



DELIVERABLE D4.3

Skills and business models for urban regeneration
Analysis of case studies and focus group findings

Introduction

As part of the Spaces to Neb project, funded by the Erasmus+ programme, a survey based on six case studies of shared spaces identified a set of key skills and various economic models relevant to shared spaces and urban regeneration. The studies covered four European countries: Le Couvent and La Côme in Marseille (France), Communa and Recyclart in Brussels (Belgium), Free Riga in Riga (Latvia) and Horcynus Orca in Messina (Italy).

The methodology employed was designed to incorporate the criteria of the EntreComp and GreenComp frameworks, alongside an analytical lens linked to the NEB Compass and the NEB self-assessment. Based on interviews and mapping, a dual analysis presents, on the one hand, a framework of skills (GreenComp and EntreComp) identified in each case study and, on the other, the business models of these case studies. These models and skills were then discussed during a working group bringing together eight participants representing the sector's main stakeholders. They validated the results and highlighted the most important skills and those that are most difficult to mobilise.

1. Analysis of the case studies

1.1 Competences and skills

Methodology

The set of skills was developed based on a systematic analysis of the skills identified in each case study. Any skill mentioned at least five times was deemed 'relevant' and

'necessary' for urban regeneration. This threshold enabled the identification of a final set of priority skills. For the purposes of scoring, each case study counts as one point, with the exception of the French and Italian cases, which were weighted at two points each, as they were identified as best practices and should therefore be prioritised.

GreenComp skills

Among the skills in the GreenComp framework analysed in the case studies, two stand out as priorities based on the five-point threshold:

'Critical thinking' is the most sought-after competence, followed by 'adaptability'. Other green competences were also identified to a significant extent, although they fell short of the priority threshold: 'promoting sustainability', 'supporting equity', 'systems thinking', 'understanding the future', 'collective action'. 'Exploratory thinking' comes last, whilst 'valuing life' and 'political action' appear less frequently.

EntreComp Competencies

Four entrepreneurial skills are the most frequently cited: "vision" and "mobilising others", "learning through experience", identified in five case studies, as well as "identifying opportunities".

Below this threshold, several entrepreneurial skills were nevertheless frequently mentioned: "ethical and sustainable thinking", "resource mobilisation", "planning and management", "ideation", as well as "self-awareness" and "self-efficacy". "Creativity", "taking the initiative", "managing ambiguity and risk", and "financial and economic knowledge" round off the picture with lower scores.

Final set of priority skills

By cross-referencing the results of the two frameworks, six key competencies emerge for entrepreneurs working in urban regeneration. Derived from GreenComp, "critical thinking" and "adaptability" form the foundations of a reflective and resilient mindset that is essential in constantly evolving contexts. From the EntreComp framework, four skills stand out as essential for collective action and the development of sustainable projects:

- Spotting opportunities — the ability to identify openings in complex environments;
- Having a vision — the ability to chart a coherent long-term course;
- Mobilising others — interpersonal and collective skills enabling people to rally around a project;
- Learning from experience — the ability to draw continuous lessons from practical experience in the field.

These six skills form the common foundation identified through the case studies and best practices analysed. They reflect an operational reality: two skills stemming from the ecological dimension — more focused on mindset and reflexivity — and four entrepreneurial skills — more directly linked to action, cooperation and organisational development.

1.2 Business model

The analysis of the business models in the case studies was conducted using a simplified version of the Business Model Canvas, adapted to the project's resources and constraints. Each component of the model was documented for each case, then discussed during the working group to verify its relevance in light of the participants' practical experiences.

Key resources

The resources mobilised by the urban regeneration initiatives analysed are based on several complementary pillars.

- Cost-sharing between residents and occupants constitutes a primary structuring mechanism: many models rely on direct financial contributions from users, whether in the form of rent, shared service charges or other forms of participation.
- Voluntary or shared labour is a recurring resource in all the cases studied. This unpaid collective contribution appears to be essential to the balance of the models, although it raises questions of long-term sustainability. Public grants — from municipal, regional, national or European sources — supplement these resources, although access to them and their reliability vary considerably depending on the context.
- Income-generating activities form a third essential pillar: bars, events, venue hire, catering or training services enable organisations to generate their own resources. Finally, collaborations with local associations, partner institutions or allied venues round out the resource ecosystem.

