

Unlocking Compact Cities

A comparative study of Ireland's THRIVE model



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Unlocking Compact Cities examines how planning, governance, funding and delivery arrangements can support integrated urban regeneration and compact growth. It uses Ireland's Town Centre First Heritage Revival Scheme (THRIVE) as its principal case and draws on evidence from Germany, Poland and the Netherlands to provide a wider European perspective. The report examines how the New European Bauhaus has been integrated into ERDF-supported regeneration in Ireland, what can be learned from six Irish THRIVE projects, the future relevance of THRIVE-type approaches to compact growth, vacancy and housing-supportive regeneration, and the lessons offered by the comparator countries. It closes with recommendations organised around four themes: investment readiness, integrated delivery, funding and programme support, and capacity building and learning.

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Unlocking Compact Cities

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Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by external experts. The information and views set out in it are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the URBACT programme, its Managing Authority, the European Commission, the Government of Ireland or the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Neither those bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report. Legislative proposals referred to in this report were under negotiation at the time of writing and are cited as proposals.

Foreword

During the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Planning Division of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), as the Ministry responsible for sustainable urban development and spatial planning in Ireland, undertook to invite research and discussions to add value in shaping EU urban and territorial policies and programmes aligned with national priorities.

The key Irish priority theme ‘Unlocking Compact Cities’ sought to examine State-led planning and delivery models for enabling investment in housing and infrastructure in complex sustainable urban development and regeneration projects, aligned with the ‘Compact Cities’ thematic partnership under the Urban Agenda for the EU and the EU Cities Policy. Within this theme, research focussed on studies of Ireland’s ERDF THRIVE model aligning New European Bauhaus policies to promote Integrated Sustainable Urban Development approaches in the reuse of existing buildings, and in the delivery of compact housing infill, aligned with domestic and other EU funding programmes. This research work has been undertaken in conjunction with and was funded by URBACT.

The importance of Integrated Sustainable Urban Development is established in Ireland’s national spatial planning policy, which seeks to promote compact development and brownfield regeneration. Urban development within existing settlement boundaries, with a complementary focus on urban centre investment, is a strategic objective of **Ireland’s national spatial strategy, the National Planning Framework (NPF), and Regional and Economic Strategies (RSEs)**, which collectively provide a spatial framework to co-ordinate and effectively direct population growth and urban development across Ireland’s regions.

Realising the full potential of urban areas, particularly urban centres, is a key aspect of the Urban Agenda for the EU. This study aims to contribute towards the relevant pillars of EU policymaking, specifically focusing on the use of multi-level policy frameworks to direct funding, while also identifying the appropriate application and sources of funding to unlock the compact growth and urban regeneration of cities of all sizes. The study contributes to enhancing the knowledge base and exchange of best practices, while capitalising on knowledge, experience and good practices of URBACT projects and cities.

DHLGH welcome the publication of the report on ‘Unlocking Compact Cities’ and would like to thank URBACT for undertaking this research study as a part of the Irish Presidency Programme.

Planning Division, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Abbreviations

Acronym	Full term
CGE	Compact Growth Enabling
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
EC	European Commission
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
FUA	Functional Urban Area
IAP	Integrated Action Plan
ISUD	Integrated Sustainable Urban Development
IUS	Integrated Urban Strategy
JTF	Just Transition Fund
LAs	Local Authorities
NEB	New European Bauhaus
NDP	National Development Plan
NPF	National Planning Framework
NPTI	National Practice Transfer Initiative
NWRA	Northern and Western Regional Assembly
OP	Operational Programme
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
SRA	Southern Regional Assembly
THRIVE	Town Centre First Heritage Revival Scheme
UAEU	Urban Agenda for the European Union
URDF	Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

Executive Summary

Unlocking Compact Cities examines how planning, governance, funding and delivery arrangements can support integrated urban regeneration and compact growth. It uses Ireland's Town Centre First Heritage Revival Scheme (THRIVE) as its principal case and draws on evidence from Germany, Poland and the Netherlands to provide a wider European perspective.

The study was commissioned by the URBACT IV Managing Authority in cooperation with Ireland's Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. It is intended to support policy discussion during the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union and wider consideration of future Cohesion Policy, the Multiannual Financial Framework, the New European Bauhaus and future URBACT programming.

The study examines four connected issues: how NEB has been integrated into ERDF-supported urban regeneration in Ireland; what can be learned from six Irish THRIVE projects; the future relevance of THRIVE-type approaches to compact growth, vacancy and housing-supportive regeneration; and the lessons that can be drawn from selected European comparators.

The evidence base combines policy and programme analysis, site visits and interviews for six THRIVE case studies in Cork, Limerick, Monaghan, Sligo, Longford and Dún Laoghaire, reflection sessions with Ireland's three Regional Assemblies, and comparative research covering Germany, Poland and the Netherlands. All six Irish cases progressed through the Strand 1–Strand 2 pathway. The study therefore provides particularly strong evidence on the role of funded preparation in moving projects from integrated strategy and project development towards capital delivery. Direct Strand 2 projects were not included in the case-study assessment.

Overall finding

THRIVE is an effective targeted intervention for complex, heritage-led regeneration within an integrated urban framework. Its main strength lies in the combination of integrated strategy, meaningful participation, project preparation and substantial capital support.

Strand 1 makes integrated strategy, community engagement, technical investigation and project readiness fundable activities in their own right. Strand 2 then provides the high-intensity capital support required to make difficult adaptive-reuse projects viable. The two strands address different but connected barriers: preparing a credible and deliverable project and financing capital investment that may not be commercially viable.

THRIVE is nevertheless one component of a wider compact-growth and regeneration system. It cannot, and should not, be expected to fund every element of housing, infrastructure, public realm, climate action, economic development or long-term operation that may be needed within a wider regeneration area. Its future value lies in protecting its distinctive strengths while improving coordination with complementary investment, technical support, research and wider delivery systems.

What the Irish cases show

Integrated strategy and project readiness are central to the model. The six cases demonstrate that regeneration projects are stronger where they form part of a wider place-based strategy and project pipeline. Strand 1 enabled authorities entering THRIVE at different levels of maturity to prepare or strengthen integrated strategies, test project priorities, undertake technical work and progress towards capital readiness.

Project preparation is itself an investment. Strategy development, feasibility work, participation, surveys, technical and conservation investigations, design, statutory processes, costing, procurement preparation and operational planning all reduce uncertainty and improve the quality and deliverability of subsequent capital investment. These activities require sufficient funding, staff time and specialist expertise.

Readiness support and local commitment need to operate together. Public support for project development can reduce risk and help authorities progress complex projects, but it does not remove the need for senior and political ownership, dedicated staff, cross-departmental working, timely decision-making and a credible pathway towards capital delivery and long-term operation.

The combination of funded preparation and 100% capital support addresses two distinct barriers. The Strand 2 grant is a fundamental viability enabler for complex heritage projects affected by conservation costs, construction uncertainty and limited commercial returns. Strand 1 addresses the separate challenge of developing projects that are technically robust, publicly supported and sufficiently mature to proceed.

