



An Outdoor CLIL Treasure Hunt with Undergraduates: Investigating Evidence of Urban Regeneration in Milan (Italy)

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Abstract

The opportunity for Italian universities to enhance multilingualism through the activation of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) pilot programs (Ministry of Education, 2015 and National Recovery and Resilience Plan, 2021) has led to implementing an innovative outdoor CLIL module integrating Urban and Social Geography contents with English language aimed at forty undergraduates (CEFR B2) attending the bachelor's degree in 'Human Sciences of the Environment, Territory and Landscape' at the University of Milan. Our primary aim was to get students to play an active role in their learning, therefore, alongside Geography and English language scaffolding, students were guided in an outdoor exploratory treasure hunt in search of the urban regeneration signs joining past and present in the Milan Portello Area (the former Alfa Romeo factory area). The findings all pointed to identify the outdoor CLIL project as an innovative way to promote learners' autonomy, personal growth, and content acquisition in a foreign language with greater engagement and motivation compared to traditional front classes. Also, in the university environments, discussing the surrounding world through geography and in a language different from the students' can be seen as a positive signal of openness and appreciation for cultural and linguistic diversity.

Keywords: CLIL, Higher Education, Geography Education, Outdoor Education

1. Introduction: ontological and epistemological reflections on teaching Geography in a foreign language

The debate surrounding the teaching of geography, as well as other disciplines, in a foreign language has become increasingly prevalent in European universities in recent

decades¹. This has resulted in various interesting and diverse experiences (Jenkins et al., 2017) which can also be found in Italy². Geography is

¹ See <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e0f69418-d915-11ed-a05c-01aa75ed71a1>.

² Against the backdrop of academic internationalization and European integration and

often considered one of the most suitable subjects to be taught in a foreign language due to its focus on studying and understanding the world. This discipline allows for numerous discourses, including descriptive, narrative, and argumentative, and covers a range of themes such as environmental, human, socio-cultural, political, economic, and landscape. Therefore, it can address numerous lexical fields (Montet and Morgan, 2001).

Moreover, geography employs transcalar analysis, which moves bidirectionally from local to global and vice versa. This approach enhances students' understanding, starting with a simple description of a geographical phenomenon in a foreign language and progressing to more precise and complex situations from both geographical and linguistic perspectives. This facilitates reflection on the causality of geographical phenomena, as well as the temporal and spatial interactions of environmental, territorial, heritage, and landscape dimensions, including their tangible and intangible forms (Kızılcıoğlu, 2010).

In the university setting, discussing the world through geography and in a language different from the students' can be seen as a positive signal of openness and appreciation for cultural and linguistic diversity. Such practice aligns with the principles outlined in the 2016 "Charter on Geographical Education", prepared by Joop van der Schee and John Lidstone on behalf of the IGU Commission on Geographical Education (van der Schee, 2014; IGU, 2016)³.

This assumes heightened significance in the current historical phase, where several negative phenomena are present: a revaluation of various forms of globalization and knowledge exchange among different regions of the world and social classes; strengthened state controls on borders that hinder cooperation, development, mobility of people and ideas, scientific research, and knowledge exchange; a cultural retreat into national and local values to the detriment of the

supranational ones that were so much emphasized in past decades and that favored the study of major international languages. Nationalist and sovereigntist views are becoming increasingly prevalent in European countries, and are being reflected in academic and scientific policies (UNESCO, 2018).

In this context, adopting CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) methodology in geography education is not simply a technical or pedagogical choice, but also a response to the broader cultural and political dynamics that are redefining the role of multilingualism and international openness within university curricula.

This contribution analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of a Geography module developed using the CLIL methodology and outdoor education principles. The module was designed for forty students enrolled in the Bachelor's program in "Human Sciences of the Environment, Territory, and Landscape" at the University of Milan during the academic year 2021/2022. Through this approach, the CLIL Geography module enhanced students' ability to think, speak, listen, take notes, and correct errors in a foreign language, all while allowing them to reflect on and assimilate geographical content (Armitage, 2018).

To support this dual learning goal, students were explicitly granted a "right to error" from the outset, thereby encouraging them to take risks both linguistically and in interpreting geographical phenomena in the field. Creating this safe space for linguistic and cognitive experimentation has been identified as a fundamental enabling condition for effective CLIL learning (Mehisto et al., 2008).

The module was jointly designed and implemented by the content teacher (Geography) and the language teacher (English), who worked in close collaboration throughout the process. This interdisciplinary cooperation extended beyond classroom delivery, encompassing the co-design of teaching materials, the facilitation of fieldwork, and the final reflection phase. Such team-teaching approaches embody the dual focus of CLIL methodology, where language and content learning mutually reinforce each other (Coyle et al., 2010). While this

globalization processes, Italian universities have seen an increase in the number of courses taught in English, especially in STEM, Economics, and Political Science (see: https://www2.cruil.it/cruil/2019-2020%20Corsi_En%20presentazione.pdf).

³ For more information, see Chang and Aman (2017).

collaborative approach is already recognized as beneficial in CLIL settings (Coonan, 2009), it remains relatively uncommon in Italian higher education, particularly in geography.

The design of this module was explicitly guided by three research questions, which connect the case study to broader reflections on the educational and geographical value of CLIL experiences:

1. How does teaching geography through CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) impact students' ability to describe, analyse, and interpret urban regeneration processes?
2. How does combining geography and English learning, through a collaborative outdoor treasure hunt, help students improve their geographical observation skills and their use of disciplinary language in English?
3. To what extent can a commercial driven urban regeneration project, like Portello Area, act as a new urban centrality, reconnecting a previously fragmented area to the wider urban fabric?

Students were involved in a series of content and language lectures, culminating in a self-guided exploration of the Milan Portello Area. The choice of this case study was not accidental: it stems from years of research and teaching activities conducted by the authors in this very site, exploring how commercial spaces can act as vectors of urban reconnection, bridging past and present layers of the urban landscape. This long-term engagement has highlighted the potential of the so-called *Portello* as an open-air geography textbook, where students can directly observe the interplay between economic functions, public spaces, and urban identities.

The structure of the paper is as follows: following this introduction, the second section provides the theoretical framework, focusing on the integration of CLIL methodology with geography education and outdoor learning; the third section outlines the methodology, detailing the pedagogical rationale behind the choice of Portello as a case study and describing the preliminary phases of designing the outdoor CLIL module. The subsequent section provides a detailed illustration of the implementation of the workshop, including a comprehensive

explanation of the questionnaire-map co-designed with students and its theoretical grounding in literature on urban regeneration and retail geography. The final section discusses the findings critically, positioning the experience within wider debates on multilingual geography education and highlighting both its pedagogical effectiveness and methodological limitations.

In view of the challenges and opportunities identified, this study adopts a CLIL approach not as a neutral language-learning tool, but as a pedagogical lens to explore how disciplinary content and language skills mutually reinforce each other in the specific context of field-based urban analysis. This dual focus, on content and language, is pivotal to addressing the first and second research questions introduced in this introduction, which explicitly link CLIL to the development of spatial observation skills, critical thinking, and multilingual geographical literacy.

