



AIBIA builds practical learning programs and living laboratories in places marginalized by global society. We work in rural, “inner” regions, and the Global South—places labeled peripheral, left-behind, or marginal—because that is where people already practice forms of ingenuity the dominant world overlooks: making-do, DIY, upcycling/recycling, repairing, sharing, cooperating, growing food, sustaining community, and surviving repeated shocks.

We do not treat these places as “case studies” or “beneficiaries.” We treat them as vantage points and spaces of hope for reimagining how we live-and-learn together—beyond extractive development, beyond commodified education, beyond the idea that there is no alternative.

AIBIA is both education and institution-building: we run immersive learning and community-based development programs now, while building the longer-term infrastructure for an intentional educational communities and development programs that can host year-round programs, residencies, collaborative work, and research.

What We Do:

1) We run immersive learning programs that change how people think

AIBIA’s programs are designed to challenge students’ assumptions through lived encounter, not just classroom critique. We place participants in what we call “provocative encounters” with everyday practices and economies—host families, producers, working cooperatives, workshops, farms, local initiatives—we then let learners follow what moves them, what inspires, what is important to them, and ultimately, where they go with their own learning.

We have two signature programs, one in Sierra Leone and one in Italy.

In **Sierra Leone** (since 2010) AIBIA has developed into a leading education-focused community-based organization in Makeni with an office, school building, and land (housing a women's agricultural cooperative). Today, our cornerstone program is a **mobile computer literacy program** delivering computer literacy (ICT) courses in the greater Makeni area to **5,000 students**. We do this in collaboration with local tertiary schools and the University of Makeni, and are currently initiating a broader vocational training program for adults.

In **Italy** (since 2020), specifically in Roccapivara (nestled on the border of the Molise and Abruzzo regions), where we are a registered non-profit association, have a 700 square meter building, 1.5 hectares (3.7 acres) of productive land, and partner with the town for other facilities. Our signature program has been **Reimagining the Economy**,

- **2021:** the first summer school delivered virtually (COVID context), built around locally produced video interviews and community material for the **University of Leipzig**.
- **2023-2024:** a two week in-person program with **University of Münster students**, structured around “reimagining the economy” through provocative encounters (small-scale industrial production alongside home-based subsistence practices; host family immersion; home visits; producer visits).
- **2025–present:** we have expanded these programs into a **stand-alone modular three-month program**, in which any student from any university can participate modularly at various stages. This includes language and local orientation; a core “Reimagining the Economy” immersion built around “provocative encounters” with households and



producers, as well as new sustainability / more-than-human aspects; and an independent learning/research phase producing short written and/or audio-visual outputs.

2) We are building living laboratories in these marginalized regions

AIBIA's long-term work is to establish living laboratories: place-based hubs where education is tied to daily life—food, housing, care, repair, governance, local relationships, and more-than-human ecologies. These laboratories are where ideas become experiments you can actually live with.

In Italy the laboratory will become an intentional educational community for living and learning together. In Sierra Leone the laboratory is an alternative development model set up as a non-profit community-based organization, but which is run as a business – reinvesting any excess revenues into new projects or community needs.

3) We are a public facing research organization, tasked with reimagining and implementing alternatives for the future.

Both of these locations have a research and data collection component to them which engages prefiguratively and collects data across its processes to be incorporated into **the think tank's critical reimaginative theory and parallel practices/infrastructures projects** for alternative thinking, doing, and learning.

While the Think Tank is in its early stages, meaning largely still in the data collection stages, we are building towards translating these experiential learnings into things others can use: open-access teaching tools, documentary media, and practical notes for people developing – or institutions that want to support – alternatives without suffocating them.

How we teach: “educational democracy” in practice

AIBIA runs on a simple pedagogical stance: facilitators create conditions for discovery; learners own what learning becomes. We do not design programs to produce identical conclusions or designed outputs. Rather, we design them so participants learn to observe, feel, think, collaborate, and reimagine—on their own terms, in real-world conditions, and following their own interests and spirit. This is why AIBIA is not just “alternative education.” It is education as practice, tied to everyday life and collective problem-solving.

How we learn: “Critical Reimaginative Theory” (CRiT)

CRiT is AIBIA's learning method: critique → reimagine → implement → iterate. We start by grounding critique in real places and everyday life, not abstract debate. Then we ask participants to prefiguratively reimagine what could be otherwise—without jumping to utopia or “one-size-fits-all” solutions. Finally, we put ideas into practice: small experiments, prototypes, routines, or proposals that can be tested against everyday practices. The point is not perfect answers. The point is learning how to move from analysis into implemented action, again and again, until we find workable alternatives.



How we build: “Parallel structures” and practices

Parallel structures are how AIBIA makes alternatives durable. Instead of waiting for institutions to change—or asking the systems that benefit from the status quo to fund their replacement—we build in parallel to existing structures: small, resilient infrastructures for learning, provisioning, governance, and collaboration that can function now. Practically, this looks like living-laboratory sites, cooperative routines, shared governance, community partnerships, open-access outputs, and programs that can operate with limited resources while staying aligned with our. We use what we must from the existing system, but keep enough distance to practice different logics—cooperation over competition, repair over extraction, and collective capacity over individual credentialism – so as to not draw too much institutional attention.

Where we are going: an intentional educational community and broader AIBIA network: practice + research + public engagement

AIBIA’s field schools are not the end goal—they are the first phase. The longer horizon is a network of intentional educational community as living laboratories: year-round local environments where education and community life are integrated, and where participants help sustain the place as part of the curriculum (food systems, shared work, cooperative production, governance, repair, and care). Over time, this is intended to grow toward a degree-granting institution – where daily life and self-management is woven into the curriculum – operating in parallel to the existing university system, while still collaborating with universities where collaboration supports our larger goals.

AIBIA’s living laboratories are linked to a wider aibia ecosystem:

- Locations: Sierra Leone, Italy, New York (Currently); Jamaica (in process); Czechia, Portugal, Morocco, etc (In Planning).
- the AIBIA Think Tank and related media (online publishing platform) and research networks (e.g. the International sociological association (ISA) RC48 research group) that study and support “alternatives from the margins,” including public-facing and policy-oriented outputs that can travel beyond a single site.
- Funded projects: DAAD Sustainable Development Goals “SDG” Partnership (applied); Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership (application in progress, due March 2026); Erasmus Innovation alliance (Future goal).
- Partnerships: the Universities of Munster, Cologne, Perugia, Montana, Makeni, and the West Indies, and the California Institute of Integrative Studies (current); in negotiation with Hasan II (Morocco), Universities of Huddersfield (UK), Manchester (UK), Coimbra (Portugal), Bologna (Italy), and Charles University (Czechia).

Contact / Learn more

AIBIA is open to collaboration. We work with universities, community groups, cooperatives, municipalities, independent researchers, and aligned practitioners. If you want to understand what we do, the simplest entry point is this: we build learning programs and living laboratories that make alternatives thinkable, livable, and visible.

Contact:

Tim Weldon, Director, *aibia*, weldon.timothy@gmail.com, www.aibia.org.