Delivery capacity is as important as funding availability. Successful delivery depends on staff resources, continuity between project stages, technical and conservation expertise, procurement capability, programme and financial management, and access to business, revenue and asset-management skills. Regional guidance, training and peer learning can strengthen knowledge, but they cannot substitute for adequate organisational capacity.

Meaningful participation and NEB implementation have resource implications. At process level, participation and co-design require staff time, facilitation, targeted outreach, accessible materials and continued engagement. At physical and project-delivery level, NEB can require access to specialist design, conservation, engineering, energy, accessibility and circular-procurement expertise. NEB has the greatest influence where its principles are translated into project design, procurement, delivery and monitoring rather than remaining high-level programme values.

Operational sustainability needs to be developed alongside the capital project. The cases demonstrate the need to identify viable uses, operators, management arrangements, maintenance responsibilities and realistic revenue assumptions before projects enter capital delivery. This can require specialist expertise that is not always available within local-authority regeneration teams.

THRIVE is housing-supportive rather than housing-led. THRIVE was designed under the provisions of Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 applicable at the time, which provided for ERDF investment in housing only in particular circumstances. Strand 2 was established under Policy Objective 5 as an integrated sustainable urban development intervention focused on the renovation and adaptive reuse of vacant or derelict publicly owned or controlled heritage buildings. Housing was therefore not a direct purpose of the six Strand 2 projects examined. Their compact-growth contribution is better assessed at site, neighbourhood and strategy level. By reactivating vacant assets and improving civic, cultural and public infrastructure,

THRIVE projects can support the wider conditions for housing and town-centre living without directly delivering housing.

The Irish cases also provide practical methods that can inform wider regeneration practice. These include beginning with an integrated place-based strategy; engaging communities before uses and designs are fixed; funding technical readiness; establishing multidisciplinary project structures; developing operating arrangements alongside the physical project; translating NEB into delivery mechanisms; using peer learning as offered by URBACT and other bodies to inform local practice; and treating the heritage asset as a catalyst within a wider regeneration area.

What the comparator evidence adds

Germany, Poland and the Netherlands support compact development and regeneration in different ways. The purpose of the comparison is not to identify a system that Ireland or other Member States should replicate. It is to understand what each approach enables cities and towns to do and what wider lessons can be drawn.

Germany shows the value of long-term planning and continuity. Integrated local development plans can guide regeneration over many years and provide a basis for successive funding decisions. The German system can support planning, feasibility work, community participation, town-centre management and temporary uses as well as physical investment. The main lesson is that individual projects can achieve greater impact where they contribute to a continuing local strategy rather than responding separately to each funding call.

Poland shows the value of creating a clear connection between local regeneration plans and access to funding. Municipalities identify areas requiring regeneration and prepare formal programmes setting out how they will be improved. Regional authorities also provide advice and support. The evidence suggests that this approach works best when municipalities have access to the staff, technical expertise and project-development support needed to prepare and deliver projects, particularly in smaller municipalities and where match funding is required.

The Netherlands shows that different places may require different forms of public support. Where demand for housing and other uses makes investment in existing urban areas financially viable, public authorities can support compact development through planning, coordination, management of publicly owned land and buildings, and cooperation with private partners. Where places face commercial vacancy, fragmented ownership or more difficult development conditions, targeted public funding may still be required. The balance between planning, public funding and private investment therefore needs to reflect local circumstances.

All three countries also show the value of support between national policy and local delivery. German regional bodies and specialist agencies, Polish regional authorities and advisory teams, and Dutch provincial authorities perform different roles, but all can help municipalities understand requirements, access expertise and coordinate issues that extend beyond one local authority.

Five practical lessons emerge from the comparison:

- regeneration benefits from a durable place-based strategy;
- project preparation needs to be recognised and resourced;
- local authorities need access to specialist advice and support;

- investment in individual buildings needs to be coordinated with activity across the wider regeneration area; and
- the type and level of support should reflect differences in local capacity, demand and project viability.

THRIVE already applies several of these principles by connecting integrated strategy, project preparation and capital delivery. The comparator evidence provides a wider perspective on how these strengths can be maintained and developed.

Future application and funding

In Ireland, these developments build on an established tiered spatial and policy framework. Compact-growth objectives set through the National Planning Framework are translated through the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and local development plans. Within this framework, ERDF investment through THRIVE is directed towards eligible RSES-designated cities and towns and delivered through Integrated Urban Strategies that apply the Town Centre First approach and integrate New European Bauhaus values and principles.

The increased prominence of housing within Cohesion Policy and the development of the New European Bauhaus Facility may provide further opportunities to strengthen these existing arrangements and connect regeneration projects with complementary support. This does not mean that housing should simply be added to the current THRIVE model or that every project should combine several funding sources. The appropriate approach will depend on the purpose, location and maturity of the project and its place within the wider regeneration strategy.

The funding mapping undertaken for the study identified no single additional source capable of replicating the function performed by THRIVE. Different forms of support instead perform complementary roles. Core regeneration and Cohesion Policy funding can support strategy, project preparation and capital delivery, while housing, vacancy and infrastructure programmes may support related interventions in the wider regeneration area. Technical assistance and peer-learning programmes can strengthen project development and institutional capability. Research and innovation funding may also support individual projects where there is a clear innovation purpose and a suitable partnership.

Over time, local authorities could strengthen strategic relationships with universities and technological universities, creating opportunities for regeneration projects, including those in smaller towns, to benefit from research expertise and relevant funding programmes. More generally, accessing complementary support requires local authorities to identify appropriate opportunities, develop partnerships and manage different programme, timing, eligibility and compliance requirements. Better coordination and clearer access to this support could help THRIVE investment achieve greater impact within wider place-based regeneration and compact-growth strategies.

Recommendations

The recommendations are organised around four connected themes rather than by institutional audience.

Moving from strategy to investment readiness

1. **Protect and strengthen the project-readiness function.** Maintain dedicated support for integrated strategy and project development, while matching extended support with evidence of local commitment and capacity to progress.
2. **Provide greater forward visibility and proportionate programme timelines.** Give local authorities earlier information on calls and indicative timelines while maintaining a clear emphasis on readiness, activation and delivery.
3. **Fund delivery capacity alongside project investment.** Consider support for dedicated project management, continuity between stages and access to specialist implementation expertise.

Delivering integrated regeneration

4. **Retain and resource meaningful participation and NEB implementation.** Recognise their process, staffing, technical and physical-delivery costs within programme budgets and timelines.
5. **Strengthen capacity for operational sustainability and end-use planning.** Develop viable uses, management arrangements and operating models alongside technical project preparation.
6. **Strengthen national coordination of funding and financing for integrated regeneration.** Consider a coordinated national funding-navigation and advisory function to help local authorities identify, sequence and manage relevant grants, finance, technical assistance and complementary investment.
7. **Match regeneration instruments to local conditions.** Periodically review whether programmes respond to differences in viability, ownership, heritage requirements, infrastructure, housing demand and local administrative capacity.
8. **Establish post-completion monitoring and a living practice resource.** Assess the longer-term effects of THRIVE projects and use the resulting evidence to support a practical repository drawing on the wider experience of Strand 1 and Strand 2 beneficiaries.