2. CLIL in Higher Education: A Theoretical Framework

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a dynamic educational approach that merges language learning with subject matter content, offering a holistic and enriched learning experience. The origins of CLIL can be traced back to Finland in the 1970s, where it was initially known as “language immersion”. David Marsh, a pioneer in the field, affirms that “CLIL [...] was designed to address both the need for language learning and content education within a single framework” (Marsh, 2002). These early experimentations integrating language and content instruction set the stage for the development of CLIL as an educational methodology with global relevance.

The theoretical foundations of CLIL are rooted in language acquisition theories and educational psychology. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is particularly relevant, emphasizing the role of scaffolding and peer interaction in cognitive development. CLIL's focus on interactive language learning in the context of subject content aligns with Vygotsky's ideas (Dalton-Puffer, 2007). Additionally, Krashen's Input Hypothesis

suggests that language learning is most effective when learners are exposed to content that is slightly beyond their current proficiency level, a principle central to CLIL (Krashen, 1982).

Building upon this theoretical insight, CLIL has evolved and gained prominence in Europe in the late 20th century as an approach to promote plurilingualism and multilingualism (Coyle, 2008). The methodology's adaptability has allowed it to thrive in a wide range of educational settings, from primary to higher education institutions (Lorenzo et al., 2020). Numerous studies have highlighted the benefits of CLIL in higher education. Scholars such as Lasagabaster and Doiz (2017) have found that CLIL enhances language proficiency, increases motivation, and promotes cognitive and academic skills. It also fosters intercultural competence, as students engage with diverse content and perspectives. Research suggests that successful CLIL implementation in higher education involves the integration of language and content, careful selection and adaptation of materials, and professional development for faculty. Also, effective assessment strategies that account for language and content acquisition are essential (Wolff, 2003).

It should be noted that implementing CLIL in higher education also presents several challenges: Faculty members' language proficiency, curriculum and material development, and the need for faculty training and support have been identified as key hurdles (Lorenzo et al., 2020). Assessment and evaluation of both language and content learning in a CLIL context can be complex and require careful consideration (Coyle and Meyer, 2019). Although CLIL degree courses exist in numerous Italian universities, there are still widespread methodological deficiencies (Coonan, 2009, pp. 127-128), given that a limited number of educators have acquired a proper in-service update or have conscious preparation of educational linguistics on which to graft theoretical knowledge methodologies on CLIL (Mazzotta, 2023).

2.1 Outdoor CLIL and Geography: An Integrated Approach for Higher Education

CLIL methodology has traditionally been associated with classroom-based instruction. However, in recent years, educators and researchers have explored the potential of implementing CLIL in outdoor settings, its benefits, challenges, and prospects of this innovative educational approach.

Outdoor CLIL draws from both CLIL pedagogy and outdoor education theories. While CLIL emphasizes the integration of language and content learning, outdoor education theories, such as experiential learning (Dewey, 1938) and place-based education (Sobel, 2008), underline the value of learning in natural or outdoor environments. The combination of these approaches in outdoor CLIL promotes experiential, context-rich language and content learning.

Additionally, research into outdoor CLIL has revealed several potential benefits: enhanced language proficiency because learning in authentic outdoor environments offers opportunities for language acquisition as students engage in real-world tasks and communication (Davies, 2018); deeper content understanding since the outdoor context provides a dynamic and multisensory learning experience that enhances students' comprehension and retention of subject content (Rickinson et al., 2004); connection to the surroundings as outdoor CLIL fosters a sense of relationship with the urban environment, promoting urban literacy and environmental stewardship (Cutter-Mackenzie, 2009); personal growth and well-being owing to the fact that learning outdoors can enhance students' personal and social development, physical health, and well-being (Waite, 2019) and also interdisciplinary learning as outdoor CLIL often involves students to apply their knowledge and skills across different subjects (Sobel, 2008). Behind and alongside with these numerous advantages, outdoor CLIL also presents its share of challenges. These include logistical considerations, access to appropriate outdoor spaces, and the need for adaptable teaching

resources. Nevertheless, these obstacles should not overshadow the methodological alignment and educational synergies that connect outdoor CLIL with Geography and Outdoor Education. Indeed, Geography and Outdoor Education share a common philosophy and tradition. The teaching of geography has been experimenting with outdoor activities for decades, involving students' cognitive, physical, and emotional dimensions (Molinari, 2014; Guaran, 2016; Pasquinelli d'Allegra, 2016). These practices also provide ample space for students to develop problem-solving competencies, which are fundamental for developing learning competencies and notably enhance the principles of critical thinking (Svobodová, 2019). These practices add the benefit of exposing students to geographical research tools and engaging them with primary and secondary data sources. In the initial phases of activities, students work with secondary data sources such as datasets, diagrams, graphs, and maps. During outdoor activities, students typically collect their primary data, including notes from observation, measurements of various quantities, and results from interviews or surveys. This evidence is then processed, analyzed, interpreted, and evaluated in the final phase, both outdoors and in the classroom.

In the specific case of the *Portello workshop*, the activity was explicitly framed as an inquiry-based experience aimed at addressing the third research question, namely assessing whether a commercial-driven regeneration project can function as an urban centrality. This emphasis on place-based inquiry served to reinforce the connection between the field activity and the broader pedagogical objective of cultivating situated geographical knowledge, a fundamental competence for future geographers (Giorda and Puttilli, 2011).

Moreover, these practices are essential for territorial education, as they facilitate the development of a sense of place. This includes a stronger connection with the local community and the resources and opportunities offered by the territory itself.

"In this way, it connects to environmentalism and issues of environmental justice, as it emphasizes the value of the natural environment

and ecosystem relationships within the territory. It also constitutes a practice of citizenship education, as knowledge and care for the place are achieved in a context of participatory relationship, and therefore active participation, within one's lived space" (Giorda and Rosmo, 2021, p. 17).

3. Methodology

The theoretical-methodological framework underpinning this project first started from the guidelines established by the European Commission (Barcelona Summit, March 2002)⁴ which gave a strong boost to the learning of languages and the maintenance of linguistic diversity in Europe, proposing CLIL among the methodologies to favor multilingualism in that students acquire the subjects of the study program while practicing and improving their language skills (European Commission, 2006⁵). Second, the "Good School Reform Act 107"⁶ (Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research, MIUR, 2015), and the "National Recovery and Resilience Plan" (Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2021⁷) were key

⁴ The Barcelona Summit of the European Council on 15-16 March 2002 in Barcelona was the third annual spring meeting, after the Lisbon Summit in 2000 and the Stockholm Summit of 2001, to focus on social and educational issues in the European Union. Following these requests, the Commission in 2006 launched its Action Plan where CLIL provision is cited as having 'a major contribution to make to the Union's language learning goals' (see https://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download_en/barcelona_european_council.pdf).

⁵ For more information regarding this theme, see European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at school in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2006, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/756ebdaa-f694-44e4-8409-21eef02c9b9b>.