Main channels of engagement

Stakeholder engagement relies above all on strong involvement from the local community. Residents, collectives and users play an active role in planning activities, organising workshops and promoting the spaces. This participatory dynamic is underpinned by structured partnerships with local institutions — local authorities, associations, schools, cultural services, and social and solidarity economy actors — which are systematically involved in the running of these venues.

Programming is often designed in an open manner and co-created with residents and local stakeholders. Cultural events, artistic interventions and socio-educational activities are the main drivers for reaching new audiences and embedding the initiative within its local area. Collective governance — assemblies, working groups, umbrella organisations — ensures the coordination of these various stakeholders.

Management structure

All the initiatives analysed operate on a non-profit basis: none aims to make a profit, and any surplus is systematically reinvested in the venue or its programme. This approach is coupled with a heavy reliance on the involvement of volunteers, one of the main drivers of financial stability.

The business models generally combine several sources of funding: public grants, revenue-generating activities (events, bars, rentals, training, festivals) and voluntary contributions. This hybrid approach is seen as essential for the projects' survival. Key

stakeholders invariably include local residents and community actors, artists and cultural operators, municipal and public authorities, as well as partner associations and NGOs. The target audiences are generally diverse: young people, families, vulnerable groups and cultural audiences.

2. Results of the focus group

The focus group, comprising eight participants active in urban regeneration, had the primary objective of identifying the key skills and economic models necessary for the creation and maintenance of communal spaces and transitional urban planning projects. The discussions enabled the findings from the case studies to be examined and enriched based on the practitioners' concrete experiences.

2.1 Skills used on a daily basis

The first question put to participants concerned the skills they use most in their day-to-day work. Asked to choose from a common set of skills, they selected seven skills, two of which were from the GreenComp strand and five from the EntreComp strand. This breakdown is significant: it reveals that entrepreneurial skills dominate in operational practice, whilst green skills — although recognised as fundamental — are sometimes perceived as being more closely linked to a long-term approach than as something difficult to maintain given the temporary nature of how spaces are used.

Among the skills identified as most frequently used are “adaptability”, “vision” and “mobilising others” — three skills that directly overlap with the findings of the case studies. This overlap between the quantitative results from the interviews and the qualitative feedback from the focus group reinforces the robustness of these skills as pillars of urban regeneration action. Other skills were specifically mentioned by the group: the capacity for political action, creativity, financial planning, and ethical and sustainable thinking.

2.2 Identified skills gaps

The second question in the focus group concerned the skills lacking within the teams. Participants identified several significant gaps, some of which echo the skills deemed necessary but insufficiently developed within organisations in the sector.

Transparency and communication stand out as a major shortcoming, particularly in the pre-operational phase. Even before a physical space opens, the ability to create communication platforms that align the often divergent expectations of non-profit organisations, private actors and elected politicians is identified as the most critical skill. This need is closely linked to the frequently observed disconnect between the stated political will to create community spaces and the financial resources actually mobilised.

The community's long-term vision is another recurring shortcoming. Participants highlight the difficulty of maintaining a shared vision over time within unstable institutional and financial environments. This fragility is exacerbated by shortcomings in the management and support of people—particularly key stakeholders—as well as by a lack of knowledge sharing among sector actors.

“Mobilising others”, although identified as a necessary skill, is also cited as a shortcoming. This apparent paradox illustrates the sector’s structural tension: whilst practitioners manage to mobilise volunteers, this dynamic reaches its limits in the face of what participants refer to as “volunteer fatigue”. Individuals are increasingly reluctant to commit without financial compensation. This reality suggests that future business models can no longer rely on unpaid labour and must move towards professionalisation or clearly defined and valued temporary engagement.

