Abstract: This report presents the results of research focused on the current training needs of grassroots urban regeneration processes. The aim of the project was to understand more about the history of these processes, their effects and the specific facilitating factors and challenges of their local contexts. The research analyses ten case studies of culture-led grassroots urban and social innovation processes across Europe. Each case study was explored through four different lenses: tracing the chronology and the future directions of the processes; exploring their effects and their innovations; understanding the challenges and facilitating factors they encountered; and identifying the skills they used and those for which they need further training. The report draws some key lessons for urban regeneration processes and for the training of professionals in the field of urban innovation.

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Authors of the case reports:
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- **Fabrica de Pensule**
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- **Institut for X, Blivande, Le plus petit cirque du monde, Aparaaditehas**
  Burak Sayin – Trans Europe Halles, Sweden
- **Nova Cvernovka, Brunnenpassage, Communitism**
  Francesco Campagnari – Università Iuav di Venezia, Italy
Research methods and case study selection

This report presents ten case studies of culture-led grassroots urban and social innovation processes across Europe, in order to understand their emerging innovations, their current challenges and their needs for further training. This task expands the research in task 2.2, focusing on in-depth inquiry and on culture-led urban grassroots innovation.

The choice of the thematic focus on culture stems from its historical prominence in urban regeneration processes in Europe: because citizen cultural organisations have been among the first to reuse empty buildings since the 1970s, turning our focus on them allows a long-term perspective on their effects of urban innovation. An in-depth approach facilitates understanding of the internal mechanisms of the case studies in relation to the EUREKA project topics such as training on urban innovation.

THE CASE STUDIES FOCUS ON FOUR DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS:

- **Chronology**: tracing the evolution of urban regeneration processes, focusing on their origins and their future directions.
- **Effects**: exploring the effects produced by the process of urban regeneration, both from the perspective of the actors involved and from the perspective of external actors.
- **Facilitating factors and challenges** encountered in the processes of urban regeneration.
- **Knowledge and skills**: focusing on the knowledge, capacities and skills used in the process in its most crucial moments and by its central actors. We also explore the skills developed in the processes and the need for further training.

The ten case studies were selected on the basis of three different criteria:

1. **TEH membership**: As the research focuses on culture-led grassroots urban innovation processes, we selected ten cases from the Trans Europe Halles network. While this choice might be limited, we believe that members of the network – including more than 120 European grassroots cultural organisations in repurposed buildings – are a good representation of this phenomenon.

2. **Geographical distribution**: In order to represent the whole of Europe, we selected case studies that are geographically distributed across the Northern, Southern, Western and Eastern regions of the continent.

3. **Duration**: We chose case studies that have existed for different lengths of time, in order to understand the continuity and consolidation of their innovations. We selected recent case studies (active for less than five years), medium duration cases (between five and ten years) and long-term case studies (more than ten years).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative name</th>
<th>City, Country</th>
<th>EU region</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Urban size (inhabitants)</th>
<th>Urban position</th>
<th>Former building use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aparaaditehas</td>
<td>Tartu, Estonia</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Medium (10&gt;5 years)</td>
<td>Small urban area (50k-100k)</td>
<td>Semicentral</td>
<td>Industrial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institut for X</td>
<td>Aarhus, Denmark</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Long &gt;10 years</td>
<td>Medium urban area (100k-500k)</td>
<td>Semicentral</td>
<td>Infrastructural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde</td>
<td>Bagnex, France</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Long &gt;10 years</td>
<td>Large urban areas (over 2M)</td>
<td>Peripheral</td>
<td>Sports and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Cvernovka</td>
<td>Bratislava, Slovakia</td>
<td>East</td>
<td>Short (&lt;5 years)</td>
<td>Medium-large urban area (500k-2M)</td>
<td>Peripheral</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ovestlab</td>
<td>Modena, Italy</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Short (&lt;5 years)</td>
<td>Medium urban area (100k-500k)</td>
<td>Peripheral</td>
<td>Industrial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blivande</td>
<td>Stockholm, Sweden</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Short (&lt;5 years)</td>
<td>Medium-large urban area (500k-2M)</td>
<td>Peripheral</td>
<td>Sports and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communistism</td>
<td>Athens, Greece</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Medium (10&gt;5 years)</td>
<td>Medium-large urban area (500k-2M)</td>
<td>Semicentral</td>
<td>Industrial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunnenpassage</td>
<td>Vienna, Austria</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Long &gt;10 years</td>
<td>Medium-large urban area (500k-2M)</td>
<td>Semicentral</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitamine</td>
<td>Irun, Spain</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Medium (10&gt;5 years)</td>
<td>Small urban area (50k-100k)</td>
<td>Peripheral</td>
<td>Public spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabrica de pensule</td>
<td>Cluj-Napoca, Romania</td>
<td>East</td>
<td>Long &gt;10 years</td>
<td>Medium urban area (100k-500k)</td>
<td>Semicentral</td>
<td>Industrial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following are the selected case studies:

**DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

The research adopted a case study method for each process. The case studies were developed with multiple qualitative methods of inquiry, in order to maximise triangulation of interpretations.

The main data sources were:
- semi-structured interviews
- archival documents analysis
- press review
- direct observation in the field.
Each of these methods proved useful in relation to specific aspects of the inquiry. Press reviews helped to construct the timelines of the case studies; archival data were useful to help understand the internal organising processes; semi-structured interviews were the main tool for acquiring information about the meanings, the oral histories and the experiences of the people involved. Direct observation was a useful tool for understanding the context of action and the materiality of the regeneration actions.

### ANALYSIS: SINGLE-CASE AND MULTI-CASE

The data from each case study were analysed by a relevant stakeholder, according to their specific disciplinary specialism. Analysts developed internal categories and descriptions for each case study, grounding their findings in empirical evidence. Partners developed a report for each case study, highlighting its specificities. Iuav and Trans Europe Halles (TEH) developed the current general report, bringing together findings from the ten case study reports. Categories and characters from the sections of each case study were transferred into tables in order to understand the frequency of each phenomena. The report was then drafted to represent these distributions, and to help reflect on their implications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative name</th>
<th>No. of interviews</th>
<th>No. of archival documents</th>
<th>No. of newspaper articles</th>
<th>No. of days in the field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aparaaditehas</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institut for X</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ovestlab</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blivande</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communistism</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunnenpassage</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitamine</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabrica de pensule</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chosen case studies each have different histories, trajectories and operate in different contexts. Here is a brief introduction for each of them, offering a better understanding of their operations and activities. The Widget Factory (Aparaaditehas) is an old factory complex in Tartu, Estonia. In the past, it mainly manufactured refrigeration equipment and secret submarine parts, and also non-functioning umbrellas and zippers to cover up these secret activities. The Widget Factory and its surrounding city block have become one of the most rapidly developing areas in Tartu. Today it is a culture factory that brings together creative entrepreneurs, artists and designer studios, commerce and entertainment. It hosts four restaurants, two cafés, a flea market, two galleries, event spaces, venues, office spaces, a co-working area and rooms for numerous shops. Its courtyard is a popular meeting place in the area, hosting concerts, flea markets and an outdoor cinema in the summer.

Institut for (X) (IFX) is a culture, business and education organisational platform in Aarhus, Denmark. It is an independent and not-for-profit culture association arising from citizen initiatives.

Short summary of the case studies of urban regeneration
The IFX is continuously being redefined by its members, which include 600+ active individual and collective members, 90 studios and workshops, 43 businesses, 15 associations and five networks. The outdoor spaces and park areas are public, and everyone is invited to use and co-produce them. Everyone at IFX pays rent and organises through neighbourhood meetings. The platform produces cultural and commercial events and products, with an estimated annual turnover of €2.5 million euros.

**Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde (PPCM)** - or "Smallest circus in the world" in English is a not-for-profit association focusing on the connection between social circus, artistic practice, human relations and community action in the Bagneux municipality of Paris. Over the past 23 years, PPCM has pursued openness about the world, citizenship, solidarity, cosmopolitanism, meticulousness and interdisciplinarity as its core values. Today it is located in a newly-created building designed by architect Patrick Bouchain. PPCM collaborates with the architect in the development of new urban transformation projects in the Bagneux neighbourhood.

**Nova Cvernovka** is a creative and cultural centre located in the Nové Mesto neighbourhood of Bratislava, Slovakia. It opened its doors in 2016, when a creative community took over a former chemical school after being evicted from their previous space in the city centre. The area of the cultural centre covers nearly 30,000 square metres (including a neighbourhood garden and outdoor venue); its 18,000 square metres of floor surface is divided into two buildings, with creative, residential and event spaces.

