

***SUBMERGED AESTHETICS, EMERGING POLICIES:  
THE ROLE OF ECO-ART IN MARINE CONSERVATION  
THROUGH *THE HOUSE OF FISH* PROJECT***Isha Bansal<sup>1</sup>, Shambhavi Shivani<sup>2</sup> ORCID: IB 0000-0001-9772-2349<sup>1</sup> Jindal Global Law School, O. P. Jindal Global University, India (03j2ta742)<sup>2</sup> O. P. Jindal Global University, India (03j2ta742)Contacts: [ibansal@jgu.edu.in](mailto:ibansal@jgu.edu.in), [sshivani@jgu.edu.in](mailto:sshivani@jgu.edu.in)**ABSTRACT**

This article explores how eco-art can meaningfully contribute to marine conservation by integrating aesthetic expression with ecological restoration and community engagement. Focusing on The House of Fish—an underwater sculpture park off the coast of Tuscany initiated by fisherman Paolo Fanciulli—the study examines how Carrara marble sculptures function as artificial reefs, deterrents to illegal trawling, and catalysts for sustainable tourism through practices such as pescaturismo. The project is situated within Italy’s broader tradition of environmentally engaged art, drawing on influences from Arte Povera and relational aesthetics to consider how artistic interventions can support ecological regeneration. In doing so, the paper highlights eco-art’s capacity to shift environmental narratives from abstract policy to tangible, place-based experience. It also assesses how such initiatives align with national and international policy frameworks, including Italy’s National Biodiversity Strategy, the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and the Sustainable Development Goals. Ultimately, the article argues that eco-art is more than symbolic—it offers a compelling model for integrating cultural practice into environmental governance. To promote eco-art as a policy-supported practice, the article proposes a set of recommendations for adoption at both national and international levels.

**Keywords:** Eco-Art, Marine Conservation, Environmental Policy, Pescaturismo, The House of Fish**ESTETICA SOMMERSA, POLITICHE EMERGENTI: IL RUOLO DELL’ECO-ARTE NELLA CONSERVAZIONE MARINA  
ATTRAVERSO IL PROGETTO *THE HOUSE OF FISH***

Il presente articolo esplora come l’eco-arte possa contribuire in modo significativo alla conservazione marina integrando l’espressione estetica con il ripristino ecologico e il coinvolgimento della comunità. Concentrandosi su The House of Fish, un parco di sculture sottomarine al largo della costa toscana avviato dal pescatore Paolo Fanciulli, lo studio esamina come le sculture in marmo di Carrara fungano da barriere coralline artificiali, deterrenti alla pesca illegale con reti a strascico e catalizzatori per il turismo sostenibile attraverso pratiche come il pescaturismo. Il progetto si inserisce nella più ampia tradizione italiana dell’arte impegnata sul piano ambientale, attingendo alle influenze dell’Arte Povera e dell’e-



estetica relazionale per considerare come gli interventi artistici possano sostenere la rigenerazione ecologica. In tal modo, l'articolo evidenzia la capacità dell'eco-arte di spostare le narrazioni ambientali dalla politica astratta all'esperienza tangibile e legata al luogo. Valuta inoltre come tali iniziative si allineino con i quadri politici nazionali e internazionali, tra cui la Strategia Nazionale per la Biodiversità italiana, la Direttiva Quadro sulla Strategia Marina dell'UE e gli Obiettivi di Sviluppo Sostenibile. In definitiva, l'articolo sostiene che l'eco-arte è più che simbolica: offre un modello convincente per integrare la pratica culturale nella governance ambientale. Per promuovere l'eco-arte come pratica sostenuta dalle politiche, esso propone una serie di raccomandazioni da adottare a livello nazionale e internazionale.

**Parole chiave:** Eco Art, Conservazione marina, Politica ambientale, Pescaturismo, The House of Fish

## 1. INTRODUCTION. HOW CAN ART HELP HEAL THE SEA?

This question lies at the heart of this paper, which explores the evolving role of contemporary art in addressing ecological degradation. As climate change accelerates and marine ecosystems face increasing threats from pollution, overfishing, and habitat destruction, the need for creative, cross-disciplinary responses has never been more urgent<sup>1</sup>. Among the reactions emerging at the intersection of art and activism is Eco-art—a practice that integrates aesthetic expression with ecological purpose.