⁶ For more information, see: MIUR, Law 107/2015, The Good School Reform Act, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2015/07/15/15G00122/sg>.

⁷ For more information, see: The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza, NRRP), 2021, <https://www.mef.gov.it/en/>

drivers in setting new standards encouraging pilot practices and the experimentation of didactic innovation to guarantee learners' active participation and equal opportunities for educational success (Ripamonti, 2018).

This study highlights a collaborative CLIL experiment carried out during the academic year 2021/2022 at the bachelor's degree in "Human Sciences of the Environment, Territory and Landscape"⁸ of the University of Milan to show the advantages of the CLIL methodology in higher education in Italy⁹.

The Outdoor CLIL module was explicitly designed to address the three research questions outlined in the introduction: (1) exploring how the use of English as a working language affects students' observation and interpretation of urban transformations; (2) evaluating the pedagogical effectiveness of combining geographical content with language learning through a collaborative outdoor treasure hunt; and (3) critically assessing whether the redevelopment of the Portello Area is evolving into a new urban centrality capable of reconnecting a previously fragmented urban fabric.

This outdoor CLIL model, developed by the authors, was based on an evidence-based diagnosis of their work setting. Over the past two academic terms (2019/2020; 2020/2021), the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Urban and Social Geography (which was initially delivered in Italian) workshops¹⁰ were taught separately as elective semester-long

theoretical workshops in the second year of the bachelor's degree. Witnessing recurring static lecturing standards, it was decided to evaluate how concepts were taught in-depth, focusing on the methods, tools, and approaches used by each teacher. It was found that year-over-year there had been few changes in how both disciplines were taught, with no incorporation of more modernized teaching methodologies or useful digital tools.

It was thus resolved to act by implementing alternative techniques which could address our specific target: how to make the geography teaching and learning act perceptual, relational and multilingual, directly engaging students with the processes of urban transformation. A teaching module was developed that integrated the didactics of geography and the didactics of the English language with a pedagogical outdoor education model. To this end, a practical treasure hunt has been designed involving a group of forty undergraduates whose tasks were to search Milan's urban regeneration signs while combining geographical observation with the use of English as a working language.

In line with the research questions, the workshop explicitly combined content learning (urban regeneration and commercial centrality) with language learning (the development of disciplinary English through observation, description, and critical reflection). This dual approach was designed to address two key objectives: fostering geographical thinking and enhancing multilingual proficiency in a real-world context.

Technologies, a collaboration between educators (subject and language teachers), a deeper understanding of subject matter, and the development of practical resources and place-based CLIL materials have enhanced the event.

CLIL methodology with its multiple focus – rich learning environment, authenticity, active learning, scaffolding, and cooperation (Mehisto et al., 2008) – seemed the answer to the first two research questions: a) how to get undergraduates to "read" their urban environment using the language of/for/through learning? b) how to promote the acquisition of geography with experiential language activities? The third research question, concerning *Portello's* role as

focus/The-National-Recovery-and-Resilience-Plan-NRRP/.

⁸ The degree course, with few exceptions, is taught in Italian.

⁹ The University of Milan has recognized the importance of CLIL as an innovative pedagogical approach aligning with the University commitment to academic excellence and internationalization (https://www.unimi.it/sites/default/files/2022-12/Piano%20strategico_2022-24_Universit%C3%A0%20degli%20Studi%20di%20Milano.pdf).

¹⁰ These are respectively the ESP workshop on "English for Specific Purposes with a focus on disciplinary vocabulary" (held by Francesca Ripamonti) and that of "Places, non-places, hyperplaces. Practices of urban sustainability and business resilience" workshop (held by Giuseppe Gambazza).

a potential urban centrality, framed the geographical focus of the treasure hunt, guiding the co-construction of the questionnaire-map.

The task proved challenging other than necessary since our students were highly motivated to tackle authentic territory issues after two years of lockdown. This motivation was reinforced by the fact that the treasure hunt was not a mere recreational activity but was explicitly framed as a tool to address the research questions introduced at the outset. The students were invited to adopt the perspective of field geographers, combining observation, analysis, and linguistic reflection to produce geographically informed narratives in English. Our main purpose was to encourage lessons that took the form of a cooperative process with the primary and institutional objective of conveying the acquisition of contents and knowledge through the mediation of the foreign language. In this process, students were not passive entities undergoing the interaction and didactic action but, on the contrary, they became the real protagonists of a shared path of dialogues through which knowledge was constantly “constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed” (Wegerif, 2006, p. 59).

By implementing CLIL methodology we wanted to operate a reconsideration of our daily teaching practices from the presentational talk typical of top-down frontal classes to the exploratory talk, usual of the group work and of the laboratory activities which see the students as agents of the educational action even though they do not always express themselves in a perfectly coherent and complete way. The integration of contents and language alongside interdisciplinarity were kept central thanks to a wide variety of discourse typologies that covered the various phases and purposes of our didactic intervention: 1) the organizational talk: the moment that provided the general task settings; 2) the social talk: the moment of social interaction; 3) the critical talk: the dialogic phase of critical reflection, often guided by the use of thought-provoking questions; 4) the expert talk: the phase of pure explanation in which the experts’ voices provided prompts and clarifications in a frontal transmissive way; 5) the exploratory talk: the speech that was the verification of the successful understanding by

the learners; and 6) the pedagogical talk: that aimed to build a bridge between the daily social interactions and the more formal academic communication (Figure 1).

Appropriately balancing these types of discourse in our CLIL classes enabled us to differentiate our specific contents. Precisely, holding that “accessing knowledge is not possible without using the language and its functions” (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 36) we utilized Coyle’s language triptych firstly to introduce the students to the basics of urban and social geography (language of learning, *i.e.*, the language pertinent to the thematic contents); then the learners were scaffolded to operate effectively in tasks and other classroom activities related to the Milan-Portello new residential and commercial area, formerly the Alfa-Romeo car factory headquarters (the language for learning, *i.e.* the language needed for asking questions, giving explanations, demonstrating cause-effect). These activities became the occasion for encouraging Bloom’s lower thinking skills (LOTS: remembering, understanding, and applying) and the three higher level skills (HOTS: analyze, evaluate, and create) by debating, inquiring, comparing ideas on the Portello Area urban plan, its reinterpretation, its new places, commercial units, and the practices which led to the more concrete meaning of urban regeneration (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001).

As for the language through learning, *i.e.* the synergistic use of language (as an object of learning and a tool for learning) and content to build new knowledge through reflection, our students were guided in an outdoor scavenger hunt in the Milan Portello Area in search of the urban regeneration signs that joined the past to the present. This experiential, inquiry-based methodology is directly associated with the research questions, thereby establishing a situated learning environment in which geographical knowledge and language skills can be developed concurrently.