**OvestLab** is a former mechanical workshop located in the Villaggio Artigiano in Modena, Italy. It is co-managed by the associations Amigdala and Archivio Architetto Cesare Leonardi to promote a process of construction of a “Civic Factory”, a space in which to share practices and reflections on the cultural and artistic reactivation of the territory of the Villaggio Artigiano.

**Blivande** (meaning “becoming” in Swedish) is a co-created urban village with a grassroots community for arts, culture and being. Blivande’s main principles are participation, self-realisation, meaning making and solidarity. This self-defined experimental place consists of a makerspace (with wood and metal workshops), a co-working space and a cultural and creative hub (Frihamnstorget). Blivande has a community of 200 members and renters and 20 associations working with arts, crafts and self-expression. It aims to develop its own self-sustaining ecosystem into a replicable model.

**Communitism** is a sociocultural space located in the Metaxourgio neighbourhood of Athens, Greece. Communitism hosts several activities in its two-storey 1,200 square metre building; it attracts several different communities from the neighbourhood and beyond. The centre is a place of experimentation and encounter for different organisations, communities and individuals. Communitism is characterised by its neoclassical building, which the association is gradually renovating.

**ArtSocialSpace Brunnenpassage** has been operating since 2007 as a laboratory and venue for transcultural and participatory art processes. It is located in a former market hall at Brunnenmarkt in Ottakring, Vienna’s XVI district. Brunnenpassage aims to break down the distinction between producers and consumers of cultural activities, integrating a strong participative dimension in its programme. At the local level, it aims to develop a free and welcoming space of interaction and encounter between different social groups. At an institutional level, it aims to change the institutional approach to post-migrant communities in cultural policies and cultural institutions.

**Bitamine Faktoria (BF)** is a cultural association from Irun, Spain, that promotes the engagement of local communities for urban and social innovation through arts and culture. BF was born in 2012 but its origins can be traced back to at least 2006. In 2016, BF opened a space in the neighbourhood of Larreaundi in Irun, where they stayed until 2021. In March 2021, in part due to the pandemic, the space closed down and, at the time of writing (July 2021), BF does not have a physical space as such.

**Fabrica de Pensule (“the Paintbrush Factory”)** is a non-governmental organisation that has been operating since 2009 in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. It was born as a reaction to the local lack of production and exhibition spaces in the city. The aim of the organisation is to bring together ideas, events and projects of cultural organisations, galleries, producers and independent artists in Cluj-Napoca. The Factory now has two multidisciplinary lines of activities, in the field of performative arts and visual-contemporary arts.
The urban innovation effects of the urban regeneration process

In this section, we will explore the main effects generated by these initiatives. In particular, we will focus on the effects of innovation, considered as the generation of new ways of seeing and doing things that we usually take for granted. Here we can quote Lanzara (2016: 7) to better understand the concept:

To produce innovation, action needs not be radically new or revolutionary in the common sense of the term. It need not set itself Faustian goals. Even simple, apparently inconspicuous actions that trespass an accepted boundary and question what we take for granted, or actions that establish new linkages and throw bridges across traditionally separate domains, can be highly innovative, leading to seeing and doing familiar things in unprecedented ways.

We can recognise different categories and fields of effects generated by the initiatives. These initiatives frequently generate effects operating with and on public space, both as a concept, a practice and a physical space. In different cases the cultural centre can be interpreted as a public space (Crosta, 2010). For example, the team running Brunnenpassage has established the centre as a place where people from the neighbourhood can meet and interact with different cultures and do different kinds of activities. The team proactively focused on the reduction of symbolic barriers limiting the presence of underrepresented communities in public space. Communitism similarly established its centre as a public space, focusing on welcoming artistic communities from across the city of Athens.

Centres like Fabrika de Pensule and Bitamine contribute instead to the renewal of imagery and possible uses of existing public spaces through artistic interventions. In all these experiences, public space was used in innovative ways to empower participants, or to foster the creation of new innovations through social interactions.

The effects generated by these initiatives are mostly related to the neighbourhood scale. In fact, many of these projects operate in close connection with the communities living in their direct surroundings, engaging with them through artistic practices and public spaces.

The processes also generate new uses and services in their contexts. Communitism is the only cultural space in a context characterised by prostitution and drug dealing. Nova Cvernovka offers new welfare services (kindergarten, public park, cultural programme) that were previously lacking in the neighbourhood.

