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Supporting digital, green and creative transformation in regions

A practical guideline



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Capacity2Transform



Steinbeis
Europa Zentrum

Clémentine Roth (Lead author)
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creative transformation in regions

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List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CCSI	Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries
DGC	Digital, Green and Creative
EU	European Union
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SME	Small- and Medium-sized Enterprise
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

1 Introduction

The Capacity2Transform project addressed the pressing challenges faced by companies across central Europe, namely the dual pressure of digitalisation and the transition to environmentally sustainable practices, both of which are essential for future competitiveness and resilience. Companies – especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – face multiple, overlapping transitions: digital, green, social, and cultural. Navigating these transitions requires more than technical expertise. It demands cross-sector collaboration, creativity, and the ability to rethink existing business models. The green and digital transitions, in particular, call for new skills, new partnerships, and new mindsets.

This is where the Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSI) play a powerful role. CCSI bring fresh perspectives, creative ways of working, and practical problem-solving approaches that open up new ways to tackle complex regional challenges, e.g. that help find new and effective solutions. Despite this, they remain underrecognised as drivers of innovation and sustainable transformation.

At the same time, a lack of skills and limited cooperation between people and organisations across sectors slow down innovation and the shift to more sustainable practices. Europe's transitions increasingly depend on strengthening Digital, Green, and Entrepreneurial (DGE) competences – not only among companies, but across entire regional ecosystems. **What is needed today is the ability to collaborate across sectors, mobilise diverse competences, and create the conditions for long-term, place-based change.**

The project main objective was twofold: 1) to empower SMEs in the tourism and CCSI sector to deliver innovative digital, creative, and sustainable solutions, and 2) to position CCSI as catalysts for broader economic transformation across the European Union (EU). Capacity2Transform addressed these issues by helping SMEs and CCSI embrace digital, green, and creative approaches, build sustainable business models, and foster collaborations that open new opportunities for innovation and growth. Unlocking the potential of the cultural and creative sector requires enabling businesses to accept it as a key partner for innovation and ideally bring it into their core business rather than using it as an add-on.

To achieve these aims, the Capacity2Transform project developed an **innovative methodology** that encourages cross-sectoral collaboration and knowledge exchange. The methodology developed and tested in this project is called **Digital, Green and Creative (DGC) transformation**. **It is the process of reshaping regional economies and individual organisations by integrating digital, green and creative competences into their innovation ecosystems and into their core business models**. It involves embedding these competences and skills into strategies¹, collaboration models, support structures, and everyday business practices to enable sustainable, inclusive and cross-sectoral innovation.

Capacity2Transform fostered the integration of creative thinking and digital technologies into traditional business models, supporting the co-development of sustainable and future-oriented practices. **A core element of the methodology is the implementation of capacity-building and co-creation programmes**, where participating SMEs and creative professionals work together to develop and test new solutions in real-world settings. In the frame of the project, such pilot programmes were implemented in each participating region (in Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia and Slovenia). They can serve as practical demonstrations of the project's approach. We provide concrete examples from the implemented programmes to illustrate this guideline.

This guideline aims to inspire and guide other regional ecosystems to follow and use our methodology. Indeed, we aim to facilitate the wider adoption of transformative practices thereby validating the transferability of Capacity2Transform' DGC methodology.

The book is structured to guide readers step by step through the logic and practice of the DGC transformation approach. It begins by outlining the broader context (see Section 2) in which the Capacity2Transform project operated, highlighting the challenges faced by the tourism sector and the untapped potential of the cultural and creative sectors and industries (CCSI). It then introduces the objectives and core principles of the Digital, Green and Creative (DGC) transformation, explaining why combining these three dimensions is essential for sustainable and future-oriented development (see Section 3).

¹ When we speak about embedding DGC competences into strategies, we primarily refer to regional policy and innovation strategies (like Smart Specialisation Strategies – S3), which then support and influence the transformation of business strategies within SMEs and CCSI.

Building on this foundation, the guideline sets out what business support organisations, CCSI and public authorities can do to prepare the ground for DGC transformation in their region, i.e. create favourable conditions by understanding their local ecosystem, engaging stakeholders and strengthening capacities (see Section 4).

It then describes how to make DGC transformation happen in practice, detailing the three key working principles – upskilling, peer exchange and co-creation – with concrete examples (see Section 5). Each principle is translated into concrete actions, tools and methods that regional ecosystems can adopt. Finally, the guideline provides a synthesis including a practical timeline illustrating how the methodology can be implemented in a real regional context (see Section 6). The Final section (see Section 7) draws conclusions and highlight eight key lessons.

2 Context

The tourism sector is one of the EU’s major economic and social pillars, yet in recent years it has been shaken by multiple crises. The 2022 Tourism Trends and Policies report of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic exposed structural weaknesses that had been building for years, from labour shortages to low digital readiness (OECD, 2022). These vulnerabilities were further aggravated by the economic consequences of Russia’s war against Ukraine, which intensified energy as well as operational costs. Many tourism enterprises – especially SMEs – are now struggling to remain viable amid rising prices, workforce gaps, and declining resilience. These pressures make it difficult for businesses not only to recover in the short term but also to remain competitive in the long run.

At the same time, tourism companies face several overlapping transitions. Digitalisation, climate action, demographic change, and shifting visitor expectations are reshaping the way tourism products are designed and delivered. Managing such simultaneous and additionally interdependent, complex transitions requires far more than technical know-how (European Commission, 2021). Businesses need the ability to rethink their models, explore new forms of collaboration, and adopt

mindsets that support continuous innovation and adaptation. The green and digital transitions, in particular, demand new forms of cooperation, creativity, and both the willingness and the capacity to work with partners outside one's own sector.

Across the EU, however, deep skills gaps and structural weaknesses in regional ecosystems continue to slow down progress. Many regions lack coordinated support structures that would help SMEs navigate the green and digital transitions. The sector's future competitiveness depends on strengthening digital, green, and entrepreneurial competences throughout the entire ecosystem – not just within individual businesses. Yet fragmentation remains common: Policies related to sustainability, cultural development, digitalisation, and tourism often operate in parallel rather than in synergy, leaving SMEs without a clear pathway for transformation. Many SMEs lack human resources, access to funding and practical support, and they often struggle to identify the right training tools for them among the many scattered initiatives available. Even though the European Commission has invested heavily in programmes such as the Single Market Programme to support SMEs in their transformation, the reality is that smaller businesses frequently lack the financial, human, or technical resources required to make full use of these opportunities.

As mentioned in the introduction, the Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSI) play a particularly important but often underrecognised and underused role. Reports show how creative sectors drive innovation, experimentation, and behavioural change across industries (UNESCO, 2021; Voices of Culture, 2023).² CCSI are known for their agility, openness to experimentation, and distinctive ways of approaching problems. They contribute not only artistic value but also practical tools for problem-solving, user experience design, storytelling, and digital content development. These capabilities are increasingly relevant for tourism, where visitors expect meaningful, memorable, and digitally enriched experiences. When CCSI collaborate with tourism actors, they can help generate fresh ideas, support the adoption of new technologies, and inspire more sustainable products and experiences.