Connecting funding and programme support

9. **Protect support for project readiness after 2027.** Ensure that future Cohesion Policy continues to support integrated strategies, participation, feasibility work and technical project preparation alongside capital delivery.
10. **Improve access to complementary EU support and research partnerships.** Provide clearer pathways to relevant EU programmes and strengthen connections between local authorities, universities, research organisations and National Contact Points.

Building capacity and transferring learning

11. **Strengthen the institutional capacity of cities to navigate European opportunities.** Develop a more explicit and sustained capacity-building offer that helps cities identify appropriate programmes, build partnerships and connect European learning with local delivery.
12. **Strengthen Member State and regional support for peer learning and project readiness.** Create flexible mechanisms through which cities can adapt relevant practices and connect participation in European networks with domestic support and investment.
13. **Build a more coherent European capacity-building and learning offer.** Strengthen cooperation between URBACT, the European Urban Initiative, Interreg, ESPON, NEB-related initiatives and relevant technical-assistance mechanisms so that cities can more easily identify the support appropriate to their needs.

Conclusion

Successful compact regeneration depends on more than capital funding. It requires a durable place-based strategy, meaningful participation, project readiness, organisational and specialist capacity, viable finance, operational planning and coordination with wider housing, infrastructure and regeneration activity.

THRIVE demonstrates how integrated strategy and participation can be linked to funded project preparation and capital delivery while putting NEB principles into practice. Its most transferable lesson is the value of treating project readiness as an investment and connecting it directly to a credible pathway towards delivery.

The wider lesson is that it may not be appropriate to replicate THRIVE in every context or expect it to continually expand to address every regeneration need. It is to retain and adapt the principles that make it effective: integrated place-based strategy, funded readiness, meaningful participation, accessible delivery capacity, practical NEB implementation and coordination with complementary investment and support.

1. Introduction, scope and analytical framework

Chapter purpose

This chapter sets out the background and purpose of the Unlocking Compact Cities study, its aims and research questions, and the wider compact-growth and integrated urban-development context within which the research is situated. It then describes the scope, methodology and evidence base of the study and introduces the Compact Growth Enabling (CGE) analytical framework used to structure the analysis throughout the study.

1.1 Background and purpose

Unlocking Compact Cities was commissioned by the URBACT IV Managing Authority, in cooperation with Ireland's Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), to support policy development in the context of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2026. The study contributes to wider discussion on EU Urban Policy and the Urban Agenda for the EU, focusing on how planning, governance and funding frameworks can enable compact urban development and regeneration, including the conditions needed to support housing and infrastructure within existing settlements.

The study is situated within Ireland's established policy commitment to compact development and town-centre regeneration. The National Planning Framework (NPF), Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) and Town Centre First provide the principal spatial and place-based policy context within which THRIVE operates.

Within this policy context, the Town Centre First Heritage Revival Scheme (THRIVE) provides the principal Irish programme examined in the study. Co-funded through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), THRIVE links integrated urban strategy and project preparation with capital investment in the adaptive reuse of vacant or derelict publicly owned or controlled heritage assets, while incorporating participatory approaches and New European Bauhaus (NEB) principles.

THRIVE therefore provides a practical case through which to examine how spatial planning, integrated strategy, governance, participation and public investment interact in enabling compact urban regeneration. The study considers this experience alongside approaches in Germany, Poland and the Netherlands to identify common enabling conditions and context-dependent lessons relevant to future urban policy and programme design.

The study is intended to inform Irish Presidency discussions and wider consideration of future Cohesion Policy, the Multiannual Financial Framework, NEB and future URBACT programming.

1.2 Study aims and research questions

The *Unlocking Compact Cities* study examines how planning, governance and funding frameworks can support integrated urban regeneration and compact growth, using the Irish THRIVE model as its principal case and experience from selected European comparator countries to provide a wider perspective.

The study has four principal aims:

- to examine how national and regional policy in Ireland has supported the integration and mainstreaming of the New European Bauhaus (NEB) within ERDF implementation, including the role of THRIVE Strand 1 in integrated, participatory and plan-led urban regeneration;
- to examine the Irish THRIVE experience through six case studies, including its interaction with Town Centre First, NEB, URBACT methods and wider integrated sustainable urban development approaches;
- to assess the future relevance of the THRIVE model and related approaches for compact urban regeneration, including their relationship with housing, vacancy activation, partnerships, research and innovation and emerging national and EU funding opportunities; and
- to compare the Irish experience with selected approaches in Germany, Poland and the Netherlands in order to identify wider lessons for Member States, future Cohesion Policy and the Multiannual Financial Framework, and European programmes and initiatives including URBACT.

These aims are brought together through the study's principal research question:

To what extent does THRIVE function as an enabling framework for compact urban development, and what structural factors influence its capacity to support integrated regeneration outcomes across different contexts?

A related question concerns housing:

How can THRIVE-type approaches contribute to the conditions for compact forms of housing delivery and town-centre living, particularly through regeneration of existing urban areas and their interaction with wider housing, infrastructure and regeneration measures?

These questions are examined through the Compact Growth Enabling (CGE) analytical framework introduced in Section 1.5.

1.3 The compact-cities challenge

Compact urban development is an increasingly important policy objective in Ireland and across the European Union, responding to challenges including land consumption, climate change, housing pressures, vacancy and dereliction, infrastructure efficiency and the vitality of existing towns and cities. It seeks to make better use of existing urban areas through regeneration, adaptive reuse and brownfield redevelopment, alongside the housing, services, infrastructure and amenities needed to support attractive and liveable places. Compact growth is therefore concerned not simply with density, but with the quality, functionality and liveability of existing urban areas.

This understanding of compact growth aligns closely with Integrated Sustainable Urban Development (ISUD), which recognises that physical regeneration, housing, mobility, economic, social and environmental objectives are interconnected and are not always effectively addressed through isolated sectoral interventions. Integrated approaches therefore

place particular importance on place-based strategy, participation, partnership and coordination across levels of governance.

This approach is embedded in EU Cohesion Policy. During the 2021–2027 programming period, Article 11 of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund Regulation requires at least 8% of ERDF resources at national level under the Investment for Jobs and Growth goal to support sustainable urban development through territorial or integrated approaches. This reflects the wider EU emphasis on integrated, place-based development, participation and multi-level governance.