These initiatives also generate relevant effects on the cultural scene, at a local and national level. The processes have been recognised as models for other cultural actors in different fields of action. Communitism’s model of bartering with building owners, where the organisation uses the space in exchange for its renovation, has been adopted by other cultural centres in Athens and Greece. Fabrika de Pensule has created a model in Romania for the conversion of large industrial spaces and their neighbourhood through cultural uses. Following its success and its presence in communication channels, Nova Cvernovka is now seen as a symbol for citizen-led urban transformations in Slovakia, even beyond the cultural sector. Brunnenpassage is recognised as an international model for transcultural work.

Some processes also directly contribute to changes in the local cultural scene. For instance, Bitamine contributed to the internationalisation of the arts and culture scene of Irun, through the development of international projects and exchanges.

These initiatives also generate direct impacts on the individuals participating in their activities. The artists and creative professionals who moved from the original Cvernovka to the New Cvernovka building benefited from the new services the organisation developed. Its initiators were also affected by their own professional development, learning in action. In Communitism, individuals engage and interact, learning and meeting new people. Fabrica de Pensule contributed to the continuous training of cultural professionals, and it opened new career paths for young people who were potentially interested in working in the cultural sector. Brunnenpassage trains its workers through continuous teaching on cultural exclusion, racism and empowers them through on-the-job learning. Furthermore, it fosters
dialogue between individuals operating as a space of encounter, and helps them become arts professionals. For example, a female DJ project led to the establishment of several women DJs in Vienna.

**The innovation of institutional frameworks**

Guiding political and societal imagination and action is also an important aspect of these processes. Brunnenpassage explicitly aims to influence the operations of established arts and culture institutions, promoting the inclusion of unrepresented communities, changing funding distribution, personnel choices, curatorial approaches, language and participation in cultural activities. Brunnenpassage pursues this goal first by collaborating with these established institutions on strategic projects. Second, the centre influences policy-makers and institutions through D/Arts, a lobbying organisation they created to focus on reflection, discourse and policy proposals for the transformation and innovation of the Viennese and Austrian cultural sector towards diversity and urban dialogue.

Other centres have generated institutional innovations without intentionally pursuing them. Collaborating with local and regional administrations, Ovestlab helped to refresh their perception and understanding of urban regeneration, focusing not only on the architectural and building aspects, but also on social and cultural processes. Similarly, Communitism is innovating the public discourse on active citizenship, mediating between a hardline political perspective and a pragmatic perspective of social projects.

These centres are also able to generate effects at a city level, albeit limited effects. For instance, Nova Cvernovka offered a new type of space that was missing in Bratislava, renovating the image of the city and establishing new ideas of possibility. Bitamine has contributed to the efforts of involving society in urban development processes in Irun. Through the renovation of public spaces, the organisation activated the awareness of local residents about their surroundings.

Fabrica de Pensule influenced the city on both a policy and political level, collaborating with the municipality for the development of the municipal cultural strategy, the creative industries strategy and the cultural capital bid. In parallel, they worked with other organisations to promote grassroots activities.

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**The challenges and successes of innovation**

The initiatives each encountered their own difficulties as they developed and generated urban effects. At the same time, other factors – both within and outside the processes – smoothed the way for their operations. In this section, we will explore these elements, gathered from the opinions of the interviewees and from the analysis of the trajectories of each project.

All the processes we have explored faced challenges related to financial management. The financial instability of these initiatives is a serious threat to their survival. Fabrica de Pensule, for example, discontinued its activities after a rent increase made its operations economically unsustainable.

The initiatives are always on the lookout for new sources of funding. Like Ovestlab, they are constantly looking for grants and tenders, with no certainty beyond the duration of the projects; and, like Brunnenpassage, they also constantly lobby for money with public officials. Mostly from artistic fields, members of these initiatives also often struggle to learn the ins and outs of managing the finances and cash flow of these projects.

Maintaining relationships with key stakeholders was another challenge. The initiatives have to constantly maintain a balance between stakeholders, managing their expectations and gaining their trust. The development of collaborative networks connecting stakeholders is useful, but
Quite demanding. Often the most difficult relationship is with the owners of the buildings the centres operate in. As mentioned above, Fabriza de Pensule was forced to leave its building after the owner raised the rent. One of the owners of the building where Communism operates, meanwhile, is explicitly working to gentrify the neighbourhood, pushing out artistic initiatives in the process.