In recent years, artists, conservationists, and communities have come together to reimagine the role of art as more than a mirror of crisis. Rather than simply representing nature, eco-art actively participates in its restoration. One compelling example is *La Casa dei Pesci* (The House of Fish)<sup>2</sup>, an underwater sculpture park off the coast of Tuscany initiated by fisherman and environmental activist Paolo Fanciulli<sup>3</sup>. Here, monumental sculptures carved from Carrara marble—a material historically associated with Renaissance grandeur—are submerged on the seabed not just for visual impact, but to serve as artificial reefs that deter illegal bottom trawling<sup>4</sup> and support marine biodiversity<sup>5</sup>. This initiative is more than a singular act of artistic resistance. It exemplifies a broader vision of eco-art as a tool for public engagement, ecological healing, and cultural continuity. It also connects with the concept of «pescaturismo»<sup>6</sup>, a sustainable tourism practice rooted in local fishing traditions that fosters direct public involvement in conservation.

Conventional conservation methods, such as laws and protected areas, as well as scientific reports, remain essential. However, they often struggle to move beyond institutional frameworks and technical discourse. Art, by contrast, can speak to emotion, place, and memory<sup>7</sup>. It invites people in. And in the case of *The*

<sup>1</sup> IPCC, 2022: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, 3056 pp., doi:10.1017/9781009325844.

<sup>2</sup> *Underwater Museum: How Paolo the Fisherman Made the Med's Strangest Sight*, in "The Guardian", XVII November 2020.

<sup>3</sup> *Episode 5: The Art of Activism*, in "Patagonia Stories", [online video], V December 2020. Online access [https://eu.patagonia.com/nl/en/stories/episode-5-the-art-of-activism/video-126924.html?srsltid=AfmBOor3obbxDIztMAo4\\_7tr\\_vAwXPZQEhnmSPOr6p3WxhgCRabsbxFc](https://eu.patagonia.com/nl/en/stories/episode-5-the-art-of-activism/video-126924.html?srsltid=AfmBOor3obbxDIztMAo4_7tr_vAwXPZQEhnmSPOr6p3WxhgCRabsbxFc)

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Gianni, *High Seas Bottom Trawl Fisheries And Their Impacts On The Biodiversity Of Vulnerable Deep-Sea Ecosystem*, Report prepared for IUCN/the World Conservation Union Natural Resources Defense Council WWF International Conservation International. Available at <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/Rep-2004-001.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/casa-dei-pesci>

<sup>6</sup> Pescaturismo combines the Italian words for "Fishing" (Pesca) and "Tourism" (Turismo).

<sup>7</sup> Thijs Biersteker, 'Bringing Facts to Life Through Ecological Art' (TED, YouTube, 13 September 2022) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=siTg\\_L5zzz4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=siTg_L5zzz4) accessed 28 March 2025.

*House of Fish*, it creates a space—both literal and symbolic—where sculpture, sea life, and story converge.

This paper investigates how eco-art, and specifically *The House of Fish*, contributes to marine conservation in Italy. It explores how art can shape ecological awareness, support biodiversity, and propose alternative models of sustainable development. Grounded in an interdisciplinary approach, the study draws from environmental philosophy, aesthetics, marine policy, and community-based tourism.

This paper unfolds across four interrelated sections. The first provides a conceptual and philosophical grounding of eco-art, tracing its evolution from early environmental art movements to its present role as a form of ecological resistance and public engagement. It explores how eco-art bridges scientific discourse and emotional resonance, making complex environmental issues more accessible to broader audiences. The second section focuses on *The House of Fish* as a detailed case study, analysing its artistic symbolism, the significance of Carrara marble sculptures, and its ecological role in marine restoration and the prevention of illegal trawling. This section also examines the project's integration with *Pescaturismo*—a sustainable fishing tourism model that supports local economies and fosters community involvement in conservation. The final section considers the policy implications of eco-art initiatives, advocating for their inclusion in national and international conservation strategies. It also connects the project to frameworks such as the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Italy's National Biodiversity Strategy, and Sustainable Development Goal 14.

By synthesizing artistic vision, environmental science, and grassroots action, this paper argues that projects like *The House of Fish* reimagine the potential of conservation—where aesthetics, activism, and marine resilience come together beneath the sea.

## 2. ECO-ART AS AESTHETIC RESISTANCE: CONCEPTS, MOVEMENTS, AND MEANING

In recent decades, the relationship between art and ecology has undergone a significant transformation, shifting from representation toward active intervention. The term eco-art refers to a broad and evolving field of artistic practice that integrates environmental concerns with aesthetic strategies. It frequently dissolves the boundaries between art, activism, and ecological restoration. Emerging from traditions such as land art, environmental art, and conceptual activism, eco-art distinguishes itself through its focus on sustainability, public participation, and site-specific engagement. Unlike conventional environmental art, which may depict nature or critique environmental degradation from a distance, eco-art seeks to engage directly with ecological healing by combining symbolic expression with tangible impact<sup>8</sup>.

