



***aibia* Italy Summer School 2026**

Live, Learn, and Reimagine Alternatives in a Depopulating Hilltop Town in Southern Italy

Most study abroad programs promise exposure. *aibia* Italy's summer program is built around something deeper: **personal transformation through lived practice**. *aibia*'s Summer School is a **12-week immersive experiential learning program** based in and around **Roccavivara**, a small hilltop town in Molise in southern Italy. This project has been developed in collaboration with the **University of Montana** and the **University of Münster**, and it is designed for students who want more than a "study abroad" experience. Our programs are designed for students who want to be **provoked, challenged, and placed inside a living question about what it would take to build a different world**—socially, economically, and ecologically—starting from a place that is often treated as "marginal."

The fastest way to understand this program is to understand *aibia*'s larger project. We are not running a field school as a one-off educational product. We are building an **intentional educational community** and a **living laboratory**—a place where learning is **not confined to seminars and readings** (though we do that too) or about understanding systems, but about **experiencing and experimenting with daily practices and relationships that can become the seeds of alternative futures**. That means we treat "education" as something lived: how people provision, how they cooperate, how they care for land and water, how they handle conflict, how they create meaning, how they sustain community under pressure, and the intimacy of their value systems. This program is an invitation to step into that process as a participant—someone who learns, but also someone who helps shape the questions, the conversations, and the collective outputs.

Roccavivara and the surrounding valley are not a romantic backdrop. They are a real place living through real forces: **rural depopulation, economic precarity, and climate stress**. The town is also full of intelligence that doesn't always count as "expert knowledge" in formal institutions, yet which could hold tools to unlock alternative futures: family food systems, practical land awareness, intergenerational skills, informal mutual aid, and daily techniques of making life work even as the wider world pulls people away. In *aibia*'s approach, these are not quaint traditions to observe. They are **resources for thinking otherwise**—starting points for asking: what kinds of economies and ecologies are possible when people are forced to be inventive, cooperative, and grounded? As they build everyday lives through a mix of traditions, alternative practices, and modern necessity.

The program's learning arc is built around immersion and contrast. You don't just hear about "local production"—you see multiple versions of it side by side across the broader Molise/Abruzzo region. Participants encounter **family-level, homestead, and artisanal production**; next to larger **family-owned businesses**; precisely so you can think concretely about scale, labor, value, survival, and compromise. You learn from small farms and family plots; understand local foraging practices; see how olive oil, wine, preserves, and cheeses are made by hand and circulate through family and community life; and you pay attention to the social container that makes those practices possible: **piazzas, markets, kinship networks, everyday**



reciprocity, and the quiet social infrastructures that keep a traditional community alive, and is building new **parallel, back to the land, and permaculture movements**.

At the same time, this is not a program that treats “nature” as scenery. A new and defining part of the *aibia* Summer School is its commitment to the **more-than-human** valley: land, soils, slopes, water flows, vegetation, insects, animals, and microclimates—not as separate “environmental topics,” but as realities that shape (and are shaped by) the symbiotic relationship between humans and their environment; from livelihoods, to settlement patterns, and agricultural and cultural practices. The program includes a dedicated **environmental science field week**, designed to be accessible for both scientist and practitioner where students learn to understand landscapes: how water moves, where erosion shows up, what soils reveal, what vegetation and insect life signal, and how climate stress can become visible in everyday lives. This week is designed to help students connect what they see culturally to what they can observe ecologically, **to introduce a way of seeing social and ecological lives as inseparable, and where “climate change” becomes a clear set of relations one can learn to notice, interpret, and engage with.**

aibia calls this overall approach **critical reimaginative theory**: a disciplined process that begins in critique, but refuses to stop there. Students are asked to move from encounter to analysis, from analysis toward grounded reimagination, toward ideas that can be discussed, implemented, and assessed. Hence, the program not being a classic ethnographic field school built around observation of “others.” Instead, **we use the strengths of ethnographic attention**—astute participant observation, fieldnotes, attention to details—but use those tools in collaboration with the local community **to reimagine alternative futures** we can put in place together.