Centres also struggle to establish fruitful relations with public institutions. In many cases, such as Bitamine, they clash with the rigidity of public administrations and administrators. When the building owner is a public administration, as in the case of Nova Cvernovka, maintaining relationships with the different sectors of the administration along the different stages of the project is vital for the initiative.

Managing human relations and resources in the team guiding the projects is also a significant difficulty. In particular, managing the teams balancing horizontal approaches and vertical decision-making is a common challenge. Cultural differences and diverging interests in the team are a challenge in the establishment of common ways of operating and understanding their activities.

As these projects evolved from their start-up phase, they also struggled to establish organisational routines, distributing and establishing tasks, roles and responsibilities to increase internal stability.

The development of urban innovations was also riddled with obstacles. The innovative push of Ovestlab, while successful in its efforts to establish links between public administrations and citizens, encountered several challenges. Furthermore, the combination of a long-term urban regeneration strategy with the logics of temporary reuse status, renewed annually by the public administration, proved stressful and difficult. Similarly, Bitamine faced challenges when it came to spreading its innovative approach to citizen participation, due to the lack of awareness of the topic in Irun.

The processes were also hindered by some physical and imaginary characteristics of each individual space. Fabriza de Pensule was, for instance, forced to discontinue its activities after the perception that the building and its surroundings became more favourable and commercially viable for the owner, leading to the above-mentioned rent increase.

Ovestlab struggled with the reduced spaces of its venue, which limited the possibility of expanding its activities, programme and revenue. Furthermore, the initiatives often struggle with the processes of restoration and maintenance of their spaces, which requires adequate skills and finances.

One last challenge faced by these initiatives, and in particular by their leaders, is the workload required by this type of process. Team members are continuously engaged in efforts within the organisation, in order to assemble and converge in a single direction; they tend to have little or no remuneration for the long initial start-up phases; they consider every part of the project as important, and they leave no aspect behind. The combination of these approaches, widespread in activist and voluntary processes, often lead to exhaustion and burnout.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the processes also benefited from multiple facilitating factors. Initially, their emergence, development and consolidation was frequently facilitated by the contextual policy and political situation. The launch of these initiatives often happened in periods of favourable political conditions at local and national levels. For instance, a certain sensitivity by local governments to cultural and social issues can prove crucial for gaining government support: Nova Cvernovka received political support for the lease of its buildings; Brunnenpassage was supported by grants and funding schemes; and Ovestlab received important political recognition by the Emilia Romagna Region. As the Nova Cvernovka case proves, however, this political situation can be quite volatile, with orientations and rapidly changing sensitivities.

The location of real estate in the cities and neighbourhoods was also a facilitating element for the development of these initiatives. In some cases, rents were low enough to allow the emergence of these cultural spaces, and rents have subsequently increased. In other cases, the failure of past gentrification schemes generated an attractive context with good infrastructure but affordable rents. The size of the regenerated space itself was important, pushing the initiatives to focus more on attracting people to their spaces – if they were large enough – or developing their activities beyond their base – if spaces were too small.

Societal and physical aspects of the neighbourhoods and their local processes also enabled these experiences. In some instances, these cultural centres came in the area after a first wave of cultural actors shifted the general perception of the neighbourhoods, opening up new possibilities for intervention. The presence of different processes at neighbourhood level, such as municipal or private interventions to improve infrastructures and public spaces, or the self-organisation of artistic and immigrant communities, also constituted fertile ground that paved the way for the actions of these cultural spaces.

The approaches, skills and relations of the organisations and their human resources also paved the way for the development of these initiatives. Specific organisational attitudes – like being open to collaboration or having a long-term strategy, even if funding was linked to short-term projects – benefitted some initiatives when it came to establishing their projects. The presence of friendships in the team also helped to generate a positive environment. Furthermore, the competences and skills of the team were instrumental in developing projects and strategies.

Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde - France. © Fées rue d’Art
The application and generation of skills in the urban regeneration processes: Past and future needs

The processes of urban regeneration developed by these initiatives have relied on several skills mobilised by the teams both as individual members and organisations.

Among the skills they considered most important for their processes, the members of the initiatives mention soft skills like creativity, collaboration, communication, dialogue and leadership, but also more technical abilities like cultural planning, participation management and architectural design. Skills related to the connection between different fields of action, like artistic practice with urban planning, or between self-organisation and institutions, were also considered important.