A defining characteristic of eco-art is its capacity to evoke emotional responses and cultivate long-term ecological awareness. While scientific discourse offers essential knowledge about environmental decline, it often remains confined within academic or institutional settings. By contrast, eco-art communicates through emotion, sensory experience, and form, rendering environmental issues more immediate and personal. For instance, submerged sculptures function not only as habitat-forming structures but also as evocative metaphors for resilience, vulnerability, and renewal. As previously noted, “eco-art appeals to both sensory and emotional perceptions, which may ultimately support the formation of a continuous ecological awareness”<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Kagan, S. (2014). The practice of ecological art. 4. [http://fox.leuphana.de/portal/en/publications/the-practice-of-ecological-art\(088a4166-5ec4-43e6-8c75-1e217d4b289b\).html](http://fox.leuphana.de/portal/en/publications/the-practice-of-ecological-art(088a4166-5ec4-43e6-8c75-1e217d4b289b).html)

<sup>9</sup> D. Kaufmann, K. Palawat, S. Sandhaus, S. Buxner, E. McMahon, M. D. Ramirez-Andreotta, *Communicating environmental data through art: the role of emotion and memory in evoking environmental action*, in “Humanities & Social Sciences Commu-

This emotional and embodied engagement aligns with the concept of aesthetic affect, which describes how art can bridge the divide between knowledge and action by engaging perception and experience. Public installations, whether situated in urban centres or natural landscapes, serve as enduring reminders of environmental responsibility. A compelling example is Lorenzo Quinn's *Support* in Venice. In this work, two monumental hands rise from the Grand Canal to brace the walls of the Ca' Sagredo Hotel, symbolizing both human fragility and our capacity to confront climate change<sup>10</sup>. In such instances, art becomes not just reflective but active within the ecological discourse.

The Italian Arte Povera movement<sup>11</sup>, which emerged in the late 1960s, provides a foundational framework for understanding the principles of eco-art. Art critic Germano Celant introduced the term "Arte Povera" or "poor art" to describe a group of artists who rejected the polished materials and commercial aims of postwar modernism<sup>12</sup>. These artists turned instead to humble and organic materials such as stones, soil, twigs, cloth, and wax to challenge dominant notions of permanence, market value, and artistic autonomy. They aimed to emphasize transience, vulnerability, and transformation to resist industrial excess and reconnect with natural rhythms and processes.

Rather than treating nature as a passive background, Arte Povera artists sought to collaborate with natural elements including time, decay, weather, and growth. This approach closely parallels eco-art's philosophy, which values change, impermanence, and interconnection within ecological systems. Like many contemporary eco-artists, Arte Povera practitioners attempted to dissolve the boundaries between art and life, between human and non-human presence, and between constructed objects and living environments.

One of the most significant figures in Arte Povera is Giuseppe Penone<sup>13</sup>, whose work examines the relationships between time, organic materials, and memory. Penone's sculptures reflect the belief that natural materials, such as trees or stones, are not lifeless but contain layered histories of growth, erosion, and interaction. In his iconic work *Albero Porta – Cedro* (Tree Door – Cedar)<sup>14</sup>, Penone removed the outer layers of a tree to reveal its inner core, effectively exposing its past form. This act of sculptural archaeology rendered time visible and gave form to a hidden narrative of natural transformation. It represents what might be called a form of temporal ecology, which is central to both Arte Povera and contemporary eco-art.

This philosophy finds a compelling counterpart in marine eco-art projects such as *The House of Fish*. In this initiative, Carrara marble sculptures created by contemporary artists and installed along the seabed—are intentionally designed to interact with their environment rather than remain unchanged. These artworks gradually become encrusted with marine life, functioning as artificial reefs that contribute to biodiversity. Much like Penone's tree sculptures, these underwater forms are meant to evolve rather than remain pristine. They reflect the same principles articulated by Arte Povera: a respect for natural transformation, an openness to environmental processes, and a deliberate refusal to isolate art from life.

nications", X, 2023. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02459-3>

<sup>10</sup> See reference Lorenzo Quinn's Sculpture 'Support' Warns of Rising Sea Levels at COP25, in United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) News, 2019. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/news/lorenzo-quinn-s-sculpture-support-warns-of-rising-sea-levels-at-cop25> (accessed on March 28, 2025).