2 The Brainstorming report of Voices of Culture synthesises the results of a brainstorming session organised through the Voices of Culture process, a structured Dialogue between the European Commission and the cultural sector represented by more than 30 people affiliated to cultural associations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other bodies.

However, CCSI often remain marginalised in regional and national transformation strategies and face inconsistent public support as well as limited access to funding for green and digital activities. As the Brainstorming report emphasises, funds earmarked for sustainability and digitalisation are still too often channelled toward traditional industries, leaving CCSI under-resourced despite their clear potential to contribute to system change. As a result, their transformative potential remains largely untapped.

These trends point to the need for a more integrated and collaborative approach – one that brings together tourism actors, CCSI, and regional support organisations around a common agenda. Capacity building is central to this effort, but it must reach beyond conventional training formats. Traditional capacity building often focuses on transferring specific technical skills. What we need today is the ability to build networks, foster collaboration across sectors, and equip people with the tools and confidence to experiment, co-create, and develop future-proof business models. In other words, regions must develop not only capacity building, but capacity for transformation.

This shift requires an approach that deliberately combines digital, green, and creative competences and embeds them within regional innovation ecosystems. It involves enabling SMEs to work alongside CCSI, giving them structured opportunities to create and test new ideas, and providing the methodological and policy support needed to sustain long-term change. Only by bringing these elements together can regions create the conditions for resilient, sustainable, and inclusive tourism development.

3 Objectives of DGC transformation

The Capacity2Transform project responds to this need through its Digital, Green and Creative (DGC) transformation approach. The project recognises that current challenges cannot be addressed in isolation and that genuine transformation emerges when digital technologies, sustainable practices, and creative thinking reinforce one another. Brought together they can help regions, SMEs, and creative actors develop solutions that are both innovative and practical.

Through its capacity-building programmes and co-creation activities, Capacity2Transform enabled SMEs and creative professionals to work side by side, designing and testing new ideas and approaches. This collaboration helped companies adopt digital tools, integrate sustainability into their operations, and explore new (digital) ways of engaging visitors and local communities. It also strengthened cooperation between sectors that traditionally operate separately, ensuring that innovation stays connected to real regional needs and realities.

The rationale behind the Capacity2Transform methodology is simple: The tourism sector in the EU will only become more resilient and competitive if actors learn to work across boundaries and if creativity becomes a central part of the green and digital transitions. Traditional approaches – where one actor provides a service and the other receives it – are no longer enough. We need a shared process where everyone contributes to the solution.

The DGC transformation strategy therefore aims to empower local SMEs to navigate the digital and green transitions with confidence, while helping public authorities and business support organisations build regional entrepreneurial environments that support Digital, Green and Creative ecosystems. These ecosystems rely on the combined skills of business support organisations, creative professionals, technology experts, and SMEs themselves. In many places, such collaboration does not happen naturally, which is why Capacity2Transform created structured processes to bring these actors together.

Digital and green transitions are more than technical upgrades; they require new behaviours, new working methods, and in many cases, the replacement of long-standing habits and mindsets. These shifts can be difficult and often meet resistance. Creativity plays a crucial role here: It helps people look at problems differently, imagine alternatives, and design changes that are easier to adopt because they are human-centred and meaningful.

Capacity2Transform's goal is therefore to strengthen local skills and integrate creativity into the heart of transformation processes. Co-creation sessions allow SMEs, CCSI and business support organisations to explore challenges together, understand each other's perspectives, and develop joint solutions. By establishing CCSI as permanent partners in innovation rather than occasional contributors the

project supported the development of new business models that are agile, sustainable, and better aligned with user needs.

Building these skills across SMEs, business support organisations and CCSI is essential. When actors learn together, trust grows, coordination improves, and the entire ecosystem becomes more capable of dealing with uncertainty and profound change. Sharing knowledge, exchanging experiences, and using practical transformation tools further supports this process and increases the chances that solutions will be implemented successfully.

At its core, the DGC transformation concept supports the creation of an environment where collaboration replaces isolated efforts, and co-creation replaces negotiation. Capacity2Transform's DGC approach aims to build ecosystems where digital skills, sustainable thinking, and creative methods come together to help SMEs innovate, grow, and adapt. By strengthening the abilities of people and organisations, and by fostering genuine cross-sector collaboration, the project laid the groundwork for (tourism) regions that are more resilient, more inventive, and better prepared for the future.

To sum it up, Capacity2Transform's Digital-Green-Creative transformation concept:

- **Supports cross-sector collaboration:** It brings SMEs, business support organisations, CCSI and digital/green experts together, allowing them to learn from each other and develop practical solutions for the digital-green transition together.
- **Redefines the role of business support organisations and CCSI as active partners in innovation:** They co-design business concepts and strengthen the knowledge and skills needed for long-term transformation.
- **Replaces traditional top-down processes with co-creation:** All stakeholders contribute ideas, perspectives and expertise, leading to joint solutions that are realistic, human-centred and easier to implement – very different from the usual fragmented approach to digital and green change.

4 Preparing the ground for DGC transformation

4.1 Understanding the local entrepreneurial environment

Laying the foundations for a successful DGC transformation begins with understanding the local environment in which it will unfold. The first step is to **map the regional ecosystem and identify the actors who influence, or are influenced by, digital, green and creative developments**. This includes SMEs, business support organisations, technology experts, creative professionals, public authorities and other organisations that shape the local entrepreneurial landscape. Ecosystem mapping helps identify local actors, existing connections and missing actors or links in the local entrepreneurial environment.

By gaining a clear picture of who is involved, regions can better anticipate where opportunities, barriers and synergies are likely to emerge and whom to take on board.

At this stage, the Power/Interest matrix – also called Mendelow matrix based on A. L. Mendelow’s original stakeholder scanning framework (Mendelow, 1981) – becomes a valuable tool. It helps assess how much influence each stakeholder has over the transformation process and how strong their interest is in participating. Using this matrix early on makes it easier to prioritise engagement efforts and identify where support, alignment or motivation may be needed.

In the Power/Interest Matrix, stakeholders are categorised based on their power/influence and interest in a project (in our case, it would be the DGC transformation project). This matrix helps in determining the level of engagement required for each stakeholder group and in adopting the adequate engagement effort and strategy.