Program structure: three four-week blocks (modular)

The Summer School is **modular** and structured as **three four-week blocks**, with a short break between the first and second blocks. Students can participate in the full 12 weeks or combine blocks depending on time, learning needs, and finances. Importantly, the program is designed so that the **core learning experience is Block B**, while Blocks A and C extend and deepen it.

Block A (May 18–June 12): Language and Cultural Introduction (optional).

Block A is a four-week foundation designed to help students arrive with functional Italian for everyday life and later fieldwork: navigating shops and markets, speaking with hosts, understanding the rhythms of town life, and building enough linguistic confidence to participate more fully in what follows. Block A is being planned in either **Vasto** or **Bologna**, and the final location will shape the precise accommodation model for this portion.

Break week (June 13–June 21), offering time to rest, reflect, travel independently, and/or settle into program site before the core field school begins.

Block B (June 22–July 17): Reimagining the Economy (core field school)

This is the heart of the program: a four-week intensive field school based in Molise/Abruzzo with excursions and field engagement. The first week establishes the conceptual spine through seminar-style discussions that place depopulation, “inner areas,” alternative economies, and

lived forms of change into conversation. The second week is the science/field-methods week described above. The final two weeks return to the program's central question—**experiencing how different worlds are sustained and how alternatives emerge**—through structured visits and engagements with farmers, small producers, homesteads, permaculture-oriented projects, cultural initiatives, and municipal/regional actors. Block B culminates in a collective projects shared with partners. This is where the program becomes not only “learning,” but a disciplined attempt to produce a reimaginative output from lived experience—something that can be discussed, critiqued, and implemented.

Block C (July 20–August 14): Deeper Involvement in *aibia*'s Project and Field Programs (optional)

Block C is for students who want to remain and get deeper into the community's dynamics and cultural aspects (this runs through festival season), and/or be a part of the *aibia*'s existing research and/or development programs. This block is designed to bring students deeper into the community; and as a mentored residency period, where students work on projects collectively (perhaps personalizing aspects of it) in dialogue with *aibia* and local collaborators. Current directions include work connected to **regenerative land and water practices** on *aibia*'s land, **water/rain retention** questions in town, **exploring, reimagining, and rejuvenating** *aibia* and the town's **infrastructure**, and **ethnographic inquiry** into depopulation and rural futures.

Accommodation and Daily Life

Housing and daily logistics differ by block, but within the program's Molise-based core, Blocks B and C, ***aibia* organizes accommodation, provides meals** (including excursions), **and local transport**. Block A's accommodation/meals model will be confirmed once the location model is finalized (Vasto or Bologna).

Costs and Accessibility (final figures forthcoming)

Exact fees will be published once cohort sizes and final accommodation arrangements are confirmed, though in the past have ranged from **55-75 euros per day for the full three-month program**, and **95-115 euros per day for only Block B – the 'reimagining' program**. The program will be offered as a full-program package as well as with modular pricing per block. A need-based scholarship structure is planned, and we encourage anyone interested – regardless of their financial situation – to send us an email to inquire about options for inclusion.

Who is this for?

This program is designed for students and thinkers who want to be challenged—intellectually, ethically, and personally—by a place, by a community, by different value systems, and by an experiment in living and learning together that treats “alternatives” as something lived rather than merely discussed. While the program is open to anyone and post-disciplinary in design, it is a strong fit for **advanced BA and MA students (as well as select PhD and independent scholars)** in the social sciences (especially anthropology, sociology, geography, political ecology, and social movements/social change) as well as environmental studies/science who are interested in experiential learning that connects **economy + culture + rural futures +**



environment without reducing any one of those domains to the others. Faculty members and teachers are also encourage to inquire about how best to participate.

If you are looking for a program that will simply confirm what you already believe, *aibia* is not that. If you are looking for a program that will ask you to see differently—through immersion, through disciplined attention to both social and ecological realities, and through a collective and experiential process of reimagining—then this is your invitation to challenge yourself.

Expressions of interest and Next Steps:

Please email and questions and expressions of interest to aibia.global@gmail.com, introducing who you are and why you would like to be a part of this program, by January 31st. Once we gauge the interest level, we will follow up with exact costs, scholarship opportunities, and any additional application and placement procedures.

For more information, please visit our website at www.aibia.org