<sup>11</sup> See reference <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/arte-povera/>

<sup>12</sup> Roberta Minnucci, *Reclaiming the Past in Post-War Italian Art: Cultural Memory, in Arte Povera, 1964–1974*, Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, p- 43. Available at: [https://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/66263/1/Roberta%20Minnucci\\_PhD%20THESIS\\_FINAL%20VERSION\\_Minor%20Corrections%20Included\\_NO%20ILLUSTRATIONS.pdf](https://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/66263/1/Roberta%20Minnucci_PhD%20THESIS_FINAL%20VERSION_Minor%20Corrections%20Included_NO%20ILLUSTRATIONS.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <https://giuseppepenone.com/en/about/biography>

<sup>14</sup> See reference Alberto Porta artwork at <https://giuseppepenone.com/en/works/1431-albero-porta-cedro>

Arte Povera's legacy is evident not only in the materials used but also in the conceptual shift it initiated. The movement challenged human-centred ideals of permanence and control, proposing instead a relational understanding of the world in which materials, organisms, and environments are interconnected and co-creative<sup>15</sup>. This relational thinking is echoed in eco-art installations like *The House of Fish*, where human-made interventions are designed not to dominate marine ecosystems but to integrate with and support them. These sculptures do not assert themselves in opposition to the ocean; rather, they merge with it, forming ecological infrastructure that contributes to marine regeneration and resilience.

By emphasizing relationality, material change, and environmental humility, Arte Povera becomes an essential philosophical and aesthetic antecedent to eco-art. It invites a reinterpretation of art not as a static object or distant representation, but as a participatory process embedded in ecological realities. Within this framework, projects like *The House of Fish* demonstrate how artistic vision, material vulnerability, and ecological consciousness can coalesce into meaningful acts of environmental stewardship.

Eco-art resonates with the principles of relational aesthetics, which reframe the artwork as a space for interaction, dialogue, and collective engagement<sup>16</sup>. In the context of *The House of Fish*, this is evident in its incorporation of pescaturismo, a model of sustainable fishing tourism. Visitors engage directly with marine conservation through guided tours, underwater exploration, and storytelling led by local fishermen. These encounters transform tourists into active participants in ecological education and advocacy. The project, therefore, expands the roles of both artist and audience, embedding art within lived environmental experience.

Contemporary Italian artists such as Marzia Migliora and Luigi Coppola continue this legacy by developing site-specific practices that combine artistic experimentation with environmental justice. Migliora's work, in particular, interrogates the consequences of industrialization and labour exploitation<sup>17</sup>. Her multimedia installations, constructed from repurposed materials and infused with sound and performance, respond to Italy's industrial landscapes and their ecological degradation. By reframing historical and political narratives through an environmental lens, Migliora invites audiences to reflect on the entwined damage inflicted upon both nature and human livelihoods.

Through these diverse practices, eco-art redefines what counts as aesthetic value. It embraces impermanence, ecological function, and community interaction. The artwork is no longer simply an object to be admired but becomes a living system shaped by natural forces and collective engagement. Whether situated in a gallery, a polluted river, or beneath the sea, eco-art opens up new ways of understanding beauty—not as something fixed or distant, but as an ongoing process of care, attention, and transformation. In this vision, art becomes a medium through which ecological resilience and cultural renewal can take root.

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<sup>15</sup> Z. Vasko, *Connections between Artistic Practice and Experiences in "Nature: Considerations for how Art Education Can Engender Ecological Awareness"*, in "CRAE", XLII, 2016, pp. 69–79. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.26443/CRAE.V42I2.8>.

<sup>16</sup> C. Cazeaux, *Aesthetics as Ecology, or the Question of the Form of Eco Art*, in Manchester University Press, 2017. Available at: <https://repository.cardiffmet.ac.uk/handle/10369/9251>.

<sup>17</sup> V. Vannucchi, *Art in the Capitalocene from Awareness to Action: The Work of Marzia Migliora and Luigi Coppola*, in "Quaderni di Venezia Arti", XII, 2024. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-878-1/010>.

### 3. THE HOUSE OF FISH: ECO-ART AS HABITAT, HERITAGE, AND RESISTANCE

« Full fathom five thy father lies;  
Of his bones are coral made;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes:  
Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange »

These lines from *The Tempest*<sup>18</sup> describe transformation through immersion in the sea. In *The House of Fish*, we witness a similar kind of “sea-change”—not of bones but of marble, not of death but of ecological revival.