4. The Outdoor CLIL Geography Workshop: Implementation and Results

In recent years, large retail structures and commercial establishments in urban centres have become a priority in municipal structural plans on par with residential areas, green spaces, and public areas (Carreras and D'Alessandro, 2017). Shopping and leisure centres, bringing together a wide range of offers, from commercial enterprises to a variety of leisure services (restaurants, cinemas, theatres, sports activities, and children's entertainment) have evolved into real urban and peri-urban centres, simultaneously decreeing the disappearance or resilience of neighborhood shops (Lowe and Wrigley, 1996; Rice, 2019). The study of the commercial dynamics and the residents' consumption patterns is essential for understanding various facets of the ongoing urban transformations.

The Portello Area is a paradigmatic example of retail-led urban regeneration in Milan, located on the site of the former Alfa Romeo industrial complex (Figure 1). This transformation exemplifies broader processes affecting post-industrial urban landscapes in Europe, where former manufacturing areas are reimagined as spaces for consumption and leisure (Miles, 2010).

The area lies in the north-western sector of Milan, close to major road infrastructure and well-connected to suburban and regional transport networks. This strategic location made Portello a natural candidate for large-scale commercial development, aligning with trends in the suburbanization of retail that have reshaped Italian cities since the 1990s (Faravelli and Clerici, 2012).

From a geographical perspective, Portello illustrates the spatial reconfiguration of Milan's urban fabric through commercial centrality. The shopping centre acts as both an attractor of regional flows and a service hub for nearby residential neighborhoods. Its functional mix, which combines retail, leisure, food services, and green spaces, reflects contemporary trends in multi-functional retail environments, where commercial spaces are designed to offer not only shopping opportunities but also social and recreational experiences.

The transformation has produced significant landscape changes, replacing the industrial void left by the Alfa Romeo plant with a highly designed commercial complex and a surrounding system of public spaces and residential buildings (Figure 2). This process involved a selective reinterpretation of the area's industrial memory, integrating some historical references into the architecture while prioritizing new consumption-oriented uses. The spatial organisation and design of Portello also highlight the role of retail in shaping urban place identity, as the shopping centre's image and branding contribute to its positioning within the city's mental map.

Moreover, Portello's proximity to extensive residential areas has fostered new patterns of mobility and consumption, influencing the everyday geographies of local residents and contributing to the formation of new spatial practices. However, whether this retail-led regeneration truly acts as a catalyst for broader territorial transformations remains an open question, representing one of the key issues students were invited to explore through their fieldwork.

This case study was deliberately selected to address precisely the third research question, which interrogates whether a commercially driven urban regeneration project, like Portello, can evolve into a new urban centrality capable of reconnecting a previously fragmented area to the wider urban fabric. The Outdoor CLIL geography workshop was thus designed not only to examine pedagogical and linguistic aspects but also to guide students in critically evaluating this broader geographical question.

Based on the Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) and Experience-Based Learning (EBL) approaches, a CLIL educational module was created to investigate the Portello Area in a novel way. Forty students participated in the project, and their two main tasks were to assess whether the project's initial goals of restoring the urban fabric and establishing new focal points had been met and to consider how the project was affecting the surrounding context. The schedule for the teaching module included both in-person and remote sessions (Table 1).



Figure 1. Portello Area within the Urban Context of Milan and the Regional Framework of Northern Italy. Source: Authors' elaboration based on QGIS (2025); background: Google Satellite (Portello Area), OpenStreetMap (insets).



Figure 2. Portello Area, aerial view. Source: <https://www.comune.milano.it/aree-tematiche/rigenerazione-urbana-e-urbanistica/attuazione-pgt/portello-programma-integrato-di-intervento>

Session	Duration	People involved	Mode	Discourse type
0-Planning	6 hours (3 classes x 2h. each)	Content and Language Teachers	Remote Teams platform	Organizational talk: the moment that provided the general task settings
1-Preliminary	6 hours (3 classes x 2h. each)	Teachers and students	Remote Teams platform	Social talk: the moment of social interaction
2-Portello's outdoor guided tour	4 hours (across the Portello's 5 areas)	Teachers and students	In presence	Critical talk: the dialogic phase of critical reflection (often guided with thought- provoking questions)
3-Portello's exploratory Treasure Hunt	3 hours	Students (in groups) (Teachers monitor the session)	Remote Teams platform	Expert talk: the phase of pure explanation in which the experts' voices provided prompts and clarifications in a frontal transmissive way
4-Presentation	4 hours (2 classes x 2h, each)	Students (in groups) (Teachers monitor the session)	Remote Teams platform	Exploratory talk: the speech that was the verification of the successful understanding by the learners
5-Conclusions and feedback	2 hours	Students and Teachers	Remote MTeams platform	Pedagogical talk: the discourse aiming at bridging daily interactions with more formal academic communication. Students' feedback with self-perceptions of geography learning outcomes and language progress, thanks to experience-related situations
Total	25 hours			

Table 1. Schedule of the outdoor CLIL Geography module with teaching sessions, discourse types and feedback.
Source: authors' elaboration, 2025.

4.1 Workshop Structure and Questionnaire-Map Design

The planning sessions addressed the methodological principles of both language and content teaching, providing basic knowledge of the key principles of CLIL, the main points of the dual focus teaching/learning process and the accompanying material development. Both teachers:

- prepared supplementary language materials such as grids, glossaries, vocabulary lists, and language-focused exercises tailored to the module content;
- developed strategies for integrating language interaction into the geography classes (quick debates, group or roundtable discussions);
- identified opportunities for hands-on experiences (*Portello's treasure hunt*) that deepen students' understanding of the urban and social geography content;
- planned formative assessments that provide ongoing feedback on students' progression in both language and content.

The first phase of the Outdoor CLIL module consisted of three preliminary meetings of two hours each, conducted in English on the Teams platform. In the first session, the teachers familiarised the students with the structure and objectives of the workshop, which was designed to explore the hypothetical role of the Portello area as a hub in an area marked materially and symbolically by radical transformations (Gavinelli and Morazzoni, 2012).

After the initial discourse on the role of commerce in urban regeneration practices, the lecturers delved into the Portello case, highlighting its main structural, functional, and socio-territorial aspects for subsequent discussion. This phase of the workshop largely followed the format of frontal teaching, interspersed with language scaffolding moments led by the English teacher, which fostered a more participatory environment and encouraged discussion of technical terms. English Language scaffolding permeated the whole workshop, intertwined with activities closely related to the teaching of disciplinary skills.

During these classes, the instructors

presented the fieldwork proposal and provided students with an assessment grid, designed to help them evaluate whether a commercial development could be considered a new urban centrality.

The grid was built on the assumption that the aggregation capacity of a regenerated space is directly proportional to its functional mixité and the relationships the commercial complex establishes with its surrounding context (Morandi, 2006; Lima et al., 2024).

Based on these theoretical assumptions and after reviewing relevant literature, the instructors developed a study design inspired by the heuristic framework proposed by Coca-Stefaniak (2013). This model – which employs an indicator-based approach to measure urban retail performance – was selected due to its practical adaptability to field-based educational activities, enabling students to explore urban regeneration processes through a structured yet flexible set of indicators. The methodological choice also reflects the broader Italian geographical tradition, which extensively investigates the relationships between retail spaces, urban consumption practices, and processes of urban regeneration (Cirelli, 2016; Viganoni, 2017; Clerici, 2019).