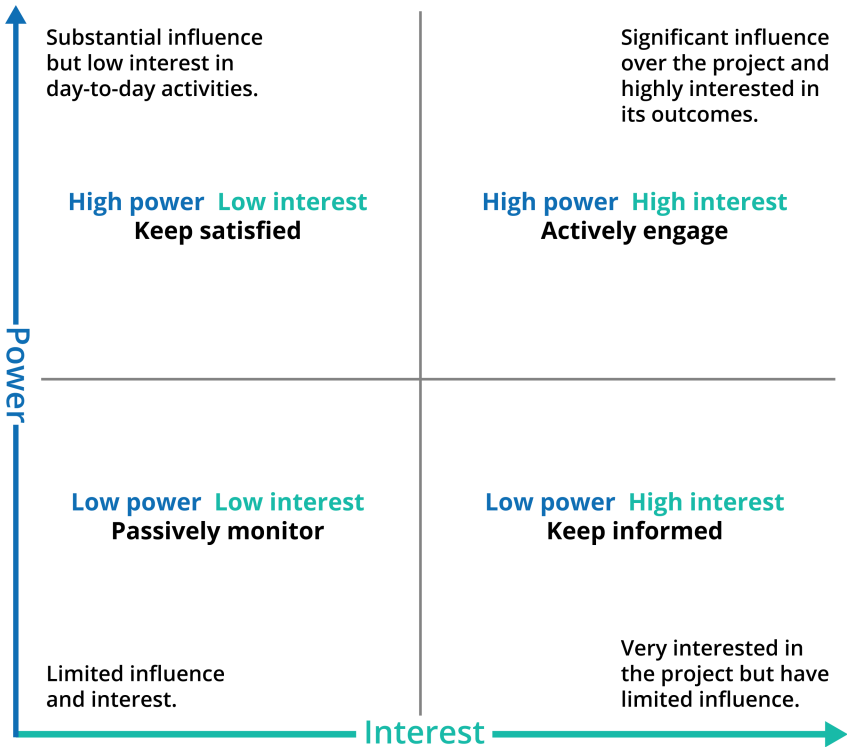


Figure 1: The Power/Interest Matrix (Authors: Clémentine Roth & Katharina Riedmüller based on the matrix by A. L. Mendelow)

4.2 Engaging with stakeholders

Once the landscape is mapped and stakeholders categorised, the next step is to **engage these actors and clarify the role they can play in the transition**. Stakeholders will be engaged differently depending on their position in the Power/Interest matrix as can be seen in Table 1 below.

Power/Interest level	Engagement effort	Engagement strategy
High Power, High Interest	Actively engage	Frequent and detailed communication, involvement in key decisions
High Power, Low Interest	Keep satisfied	Periodic updates and assurance that their interests are being considered
Low Power, High Interest	Keep informed	Regular updates and opportunities for input to keep them engaged
Low Power, Low Interest	Passively monitor	Minimal engagement required, but attitudes should be monitored as they may become more influential over time

Table 1: Differentiated engagement strategies of stakeholders based on the Power/Interest matrix (Author: Claudia Baracchini)

Within the Capacity2Transform project, stakeholders were also grouped according to their function:

- *problem owners* (companies) who face concrete transformation challenges,
- *technology experts* who bring digital or green knowledge,
- *creative professionals* who contribute new perspectives and methods, and
- *business support organisations* who anchor and facilitate collaboration.

This categorisation was used to ensure a diversity of actors (cross-sector collaboration), perspectives and competences in our pilot programmes.

4.3 Strengthening capacities

Once the ecosystem is mapped and stakeholders are engaged, we move on to strengthening capacities. This involves designing and providing tailored upskilling programmes and support tools for local actors. Training, mentoring and practical resources help participants build the digital, green and creative competences required for taking part in joint problem-solving and co-creation activities. The goal is not only to enhance individual skills but also to build a shared understanding and a common language for cooperation, which are key elements for sustainable transformation.

To support this process the Capacity2Transform project established the Knowledge Factory, a peer-learning online platform that provides structured, expert-sup-

ported learning environments³. The Knowledge Factory is based on a transnational community of business support organisations, researchers and practitioners committed to strengthening local entrepreneurial environments. It acts as a platform for sharing knowledge, exchanging experiences and spreading the support tools identified and used within Capacity2Transform. The Knowledge Factory helps design and implement effective upskilling programmes, develop both technical and soft skills, and access materials and results produced throughout the project.

In the frame of Capacity2Transform, we carried out pre- and post-assessments. The pre-assessment phase involved a comprehensive self-assessment questionnaire, available online through Qualtrics.⁴ This questionnaire evaluated participants' existing competence levels in digital, green, and entrepreneurial areas. The results provided a baseline for measuring progress. After completing the upskilling activities, participants retook the self-assessment questionnaire. This post-assessment evaluation measured the improvements in competences, offering quantitative metrics and qualitative insights into the effectiveness of the training programmes. The pre-post self-assessment results indicate a clear and consistent increase in participants' perceived competences following the Capacity2Transform upskilling activities. Based on the matched sample (n=150), average competence indices improved across all three clusters, with gains of +0.31 (Digital), +0.38 (Green), and +0.39 (Entrepreneurial), suggesting a moderate but meaningful positive shift in skills and confidence. The strongest improvements were observed in areas that are typically harder to develop through short interventions such as digital problem solving, envisioning sustainable futures, and mobilising resources for entrepreneurial action, which aligns well with the project's DGC upskilling goals. At the same time, a smaller share of participants reported lower scores post-intervention (notably in some digital areas such as safety), which likely reflects a more realistic self-evaluation after engaging with the complexity of the topics rather than an actual loss of competence. Overall, the assessment provides robust evidence that the project's learning offer strengthened DGC competences and helped participants better understand – and more accurately position – their skills.

³ See: <https://capacitytotransform.eu/> (Knowledge Factory).

⁴ The pre-assessment questionnaire can be accessed at: <https://capacitytotransform.eu/tool/dgc-competence-measurement-toolkit>.

In the following boxes we summarise what DGC transformation concretely means for different actors (public authorities, CCSI and business support organisations) and what role they can play in this process.

What the DGC transformation means for public authorities

Public authorities play a key role in creating the conditions for DGC transformation. They help shape the policy environment, ensure alignment across sectors and make sure that SMEs and creative professionals have access to the support they need.

Your role in the DGC process includes:

- **Creating an enabling environment:** Align local and regional policies so that digitalisation, sustainability and creativity reinforce one another.
- **Supporting ecosystem collaboration:** Help bring SMEs, CCSI, business support organisations, education providers and other stakeholders around one table.
- **Providing visibility and legitimacy:** Your involvement signals that the DGC transformation is important and designed to last.
- **Mobilising resources:** Facilitate access to funding, infrastructure and support programmes that make experimentation possible.
- **Removing barriers:** Identify administrative, regulatory or structural obstacles that prevent cross-sector cooperation and work to reduce them.

What the DGC transformation means for CCSI

Creative professionals bring new perspectives and methods that stimulate innovation and help make digital and green transitions more human-centred, engaging and effective. At the same time, the DGC transformation is also a learning opportunity for CCSI. By working closely with SMEs, business support organisations and public actors, creative professionals can better understand business models, industry needs, incentives and constraints. This mutual learning strengthens collaboration and helps CCSI develop solutions that are both creative and relevant to real business challenges.