#### 3.1. *From Destruction to Imagination: The Birth of the Project*

*The House of Fish* (*La Casa dei Pesci*) was born out of necessity and imagination. In the 1980s, Tuscan fisherman Paolo Fanciulli began observing the destructive impact of illegal bottom trawling<sup>19</sup>. The heavy nets used in this fishing method scraped the seabed, destroying habitats and displacing species. Most critically, they damaged extensive beds of *Posidonia oceanica*, a vital Mediterranean seagrass referred to as the «lungs of the Mediterranean» that absorbs carbon dioxide, prevents erosion, and serves as a nursery for marine life<sup>20</sup>.

Realizing that policy enforcement alone could not protect the seabed, Fanciulli envisioned a more enduring and culturally resonant form of defence. Fanciulli collaborated with local fishermen, Greenpeace activists, and marine scientists to protest against destructive fishing practices. Collectively, they organized a blockade of a commercial port in Tuscany, drawing attention to the ecological damage caused by illegal trawling<sup>21</sup>. Fanciulli’s initiatives ultimately culminated in *The House of Fish* (*Casa dei Pesci*), a project that seamlessly integrates environmental conservation with artistic expression. *Casa dei Pesci – ETS* Association was founded in 2012 as a non-profit organization to safeguard the marine environment and promote fish repopulation, continuing the public interventions started already in 2007 by the Province of Grosseto to defend the seabed of the Maremma coast<sup>22</sup>.

#### 3.2. *Sculpture as Reef: The Ecological Function of Art*

At the heart of the project is the installation of Carrara marble sculptures and specially designed reef blocks on the seafloor near Talamone. The marble, historically used for monumental art, was selected for its ecological benefits. It is rich in calcium carbonate<sup>23</sup> and has a rough, porous texture that facilitates the colonization of marine life.

<sup>18</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Act 1, Scene 2.

<sup>19</sup> A. Pusceddu, S. Bianchelli, J. Martín, P. Puig, A. Palanques, P. Masqué, & R. Danovaro, *Chronic and intensive bottom trawling impairs deep-sea biodiversity and ecosystem functioning*, in “Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America”, 111 (24), 2014, pp. 8861–8866.

<sup>20</sup> N. Cantasano, *The Meadows of Posidonia Oceanica (Linnaeus) Delile in a Climate Change Scenario*, in “Advances in Oceanography & Marine Biology”, III, 2023. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.33552/aomb.2023.03.000563>.

<sup>21</sup> Paolo Fanciulli: The Italian Fisher Taking on Industrial Deep-Sea Trawlers, in “Huck Magazine”, [online] Available at: <https://www.huckmag.com/article/paolo-fanciulli-the-italian-fisher-taking-on-industrial-deep-sea-trawlers>

<sup>22</sup> United Nations, *Casa dei Pesci - A Sustainable Partnership for Marine Conservation*, in “SDGs Partnerships”, 2024. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/casa-dei-pesci>.

<sup>23</sup> Brilli, M., Giustini, F., & Gozzi, M. *The Carbon and Oxygen Isotope Composition of the Marble Inscriptions of Aléria, Corsica*. in “Minerals”, 13(4), 2023, 580. <https://doi.org/10.3390/min13040580>

These sculptures, created by artists including Massimo Lippi, Emily Young, and Giorgio Butini, depict figures from mythology, abstract sea forms, and culturally symbolic shapes. While they are aesthetically striking, they also perform a practical ecological function. They serve as shelters for marine organisms, interrupt trawling lanes, and provide surfaces for algae, molluscs, and coral to attach and grow.

Their placement mimics the design of natural reefs, creating corridors and clusters that support biodiversity. Scientific studies have documented the return of species such as sea bream, groupers, octopuses, and various invertebrates. Studies on artificial reefs worldwide have demonstrated their effectiveness in promoting biodiversity. According to Gianna Fabi artificial reef structures provide shelter, breeding grounds, and feeding sites for various marine species<sup>24</sup>. In *The House of Fish*, fish such as sea bream (*Sparus aurata*), groupers (*Epinephelus marginatus*), and octopuses (*Octopus vulgaris*) have been observed repopulating the area after the installation of the sculptures. Moreover, early signs of seagrass regeneration have been observed around the installations, indicating that the sculptures contribute to the recovery of complex marine ecosystems.