The assessment grid, co-designed with the students and later transformed into the questionnaire-map used during fieldwork, served a dual purpose: it functioned both as a research tool for collecting data in the field, and as a didactic device, helping students develop geographical observation skills and disciplinary language in English.

This was structured around four main indicators, following the framework proposed by Coca-Stefaniak (2013), each operationalised into a set of variables and field questions:

11. Diversity and vitality of place: types of commercial activities, presence of public spaces, functional variety.

12. Economic characteristics: local vs global brands, perceived economic vitality.

13. People and footfall: flows of visitors, time-dependent variation.

14. Consumer and business perceptions: data

gathered through interactions with passersby and shopkeepers (Table 2).

The questionnaire-map (Table 3), built upon these indicators, guided students throughout the treasure hunt, helping them to observe, describe, and interpret the geo-social dynamics underpinning Portello's regeneration process.

At the same time, it acted as a scaffolding tool for practicing geographical terminology and spatial description in English.

The treasure hunt was therefore designed not only as a field exercise but as a means to critically assess whether the transformations in the Portello Area could be interpreted as a successful example of urban regeneration – capable of filling a territorial void, creating an identity-based aggregation space, and effectively reconnecting with the broader urban system.

The questionnaire-map used during the Outdoor CLIL geography workshop was not

formally validated through psychometric procedures, as its primary function was educational rather than purely research-oriented. It was co-designed with students following an Inquiry-Based Learning process, aligning with established guidelines for educational fieldwork tools. Its structure combined elements drawn from previous research on urban regeneration and retail geography, specifically adapted to Portello's local context and the educational aims of the workshop. This participatory co-design, which included reviewing relevant literature, collaboratively brainstorming key indicators, and drafting field questions, served both as a pedagogical activity and as methodological scaffolding. Such an approach reflects established practices in geography education research, where fieldwork instruments are intentionally designed not only to collect data, but also to foster students' geographical thinking and reflective observation skills (Remmen and Frøyland, 2015; Dunphy and Spellman, 2009).

CONSUMPTION SPACES AS NEW URBAN CENTRALITIES	
I1. Place diversity and vitality	I2. Economic characteristics
V1- Commercial offer	V1- Retail sales
V2- Cultural and leisure activities	V2- Partnership
V3- Events	V3- Charities
V4- Markets	V4- Empty stores rate
V5- Historical and cultural heritage	V5- Evening and night economy
V6- Functional diversity	
I3. People and footfall	I4. Consumer and business perceptions
V1- People flows	V1- Business confidence
V2- Attraction areas	V2- Visitors' satisfaction
V3- Accessibility	V3- Elements of attractiveness
V4- Parking areas	V4- Perception crime and security
V5- Community spirit	V5- Routes taken
V6- Internal routes	
V7- Means of transport	
V8- Opening hours	
V9- Entrances	
V10- Ways out/gates	

Table 2. Indicators and variables for evaluating Portello's urban regeneration process.

Source: authors' elaboration, based on the collaborative creation process with students during the academic year 2021/2022.

4.2 From Theory to Practice: the Walking Tour

The second session inaugurated the on-site phase, introducing students to the Portello area through a guided four-hour walking tour (Figure 3). During this visit, the instructors led the class through the five sub-areas of Portello, designed by Gino Valle and developed by different design teams. This contextual introduction aimed to provide students with a spatial and historical framework essential for understanding the socio-territorial dynamics they would later investigate through the treasure hunt. This phase directly addressed the third research question, linking the treasure hunt format to the broader goal of fostering geographical observation skills and spatial thinking through direct field experience.

The five sub-areas, which form the core of the Portello redevelopment project, include:

- Portello Park: the central green space, designed by landscape architect Charles Jencks. Its distinctive spiral pathway leads to the “Spiral of Time”, a symbolic hill evoking historical and natural transformations. The park also includes thematic gardens and intimate spaces designed for the elderly, enhancing its multifunctionality (Figure 4).
- Residential complex by Cino Zucchi: located in the north-eastern section, this complex consists of five irregularly arranged buildings. The design promotes porosity, creating semi-open spaces that connect to the surrounding urban fabric, while maintaining a cohesive front along Via Traiano, aligned with the preserved facade of the former industrial canteen.
- Residential complex by Guido Canali:

situated in the south-east section, this development consists of six twin towers facing the park, emphasising a strong visual and functional relationship between housing and public space. The buildings’ terraces create residential units with panoramic terraces and a strong spatial continuity with the surrounding park, evoking the experience of private villas elevated above the ground.

- Tertiary-commercial complex by Gino Valle: facing the ex-Milan Fair, this complex integrates office spaces and retail units, organised around a fan-shaped square. The design is supposed to ensure continuity between the fairgrounds and the Portello area, thanks to a diagonal cycle-pedestrian axis.
- Portello Shopping Centre: located in Piazzale Accursio, this compact urban hub features a covered entrance square, retail spaces on multiple levels, and a canopied pedestrian square designed to function as a semi-public meeting place (Gambazza, 2015).

This exploratory visit served a dual purpose: it provided students with essential geographical, architectural, and historical knowledge of the area, while preparing them for the field-based treasure hunt that followed. By walking through the spaces they would later analyse, students were encouraged to develop an initial spatial awareness, forming hypotheses about the relationships between commercial activities, public spaces, and the wider urban regeneration process. This combination of guided exploration and active observation marked the transition from classroom-based theorisation to field-based investigation.



Figure 3. Instructors leading students during a walking tour across the Portello area. In the background and on the right, the residential complex designed by Cino Zucchi.
Source: photo by the authors, 2021.



Figure 4. The Portello Park with the "Spiral of Time"; on the right, the buildings of Gino Valle square (*Piazza Gino Valle*), with the CityLife skyscrapers visible in the background.
Source: photo by the authors, 2021.

4.3 The *Portello* Exploratory Day: The Treasure Hunt

The *Portello Exploratory Day* was preceded by a three-hour outdoor preparatory session, during which each student received a questionnaire-map, explicitly structured around the four indicators presented in the methodological framework (see the initial part of section 4). This tool was designed to help students actively identify spatial, economic, social, and perceptual relationships, connecting the area's physical transformations with broader processes of urban regeneration (Table 3).

The treasure hunt was thus conceived not as a mere gamified activity, but as a methodological bridge between inquiry-based learning and place-based fieldwork, explicitly connecting the research questions, the disciplinary content, and the language learning goals.

The actual exploratory activity took the form of a treasure hunt, a playful but methodologically sound tool already used in geography education to promote active learning and spatial observation skills (Gaillard and McSherry, 2014; Escribano Munoz, 2025). Forty students, divided into eight groups of five, were assigned specific tasks directly related to the indicators and variables identified in the questionnaire-map. Each group was asked to:

- collect empirical evidence through direct observation;
- analyse structural and socio-territorial elements;
- answer indicator-based questions embedded in the questionnaire-map.