Finally, several identified gaps converge on what the frameworks refer to as ‘role awareness’—a skill identified as a differentiating factor. The ability of each actor to identify their precise role within a collective and to effectively allocate responsibilities between staff and volunteers is presented as a prerequisite for systemic coherence and organisational effectiveness.

2.3 Economic modelling: insights from the focus group

Discussions on economic modelling confirmed and enriched the findings of the case studies, adding critical dimensions drawn from practitioners’ direct experience.

Resource hybridisation and blended finance

The group unanimously confirmed that the hybridisation of resources is a *prerequisite* for the viability of projects. Successful organisations never rely on a single source of funding, but build a patchwork combining public budgets and self-generated income. One of the positive examples cited involved a local authority granting the organisation a ‘carte blanche’, allowing it to manage a dedicated annual income and organise free activities for residents — whilst preserving the project’s non-commercial nature.

On the issue of voluntary work, whilst this form of contribution remains a central and recognised resource, the group emphasised that it relies on a precarious system, the fragility of which is becoming increasingly apparent. The fact that activities are free of charge is seen as essential to maintaining the social mission of community inclusion, but this must not obscure the need for the sector to become progressively more professional.

Governance and non-hierarchical structures

There is a strong desire for non-hierarchical structures — sociocracy, horizontal governance — among stakeholders in the sector, but this is hampered by a lack of the technical skills required for their effective implementation. Peer-led self-governance remains an ideal that is difficult to achieve without appropriate methodological support.

The group also highlighted the limitations of public calls for projects, which were deemed insufficiently inclusive in their design: they do not involve the community from the definition phase onwards, which undermines both the legitimacy of the projects and their funding prospects. Furthermore, participants observed that regeneration initiatives tend to be led directly by local authorities, to the detriment of local, community-based planning that would allow for better consideration of real needs, particularly regarding building renovation.

Stakeholder engagement and territorial legitimacy

The group reached a strong consensus on the timing and methods for building legitimacy: this is established before the keys are handed over. Cultural and artistic initiatives carried out in an area even before a site opens were identified as the most effective lever for engaging local residents and creating a sense of belonging. This pre-operational phase is also the key moment for securing the support of influential political figures, an essential condition for the project's long-term viability.

Collaboration with political stakeholders involves, in particular, visits and concrete demonstrations of the project's benefits, which serve both to reassure elected representatives and to raise their awareness of the venue's objectives. This proactive approach is all the more necessary given that changes in government and complex political dynamics constitute a recurring source of instability for project leaders. In light of these challenges, the group highlighted the value of a structured analytical approach—such as a SWOT analysis combined with a strategic stakeholder analysis—to anticipate tensions and institutional changes.

Mental workload and working conditions

A particularly prominent point of discussion concerned the working conditions of project leaders. Participants highlighted the need to manage the mental and financial burden associated with working in unstable environments. Business models must be transparent and robust to avoid placing project leaders in precarious situations.

Participants highlighted a common misconception within institutions: social impact projects are often mistakenly perceived as inexpensive to implement. This systematic underestimation of the resources required undermines project leaders and contributes to the structural disconnect between political ambitions and the resources actually allocated.

Conclusion

This report highlights the convergence between the findings of the case studies and the insights from the focus group. Six key competencies — Critical Thinking, Adaptability, the ability to Spot Opportunities, Vision, Mobilising Others and Learning by Experience — emerge as the common foundation for urban regeneration entrepreneurs, whether drawn from the best practices analysed or from the practitioners gathered in the focus group.

In terms of business models, sustainability relies on a deliberate hybridisation of resources, combining public funding, self-generated income and voluntary contributions. The latter, whilst indispensable in the short term, is showing signs of running out of steam, calling for a shift towards more professionalised models. Participatory and non-hierarchical governance remains a fundamental ideal, but its implementation requires technical and organisational skills that are still insufficiently developed in the sector.

Finally, territorial legitimacy is built primarily during the pre-operational phase, through early cultural and community engagement, and by securing solid political alliances. These conditions are fundamental to the success of urban regeneration projects and

must be integrated from the outset into the design of support and training schemes for social entrepreneurs in the sector.