Submerged Carrara marble sculptures from The House of Fish project. Source: Casa dei Pesci

### 3.3. *Community Participation and Environmental Learning*

A defining strength of *The House of Fish* is its integration of local knowledge and public engagement. Rather than functioning as a closed artistic or scientific project, it invites participation through Pescaturismo<sup>25</sup>, a model of sustainable tourism that connects environmental stewardship with cultural immersion<sup>26</sup>.

Under this approach, tourists are welcomed aboard Fanciulli's fishing boat, where they experience traditional, low-impact fishing techniques, learn about the history of the seabed, and explore the underwater sculpture park through snorkelling or diving excursions. These interactions create a setting where environmental education is not abstract or institutional but embodied, relational, and place-based.

Pescaturismo offers an alternative economic model for coastal communities. It allows local fishers to diversify their livelihoods while promoting conservation values. Visitors are not simply consumers of scenic

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<sup>24</sup> Fabi, G., Luccarini, F., Panfili, M., Solustri, C. and Spagnolo, A. Effects of an artificial reef on the surrounding soft-bottom community (central Adriatic Sea) in "ICES Journal of Marine Science" 2002 59.

<sup>25</sup> Maria Bonaria Lai, Gianni Cicia, Teresa Del Giudice, *Pescaturismo, a sustainable tourist experience*, in "Journal of Cleaner Production", 133, 2016, pp. 1034-1042, ISSN 0959-6526. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2016.05.013>.

<sup>26</sup> *Underwater Museum: How Paolo the Fisherman Made the Med's Strangest Sight*, in "The Guardian", XVII November 2020.

beauty—they become co-learners and temporary stewards, contributing financially and emotionally to the protection of the marine landscape.

The initiative also includes the Adopt an Amphora campaign<sup>27</sup>, which deepens public involvement. Inspired by ancient Mediterranean storage vessels, these amphora-shaped shelters are placed on the seabed to house octopuses and small fish. Sponsors receive a certificate and GPS coordinates, allowing them to track their amphora. Many return to visit it, developing a personal sense of connection with marine life and underwater heritage. This experience creates a lasting emotional connection, reinforcing the idea that small, deliberate actions can lead to real ecological change. By bringing people closer to the ocean, the initiative transforms passive concern into active stewardship, awakening a sense of collective responsibility to protect marine ecosystems.

This layered engagement through fishing, storytelling, artistic appreciation, and sponsorship, turns *The House of Fish* into a community-rooted model of ecotourism, one where sustainability is measured not only in biodiversity but in cultural continuity and shared responsibility.

### 3.4. *Impact on local fisherman community*

The House of Fish has had a transformative impact on the local fishing community, shifting perspectives on conservation and sustainability. Initially, many fishermen viewed marine protection efforts as a threat to their livelihoods, fearing that restrictions on traditional fishing methods would reduce their income. However, the project has demonstrated that marine conservation and economic stability are not mutually exclusive. By integrating eco-tourism with sustainable fishing practices, local fishermen have found new opportunities to support themselves while actively contributing to the health of the marine ecosystem. Local fishermen, initially resistant to change, now see *The House of Fish* as a means of securing their future livelihoods. By promoting eco-tourism, the project provides an alternative economic model, proving that marine conservation and sustainable livelihoods can coexist.

### 3.5. *Aesthetic Legacy and Cultural Continuity*

By returning Carrara marble to the sea, *The House of Fish* ties artistic heritage to ecological restoration<sup>28</sup>. What was once carved for cathedrals and palaces is now offered to the ocean. This shift reframes marble not as a medium of permanence but as one of transformation. Over time, the sculptures are reshaped by marine currents, covered in growth, and integrated into the life of the reef. By using Carrara marble, the same material that sculptors like Michelangelo and Bernini used for Renaissance masterpieces, The House of Fish bridges the artistic past with contemporary ecological concerns<sup>29</sup>. This connection highlights the timeless role of stone as a medium for artistic expression, while also redefining its purpose—not as a static museum piece, but as a living, functional artwork that interacts with the environment.

This approach is reminiscent of Italy's Arte Povera movement, which rejected polished surfaces and industrial materials in favour of organic forms and natural processes. In the same spirit, the underwater

<sup>27</sup> See for reference on the Adopt an Amphora initiative at <https://casadeipesci.it/casa-dei-polpi/>

<sup>28</sup> See for reference on the Adopt an Amphora initiative at <https://casadeipesci.it/casa-dei-polpi/>

<sup>29</sup> Primavori, P. *Carrara Marble: a nomination for 'Global Heritage Stone Resource' from Italy*, in "Geological Society, London, Special Publications", 407(1), 2015, pp. 137–154. <https://doi.org/10.1144/SP407.21>

sculptures resist preservation. Instead, they invite time, tide, and touch to participate in their evolution. They become living monuments, changed by the very ecosystem they aim to protect.