To enhance creativity and engagement, students were invited to document their findings using the tools of their choice: photographs, video clips, audio recordings, or written notes. Importantly, the instructors deliberately refrained from prescribing any fixed data collection method, leaving each group free to develop its own fieldwork strategy. This freedom of method was a conscious didactic

choice, aimed at encouraging students to experiment with different approaches and to reflect critically on the strengths and weaknesses of their own data collection processes. This meta-cognitive dimension, though implicit during the treasure hunt, would later become explicit during the final debriefing and reflection session.

During the fieldwork, the teachers were always present at the investigation site, observing the students' research activities and making themselves available for any clarifications, which were not necessary since each group moved cohesively, organised effectively, and documented significant elements within the area.

Data collection, with minor variations, mostly consisted of brief notes, short reports recorded in notebooks or on the margins of questionnaires, and photographs of key points taken with smartphones. One group asked questions of some local visitors. At the end of the exploration, teachers and students gathered at the entrance of the mall to share initial impressions. This informal debriefing allowed for a first exchange of viewpoints and highlighted the variety of interpretative approaches adopted by the different groups. Some students reported initial difficulties due to the open-ended nature of the data collection, but most appreciated the flexibility and autonomy offered by the activity.

Following the fieldwork, students were required to present their findings in a 15-minute PowerPoint presentation, delivered remotely via the Teams platform. Each group was asked to structure their presentation according to the four-indicator framework, explicitly linking their observations and data to the analytical categories introduced during the preparatory sessions. This final presentation phase served both as an opportunity to consolidate the learning process and as a formative assessment tool, allowing teachers to evaluate students' ability to construct a geographically informed narrative in English.

Contextualization	-Where is the Portello area located?
	-What are its borders?
I1. Diversity and vitality of place	-What is the commercial offer?
	-What services/facilities are offered beyond commercial activities?
	-Are there cultural events or leisure activities?
	-What unusual features can you identify in the park? Explain.
	- Can you detect a common theme connecting all the structures in the area?
	-What are the structural characteristics of Piazza Valle?
	- In your opinion, could it become an attractive space for flows of people? Why?
	- What are the main features of the "porous" residential buildings designed by Zucchi?
	- What surrounding buildings can you identify (layout, commercial logos, activities, structures)?
	- What are the main characteristics of the "curtain" residential buildings by Canali?
I2. Historical analysis	- What are the main features and "urban traits" of the Mall?
	- Can you identify and describe the main "blocks" that compose the Mall?
	- Which elements evoke the area's past?
	- Who are the architects involved in the project?
I3. Commercial analysis	Do you recognize similar architectural styles elsewhere in Milan?
	- What is the overall shopping offer?
	- How many shops are there?
	- How many vacant shops?
	- How many franchised shops?
	- Are there any charity shops?
	- Are there tertiary activities (telecommunication, insurance, sports) in Piazza Valle?
I4. Outside the Mall: People and Footfall	- Are there evening or night-time commercial activities?
	-Who visits the area?
	-How accessible is Portello? (visible vs invisible entrances)
	-What are the opening hours?
	-How many entrances and exits?
	- What transport options are available?
	- Where are the parking areas?
	- How does the Portello structure "communicate" with the surrounding urban fabric?
Consumers' and business analysis OPTIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY	- What infrastructural links exist (bridges, ring-roads, cycle/pedestrian paths, other connections)?
	- Who are the visitors (age, gender, place of residence)?
	- What is their level of satisfaction?
	- What makes the area attractive to them?
	- What is their perception of safety and crime?
Personal analysis	- What is the visit to Portello part of? (Main destination / Stop along a multi-purpose trip / After-work activity / etc.)
	- Why do you think Portello can be considered a successful case of urban regeneration?
	- What are your personal impressions?
	- Identify perceived strengths and weaknesses.

Table 3. Questionnaire map help students identify the links connecting the Portello area and the urban planning. Source: authors' elaboration, based on the collaborative creation process with students during the academic year 2021/2022.

4.4 Main Results: Students' Observations on Urban Centrality

The results of the exploratory fieldwork are presented below, following the analytical framework introduced in the initial part of section 4. Each subsection reports the findings related to one of the four indicators (I1-I4) used to assess the Portello area's capacity to act as an urban centrality.

I1 – Diversity and vitality of place

The first indicator focused on identifying the functional variety and spatial articulation of Portello. Students' observations confirmed the presence of a rich mix of commercial, recreational, and public functions, concentrated around two key nodes: the Portello mall and Gino Valle Square. The mall stood out as the primary magnet, offering both retail and food services under the iconic sail-shaped canopy, which reinforces the area's visual identity.

The adjacent park, with its distinctive landscape elements (the spiral hill, themed gardens, and playground) was also recognised as a key asset, particularly for families and recreational users.

However, the residential buildings designed by Zucchi and Canali appeared more peripheral to this dynamic. Students perceived them as architectural presences rather than active contributors to the area's vitality. This polarisation between commercial-recreational functions and residential ones highlights a spatial imbalance that characterises the internal geography of Portello.

I2 – Economic characteristics

The second indicator focused on the commercial composition and economic vitality of the area. All groups noted a clear prevalence of branded chain stores and franchises within the mall, while smaller, independent businesses were found mainly around Piazza Valle. This contrast between global retail formats and local entrepreneurship was a recurring theme in students' analyses.

The absence of vacant shops was interpreted as a positive sign, especially in the context of widespread retail decline. The presence of tertiary services (telecommunication agencies,

insurance offices, fitness centres) was also noted as a diversification factor.

However, students highlighted how this economic vitality remains heavily concentrated within the mall, reinforcing Portello's mall-centric economic structure. This concentration, while effective in attracting visitors, raises questions about the area's resilience to future shifts in consumer behaviour, especially considering the growing role of e-commerce.

I3 – People and footfall

The third indicator focused on pedestrian flows and accessibility. All groups observed an uneven distribution of footfall, with much higher concentrations around the mall and park, while Piazza Valle and the residential areas saw significantly lower flows.

This pattern was linked both to functional factors (the mall and park offering more attractive amenities) and to spatial visibility, as the mall and park entrances are visually more prominent than the residential accesses.

Accessibility analysis confirmed this contrast: pedestrian and cycling paths converge mainly toward the commercial and recreational nodes, while the residential zones seem more marginal.

Overall, Portello's footfall dynamics reflect a destination-driven pattern, where visitors are attracted to specific functions rather than to the area as a cohesive urban whole. This selective centrality underlines the incomplete internal integration between the different functional areas within Portello itself.

I4 – Consumer and business perceptions

The fourth indicator aimed to capture how Portello is perceived by its users/visitors, passersby, and shopkeepers. This proved to be the most challenging indicator for students, due to time constraints and limited confidence in conducting spontaneous interviews in English. As a result, data collection was fragmented and uneven.

Despite this, some groups gathered qualitative impressions, showing a generally positive image of Portello as clean, safe, and attractive. However, these positive perceptions

were almost entirely linked to the mall and park, while little attention was given to the residential areas.

Several students reflected that most respondents were already familiar with Portello and visited with a specific purpose (shopping, recreation), rather than using it as a spontaneous gathering place.