Your role in the DGC process includes:

- **Introducing creative methods:** Bring tools such as design thinking, prototyping, storytelling or user-centred design into the process.
- **Reframing challenges:** Help teams look at problems from different angles and explore alternative solutions.
- **Bridging communication gaps:** Translate complex topics into understandable experiences, visuals or narratives.
- **Co-designing solutions:** Work alongside SMEs and business support organisations to develop ideas that are both innovative and feasible.
- **Learning from other sectors:** Use collaboration to better understand business needs and market realities, strengthening your own business intelligence and impact.

What the DGC transformation means for business support organisations

Business support organisations are central to making DGC transformation work on the ground. They connect actors, coordinate activities and help turn ideas into practical actions.

Your role in the DGC process includes:

- **Facilitating stakeholder engagement:** Help identify, reach out to and motivate SMEs, CCSI and other relevant actors.
- **Organising learning opportunities:** Host or coordinate upskilling activities, peer exchanges and mentoring sessions.
- **Supporting co-creation:** Act as neutral facilitators during workshops, ensuring that all voices are heard and the process stays productive.
- **Enabling knowledge transfer:** Share tools and encourage the exchange of practical solutions.

5 Making DGC transformation happen

Our concept of DGC transformation is based on the following three working principles: 1) Upskilling – strengthening local competencies; 2) Peer-exchange; 3) Co-creation.

Each principle will now be detailed or “operationalised”. We provide for each principle a concrete example from our regional pilot programmes. These examples, which serve as illustrations, are shown in coloured boxes. Since each partner region tailored its activities according to local needs, the respective upskilling programmes varied greatly in terms of formats and focus.

5.1 Upskilling – strengthening local competencies

Upskilling activities aim to equip participants with the necessary skills, tools, and methodologies to drive change. In the frame of the Capacity2Transform project, the upskilling aspect corresponded to the first of two programmes that each partner region implemented. Our activities focused on strengthening the regional ecosystem actors around SMEs (public authorities, business support organisations, and creative professionals) because **systemic transformation requires better but also aligned capacities across ecosystem actors, not just stronger SMEs.**

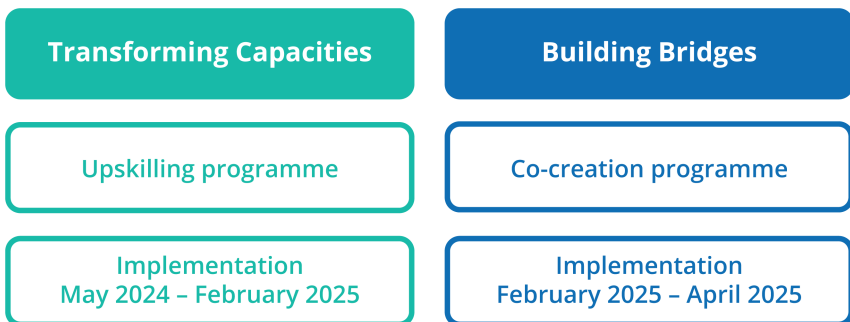


Figure 2: Capacity2Transform pilot programmes for transformation
(Author: Clémentine Roth)

Our upskilling actions followed a structured approach divided into **three main phases: 1) planning and preparation, 2) execution and 3) evaluation**. By focusing on detailed planning, resource mobilisation, and continuous evaluation, sustainable and replicable outcomes can be achieved.

PHASE 1: Planning and preparation

Stakeholder engagement and needs assessment

Objective: Engage relevant stakeholders, including technology experts, creative professionals, and business support professionals throughout the planning process to ensure their needs and perspectives are considered (for the identification process, see Sections 4.1 and 4.2).

Activities: Conduct surveys, interviews, and focus groups to assess the specific needs and expectations of stakeholders. This helps in designing upskilling programmes and actions that are tailored to local needs. Establish clear communication channels to keep stakeholders informed, involved but first and foremost actively engaged.

Defining upskilling action objectives and outcomes

Objective: Establish clear objectives and expected outcomes for each upskilling action.

Activities: Organise collaborative sessions with stakeholders to define measurable objectives and desired outcomes. Establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be able to monitor progress and measure success.

Developing a detailed action plan

Objective: Create a comprehensive action plan that outlines the steps, resources, and timeline for implementing the upskilling actions.

Activities: Plan task breakdowns, responsibilities, resource allocation, and timeline. To design effective upskilling programmes, you can check the methodologies

outlined in our deliverable D2.1.2.⁵ Use project management tools to create and track timelines, ensuring that all tasks are completed on schedule.

Identify potential risks and develop mitigation strategies to address them proactively. Regularly review and update the risk management plan to ensure it remains relevant and effective.

Resource mobilisation

Objective: Mobilise the necessary (human and financial) resources to ensure successful implementation.

Activities: Organise a resource mobilisation workshop with key stakeholders (e.g. finance teams, trainers) to identify available human and financial resources. Allocate resources efficiently, ensuring that all necessary financial, human, and technical resources are available. Monitor resource usage and adjust allocations as needed to address emerging needs and challenges.

PHASE 2: Execution

The second phase centres on the actual execution of upskilling actions. This phase involves deploying the planned activities and monitoring progress.

Implementation of upskilling actions

Objective: Execute the planned upskilling actions, ensuring adherence to the defined objectives & timeline.

Activities: Carry out the upskilling actions according to the detailed action plan.

Monitoring and tracking progress

Objective: Continuously monitor the progress of upskilling actions to ensure they are on track; adjust if necessary.

⁵ The deliverable D2.1.2 is available at: <https://www.interreg-central.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Transnational-PILOT-Action-Plan-for-Strengthening-Skills-and-Guidelines-for-Transforming-Capacities.pdf>.

Activities: Use monitoring tools and frameworks to track the progress of each upskilling action. Regularly collect data and feedback from stakeholders to identify any issues or areas for improvement.

PHASE 3: Evaluation

The third phase centres on assessing impact and disseminating results. The evaluation component is crucial as it provides insights into the effectiveness of the actions and highlights areas for improvement, ensuring that the project achieves its desired outcomes.

Evaluation and impact assessment

Objective: Assess the impact and effectiveness of upskilling actions; identify successes & areas for improvement.

Activities: Conduct pre-assessment and post-assessment evaluations (see Section 4.3). Analyse the data to measure the outcomes against the established objectives. In case upskilling actions should take place again, identify areas for improvement and prepare recommendations for future actions.

Efficiency, effectiveness, and engagement tips

Here are eight practical tips to maximise the impact of your upskilling activities (originally developed in our deliverable D2.1.2). You can also have a look at our Media Factory which provides freely available resources including best practices and innovative solutions in the fields of green technology, digital transition, sustainable development.⁶

⁶ See <https://digital-green-creative.eu/> (Media Factory).

