger interconnectedness and investment in the arts. While there are fewer towns in peak distress, there are still communities with an aging population and abandoned buildings, where early intervention may be more impactful in the short term as opposed to locations that require significant long-term investment from a variety of individuals and organizations.



Image of a housing project from 2003 by Cino Zucchi. (Mia Fleming).

Perspective & Recommendations

from an architect

Given the scale of the town and its diversity of people, I would advocate pursuing a project in the town of Taranto, or a town of similar scale. There is potential for the project to grow, expand and redefine itself due to the scale and complexity of the town. The scale and location of the housing stock available for purchase allows for an opportunity to positively contribute to public infrastructure and property.

The proximity to a number of schools and the Bari University offer an opportunity for Mammalian to present projects already in their repertoire, including *Nightwalks with Teenagers* and *Eat the Street*, while also crafting new and specific works.

Seeking out these towns and their interest in Mammalian projects seems like a natural next step before beginning a consultation and workshop process prior to purchase.

Mia Fleming (Australia)



from an italian artist

It would be my recommendation to stay in the North of Italy, as it is more accessible for artistic partners and collaborators to come and go with more ease. In terms of creating socially-engaged and community-based work, it is preferable to choose a region in which its residents continue to have families. With this, the effect of the residency will reverberate as a wave, in years to come, across generations. In an almost abandoned town, it is not difficult to imagine that in the following decades nobody will reside there anymore, and those that do, are perhaps new residents and other artists in a similar field.

I am personally in love with the Emilia Romagna region; it is the region in which public administrations value and nurture cultural projects.

In Romagna, over the past 30 years, theatre companies such as Teatro Valdoca and Societas Raffello Sanzio have developed a huge amount of work, creating performances with schools and also with and for people within the region. The area has become prolific with many many festivals, such as Santarcangelo Festival and Motus. These cultural events and organizations have captivated the people that live there, and these regions now have towns filled with individuals who are interested in participating in a variety of cultural events.

In Emilia, there are many medium-sized towns with no cultural organizations or events. One of these towns could be a good place to consider.

Chiara Prodi (Italy)

Shout Out - Altofest

Within our research, we also came across some great examples of other individuals and organizations engaging with architecture, performance and community, but one in particular stood out, for the very innovative connections they create with the locals, and the relatively high commitment that is asked of both artists and locals.

Altofest. International Contemporary Live Arts Fest

GIVE RISE TO Human Regeneration

Created and Curated by TeatrInGestAzione

https://www.teatringestazione.com/altofest/opencall2022_en/

Altofest takes place in different areas of Naples and consists of a 10-day artistic residency period, followed by a 5-day programme, where locals generously donate their homes to international artists to create new work for a small audience.

During the residency days, the houses become spaces for artistic creation, while the programming days open the doors to the audience. Altofest embraces experimental sociality, emphasizing proximity, mutual care, and the exchange of gifts. This fosters a direct relationship between artists and resident citizens, initiating a dialogue about the profound meaning of hospitality and sparking a process of human regeneration that blurs the lines between the private and public realms. The project facilitates a connection between artists and citizens, transcending traditional roles and encouraging collective participation, ultimately leading to the formation of new relationships. It goes beyond simply hosting performances in homes; the daily presence of the artist influences the perspective of those who reside or pass through the domestic space. The artist's creative urgency intertwines with the host's needs, resulting in a constant dialogue that redefines not only the artwork itself but also the signs, the inhabited space, and the objects that compose the sense of "home." The citizen involved in the project is not a passive recipient but an integral and active part, playing a foundational role in the artistic process while the artist reciprocates by caring for the host and their community.

Awarded by the EFA (European Festival Association) with the EFFE AWARD 2017-18 (Europe for Festivals Festivals for Europe), as one of the six best festivals in Europe. In 2018 it was included as a best practice in the annual report "I am Culture 2018", edited by Fondazione Symbola.

A photograph of a street in a historic town at dusk. The street is paved and has a metal railing on the right side. On the left, there is a white building with a dark door and a small window. In the foreground, there is an outdoor seating area with white plastic chairs and tables, a wooden cabinet, and a bicycle. A person in a white shirt is walking in the background. The word "grazie" is overlaid in the center of the image. The background shows a hillside with white buildings and a church with a dome. The sky is blue with some clouds. There are power lines and street lamps visible.

grazie