Overall, students' findings show that Portello's image is strongly shaped by its functional poles, while residential and historical dimensions remain less visible in the collective perception of the area.

In summary, the analysis portrays Portello as a functionally articulated space, where vitality and attractiveness are highly concentrated around its commercial and recreational cores. The fieldwork focused intentionally on these internal dynamics, guiding students to observe, describe and assess how functional diversity, economic composition, footfall patterns, and user perceptions coalesce to shape Portello's centrality.

The broader relational dimension, including connections between Portello and the wider urban fabric, remained largely outside the scope of the students' analysis. This reflects not only the design of the fieldwork tools, but also a deliberate pedagogical choice: to train students first in micro-scale spatial observation, before encouraging more complex interpretations at the city or metropolitan scale, a step that could be further developed in future iterations of the workshop.

4.5 Students' Reflections on Geographical Learning and Language Outcomes

Following the conclusion of the CLIL geography workshop, a feedback questionnaire-map was administered to collect students' perceptions and reflections on the experience (Table 4). The questionnaire comprised 14 questions, designed not only to assess students' overall satisfaction, but also to explore how they perceived the activity's contribution to their geographical observation skills, spatial analysis skills and language proficiency. Furthermore, it

included also included specific questions designed to assess the perceived usefulness of the questionnaire-map and to reflect on the relationship between commercial spaces and urban regeneration, directly linking the students' feedback to the research questions introduced at the beginning of the paper.

The analysis revealed that students expressed a high level of appreciation for the initiative, describing it as an engaging and valuable learning opportunity. The outdoor dimension, combined with the use of English and the focus on real-world geographical analysis, emerged as particularly effective. It was further noted by several respondents that the integration of fieldwork, language practice, and thematic investigation of urban regeneration rendered the experience more concrete, participatory, and memorable than traditional classroom activities.

Furthermore, the outdoor CLIL geography experience provided students with the opportunity to explore a part of Milan with which many of them were unfamiliar. One participant noted: "I enjoyed every moment of the event, but I was particularly pleased with the walking tour of the area, marked by the targeted explanations that our guides gave us as a lesson in the field. I also appreciated the wonderful view of Milan".

Also, the activity enabled students to engage directly with the socio-spatial phenomena that had been the subject of discussion in the classroom. This experiential learning approach was highly regarded, as evidenced by a student's remark: "I liked sharing what we learned in class. We put into practice what we studied in the territory. I think that not only are the concepts put into practice, but they are also better remembered!".

Additionally, the students themselves identified both the strengths and limitations of the questionnaire-map they had co-designed, recognising its value in structuring observations, especially in identifying and describing specific elements within the Portello area (such as the functional mix, the architectural features, and the commercial offer). However, they also pointed out that the prompts offered limited guidance when it came to understanding how the Portello area relates to the surrounding

neighbourhoods or fits into the wider urban fabric of Milan. This limitation reflects a tension already present in the design of the questionnaire-map itself, which focused more on internal spatial features than on external connections. This critical feedback process represents a significant metacognitive step, encouraging students to reflect not only on the content of their observations but also on the tools and methods that shape their field enquiry.

Overall, the CLIL experience was found to be satisfactory or better than expected by all participants, with many expressing a willingness to recommend it to their colleagues and a desire to participate in similar initiatives in the future, possibly exploring different topics. It was found that students particularly appreciated the opportunity to experience geography as a hands-on, inquiry-based subject, and to engage directly with the urban environment, applying geographical tools and concepts in an authentic setting. This lends further pedagogical value to the combination of CLIL and outdoor education, confirming its potential to foster autonomy, critical thinking and the development of situated geographical knowledge, key dimensions already highlighted in the initial research questions.

Despite the overall positive response, some critical points emerged, mainly related to time constraints. Two students proposed that an extended on-site phase would have facilitated a more profound and systematic analysis, particularly concerning the questionnaire-map's more intricate or open-ended items. This observation underscores a dichotomy between the exploratory and playful nature of the treasure hunt and the necessity for more systematic data collection, particularly when addressing analytical categories that necessitate relational or diachronic interpretation. This observation also connects to the third research question, showing how the outdoor activity allowed students to experiment with real-world data collection, but also revealed the challenges of balancing autonomy, creativity, and methodological rigour in the field.

Finally, with regard to the utilisation of English as the working language, no substantial comprehension issues were reported, thereby validating the efficacy of the language

scaffolding provided during the preparatory sessions. However, some students admitted feeling less confident when conducting spontaneous interviews or formulating complex observations in English during the fieldwork. This suggests that, while the CLIL setting encouraged language immersion and active practice, further support could be beneficial in enhancing students' communicative autonomy in authentic research situations. It is also important to note that the group of participants had voluntarily enrolled in this optional workshop, fully aware that it would be conducted in English. This self-selection process undoubtedly influenced the positive feedback on language use, indicating that the participants were already predisposed to approach geography through English, unlike the broader student population.

5. Discussions and Conclusions

The present study set out to examine the manner in which the integration of CLIL methodology and outdoor exploratory activities can enhance geography learning in higher education, employing the case of Portello in Milan as a point of reference. The research design was structured around three research questions, which provided the conceptual backbone for both the educational intervention and the subsequent analysis.

The first research question posed the following: *To what extent does the use of English as a working language enhance or hinder students' ability to observe, describe, and interpret urban transformation processes?*

The results obtained from this study align with those reported in the work of Coyle et al. (2010), which confirmed that language cannot be separated from content in CLIL experiences. The outdoor phase revealed the emergence of the Language Triptych (language of learning, for learning, through learning) as a pivotal support mechanism for students. The co-designed questionnaire-map, serving both as a language support (scaffolding) and a research instrument, played a critical role in guiding both language use and geographical observation (Llinares and Whittaker, 2007).

CLIL exploratory day at Portello: feedback		
1. Overall, how would you rate the event?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input type="checkbox"/> Good
<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
2. What did you like about the event? (You can refer to the content, the language, the outdoor setting, or other aspects)		
3. What did you dislike about the event? (You can refer to the content, the language, the outdoor setting, or other aspects)		
4. Did the format of the event work? Tick all appropriate answers		
<input type="checkbox"/> The timing of the event (2.30-18.00) worked well for me.		
<input type="checkbox"/> The length of the event was appropriate.		
<input type="checkbox"/> The combination of presentation, fieldwork and final discussion was effective.		
5. Did the CLIL exploratory outdoor class meet your expectations?		
If relevant, indicate any suggestion for improvement in the Comment Field.		
<input type="checkbox"/> It exceeded them.		
<input type="checkbox"/> It met them fully.		
<input type="checkbox"/> It met them in part.		
<input type="checkbox"/> It disappointed me.		
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)		
6. To what extent do you think this experience helped you develop observation and spatial analysis skills?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Very much		
<input type="checkbox"/> To some extent		
<input type="checkbox"/> Only partially		
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all		
7. Did you find the questionnaire-map a useful tool to guide your observations? Why/Why not?		
.....		
8. Do you think working with the questionnaire-map helped you reflect on the relationship between commercial spaces and urban regeneration? Why/Why not?		
.....		
9. Would you repeat this CLIL exploratory outdoor class in the future		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes		
<input type="checkbox"/> No		
<input type="checkbox"/> Perhaps		
10. If yes, which aspects of this CLIL exploratory class would you like to see covered or further developed in the future? (e.g., more time for fieldwork, deeper analysis, different case study)		
.....		
11. Was the English language a problem for the overall comprehension and participation??		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes		
<input type="checkbox"/> No		
12. Would you recommend this experience to a friend or colleague?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes		
<input type="checkbox"/> No		
<input type="checkbox"/> Perhaps		
13. Compared to a traditional lecture, do you think you have learnt more from this outdoor CLIL exploratory experience?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes		
<input type="checkbox"/> No		
<input type="checkbox"/> Perhaps		
14. Is there anything else you would like to share about the event?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes		
<input type="checkbox"/> No		