#	Tip	What to do and how to
1	Leverage technology	Use digital tools and platforms to enhance the delivery and management of training programmes Incorporate e-learning modules, virtual workshops & online collaboration tools to facilitate remote participation
2	Interactive and engaging content	Design training programmes that are interactive and engaging to maintain participant interest and motivation Use multimedia, simulations & hands-on activities to create a dynamic learning environment
3	Regular monitoring and feedback	Implement continuous monitoring and feedback mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of training activities Use tools like Mentimeter, Slido & Quiz to collect real-time feedback and make necessary adjustments
4	Flexibility & adaptability	Be flexible and adaptable in your approach, allowing for changes and adjustments based on feedback and evolving needs Encourage an iterative process where training programmes are continuously improved based on participant feedback and assessment results
5	Capacity building for trainers	Invest in the training and development of trainers to ensure they have the skills and knowledge needed to deliver effective training programmes Provide ongoing support and professional development opportunities for trainers
6	Foster collaboration	Promote collaboration among participants through group activities, peer learning, and networking opportunities Encourage the sharing of best practices and experiences to enhance collective learning and innovation
7	Sustainability and long-term impact	Design training programmes with sustainability in mind, ensuring that the skills and knowledge gained can be applied and maintained over the long term Develop strategies to support the ongoing development and application of skills beyond the initial training period Support knowledge transfer within organisations for long-term use
8	Evaluation & continuous improvement	Conduct regular evaluations to measure the impact of training programmes and identify areas for improvement Use evaluation results to refine and enhance future training activities, ensuring they remain relevant and effective

Table 2: Practical tips to maximise the impact of upskilling activities
(Author: Claudia Baracchini)

Example of upskilling programme – the Slovenian case

In Slovenia, the regional upskilling programme notably supported creative collaboration for sustainable tourism through a **speed-dating event and 9 thematic workshops** (e.g. on Artificial Intelligence (AI), storytelling, branding, sustainability). The different activities, which built on each other and span over several weeks, led to visible skills upgrading but also stronger cross-sector ties. Skills upgrading and cross-sector collaboration were evidenced by the immediate application of digital, creative and sustainability tools in participants' tourism offers, alongside the initiation of joint concepts, informal partnerships, and continued cooperation between tourism SMEs, CCSI and business support organisations.

The flagship “**Innovate Together**” **Speed Dating event** played a catalytic role in identifying key digital, green and creative competence gaps while accelerating collaboration between tourism entrepreneurs and creative professionals. Facilitated by regional **business support organisations**, the event created a structured environment where CCSI and SMEs could meet, exchange needs, and explore collaboration opportunities. Through short, targeted conversations, participants uncovered shared challenges related to digital presence, storytelling, visual communication, branding, and sustainability communication. The exchanges also sparked several early-stage solution ideas, ranging from AI-based visitor support tools to interactive digital information formats and new cross-sector partnerships, which later shaped the design and focus of the subsequent training and workshop programme.

Building on the Speed Dating insights, business support organisations worked with CCSI and SMEs to **co-create a focused workshop programme** addressing the priority gaps identified earlier. Through short, hands-on sessions on Canva & AI, storytelling, branding, event design, photography, web development, and sustainability communication, **participants strengthened their digital, green and creative skills** while **deepening cooperation across sectors**. The programme provided practical tools that immediately improved the visibility and communication of tourism providers and reinforced the role of CCSI as key partners in the region's digital-green transformation.

5.2 Peer exchange

Peer exchanges provide a collaborative space where individuals or organisations with similar interests or challenges come together to share knowledge, experiences and practical insights on a particular topic. They are designed to support mutual learning and professional growth, allowing participants to benefit from the collective expertise and experience of the group. This makes them a central element of the DGC transformation process, as they turn individual learning into a shared resource.

In these sessions, SMEs, creative professionals, business support organisations and other local actors reflect together on what they have learned and how they apply new ideas in their daily work. By comparing approaches, discussing what worked and what did not, and talking openly about difficulties, participants help each other avoid common mistakes and discover practical solutions. This kind of honest, experience-based knowledge transfer makes the digital and green transition feel like a shared effort rather than a task each organisation must face alone.

Peer exchanges can also connect regions with one another. When participants hear how peers in other countries tackle similar challenges, they gain fresh perspectives and inspiration. This interregional exchange broadens the pool of knowledge available to local ecosystems and makes it easier to adapt successful practices to/from different regional contexts.

Overall, peer exchanges play a crucial role in strengthening DGC competences. They help SMEs and CCSI apply digital, green and creative skills in real situations and build the soft skills needed for collaboration. By fostering trust, shared understanding as well as cross-actor and cross-regional learning, they support the wider ecosystem and increase the chances that DGC practices will continue to grow and evolve.

In practical terms, peer exchanges usually take the form of group discussions, either locally or with participants from different regions. Whether small and community-based or broader and international, they create a living network of people who learn from one another and keep the DGC transformation moving forward.

Example of peer exchange – the German case (Baden-Württemberg)

Steinbeis Europa Zentrum organised a 3-hour online **peer exchange on sustainable touristic wine destinations**.

The event gathered 60 participants from 13 European countries, working in sustainable tourism, wine tourism, destination management organisations, as well as in education, economic development and public administration. During the peer exchange, participants shared experiences and strategies, and learnt about certifications that support greater sustainability in tourism and wine tourism.

Three EU-funded projects (Capacity2Transform⁷, #RomansWineDanube⁸, and Green Vineyards⁹) presented their respective activities to support local communities and businesses in making viticulture, winemaking, and tourism more sustainable. Two wineries and a sustainable tourism designer shared success stories and best practices from Baden-Württemberg, Slovakia, and Italy. In addition, the certified cultural route *Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route* was introduced, together with its upcoming wine festival activities¹⁰. Finally, two companies that offer sustainability certifications for the tourism sector presented their services.

Here is the central message that crystallised from the exchange: Strengthen the unique cultures of each region through local, distinctive, high-quality tourism offerings and reinforce them through regional and international partnerships!

5.3 Co-creation

In Capacity2Transform project, co-creation was at the heart of the second programme called *Building Bridges* (see Figure 2). While the first programme focused

7 Project website: <https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/capacity2transform/>.

8 Project website: <https://interreg-danube.eu/projects/romanswinedanube>.

9 Project website: <https://greenvineyards.eu/>.

10 For more information about this certified cultural route, see: <https://romanemperorsroute.org/>.

on upskilling, this one focused on bringing people together to solve real problems. The idea behind co-creation is simple: When people with different backgrounds work together, they see problems from different angles and can develop solutions that work for more than one group and that are normally out of the box for the respective actor. This makes co-creation a powerful tool for DGC transformation, where digital, green and creative perspectives all need to come together.

