



Project Brief: Cultural and Sensory Therapy for Seniors with Alzheimer's

Project Objective:

This project leverages Neapolitan cultural traditions as therapeutic support to stimulate memory and engagement among seniors affected by Alzheimer's. Activities include culinary, musical, and visual workshops aimed at improving participants' quality of life by slowing cognitive decline and reducing social isolation.

Project Context and Importance

Alzheimer's is a neurodegenerative disease affecting about 5% of people over the age of 65, with an even higher incidence in those over 85. This condition gradually impairs essential cognitive functions, including memory, attention, spatial orientation, and reasoning abilities. Although there is no cure, non-pharmacological interventions—such as cognitive and sensory stimulation—have been shown to slow its progression and improve quality of life.

The cause is related to a protein called APP. In those who metabolize this protein, a neurotoxic substance forms and gradually builds up, leading to the death of nerve cells. Symptoms can even appear in people as young as 40. Alzheimer's can also have a genetic component. The main symptom is memory loss, but other signs may include:

- Loss of independence in daily activities
- Language difficulties

- Spatial disorientation
- Temporal disorientation
- Depression
- Sleep disturbances
- Behavioral issues (hallucinations, delusions)
- Personality changes.

The presence of the neurotoxic beta-amyloid protein, which causes Alzheimer's, can be identified through specific tests such as PET scans, MRI, and PET with amyloid tracers.

Finally, while there are no specific drugs to prevent or cure Alzheimer's, some medications can help slow its progression.

Cognitive Stimulation Principles

We would like the project to be based on a multisensory approach that integrates music, cuisine, and historical objects, offering familiar stimuli for participants. These workshops activate long-term memories and engage remaining abilities, fostering social interaction and reducing symptoms of disorientation and isolation. Depending on the patient's needs for improvement or recovery, two types of cognitive stimulation may be used.

1. **Cognitive Skills Stimulation:** The goal of these techniques is to engage preserved executive functions to help recover those that have deteriorated. Typically, workbooks, apps, and software programs are used.

2. **Brain Area Stimulation:** The purpose of these methods is to direct changes in brain activity in the areas affected by the disease. Brain stimulation techniques and neurotechnologies are mainly used.

Key elements of cognitive stimulation

- **Familiarity:** This is the key element. The more familiar the environment where stimulation occurs, or at least the stimuli presented, the more effective the therapy. The more the person has been in contact with these elements, the greater the likelihood of interaction with the surrounding environment, and thus, the opportunity to exercise their cognitive abilities.
- **Support and Communication:** Memory loss, along with the behavioral and cognitive issues associated with this condition, significantly affect the social environment of the affected person. It is essential to give the patient opportunities to interact and build connections with others, both to practice recalling memories and to maintain language fluency, as well as to prevent social skills from deteriorating, which often leads to isolation and, frequently, depression.
- **Stimulation:** Whether directed at modifying brain activity in the most affected areas or enhancing preserved cognitive functions to compensate for those that have deteriorated, it is crucial to encourage the person to interact as much as possible with both their social and physical environment.

Integrated Approach for Sensory Stimulation

The use of cultural elements in a therapeutic context aims to:

- Strengthen the sense of belonging and identity;
- Stimulate the retrieval of long-term memories;
- Reduce depressive symptoms and behavioral disorders;
- Improve self-esteem and the perception of personal usefulness, thus enhancing autonomy.

Target Audience

The project primarily targets elderly Neapolitans aged 65 and above who are affected by Alzheimer's, experiencing various levels of cognitive decline. The initiative also includes caregivers and family members, engaging them in activities to facilitate participation and promote social support.

User Personas

Needs

Stimulating activities

Stable routine

Emotional and relational support

Frustrations

Memory loss

Disorientation and confusion

Inability to perform activities independently

Name and surname Age

Maria Concetta Esposito

Age: 80 years

Photo



Short Bio

Maria Concetta is 80 years old and lives in Naples, surrounded by the love of her family. Once a primary school teacher, she loved reading novels and cooking for her loved ones. Now, with an Alzheimer's diagnosis, Maria faces small daily challenges with memory and orientation. Although she often forgets names of people and objects, she still lights up when she hears old Neapolitan songs or sees family photos. Her son and granddaughter take care of her as they can, but Maria finds peace in a stable routine and in small daily gestures that remind her of her history and roots.

Scenarios ex ante:



Market Context

The project responds to a growing demand for non-pharmacological therapies supporting seniors with dementia, especially in Europe and the United States. With an aging population and no definitive cure for Alzheimer's, many organizations and families seek alternative solutions to improve patients' quality of life.

In Italy, there is increasing interest in treatments that combine cultural and cognitive elements. This project could attract the interest of senior care centers, caregiver associations, and local elder support organizations, as well as public institutions looking to develop structures and policies that support seniors with dementia.