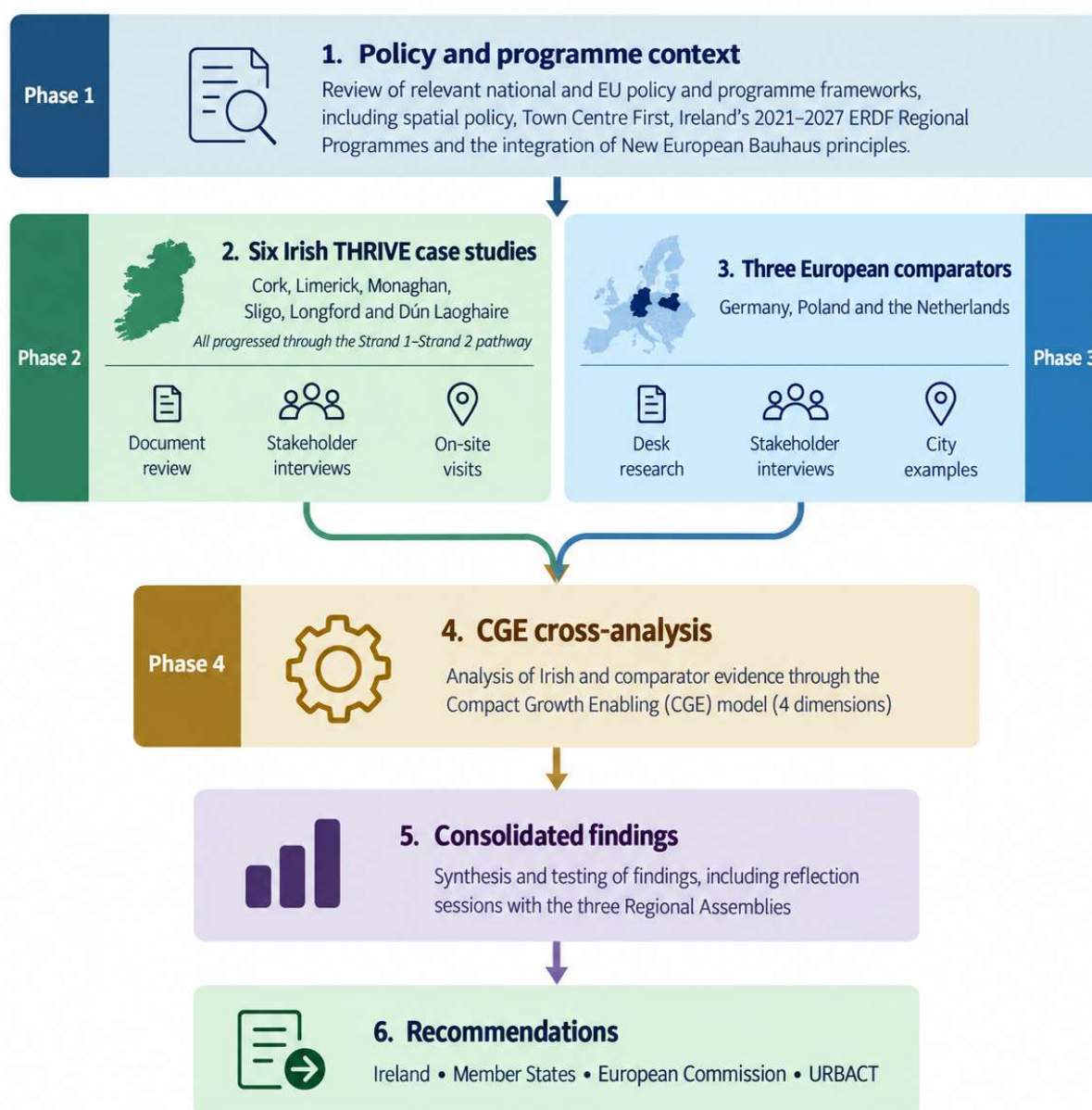
The New European Bauhaus (NEB) reinforces this agenda through its emphasis on sustainability, inclusion, quality of place, participation and interdisciplinary working. For this study, its particular significance lies in how these principles are translated from policy objectives into programme design and local delivery.

The central challenge, however, is one of implementation. Regeneration within existing urban areas can involve fragmented ownership, heritage and conservation requirements, viability constraints, infrastructure needs, complex statutory and procurement processes and long development timelines. Delivery may depend on coordination between levels of government and funding programmes, sufficient institutional and technical capacity, effective community engagement and the ability to move projects from strategy through preparation to implementation.

The compact-cities challenge examined in this study is therefore how the enabling conditions for integrated, place-based regeneration can be translated into delivery.

1.4 Scope, methodology and evidence

The study combines policy and programme analysis, Irish case-study research and European comparative analysis. These evidence strands are brought together through the Compact Growth Enabling (CGE) analytical framework described in Section 1.5, providing a common analytical framework through which the Irish and comparator evidence can be assessed and subsequently synthesised.

Figure 1.1 Study methodology and analytical process

Note: The study comprises four interrelated phases (1–4). Phases 5 and 6 set out the synthesis of findings and the resulting recommendations.

The research was undertaken in four interrelated phases. The first phase examined the policy and programme context within which THRIVE operates, including national and regional spatial policy, Town Centre First, Ireland's 2021–2027 ERDF Regional Programmes and the integration of NEB principles.

The second phase examined six Irish THRIVE case studies: Cork, Limerick, Monaghan, Sligo, Longford and Dún Laoghaire. The cases were drawn from across Ireland's three Regional Assembly (NUTS II) areas and examined through document review, stakeholder interviews and site visits. The fieldwork used a common interview guide, applied flexibly through semi-structured discussions, together with site observation and review of relevant project and programme documentation. Structured case-study fiches were used to capture and organise evidence consistently across the cases, informed by the four CGE dimensions and by the

study's specific interest in NEB, integrated and participatory urban development, Town Centre First and European peer learning.

All six selected cases progressed through the THRIVE Strand 1–Strand 2 pathway, moving from integrated strategy and project readiness to capital delivery. This provides a strong evidence base for examining how this pathway operates in different local contexts. THRIVE also permits direct access to Strand 2 for eligible projects with an appropriate Integrated Urban Strategy and sufficient project readiness. Direct Strand 2 projects were not included among the six cases examined and the findings should therefore not be interpreted as an assessment of that route.

The comparator Member States were selected through a structured screening process agreed during the inception phase. Selection considered the maturity of the urban dimension within ERDF implementation; the presence of structured governance frameworks supporting urban regeneration; relevant funding and delivery arrangements supporting NEB or comparable integrated sustainable urban development approaches; and relevance to the study's focus on compact growth, vacancy and urban regeneration. On this basis, Germany, Poland and the Netherlands were selected to provide contrasting institutional, policy and funding contexts for the comparative analysis.

The third phase examined these three comparator countries through a combination of desk research and targeted stakeholder interviews. The analysis considered the national policy and programme framework, relevant regional, intermediary or programme-level arrangements, and a city example in each country. The same CGE framework was used across the three comparators to examine how strategic frameworks, governance arrangements, funding architecture and housing and infrastructure conditions interact in practice. Interview evidence was used to provide institutional and delivery perspectives and was triangulated, where possible, with programme documentation, policy frameworks and other published evidence. The views of individual interviewees are therefore treated as qualitative evidence and contextual insight rather than as representative or official positions of the Member State concerned.

The comparative analysis does not seek to rank Member States or identify a single model for replication. Institutional, legislative and funding arrangements are examined within their particular national and regional contexts. The purpose is to identify common enabling conditions, differences and context-dependent approaches, and to assess which principles or programme-design lessons may have wider relevance without assuming that particular institutional or legislative arrangements are directly transferable.