### 3.6. *Alignment with Policy and International Frameworks*

The success of *The House of Fish* has not gone unnoticed by policy actors. The Tuscany Region formally supports the project and has integrated it into broader regional strategies for marine conservation and sustainable tourism. The project also contributes directly to the objectives of several national and international frameworks, including the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive<sup>30</sup>, Italy's National Biodiversity Strategy<sup>31</sup> and UN Sustainable Development Goals<sup>32</sup>, by enhancing seafloor integrity, supporting biodiversity restoration, and preventing harmful practices such as illegal bottom trawling. By integrating community-based eco-tourism and public engagement, the project advances sustainable use and participatory governance to achieve Good Environmental Status.

By aligning grassroots action with institutional goals, *The House of Fish* becomes more than a local effort. It offers a scalable and adaptable model for other coastal areas facing ecological and social pressures. It shows that small communities when empowered through interdisciplinary collaboration, can lead innovative responses to global environmental challenges.

### 3.7. *A Living Archive of Responsibility*

As time passes, the sculptures placed under the sea will continue to change. Their edges will soften, their forms will blur, and their visibility may diminish. But this process is not a disappearance—it is a continuation of the artwork's life. The sea becomes both canvas and co-creator, shaping marble into habitat, and sculpture into ecosystem.

This transformation mirrors the core philosophy of the project: that art, nature, and community are not separate spheres but mutually sustaining elements of a living landscape. *The House of Fish* becomes a submerged archive, not of loss but of renewal, where each sculpture carries the memory of its making and the life it fosters.

### 3.8. *From Vision to Vital Practice*

*The House of Fish* represents a new chapter in environmental art and marine conservation. It combines the materiality of sculpture with the science of habitat restoration and the ethics of community engagement. It resists the idea that conservation must be driven only by legislation or crisis. Instead, it offers a hopeful and grounded example of what happens when imagination meets action.

As environmental crises escalate, projects like this serve as reminders that regeneration is not only necessary but possible. They show that beauty, when rooted in place and purpose, can protect life. And

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<sup>30</sup> Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive), OJ L 164, 25.6.2008. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32008L0056>

<sup>31</sup> National Strategy on Biodiversity of Italy for the period 2021-2030, available at <https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC212815/>

<sup>32</sup> United Nations, Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 (A/RES/70/1).

they affirm that when we allow the sea to shape our art, it can also shape our sense of care, memory, and responsibility.

The success of *The House of Fish* lies not only in its local ecological impact or aesthetic resonance but also in its capacity to reframe the possibilities of marine conservation through art-based, community-rooted intervention. As the project continues to evolve, it raises a pressing question for both policymakers and practitioners: How can such interdisciplinary, participatory models be supported, scaled, and sustained within formal governance systems? The next section explores this question by examining the current policy landscape and proposing frameworks through which eco-art can be more fully integrated into marine protection strategies, cultural heritage programming, and sustainable development agendas.

#### 4. POLICY PATHWAYS FOR ECO-ART: INSTITUTIONALISING CREATIVITY FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Eco-art seeks to influence environmental policy by shaping the values, perceptions, and ethical commitments of its audiences, fostering a deeper cultural and emotional engagement with ecological issues. To fully realise the potential of Eco-art projects, there is an urgent need to integrate eco-art into mainstream environmental governance and policy. This chapter explores how governments, institutions, and international frameworks can support the expansion of eco-art initiatives as part of sustainable development.

Across Italy, regional policymakers have begun to recognise that artistic interventions can complement scientific methods and enhance public engagement. In Tuscany, *The House of Fish* has been included in eco-tourism and marine protection strategies, setting a precedent for further legislative innovation. Future marine zoning laws could incorporate eco-art as a legally protected conservation measure, particularly through the formal classification of underwater sculptures as artificial reefs within Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

At the national level, eco-art aligns well with Italy's National Biodiversity Strategy (NBS), particularly in objectives that promote habitat restoration, sustainable tourism, and public education. Eco-art installations can help transform degraded marine zones into biodiverse and culturally resonant spaces. Their participatory and place-based design is especially suited to advancing decentralised conservation strategies that empower communities.