Table 4. CLIL Exploratory “Treasure Hunt” at Portello: students’ feedback questionnaire.
Source: authors’ elaboration, 2021.

The findings reveal that English was not perceived as a significant barrier by the students; rather, it was reported to add a cognitive challenge that made the workshop more stimulating. This finding aligns with the assertion that, when the scaffolding is explicitly provided, outdoor CLIL becomes a space for both linguistic and geographical learning (Dalton-Puffer, 2007). However, spontaneous interviews with passers-by proved more arduous, thus corroborating the pertinence of Wegerif's emphasis on the role of exploratory talk (2006; see section 3). Consequently, it is recommended that future outdoor CLIL activities consider incorporating pre-fieldwork simulations to enhance students' spontaneous communicative competence in real-world encounters.

It is also important to acknowledge that participation in the workshop was entirely voluntary, meaning that students had already self-selected based on their willingness to engage with geography through English. This aspect may have contributed to the generally positive reception of the CLIL approach and the limited perception of language as a barrier. Future studies could explore whether similar outcomes emerge in settings where participation is compulsory or where students have more diverse language backgrounds.

The second research question asked: *How does combining geography and English learning, through a collaborative outdoor treasure hunt, help students improve their geographical observation skills and their use of disciplinary language in English?*

The combination of inquiry-based learning and outdoor experiential education, framed within a structured sequence of preparation, observation, and debriefing, created a powerful learning environment, as students themselves acknowledged (Remmen and Frøyland, 2015; Waite, 2019; Oost et al., 2016). This structured process supported both disciplinary thinking and linguistic awareness, aligning with CLIL's dual focus on content and language learning (Coyle et al., 2010).

Physical immersion, combined with guided observation through the co-designed questionnaire-map, promoted both spatial thinking and place-based learning, reinforcing

the central role of fieldwork in geographical education (Gibson, 2011; Sobel, 2008; Giorda and Puttilli, 2011). Particularly significant was the questionnaire-map's co-design process, where students actively contributed to the construction of their research tool. This activity exposed them to the epistemological tension between structure and openness that characterises real-world fieldwork, fostering awareness of how geographical knowledge is constructed in practice (Dunphy and Spellman, 2009; Cook, 2010).

The third research question explored: *To what extent can a commercial-driven urban regeneration project, like Portello, act as a new urban centrality, reconnecting a previously fragmented area to the wider urban fabric?*

In addressing this question, the students' fieldwork provides insights that directly connect to ongoing debates in retail geography (Morandi, 2006; Cirelli, 2016; Viganoni, 2017). The case of Portello illustrates how retail-led regeneration projects frequently adopt resilience strategies aimed at preserving commercial attractiveness through active management and functional diversification. However, these strategies do not necessarily foster deep relational ties with surrounding neighbourhoods (Guimarães, 2018).

Students observed a functional and symbolic polarisation between the commercial-recreational poles (mall, park, and Gino Valle Square) and residential spaces, echoing broader patterns of spatial fragmentation linked to retail-led suburban regeneration and the weakening of inner-city retail systems (Dolega and Lord, 2020).

Moreover, the historical memory work at Portello – expressed through architectural references to Alfa Romeo's legacy – is largely aesthetic and thematic rather than functional or social. This confirms how contemporary retail landscapes often operate as narrative spaces, strategically reassembling past and present into consumption-oriented storytelling rather than active processes of heritage preservation (Muliček and Osmina, 2018).

In conclusion, this observed spatial and symbolic polarisation suggests that retail-led regeneration projects can produce self-contained commercial and recreational enclaves,

potentially operating independently from surrounding residential areas. Rather than promoting immediate and organic integration with the neighbourhood, these spaces often function as designed destinations attracting visitors from broader urban and regional catchment areas. These preliminary insights offer a valuable starting point, indicating the need for future multi-phased investigations that could better elucidate these complex spatial relationships.

In general, some critical issues emerged, offering valuable insights for future design. Firstly, the time constraint was perceived by several students as limiting their ability to fully capture the broader spatial relationships between Portello and the surrounding neighbourhoods, as well as the historical layers underpinning its transformation. Such a consideration opens the way for future editions to experiment with multi-phased fieldwork, where initial exploratory observation could be followed by more in-depth, theory-driven analysis, perhaps integrating GIS or spatial data visualisation techniques.

Secondly, the balance between autonomy and methodological rigour emerged as a pedagogical tension. While students valued the freedom to document and interpret the space creatively, they also expressed uncertainty in synthesising their findings into coherent narratives. This proves the importance of explicitly teaching how to move from data to interpretation, possibly through collaborative data interpretation workshops immediately after fieldwork.

Finally, the language factor, while not a barrier to observation, conditioned the depth of students' engagement with local actors. This reflects the dual challenge identified by Coonan (2009) in CLIL: mastering disciplinary content language does not automatically translate into interpersonal communicative fluency. Addressing this requires a shift in CLIL training, integrating field-based communicative strategies, possibly through scenarios, simulations, and adaptive speaking exercises.

In conclusion, the Portello outdoor CLIL geography workshop exemplifies how content and language learning can be meaningfully integrated through inquiry-based, place-based fieldwork. This hybrid format fosters geographical literacy, spatial thinking, and

multilingual competence, while actively engaging students in real-world urban analysis. Such approaches resonate with the civic and territorial education, where learning the territory means learning to take care of it (Giorda and Rosmo, 2021).

At the same time, the Outdoor CLIL geography workshop represents a situated case study that invites a reconsideration of how retail geography might be taught in Italian universities, moving beyond textbook-based approaches towards direct engagement with urban spaces of consumption. This integration of educational innovation and disciplinary research is, ultimately, one of the greatest strengths of the experience.

Looking ahead, future research could explore comparative Outdoor CLIL modules in different urban contexts (e.g. historic centres, peri-urban retail corridors, post-industrial landscapes) to better understand how geographical settings shape learning outcomes. Through such comparative approaches, outdoor CLIL has the potential to become not only a method for integrating geographical content and language learning, but also a critical pedagogical lens to interpret contemporary urban transformations.

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