The fourth phase brought the Irish and comparator evidence together through cross-case and cross-country analysis using the CGE analytical framework. Emerging Irish findings were discussed with the three Regional Assemblies through reflection sessions, providing an opportunity to test and contextualise the analysis against their experience as Managing Authorities. The consolidated evidence was then used to assess THRIVE against the study aims, distinguish transferable findings from context-specific features and develop the recommendations in Chapter 5.

The study is qualitative and comparative in nature. The six Irish cases provide detailed evidence of THRIVE implementation across different urban and regional contexts but are not intended to constitute a statistically representative sample of all THRIVE-funded projects or Irish urban regeneration activity. As the projects were examined during implementation, the

analysis focuses principally on enabling conditions, programme operation and delivery experience rather than attempting to assess or attribute longer-term regeneration outcomes that have yet to materialise fully. Similarly, the three European comparators provide selected perspectives on different approaches and institutional settings rather than a comprehensive assessment of urban-regeneration systems across the European Union. Findings concerning transferability are therefore considered in relation to the institutional, policy and funding contexts in which particular approaches operate.

1.5 The Compact Growth Enabling analytical framework

The Compact Growth Enabling (CGE) analytical framework was developed at the outset of this study to provide a common structure for the analysis. It focuses on the conditions through which planning, governance and funding systems can enable or constrain integrated urban regeneration and compact growth. Rather than assessing projects solely in terms of their physical outputs, the framework considers the wider enabling environment around delivery, allowing THRIVE to be examined as part of the broader system of policies, institutional arrangements and investment that contribute to compact urban development.

Figure 1.2 The Compact Growth Enabling (CGE) Model

Four interlinked dimensions for enabling compact, sustainable and inclusive urban development



The study's analytical framework comprises four interrelated dimensions:

- 1. Strategic Mainstreaming** – examines how compact growth, integrated sustainable urban development and NEB principles are embedded within spatial policy, programme design and place-based strategies, and how these frameworks translate strategic objectives into a pipeline of regeneration activity.
- 2. Multi-Level Governance Integration** – examines how responsibilities, relationships and capabilities across national, regional and local levels support planning and

delivery, including coordination between institutions, stakeholder and community participation, institutional capacity, continuity of knowledge and opportunities for peer learning and knowledge exchange.

3. **Funding Architecture & Leverage** – examines how ERDF, national and other funding sources interact with programme design and project development, including the adequacy, timing, coordination and sequencing of investment, project readiness and the capacity to connect complementary funding instruments.
4. **Housing & Infrastructure Enabling Conditions** – examines the wider conditions through which regeneration can support compact forms of urban development and town-centre living, including housing-enabling potential, infrastructure readiness, site and project pipelines, viability and the relationship between individual regeneration projects and wider site, neighbourhood and settlement-level development.

The four dimensions are analytically distinct but interrelated. They are used in this study to examine how strategic frameworks, governance capacity, funding arrangements and wider enabling conditions interact in moving regeneration from policy and strategy towards delivery.

NEB and European peer learning are treated as cross-cutting themes rather than additional analytical dimensions. NEB is considered principally through Strategic Mainstreaming, reflecting the study's focus on how its principles are embedded in policy, programme design and regeneration practice, while peer learning (especially through URBACT) is considered principally through Multi-Level Governance Integration because of its role in institutional capability and knowledge exchange. Both themes are also considered under other dimensions where supported by the evidence.

The analytical framework is applied consistently to the Irish and comparator evidence in Chapters 2 and 3 and provides the structure for the consolidated assessment in Chapter 4.

1.6 Structure of the study

The remainder of the report is organised in four chapters. Chapter 2 examines the Irish THRIVE evidence, including the wider policy and programme framework, six case studies and cross-case findings structured through the CGE analytical framework. Chapter 3 examines comparator evidence from Germany, Poland and the Netherlands and identifies cross-country findings through the same framework. Chapter 4 brings the Irish and European evidence together to assess THRIVE, identify enabling conditions and distinguish transferable lessons from context-specific features. Chapter 5 presents recommendations for Ireland, Member States, the European Commission and URBACT.

2. Ireland: THRIVE in context and evidence

Chapter purpose

This chapter examines the Irish evidence to assess how THRIVE operates as an enabling framework for compact urban regeneration, where its principal strengths and delivery constraints lie, and how it contributes to wider compact-growth and integrated urban-development objectives. Particular attention is given to the role of the Strand 1–Strand 2 pathway in integrated and plan-led regeneration, the operationalisation of New European Bauhaus (NEB) principles, and the interaction between THRIVE, Town Centre First and wider European urban learning.

The analysis draws on six Irish THRIVE case studies, developed through document review, stakeholder interviews and site visits, together with subsequent reflection sessions with the Regional Assemblies. As set out in Chapter 1, all six selected cases progressed through the Strand 1–Strand 2 pathway. They therefore provide a strong basis for examining this route through THRIVE but do not represent the experience of projects accessing Strand 2 directly.

The chapter proceeds in four parts. Section 2.1 establishes the wider compact-growth and town-centre regeneration framework within which THRIVE operates and explains THRIVE's particular role within that system. Section 2.2 presents the six case studies. Section 2.3 analyses the cross-case evidence through the four dimensions of the Compact Growth Enabling (CGE) analytical framework: Strategic Mainstreaming; Multi-Level Governance Integration; Funding Architecture & Leverage; and Housing & Infrastructure Enabling Conditions. Section 2.4 draws together the key findings from the Irish evidence.

The evidence presented in Section 2.3 draws both on the six case studies and on the subsequent reflection sessions with the Regional Assemblies. The section identifies cross-case findings rather than recommendations; these are subsequently considered alongside the comparator evidence in Chapters 3 and 4 before informing the recommendations in Chapter 5.

2.1 THRIVE statutory, planning and programme framework

Ireland's approach to compact growth and town-centre regeneration combines spatial policy, place-based regeneration policy and targeted funding and delivery instruments. The National Planning Framework (NPF) and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) provide the spatial framework for compact growth, while Town Centre First provides the overarching collaborative and plan-led approach to town-centre regeneration. National and European funding instruments support different elements of implementation, including regeneration, vacancy and dereliction, housing, infrastructure, public realm and adaptive reuse.

Within this wider system, THRIVE connects integrated strategy and project readiness, where required, with capital investment in the adaptive reuse of publicly owned or controlled heritage assets in eligible urban centres. It is therefore a targeted component of Ireland's wider compact-growth and regeneration framework rather than a comprehensive instrument for town-centre regeneration or housing delivery.