OUR FOCUS

The focus of the project, in addition to the multisensory approach, must be based on the Neapolitan culture, a program could be developed that offers cooking sessions and traditional songs as a

form of "therapeutic tourism" for relatives and patients from other countries.

Expansion Opportunities

Collaborations with Cultural Associations and Local Institutions:
Partnerships with Neapolitan cultural associations can extend access to seniors beyond healthcare facilities to more familiar environments like social centers and community spaces.

Support Centers in Naples

The project is supported by dedicated centers such as Caffè Alzheimer and the first public clinic in Campania, which offer occupational therapy, psychological support, and group activities. These centers encourage seniors' participation and provide essential support for caregivers

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Workshops and Stimulation Activities

Music and Memory : Musical workshops feature traditional Neapolitan songs such as *‘O Sole Mio*, encouraging participants to sing and play simple instruments. Music evokes emotional memories and strengthens a sense of belonging, promoting emotional well-being and socialization.

Visual Stimulation and Local Iconography

Using historical postcards of Naples and traditional objects like tamburelli and Pulcinella figurines, the project aims to revive memories associated with familiar places and childhood experiences. Iconic images of the city, such as Mount Vesuvius and Castel dell'Ovo, activate long-term memory and strengthen the sense of belonging.

Culinary and Culinary History

Through preparing traditional dishes like pizza and pastiera, culinary workshops offer important sensory and memory stimulation, reviving memories tied to family and community moments. This activity, beyond

reinforcing a sense of identity, allows seniors to experience a familiar, interactive environment.

Traditional Neapolitan Recipes: Culture and History through Food

Food is a pillar of Neapolitan culture, with each recipe representing a piece of the history and identity of this land. The following dishes not only nourish the body but also evoke emotions and memories:

Savory Dishes:

Zeppole and Panzerotti

Description: Fried dough fritters (zeppole, also known as “pasta cresciuta”) and potato croquettes without mozzarella (panzerotti).

Historical Context: This Neapolitan “street food” is associated with the narrow streets of Naples, eaten hot and standing. The zeppola is also symbolic of the Neapolitan accent, echoing a unique pronunciation style.



Pizza Margherita

Description: The classic pizza with tomato, mozzarella, and basil.

Historical Context:

Created in 1889 in honor of Queen Margherita of Savoy, with colors representing the Italian flag, this pizza has become an icon of Italian cuisine.



Pizza con le Scarole

Description: Pizza filled with escarole, olives, and capers, a symbol of Neapolitan holiday cuisine.



Historical

Context:

Common during festive seasons, this dish highlights the flavors of Campanian tradition.

Casatiello

Description: Easter bread enriched with cured meats, cheese, and lard.

Historical Context: Its circular shape symbolizes the crown of thorns, making it an Easter symbol. This ritual bread dates back to ancient Greek practices and is now associated with the holiday.



Ragù Napoletano

Description: A slow-cooked meat sauce with tomatoes and vegetables.



Historical Context: Traditionally a Sunday dish, the term “ragù” derives from the French “ragout,” Italianized to “ragutto” during the fascist era.

Parmigiana di Melanzane

Description: Layers of fried eggplant, tomato, and cheese.

Historical Context:

Although eggplants arrived in Italy in the 15th century, the dish only took its current form in the 19th century, becoming a symbol of Neapolitan cuisine.



Frittata di Maccheroni

Description: Frittata made with leftover pasta mixed with eggs and cheese.



Historical Context: This dish reflects the Neapolitan tradition of avoiding food waste and is perfect for picnics, dating back to times of poverty when nothing was discarded.

Sweet Dishes:

Pastiera Napoletana

Description: An Easter dessert made with wheat, ricotta, and eggs.

Historical Context: This symbol of rebirth is tied to the Easter tradition and was likely created by Benedictine nuns. It represents life and fertility.



Babà

Description: A soft dessert soaked in rum.

Historical Context: Originating from France and Poland, babà became a symbol of Neapolitan desserts, enriched locally with rum.



Zeppole di San Giuseppe

Description: Fried pastry with cream and cherries, prepared for Father's Day.

Historical Context:

This dessert dates back to ancient Roman times when the “*Liberalia*” celebrated grain and wine deities, later integrated into the feast of “*San Giuseppe*”.



Limonata a Cosce Aperte

Description: A simple, refreshing drink made with water and lemon.

Historical Context: Popular in Naples since the 18th century, this drink reflects the local agricultural and natural resources in Neapolitan culture.



Conclusion

This project combines Neapolitan cultural traditions with therapy for seniors with Alzheimer's, creating an environment of cognitive and social stimulation that preserves cognitive abilities and enhances emotional well-being.