In the frame of the project, co-creation took place mainly through workshops and group mentoring. In the case of the co-creation programmes, all partners followed the same methodology,¹¹ which included the use of tools and approaches such as Lightning Talks¹², 5W1H Problem Solving¹³ and User Personas¹⁴. These activities helped participants design new solutions, develop business models and learn how to collaborate effectively. Co-creation was not only about generating ideas, it was also a hands-on way to build soft skills such as teamwork, communication and facilitation. Because these workshops were based on real challenges rather than theoretical exercises, they also strengthened participants' capacity to address problems in their own organisations.

Each region began by identifying ten “worth-solving” problems, that is, challenges that mattered to local tourism and creative actors. From these, one or two key challenges were selected for deeper work. Multidisciplinary teams were then formed, bringing together SMEs, technical experts, and creative professionals. These teams worked through co-creation workshops, supported by three transnational online skills sessions that connected regions and encouraged shared learning (you can learn more about our building bridges pilot action results in our report D2.3.3¹⁵).

The outcomes of the co-creation workshops were concrete and diverse: Detailed new business models, solution concepts, video pitches and, perhaps most importantly, new relationships, new ways of thinking and new collaborations.

11 Project partners followed the methodology set out in our Guidelines for the Building Bridges PILOT action. Check it out if you are interested to know more about our co-creation workshop framework: <https://www.interreg-central.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Guidelines-for-Building-Bridges-PILOT.pdf>.

12 For a concise explanation of a lightning talk and preparation tips, you can check this guide: <https://virtualcoffee.io/assets/pdfs/lightning-talk-guide.pdf>.

13 For more information about the 5W1H Problem Solving tool, you can check the following resource: <https://citoolkit.com/articles/5w1h/>.

14 A user persona represents the target audience of a product or service. By looking for patterns or overlapping information in the data collected during the user research phase, we identify the key information for creating the personas. See for instance: <https://www.wowmakers.com/blog/user-persona/>.

15 The report on the Building Bridges pilot action (D2.3.3) is available at: <https://www.interreg-central.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Report-on-Building-Bridges-Pilot-Action.pdf>.

The co-creation process itself started with building a catalogue of challenges, collecting real issues from the field. Next came the selection and engagement of participants. Stakeholders who had provided challenges often became “challenge owners” and played a central role in shaping the solution. Partners ran a local open call to gather participants, ensuring a mix of skills, interests and backgrounds.

Finally, partners prepared their co-creation workshop. These workshops usually lasted two days and brought together groups of around eight people, each group working on one selected challenge. A facilitator guided the work, mentors supported the teams and challenge owners ensured that solutions remained relevant and feasible. Practical arrangements such as finding a suitable venue and preparing materials were also key to creating a productive and welcoming environment.

Through this structured yet flexible approach, co-creation became a practical method for testing new ideas, building trust and strengthening the capacity of regional ecosystems to work together on Digital, Green and Creative transformation. In Annex 1 you can find a two-day workshop structure.

Co-creation workshops aim to foster multi-stakeholder and cross-sector collaboration to develop innovative solutions addressing a selected challenge. To replicate such co-creation workshops, here are the main elements to take into account:

Identification of challenges

Objectives: Identify real, relevant challenges that matter to local stakeholders and are meaningful enough to drive a co-creation process.

Activities: Collect challenges from SMEs, CCSI and other actors, ensuring they reflect everyday problems, opportunities or local needs.

Selection of workshop participants

Objective: Select participants for the workshop to collaboratively develop innovative solutions.

Activities: To ensure a diverse and skilled participant pool you can execute a national open call, giving stakeholders the opportunity to choose a challenge, submit

possible solutions and to participate in the workshop. We recommend a group of max. eight people per challenge.

Preparation of the co-creation workshop

Objective: Organise a successful two-day workshop (recommended duration).

Activities: Secure a suitable venue (e.g. possibilities for breakout rooms, sound quality/soundproofing of the room), arrange catering, assign a facilitator to guide the workshop, engage mentors, ensure the presence of challenge owners, prepare any necessary workshop materials (e.g. business model canvas as listed in Annex 2 drawing on Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

Example of co-creation workshop – the Croatian case

Organised by the Split Development Agency (RAST) and the IRI Centre, the two-day co-creation session in Split focused on designing innovative, sustainable ways to support public green space maintenance during the city's busy summer season.

The outcome was a “Green Olympic”: A gamified, community-based program where Split's town districts compete in eco-friendly challenges like plant watering, garbage collection, and public engagement. Participants can earn points, rewards, and recognition, while top-performing districts receive investments in their local green infrastructure.

The concept combines digital tools, volunteer action, and civic pride to create a replicable model for cities looking to strengthen public services through community involvement. This co-created solution is set to pilot in Split in the upcoming season.¹⁶

¹⁶ The video pitch is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuzEtnmkw8M>.

6 Synthesising DGC transformation process

In this section, we summarise the DGC transformation process and bring together the different elements and phases developed throughout the guideline. Figure 3 below graphically depicts our structured three-phased process for DGC transformation: **Preparation**, **Execution** and **Evaluation**.

Phase 1: Preparation (ca. 6 months)

In this first phase, the focus is on understanding the local entrepreneurial ecosystem. This phase includes:

- mapping stakeholders using the Power/Interest matrix (see Section 4.1);
- engaging stakeholders according to their categorisation (see Section 4.2);
- assessing needs and gaps (see Section 5.1 phase 1);
- designing a detailed action plan (see Section 5.1 phase 1);
- establishing KPIs to monitor progress and success (see Section 5.1 phase 1);
- mobilising the necessary human and financial resources (see Section 5.1 phase 1).

Phase 2: Execution (ca. 9 months)

The second phase focuses on rolling out the three working principles of DGC transformation: Upskilling, peer exchange and co-creation. It includes:

- implementing upskilling actions (see Section 5.1 phase 2);
- organising peer exchange (see Section 5.2);
- supporting co-creation (see Section 5.3);
- monitoring and tracking progress (see Section 5.1 phase 2);
- making use of our eight practical tips for efficiency, effectiveness and engagement (see Section 5.1).

Phase 3: Evaluation (ca. 6 months)

The third and last phase focuses on evaluating carried activities. It includes:

- assessing the impact and effectiveness of the actions (see Section 5.1 phase 3)
- identifying areas of improvement and adjusting the process (e.g. update training material or training format) (see Section 5.1 phase 3)

- disseminating results (see Section 5.1 phase 3)
- scaling up successful practices

Figure 3 graphically synthesises the DGC transformation process. It depicts the three phases, lists the key activities and provides an indicative timeframe based on Capacity2Transform project experience. Together, the phases form a continuous pathway that supports skills development, crosssector cooperation, and sustainable scaling of successful practices.

