

NEWS LESSON

Can Culture Keep Civita Alive?

BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you live in a beautiful village with very few neighbours?
2. What makes a place feel alive beyond having visitors?
3. Can an arts event change how people see a town?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**evocative**	☐	A	an impressive sight
2	**spectacle**	☐	B	imagines as a future possibility
3	**depopulation**	☐	C	buildings and traditions passed down from the past
4	**infrastructure**	☐	D	attractive in a way that looks like a painting
5	**heritage**	☐	E	a fall in the number of people living in a place
6	**picturesque**	☐	F	the basic buildings and services a place needs
7	**vulnerability**	☐	G	making you remember or imagine a feeling or a place
8	**envisages**	☐	H	the quality of being easy to harm or damage

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Civita di Bagnoregio and Bolsena have won a title and one million euros to host contemporary art in 2028. Keeping the village alive is a longer job.

1 The long footbridge to Civita di Bagnoregio creates the perfect approach to a beautiful place, and exposes the reason for its fragility. Medieval houses cling to a shrinking fragment of hilltop above the eroded valleys of northern Lazio. Visitors pause to photograph the spectacle; beneath them, rain and wind continue working on the soft volcanic material. "La Città che Muore", the Dying Town, is not simply an evocative nickname. The ground beneath the village is slowly wearing away.

2 Civita has survived since Etruscan times, but permanent settlement has dwindled to a tiny community. Tourism sustains cafés and guesthouses without solving the familiar problems of rural depopulation: limited employment, fragile services and the departure of younger residents. The contrast between a crowded visitor route and a nearly empty village raises an awkward question. Can a place remain culturally alive if it functions mainly as scenery? The question is hardly unique to Civita, but few places in Italy pose it quite so starkly.

3 An answer, or at least a new experiment, came along in October 2026 when Civita and nearby Bolsena were jointly designated Italy's Capital of Contemporary Art for 2028. Their proposal, "Arte che viene, arte che va", won against entries from Capri, Padua and Pozzuoli, securing a million euros of public funding. The scheme envisages more than temporary exhibitions. Its ambitions include creative infrastructure, collaboration with educational institutions and opportunities for younger artists to engage with the region.

4 The choice reflects an increasingly influential view of culture as a tool for regional development. A well-designed programme can bring in investment, new partnerships and year-round activity to places otherwise known largely for their heritage. Contemporary art may also challenge the tendency to treat historic villages as finished objects, picturesque surroundings to be consumed rather than communities capable of change.

5 Yet cultural projects often struggle to convert short-term attention into durable economic opportunities. Funding cycles come to an end, visiting artists move on, and the institutions left behind are frequently too thinly staffed to shore up what the programme began. Whether Civita and Bolsena can avoid that familiar pattern is, for the moment, an open question.

6 Civita's particular vulnerability makes this tension sharper. Art can stimulate discussion and attract resources, but it cannot remedy the erosion of the volcanic material supporting the settlement. Conservation and engineering remain indispensable, as does investment in the practical conditions that enable permanent residents to stay. There is a risk, too, that an increasingly celebrated village becomes more attractive to visitors and property investors than to people seeking an ordinary home.

7 The significance of the 2028 programme will therefore depend on what survives it. Temporary installations and a crowded calendar may bring welcome publicity, but they will not in themselves secure a future for Civita or Bolsena. More meaningful success would involve permanent spaces for creative work, stronger local institutions and reasons for younger generations to remain connected to the area. The Dying Town does not need art to disguise its fragility. It needs a cultural project capable of working alongside the less glamorous business of keeping a community alive.

Sources: Ministero della Cultura. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer implies that Civita looks far busier in summer than it is lived in. T F NG
2. The writer believes cultural projects reliably turn publicity into lasting jobs. T F NG
3. Bolsena will host more of the 2028 events than Civita. T F NG
4. The writer suggests that Civita's problem is shared by other places, though few face it so sharply. T F NG
5. The writer says the programme will be judged mainly by the size of the 2028 crowds. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

designated **durable** **ephemeral** **forestall** **remedy** **starkly** **stimulate** **sustains**

1. Short-term publicity is rarely enough; towns need _____ income that lasts beyond a single festival.
2. No amount of public art can _____ the damage once a cliff has begun to collapse.
3. The mayor hopes a summer of installations will _____ interest among younger residents who have drifted away.
4. Only a handful of buildings in the old centre have been _____ as protected monuments.
5. The empty winter lanes contrast _____ with the crowded bridge in August.
6. Seasonal tourism _____ a few cafés but creates little year-round employment.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The long-term _____ of the scheme will depend on whether local residents become involved. (SUSTAIN)
2. A full _____ of an old stone bridge would cost far more than a festival. (RESTORE)
3. Residents were _____ by the sudden rise in rents. (SETTLE)
4. Some locals remain _____ about whether art can solve practical problems. (SCEPTIC)
5. The _____ of soft volcanic rock makes any repair work a delicate task. (FRAGILE)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Particles change the meaning completely. Read the small word after the gap, then pick the verb that forms a phrasal verb with it. Some verbs split around an object.

fall **iron** **peter** **scale** **stave** **tide** **wear**

1. The grant will help the museum _____ off closure for another year.
2. Attendance tends to _____ out once the novelty of a festival fades.
3. Without further funds, the council may have to _____ back the programme.
4. Residents hope the new income will _____ the village over until spring.
5. Organisers must _____ out the disagreements over who owns the new studios.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What would persuade younger people to stay in a small town?
2. Would you rather protect a place exactly as it is or let it change?
3. What should still be there after a big cultural festival ends?

9 Role-play: how to spend the money

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · a neighbour who wants practical repairs

Your small town has won 100,000 euros. You think the money should pay for a safer bridge and a better bus service. Explain why, and ask your neighbour two questions about their idea.

Student B · a neighbour who wants an art festival

Your small town has won 100,000 euros. You think the money should pay for an art festival that brings visitors and young people. Explain why, and ask your neighbour two questions about their idea.

Useful phrases

I'd rather spend the money on something people can use.

That's a fair point, but it won't last.

What would happen if nobody came?

I'm not sure that's the best idea.

We're not going to agree on everything.

Could we split the money between both plans?

Afterwards, tell the class: how did you decide to spend the money, and was it a fair deal?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 G · 2 A · 3 E · 4 F · 5 C · 6 D · 7 H · 8 B

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 durable · 2 remedy · 3 stimulate · 4 designated · 5 starkly · 6 sustains

6 Word forms

1 sustainability · 2 restoration · 3 unsettled · 4 sceptical · 5 fragility

7 Language focus

1 stave · 2 peter · 3 scale · 4 tide · 5 iron

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