Table 2.1 Instruments supporting town-centre regeneration and compact growth in Ireland (non-exhaustive)

Instrument / measure	Relevant role
Town Centre First	Overarching collaborative and plan-led policy approach to town-centre regeneration, supporting locally developed Town Centre First Plans and regeneration project pipelines.
THRIVE	ERDF-supported integrated strategy/project readiness and capital investment in the adaptive reuse of publicly owned or controlled heritage assets in eligible urban centres.
Towns and Cities Regeneration Investment Fund (TCRIF)	Supports transformative regeneration in eligible towns and cities, with a particular focus on disadvantaged areas; introduced in 2026 to replace the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF).
Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF)	Large-scale strategic regeneration investment in rural towns and villages, addressing vacancy and dereliction, reuse of existing buildings, economic activity and supporting infrastructure.
Town and Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS)	Supports the regeneration of smaller rural towns and villages, including town-centre revitalisation, reuse of vacant and derelict buildings and project development.
Vacancy and housing-reuse measures	Measures including the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant , Living City Initiative , Repair and Leasing and Buy and Renew , supporting the return of vacant and underused buildings, including upper floors over commercial premises, to residential use.
Other housing and sectoral investment	Housing, active travel , public realm, climate, culture and other investment that may contribute to wider integrated regeneration and compact growth.

THRIVE is delivered through Ireland's ERDF Regional Programmes 2021–2027 under Policy Objective 5, *A Europe closer to citizens*, and Specific Objective RSO 5.1 on integrated and inclusive urban development. Nationally and regionally, it supports the compact-growth and sustainable urban-development objectives of the [NPF](#) and RSES, with eligible settlements drawn from RSES-designated Cities and Suburbs, Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns. Local statutory plans provide the land-use planning framework within which individual projects are developed and consented.

THRIVE is also explicitly aligned with [Town Centre First](#), which provides a collaborative and plan-led approach to regeneration involving local authorities, communities, businesses and other stakeholders. THRIVE translates this wider framework into a targeted ERDF delivery pathway while embedding NEB, circular-economy and citizen and stakeholder involvement principles into strategy development and project delivery.

For THRIVE eligible settlements, the two THRIVE strands perform distinct but connected functions. Strand 1 funds the preparation or enhancement of Integrated Urban Strategies for eligible RSES-designated settlements and the identification, prioritisation and development of a pipeline of heritage-led regeneration projects. These strategies must comply with Article 29 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 and apply the Town Centre First multidisciplinary, participatory and community-led approach while integrating NEB and circular-economy principles. Strand 1 also supports the technical and project-development work required to progress priority projects towards capital readiness.

Strand 2 provides capital funding for a locally identified priority regeneration project highlighted within an appropriate Integrated Urban Strategy and aligned with spatial-planning policy. Projects address vacancy and dereliction through the adaptive reuse of publicly owned or controlled built heritage, demonstrate transformative potential and continue to apply NEB, circular-economy and citizen and stakeholder involvement principles.

The relationship between the strands is not necessarily sequential for every beneficiary. Authorities with an Integrated Urban Strategy and a sufficiently mature project can apply directly to Strand 2. Strand 1 therefore provides a funded readiness pathway where further strategy and project development are required to bring projects to a level of readiness appropriate for Strand 2.

Table 2.2 provides an overview of the THRIVE programme architecture and main elements.

Table 2.2 THRIVE programme architecture at a glance

Element	THRIVE framework
EU framework	ERDF Regional Programmes 2021–2027; Policy Objective 5, <i>A Europe closer to citizens</i> ; RSO 5.1 on integrated and inclusive urban development.
Spatial policy framework	Supports compact growth and sustainable urban development objectives under the National Planning Framework and respective Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies.
Town Centre First	Provides the collaborative, plan-led and delivery-focused policy approach through which local authorities, communities, businesses and other stakeholders contribute to town-centre regeneration.
Overall regeneration logic	From spatial strategy to integrated local strategy and participation to project pipeline to project readiness to capital delivery.
Strand 1 – strategy and readiness	Integrated Urban Strategy development or enhancement; participation and co-design; project pipeline formation; surveys, design, costing and other project-development activity.
Strand 2 – capital delivery	Capital investment in a priority heritage-led regeneration project identified within an appropriate Integrated Urban Strategy.
Participation	Embedded through Town Centre First and reinforced through THRIVE requirements for citizen and stakeholder involvement.
Grant Rate	100% grant funding; no local co-financing requirement for the THRIVE-supported investment.
Core asset Ownership	Public ownership or control of the heritage asset supported through Strand 2.
Design and method	New European Bauhaus and circular-economy principles embedded alongside integrated, participatory project development.
Multi-level support actors	DHLGH and the Regional Assemblies in programme design and oversight; Southern Regional Assembly and Northern and Western Regional Assembly as Managing Authorities for the two ERDF Regional Programmes; NEB contact point supporting NEB integration; local authorities as project promoters and deliverers.
Synergy potential with wider instruments	Targeted heritage-led intervention operating within a wider compact-growth and regeneration framework, with potential links to housing, infrastructure, public realm, climate, cultural and other investment programmes.

Figure 2.1 summarises how these different elements connect in practice, from national and regional spatial policy through integrated local strategy and project readiness to capital delivery and wider place-based regeneration.

Figure 2.1 Policy and programme architecture for THRIVE within the wider urban and regional framework

From national strategy to local delivery, with complementary investment



THRIVE should therefore be assessed in terms of the distinctive role it performs within this wider system rather than against every condition required for compact growth or town-centre living. Its wider contribution depends in part on how effectively it connects with complementary interventions operating at building, site, neighbourhood and settlement scale.

2.2 The six THRIVE case studies

The six case studies cover different urban contexts and project types across Ireland's two ERDF Regional Programmes: Cork, Limerick, Monaghan, Sligo, Longford and Dún Laoghaire. All involve the heritage-led adaptive reuse of publicly owned or controlled assets and progressed through the Strand 1–Strand 2 pathway.

The short profiles below provide the local evidence underpinning the subsequent cross-case analysis, including relevant experience of URBACT and European peer learning. Summary presentations of the six case studies are published alongside this report, and the more detailed case-study fiches are available on request from the URBACT Joint Secretariat.

Table 2.3 Irish case studies

Case	Population of the town/city	Building and reuse	URBACT involvement
Cork, Shandon	224,004	Butter Exchange complex and Weighmaster's House (Protected Structure, Architectural Conservation Area), reused as an enterprise hub and community/creative space within the Shandon Integrated Urban Strategy.	Partner in 'Playful Paradigm' transfer network (TN) (2018-2021); led the National Practice Transfer Initiative (NPTI) 'Playful Towns' (2021-2022); Good practice award for 'Playsmaking' (2024),
Limerick, King's Island	103,611	35-39 Nicholas Street, a derelict medieval site with upstanding walls and a preserved stone fireplace (a Recorded Monument), reused as The Fireplace / Forge Design Factory within the King's Island Walled Town strategy.	Current partner in 'ReDan' TN and previous partner in GreenPlace and BiodiverCity action planning networks (APNs) (2023 - 2025)
Dún Laoghaire, George's Place	31,239	Nos. 9-10 George's Place (former Kingstown Royal Harbour Hotel) and the adjacent former Wash House, vacant protected structures, reused with an educational anchor tenant (IADT).	Partner in APNs 'Tourism Friendly Cities' (2019-2022) and 'Change' (2015 -2018)
Sligo, the Gaol	20,608	The former County Gaol in Abbeyquarter North, adjacent to Cranmore, reused as a visitor, community, cultural and heritage destination.	Partners in the NPTI 'Playful Towns' (2021-2022); partner in APN Cities@Heart (2023 -2025)
Longford, Connolly Barracks	10,952	The former Connolly Barracks military complex and campus lands, reused as civic, cultural, visitor and event infrastructure, out of the URBACT MAPS Integrated Action Plan.	Partners in APNs (2023-2025) U.R. Impact , M.A.P.S and UrbSecurity (2018-2020). Good practice award in 2017 for their work on ghost estates .
Monaghan, St Louis Convent Chapel	7,894	The former St Louis Convent Chapel within a 20-acre site of protected structures, lake and parkland, reused as a shared cultural, community and creative space.	Current partners in TN "PARKS"; Good practice award 2017 regarding their town team .