These skills were learned through different approaches. Some of them were acquired before the engagement with processes of urban regeneration, through different levels of learning formalisation. Among these skills previously acquired and used in these new endeavours, there are cultural planning abilities, facilitation skills and abilities to communicate with different stakeholders and to manage the complexity of projects.

The origin of these skills is difficult to trace, but it can be related to the wide range of previous job experiences, training backgrounds and activist experiences of the members of the teams.

Across all the case studies, the most common type of formal training related to artistic fields like theatre, visual arts, performative arts, community and participatory art and artistic management. Architecture and urban morphology are also mentioned, with individual cases of training in economics, psychology, graphic design, engineering, anthropology and physics.

The members of the initiatives often acquired skills from previous jobs or experiences. Among the professional backgrounds are cultural managers, artists, curators, account managers, DJs, engineers, architects, film producers, osteopaths, graphic designers, permaculturists, photographers and web designers. Most of them have been engaged with the cultural field as professionals or activists for long periods of time.

At the same time, they mixed this engagement with other spheres of activity, such as university teaching or social movements, which contributed to their ability to connect different worlds. They often have international connections, either by collaborating with international projects or having foreign origins themselves, facilitating their international and intercultural work.

Previous training and experiences often had little value in practice. The learning process mostly occurred through learning by doing, both at individual and collective level. Individuals acquired skills through their direct engagement with their responsibilities and projects. Collectively, teams learned through collective meetings and discussions, evaluating their activities and reflecting on their effectiveness and future directions.

Additionally, teams like Brunnenpassage also receive training on specific topics, like racism and exclusion. However, they report that formal training (based on concepts) was no substitute for experience in this profession, where connection and involvement with people is crucial.

The processes of urban regeneration led to the acquisition of different types of skills. Most of them are linked to the field of management and finances: many of the members of the team, as already mentioned, come from artistic and creative fields. Through the involvement in the initiatives, they learned how to be project managers, navigating budgeting, administration, personnel management, public relations and the creation of organisational procedures. In more articulated initiatives, like Nova Cvernovka, they learned to manage the complexity of the projects and to balance constant change. They also developed skills in financial management, learning to fundraise and manage capital, both through donations, grants and loans or by lobbying for higher public funding.
A second important dimension that was mentioned referred to learning how to manage a community and how to work with people as a team, considering cultural differences. The ability to find common ground and live with diversity in teams and communities, as well as to coordinate activities, events and people, was crucial in terms of achieving goals and developing projects.

The members of the team learned how to cope with their cultural differences and eventual divergences in organisational visions. In particular, they developed skills related to transcultural work, being able to welcome and relate to many different identities, languages and cultures. The teams recognised the importance of developing a welcoming mindset, being able to open conversations, listen and facilitate processes of dialogue.

A third set of skills is linked with programming and curatorial management. Thanks to artistic freedom and the opening of spaces of experimentation, several members of the teams learned to balance the different artistic disciplines, formats, audiences and spectrums of participation approaches for each project – while keeping the initiative sustainable.

While these skills helped the initiatives to develop their processes, the training needs they present today almost require the same categories of abilities acquired in practice.

Management and financial tools were among the most necessary instruments to be acquired through training; the need to professionally manage legal, administrative, fundraising and financial issues was particularly pressing for the least professionalised initiatives, like Communitism. More structured and professionalised experiences like Nova Cvernovka and Brunnenpassage focused instead on the expansion of their tools, mentioning the need for skills like evaluation, strategic planning, governance design, organisational design and internal wellbeing.

Further training should focus on social tools for the initiatives. They mentioned skills and tools to better connect with their neighbourhoods, in order to improve relations and local impact. They also stressed the importance of continuous training in non-violent communication, exclusion mechanisms and anti-discrimination strategies.

Training on digital tools for communication, web development and programming was also requested. The pandemic exposed the importance of digital aspects of programming, and that the teams – in their curatorial and technical parts – need to be properly trained. Finally, on a more artistic note, continuous training in programme management was mentioned.

In conclusion, it appears that practitioners in these teams feel the need for training in fields where their skills have been developed in practice, through learning-by-doing. More formalised training would support them in consolidating, recognising and expanding this skillset.