At the European level, the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) mandates member states to achieve Good Environmental Status through cross-sector collaboration. Eco-art installations, which promote biodiversity, protect seafloor integrity, and stimulate community participation, could be incorporated into EU-funded programmes such as LIFE and Horizon Europe. Similarly, the European Green Deal's emphasis on cultural transformation provides an opportunity to embed eco-art into climate adaptation strategies and coastal regeneration policies.

Globally, projects like *The House of Fish* align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Life Below Water<sup>33</sup>, safeguarding cultural and natural heritage<sup>34</sup>, and education for

<sup>33</sup> B. Haas, *Achieving SDG 14 in an Equitable and Just Way*, in "International Environmental Agreements-Politics Law and Economics", XXIII, 2023, pp. 199–205.

<sup>34</sup> SDG 11.4, available at <https://www.globalgoals.org/goals/11-sustainable-cities-and-communities/>

sustainable lifestyles<sup>35</sup>. Eco-art also supports the aims of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030), offering community-based models for restoring degraded coastal environments.

To advance eco-art as a policy-supported practice, the following recommendations are proposed for all the nations:

1. **Formal Recognition in Environmental Law:** Governments should acknowledge eco-art as a legitimate conservation strategy. Legal protections should be extended to underwater installations, recognising them as functional components of MPAs.
2. **Cross-Ministerial Funding Frameworks:** Ministries of culture, environment, and tourism should develop joint funding platforms that support eco-art projects, particularly those that advance biodiversity goals and promote sustainable tourism.
3. **Integration into Blue Economy and Coastal Resilience Plans:** Coastal cities should include eco-art installations in urban planning<sup>36</sup> and shoreline protection strategies, where they can function as nature-based defences against erosion and habitat loss.
4. **Support for Pescaturismo and Sustainable Tourism:** National tourism boards should promote models like pescaturismo, which combines conservation with cultural tourism. Eco-art parks offer immersive, low-impact alternatives to conventional marine tourism.
5. **Interdisciplinary Research and Monitoring:** Universities and research institutions should be supported in conducting long-term ecological, social, and economic assessments of eco-art installations to inform best practices and policy design.

International organisations such as UNESCO, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) should also consider issuing guidelines and offering funding support for eco-art integration in coastal protection projects worldwide. Financial institutions, including the World Bank, can categorise eco-art under blue economy investments, enabling funding in countries where marine degradation threatens biodiversity and livelihoods.

Eco-art is no longer an experimental or peripheral practice. With appropriate legal, financial, and institutional backing, it can become a central pillar of a sustainable and inclusive environmental future. Italy, with its rich artistic heritage and extensive coastline, is well-positioned to lead this transformation. By embracing eco-art as a conservation infrastructure, governments can help reimagine marine restoration as not only a scientific or technical task but also a cultural, creative, and participatory one.

## 5. CONCLUSION – SEA-CHANGE AS PRACTICE AND POLICY

Shakespeare’s reflection on transformation—”But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange”—captures the essence of what eco-art seeks to achieve. This study has examined how eco-art, particularly through *The House of Fish*, can serve as a bridge between environmental restoration, cultural heritage, and civic engagement.

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<sup>35</sup> SDG 12.8, available at <https://www.globalgoals.org/goals/12-responsible-consumption-and-production/>

<sup>36</sup> C. Kennedy, E. Irons, P. Watts, *Ecological art in cities: exploring the potential for art to promote and advance nature-based solutions*, in *Nature-Based Solutions*, 2023, pp. 317-340.

Rather than functioning merely as symbolic gestures, projects like *The House of Fish* demonstrate the tangible ecological value of art. The submerged sculptures have deterred illegal trawling, revitalised marine biodiversity, and engaged local communities through pescaturismo. These outcomes indicate that eco-art can serve as an effective mode of conservation when integrated thoughtfully with local livelihoods and marine ecosystems.

To move beyond isolated success, such initiatives require institutional support. Legal frameworks, funding mechanisms, and interdisciplinary collaboration must recognise eco-art as a legitimate approach to marine protection and sustainable development. Acknowledging the role of creativity and community in ecological recovery ensures that conservation strategies become more inclusive, innovative, and impactful.

Eco-art challenges us to reimagine environmental policy through a lens that is not only technical but also cultural and emotional. It underscores the importance of restoring ecosystems in ways that also restore relationships—with place, memory, and one another. As environmental threats intensify, the integration of artistic practice into conservation offers a grounded yet imaginative path forward.

By placing art at the centre of ecological restoration, we do not just protect the sea—we deepen our understanding of what it means to live responsibly within it.

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