2.2.1 Cork, Shandon

CASE STUDY SHANDON, CORK

From derelict heritage complex to a civic
and enterprise destination



Context and regeneration challenge

Shandon is a historic inner-city neighbourhood within Cork City, characterised by a strong concentration of heritage, cultural and community assets. The case-study area centres on the former Butter Exchange complex, close to landmarks including St Anne's Church and the Firkin Crane.

Despite this strong identity, parts of Shandon have experienced long-term vacancy and dereliction, alongside challenges affecting the quality and use of the public realm. The regeneration challenge is to bring important heritage assets back into use while strengthening community activity, enterprise and the wider vitality of the neighbourhood

The THRIVE intervention

The project focuses on the former Butter Exchange complex, including the Butter Exchange Portico, boundary walls and Weighmaster's House, a protected structure within an Architectural Conservation Area.

The Shandon Exchange will combine conservation-led adaptive reuse with new enterprise, creative, community and civic uses. A key outcome of the co-design process was recognition of the lack of informal "third spaces" for young people, families and community interaction. As a result, the project evolved from a more narrowly enterprise-focused concept towards a multifunctional and accessible civic destination.

Compact Growth Contribution

The project brings a long-derelict city-centre heritage complex back into productive use, reducing vacancy and intensifying activity within the existing urban fabric.

Its contribution to compact growth is primarily through heritage reuse, enterprise and community activity and improved quality of place. Housing was considered at wider Shandon/IUS level rather than as a use for the Butter Exchange itself, illustrating how heritage-led regeneration can support the wider conditions for compact urban living without directly delivering housing.

At a glance:

Project: Shandon Butter Exchange & Weighmaster's House

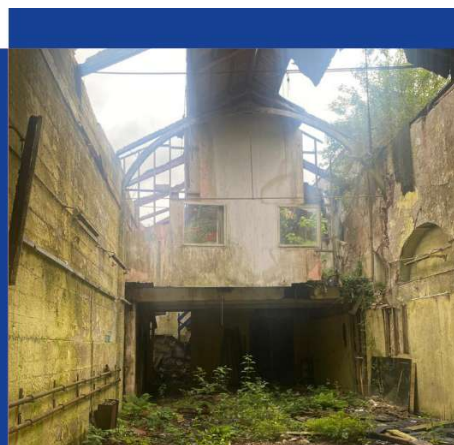
City: Cork with 224,004 inhabitants

Region: Southern Region

THRIVE pathway: Integrated strategy & project readiness → capital delivery

Funding: c. €198,000 project readiness | €7m THRIVE capital funding

Future use: Enterprise, creative, community and civic destination



From Integrated Strategy to Capital delivery

THRIVE's strategy and project-readiness phase (Strand 1) supported the Shandon Integrated Urban Strategy, community engagement, technical and conservation studies, enabling works and project development. This created the foundation for capital delivery (Strand 2) and a wider regeneration pipeline, while also strengthening multidisciplinary working within Cork City Council.

Key Challenges

- Compressed period between strategy/project preparation and capital delivery
- Conservation, archaeology and specialist procurement requirements
- Significant staff and coordination pressures
- Construction costs, funding coordination and long-term operational sustainability

Key Actors & Enablers

- Cork City Council multidisciplinary team, working with the Shandon Neighbourhood Team
- Southern Regional Assembly, providing programme guidance and support
- Recreate Shandon and community partners, supporting local ownership and future operation
- Extensive co-design & engagement, with residents, youth, schools, businesses & local stakeholders
- Public ownership and substantial capital funding, enabling delivery of a complex heritage project

Lessons from Cork

Integrated strategy and deep community participation can reshape both a project and the wider regeneration approach. Co-design helped transform the Shandon Exchange from a predominantly enterprise concept into a broader civic destination, while the IUS created a shared roadmap and project pipeline for the neighbourhood.

- Participation shapes projects. Co-design broadened the Exchange from an enterprise concept into a civic destination.
- Fund project readiness. Technical, conservation and engagement work was essential to progressing this complex heritage asset.
- Connect heritage to place. The Exchange can anchor wider regeneration and compact growth across Shandon.

CASE STUDY KING'S ISLAND, LIMERICK

From medieval vacancy to a design and regeneration catalyst



Context and regeneration challenge

Limerick city and suburbs has a population of 103,611 and is one of Ireland's principal regional cities. The case-study area, King's Island, contains Limerick's historic Medieval Quarter and some of the city's most significant heritage assets.

Parts of Nicholas Street have experienced long-term vacancy, dereliction and socio-economic disadvantage. The regeneration challenge is therefore not simply to conserve individual buildings, but to reactivate the street, bring heritage assets back into use and strengthen connections between major anchors including St Mary's Cathedral and King John's Castle.

The THRIVE intervention

The project focuses on Nos. 35–39 Nicholas Street, a vacant and archaeologically complex heritage site containing medieval walls and a preserved stone fireplace.

The site will become the Forge Design Factory, a new design, craft, cultural and community hub combining conservation of the medieval fabric with contemporary uses. Planned activities include creative workspace, studios, exhibition and retail space, a café, textile workshop, public courtyard and plant-dye garden.

The project is intended not simply to restore a heritage asset, but to generate activity and footfall and act as a catalyst for the wider regeneration of Nicholas Street and King's Island.

Compact Growth Contribution

The project brings a vacant, centrally located heritage site back into productive use, reducing dereliction and supporting activity within the existing urban fabric.

Its contribution to compact growth is primarily regenerative rather than residential: strengthening the attractiveness, vitality and functionality of King's Island as a place to live, work and visit.

At a glance:

Project: Forge Design Factory, 35–39 Nicholas Street
City: Limerick with 103,611 inhabitants
Region: Southern Region
THRIVE pathway: Integrated strategy & project readiness
→ capital delivery
Funding: €199,000 project readiness | c. €6.56m capital delivery
Future use: Design, craft, cultural and community hub



From Integrated Strategy to Capital delivery

THRIVE's strategy and project-readiness phase (Strand 1) supported the Integrated Urban Strategy, community engagement, technical studies, design, costings and partnership development. This helped move the project towards planning approval and capital delivery (Strand 2), demonstrating the value of funding project readiness for complex heritage regeneration.