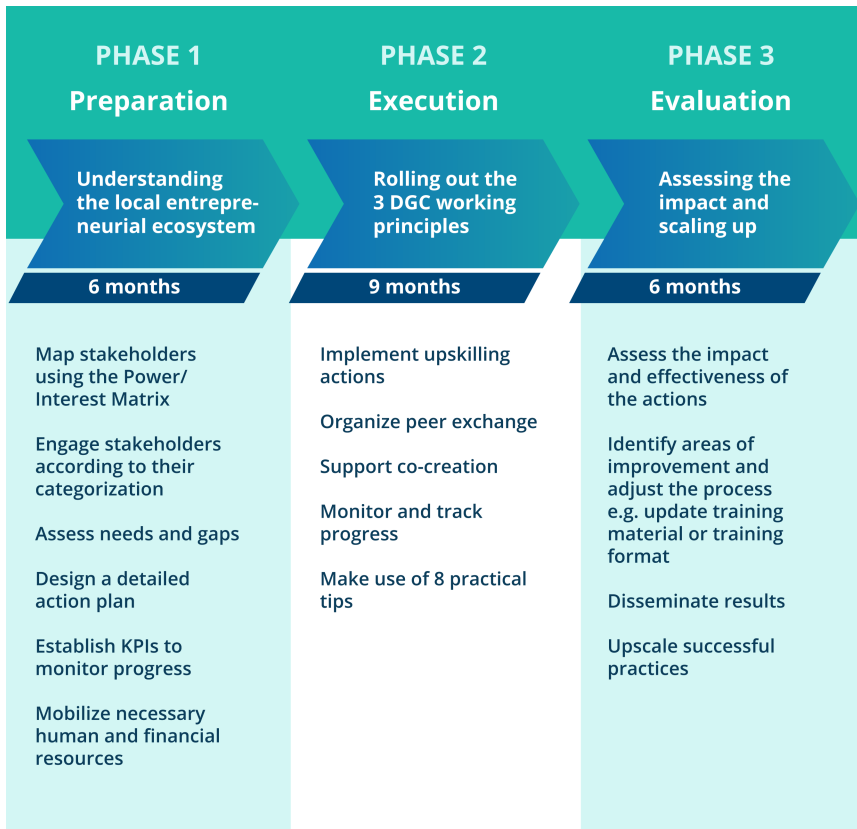


Figure 3: DGC transformation process (Authors: Clémentine Roth & Katharina Riedmüller)

7 Conclusion

This guideline has shown that the successful transformation of Europe's tourism sector – and more generally of Europe in general – depends on the integration of digital, green and creative competences. By encouraging collaboration between SMEs, CCSI and business support organisations and by placing creativity and innovation at the heart of capacity-building, the Capacity2Transform approach offers regions a practical and adaptable path toward sustainable and inclusive growth. The DGC transformation framework presented here provides concrete steps as well as tested tools and methods that companies, business support organisations, cultural and creative actors, and public authorities can use together to design, implement and scale their own transformation processes.

At its core, *capacity for transformation* means that a region has the ability and resources to continuously sense, respond and reinvent. It is collaborative rather than isolated, creative rather than prescriptive, and systemic rather than siloed. It focuses on mindsets and relationships as much as on skills. And it leads to new ideas, new partnerships and new business models that reflect local needs and future demands. The Capacity2Transform project demonstrated that this capacity can be built deliberately and/or consciously.

Across our regional pilot programmes, eight key lessons emerged that underline what truly supports DGC transformation.

1. **Transformation is relational:** When tourism, digital and creative actors work together, they create solutions none of them could build alone.
2. **Transformation needs safe spaces:** Co-creation workshops allowed participants to test ideas, make mistakes early and rethink their assumptions – something daily business rarely allows.
3. **Capacity building must be embedded in doing:** Learning stuck when participants applied them to real challenges.
4. **Real-world challenges activate entrepreneurial & sustainability learning:** When learning is tied to concrete problems, participants develop the entrepreneurial and sustainability competences they actually need – and learning becomes actionable.

5. **Creative methods accelerate DGE competence development:** The use of tools like design thinking, storytelling and prototyping sped up the acquisition of digital, green and entrepreneurial skills by making them tangible, easier to grasp and to apply.
6. **Creativity is a transformation accelerator:** Creative professionals introduced new methods and mindsets that helped SMEs overcome internal barriers.
7. **Regional ecosystems matter:** Aligned public support organisations and intermediaries support the scaling of transformation; without them, it remains local.
8. **Cross-sector collaboration builds resilience:** Bringing together SMEs, CCSI, public actors and experts strengthened their ability to adapt and innovate in uncertain environments.

Together, these lessons highlight that transformation is not a one-time effort but a continuous process of learning, collaboration and creativity. By embracing this approach, regions can build entrepreneurial ecosystems that are more resilient, more innovative and better prepared for the future.

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Annex 1: Co-creation workshop structure

Day 1: Challenge exploration and ideation

1. Introduction and orientation (1 hour)

- Welcome participants and mentors
- Provide an overview of the workshop objectives and agenda
- Reiterate the selected challenges and their importance

2. Challenge deep dive (2 hours)

- Groups meet with challenge owners to gain a deeper understanding of the selected challenges
- Mentors guide discussions to clarify requirements and expectations

3. Ideation and concept development (3 hours)

- Groups brainstorm potential solutions
- Mentors provide feedback and ensure alignment with Digital and Green Transformation goals

4. Initial concept presentation (1 hour)

- Each group presents their initial ideas for peer and mentor feedback

Day 2: Business model development and presentation

1. Introduction to business model template (1 hour)

- Facilitator introduces the business model template and explains its components (e.g., problem definition, solution, target audience, revenue model, implementation strategy)

2. Business model creation (4 hours)

- Groups work on refining their ideas and developing their business models with guidance from mentors

3. Final presentation preparation (2 hours)

- Groups prepare their final presentations, focusing on clarity and alignment with workshop objectives

4. Final presentations (1.5 hours)

- Each group presents their business model to the workshop audience, including mentors & facilitators
- Question&Answer (Q&A) and feedback session

Annex 2: Business Model Canvas

This Business Model Canvas is based on Alexander Osterwalder' and Yves Pigneur's canvas (2010) whose original template can be downloaded here: <https://www.strategyzer.com/library/the-business-model-canvas>. This version has been modified with the addition of a 10th segment "Impact and scalability". Figure 4 provides a graphical visualisation of the canvas.

1. Value Proposition

- What problem does the concept solve?
 - Describe the key issue in tourism or the creative sector that your solution addresses.
 - Highlight why this is a critical challenge for your target audience.
- Innovative offering:
 - Define the unique digital, green, or creative solution your concept provides.
 - Explain the key benefits for customers (e.g., enhanced experiences, sustainability, cost efficiency).