The city of the future: lessons learned from the case studies

What does the future hold for these initiatives? What are their concerns and hopes for the future? In which directions should their actions be targeted? What lessons can be drawn for other initiatives? The members of the experiences and their stakeholders expressed reasons both for optimism and pessimism for the future.

The initiatives expressed different concerns for their future, mostly related to real estate and urban transformation dynamics. For instance, Nova Cvernovka and Communitism perceive the gentrification of their neighbourhoods as a risk for their survival. Gentrification could increase real estate values and convince the owners of their buildings to sell them off to the highest bidder. Furthermore, these processes could expel non-affluent communities from the area, reducing their diversity and social mixture. Ovestlab, on the other hand, expressed the risk of commercialisation and mainstreaming of urban regeneration, with a loss in innovation and relevance.

There are also reasons for hope in the future. While it is a reason for concern, the initiatives hope to stop gentrification in their neighbourhoods. For
instance, Brunnenpassage continues to adopt a non-commercial approach to maintain the accessibility and public nature of its activities for residents of all incomes. Communitism operates in a similar fashion, although some of its members perceive gentrification as inevitable.

There is also hope in the relationships with public administrations and the public sphere. Members of Fabrica de Pensule hope that, in future, there will be greater pressure on public administrations to support cultural workers. Furthermore, they hope conflicts will be accepted as a normal social process, not something to avoid in the political sphere.

Looking at their future directions, the initiatives have diverging ideas and goals. Some experiences are hoping to reproduce their cultural centre in new sites. Communitism is trying to help other citizens and groups set up other self-managed citizen spaces in the Metaxourgio neighbourhood, each specialised in offering different services like culture, arts and welfare. Ovestlab is going in a similar direction in Modena, establishing a diffuse project spread over different parts of the city, supporting local communities taking care of the different neighbourhood centres. Brunnenpassage is evaluating the financial viability of a similar concept in Vienna.

Considering the risky relations with building owners, initiatives are also establishing plans to buy their venues. Nova Cvernovka is exploring different possibilities to acquire their buildings from the current owner, the Bratislava Regional Government. However, the increase in real estate values and the political changes in the institution are limiting the possibility of buying the Cvernovka complex.

The initiatives hope to push forward in their efforts to innovate their operations focusing on new themes like ecology and climate transitions, or to continue to innovate within their specialist fields, like transcultural work. They want to improve their work of inclusion of local communities, re-establishing connections with their neighbourhoods and involving more local residents. They also want to increase their recognition by public institutions. Finally, all the initiatives strive towards the generation of better and more liveable cities.

The operations of these initiatives, their urban effects and their relations with urban governance structures leads us to the formulation of some key lessons. Besides the value of cultural activities in urban regeneration processes, the main interesting lesson is the central role of the public sphere in urban regeneration and in fostering innovations. As illustrated in other cases (Campagnari & Cancellieri, 2020; Cancellieri & Ostanel, 2014), the increase of the level of publicness in an urban area or in a specific building contributed to a large extent to its regeneration. In particular, this public dimension facilitates the bringing together of diverse people and groups.

A second lesson is that these initiatives face multiple structural difficulties and challenges, while the facilitating factors are often volatile and shifting. The emergence and consolidation of these processes is often the result of circumstantial strokes of luck rather than being the result of facilitating policies.

A third lesson, closely related to the focus of the EUREKA project, is that – while the management skills guiding these initiatives are mostly developed in practice - they still need further training to achieve full professionalisation. Coming from diverse artistic backgrounds, the members of the initiatives learned in practice how to manage the financial, human and spatial aspects of these processes. After a while, they feel they need external and direct training to consolidate and innovate their skills, having them recognised to help them become full professionals.

Secondary lessons are related to the need to develop collaborative networks operating at multiple scales and levels, policy lobbying and long-term strategies for the survival of these initiatives.

In conclusion, the lessons drawn from these initiatives are useful for the field of urban regeneration and innovation. In particular, the insights on their skills and their consolidation can provide useful directions for the EUREKA project in the development of the European curriculum on urban regeneration and innovation.
We would like to thank all the people that were available to help us conduct this research, through interviews and conversations:


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European Urban Regenerators Knowledge Alliance (EUREKA) is a three-year project set to create a multidisciplinary curriculum, designed jointly by universities, cultural practitioners and policy-makers, for a rising professional profile of urban innovators. The project will identify needed skills and develop a training that addresses the current job market’s demands across Europe.

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