2. Customer segments

- Who are the target customers?
 - Identify specific customer groups (e.g., tourists, travel agencies, local communities, creative professionals).
 - Segment them by demographics, behavior, or needs.
- Key stakeholders:
 - Outline regional or local stakeholders impacted by or involved in the solution (e.g., governments, NGOs, local businesses).

3. Channels

- How will you reach customers?
 - Digital: Platforms like apps, websites, or social media;
 - Physical: Local hubs, exhibitions, or partnerships with tourism offices;
 - Creative: Storytelling, branding, and cultural events.
- Customer communication:
 - Define strategies for engaging with customers (e.g., newsletters, virtual events, regional workshops).

4. Customer relationships

- Type of engagement:
 - Self-service (e.g., booking platforms);
 - Personalised service (e.g., tailored itineraries);
 - Co-creation (e.g., involving customers in designing experiences).
- Retention strategies:
 - Loyalty programmes, exclusive offers, or community-building initiatives.

5. Revenue streams

- How will the concept generate revenue?
 - Direct: Subscription fees, pay-per-use, or one-time sales;
 - Indirect: Advertising, partnerships, or data monetisation;
 - Value-added services: Upselling eco-friendly or premium creative offerings.
- Pricing model:
 - Fixed pricing, dynamic pricing, or tiered subscription plans.

6. Key resources

- What do you need to deliver the solution?
 - Human: Experts in digital technologies, sustainability, or creative arts;
 - Financial: Seed funding, vouchers, or grants;
 - Physical: Equipment, venues, or regional infrastructure;
 - Intellectual: Proprietary technology, content libraries, or local know-how.

7. Key activities

- Core actions to implement the concept:
 - Product development (e.g., creating digital tools or eco-friendly designs);
 - Customer acquisition (e.g., marketing campaigns or regional outreach);
 - Maintenance (e.g., updating platforms, monitoring environmental impact).
- Adaptation and innovation:
 - Continuous improvement based on feedback and emerging trends.

8. Key partnerships

- Who will help deliver the solution?
 - Regional collaborators (e.g., local governments, tourist boards);
 - Technology providers (e.g., app developers, green tech companies);
 - Creative collaborators (e.g., artists, cultural organisations).

- Type of partnerships:
 - Strategic alliances, supplier relationships, or joint ventures.

9. Cost structure

- What are the major costs?
 - Fixed: Infrastructure, salaries, or licensing fees;
 - Variable: Marketing, travel, or event organisation.
- Cost optimisation:
 - Leveraging regional resources, automation, or public funding.

10. Impact and scalability

- How will the concept benefit the region and sector?
 - Environmental: Reduce carbon footprint, promote sustainable practices
 - Social: Foster local culture, create jobs, or enhance inclusivity
 - Economic: Boost tourism revenues, support regional SMEs
- Potential for scaling:
 - Can the solution be replicated in other regions or sectors?
 - What are the barriers to scale (e.g., infrastructure, regulation)?

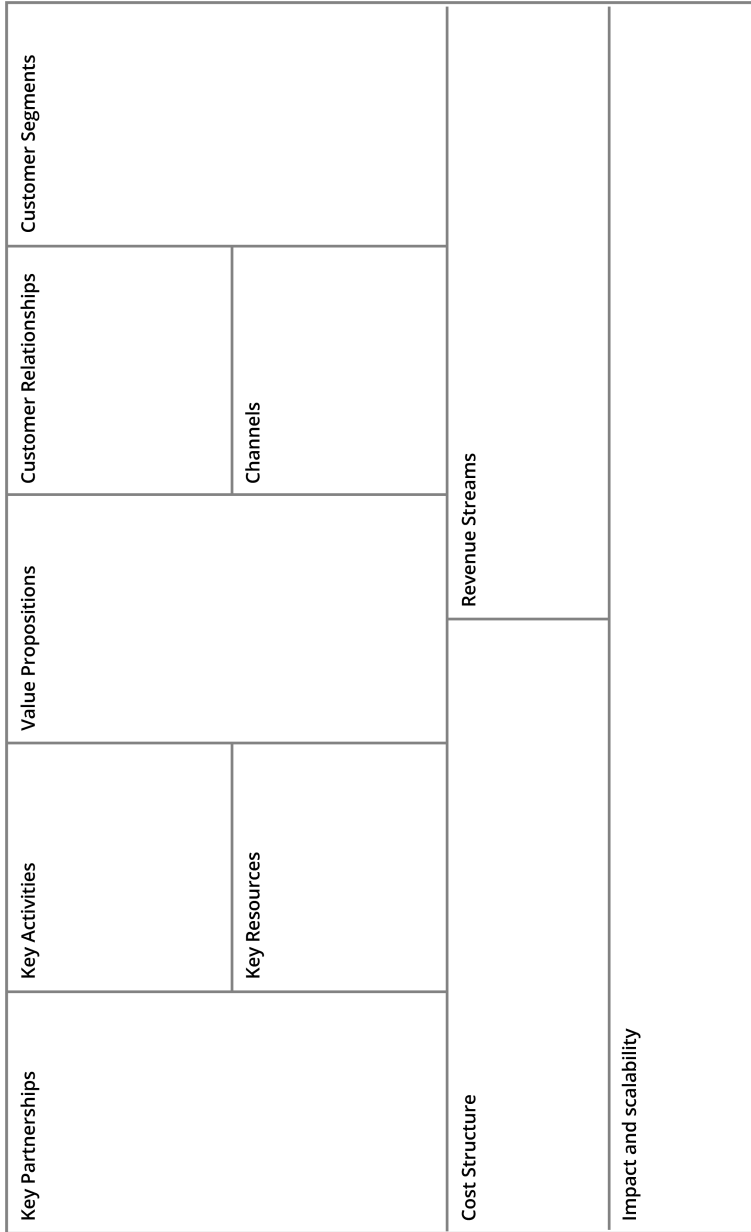


Figure 4: Business Model Canvas (Author: Katharina Riedmüller (drawing on Osterwalder' & Pigneur's template, 2010))

European companies face pressure to adapt to digital change while shifting towards more sustainable practices. These transitions are essential for future competitiveness and resilience but cannot be managed by businesses alone. They require the ability to mobilise diverse competences, collaborate across sectors and rethink how innovation happens at local level.

This is where the Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSI) make a difference. With their fresh perspectives, creative working methods, and hands-on problem-solving approaches, CCSI help unlock new solutions to complex economic and societal challenges.

This book presents an innovative and practical methodology to support Digital, Green and Creative (DGC) transformation. It shows how regions and organisations can strengthen their innovation ecosystems and core business models by combining digital, green, and creative competences. Through concrete examples, it explains how DGC transformation works in practice, based on three key principles: Upskilling, peer exchange, and co-creation.

The guideline takes readers step by step through the DGC approach and outlines what business support organisations, CCSI, and public authorities can do to create the right conditions for change in their region: From understanding their local ecosystem and engaging stakeholders to building lasting capacities.