Key Challenges

- Compressed period between integrated strategy/project preparation and the capital application
- Archaeological, conservation and National Monument complexity
- Construction-cost and unforeseen-work risks
- Significant staff and coordination requirements

Key Actors & Enablers

- Limerick City & County Council multidisciplinary team, with strong in-house architectural and procurement expertise
- Southern Regional Assembly, providing responsive programme support
- Forge Design Factory, TUS/LSAD and creative-sector partners, shaping the future use
- Community and stakeholder engagement, informing project development
- 100% funding and public ownership, enabling delivery of a complex heritage project

Lessons from Limerick

The case shows how compact growth can be supported at site and neighbourhood scale: civic, cultural and economic investment can improve place quality and confidence and help create conditions for housing in the wider regeneration area.

- Fund readiness as well as construction. Complex regeneration needs strategy, engagement and technical preparation.
- Connect the asset to the wider place. The value of the project extends beyond the building to Nicholas Street and King's Island.
- Compact growth is broader than housing delivery. Heritage reuse and new civic/economic activity can help enable residential regeneration around it.

2.2.3 Dún Laoghaire, George's Place

CASE STUDY GEORGE'S PLACE DÚN LAOGHAIRE

Reconnecting town and waterfront through
heritage-led regeneration



Context and regeneration challenge

Dún Laoghaire is a major coastal town within the Dublin metropolitan area, with a strong maritime and heritage identity. However, the relationship between its busy waterfront and traditional town centre is weakened by quieter connecting streets and a number of underused or vacant heritage assets.

George's Place sits within this transition area. Nos. 9–10 George's Place, formerly the Kingstown Royal Harbour Hotel, and the adjacent former Wash House and Council Stores are protected structures that had remained vacant or underused. The regeneration challenge was to bring these buildings back into use while increasing activity and footfall between the waterfront and town centre and contributing to the wider revitalisation of the area.

The THRIVE intervention

THRIVE Strand 1 supported the Reimagining George's Place Integrated Urban Strategy and the development of an implementation-ready proposal for the adaptive reuse of the buildings. The project is intended to create a civic, cultural, community and educational destination, with the Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT) emerging as a key prospective partner.

Importantly, the future use was not predetermined. Consultation and engagement helped shape the preferred use and the emerging partnership with IADT, aligning education and creativity with community access and long-term stewardship of the buildings.

Compact Growth Contribution

The project supports compact growth by bringing vacant protected structures within the existing urban footprint back into productive use rather than relying on outward expansion. It reduces dereliction, strengthens the historic core and seeks to improve connections and activity between the town centre and waterfront.

Housing is not the direct use proposed for the buildings. Its compact-growth contribution is instead through housing-supportive regeneration: improving place quality, civic and community infrastructure and the attractiveness and functionality of an established urban area. The case demonstrates that compact growth can be supported through regeneration even where housing is not the primary land-use outcome.

At a glance:

Project: Reimagining George's Place / Wash House Regeneration

Town: Dún Laoghaire, County Dublin

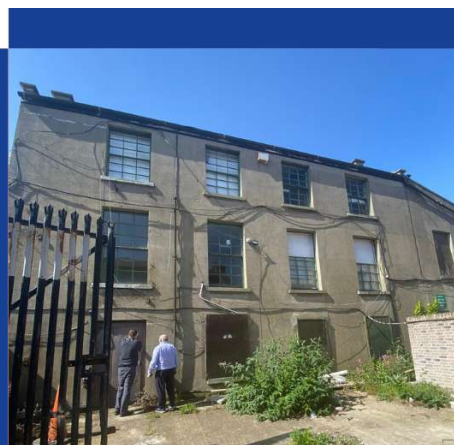
Region: Eastern and Midland Region

Site: Nos. 9–10 George's Place & former Wash House/Council Stores

THRIVE pathway: Integrated strategy & project readiness → capital delivery

Funding: c. €200,000 project readiness | €7m THRIVE capital

Future use: Civic, cultural, community and educational uses, with an emerging IADT partnership



From Integrated Strategy to Capital delivery

Strand 1 funded the Integrated Urban Strategy alongside public engagement, feasibility and conservation work, technical surveys and implementation-readiness activity. It helped turn wider ambitions for George's Place into a coherent project and strengthened its readiness for Strand 2 capital delivery.

The experience also illustrates the pressure created by compressed programme timelines. Part 8 approval was secured only shortly before the Strand 2 deadline, requiring intensive coordination across design, conservation and delivery teams. At the same time, interviewees considered that the deadline helped maintain organisational focus and accelerate decision-making.

Key Challenges

- Conservation and technical complexity associated with protected structures
- Compressed timelines between project preparation and capital delivery
- Staffing and coordination pressures on relatively small local-authority teams
- Cost, inflation and longer-term operational viability
- Aligning lengthy heritage and statutory processes with programme funding windows

Key Actors & Enablers

- Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council, with close collaboration across architecture, conservation, property and regeneration teams
- Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, providing programme support
- IADT, emerging as a prospective long-term partner and user
- Community and local stakeholders, whose engagement helped shape the preferred end use
- 100% funding and public ownership, enabling an ambitious, quality-led approach to a complex heritage project

Lessons from Dún Laoghaire

The case shows how a relatively small heritage intervention can contribute to a wider regeneration strategy when the building, its future use and the surrounding place are considered together.

- Fund project readiness. Strategy, engagement, conservation analysis and technical preparation were important in moving a difficult heritage site towards delivery.
- Allow participation to influence the project. The preferred use emerged through engagement rather than being fixed in advance, strengthening the relationship between the project, community priorities and its prospective long-term user.
- Protect quality as well as delivery. THRIVE and NEB principles helped maintain attention to architectural quality, biodiversity, inclusion and long-term civic value during project development.

2.2.4 Sligo, the Gaol

CASE STUDY THE GAOL, SLIGO

Reopening a historic gaol as a catalyst for
East City regeneration



Context and regeneration challenge

Sligo Gaol is a nationally significant protected structure in Abbeyquarter North, adjacent to Cranmore and within walking distance of Sligo town centre. Closed in 1956, much of the complex remained vacant and inaccessible for decades despite longstanding ambitions for its regeneration.

The Gaol forms part of the wider Sligo East City, Cranmore and Environs regeneration area and has been identified for more than a decade as a potential catalyst connecting the town centre, Abbeyquarter and Cranmore. THRIVE provided a route for progressing this long-recognised regeneration opportunity towards implementation.

The THRIVE intervention

The project will conserve and adaptively reuse the surviving Gaol complex as a heritage visitor attraction and community destination. Planned works include conservation of the Governor's House, Asylum Building and surviving cell blocks, visitor and interpretation facilities, community spaces, public realm and landscaping, accessibility improvements and environmental interventions.

Community engagement helped broaden the project from a predominantly conservation-focused initiative towards one incorporating active community, educational and cultural uses. Ideas emerging through participation included community gardens, biodiversity measures, outdoor gathering spaces and use of former cells for exhibitions.

Compact Growth Contribution

The project brings a major vacant heritage asset within the existing urban area back into productive use. Its compact-growth contribution extends beyond the building itself: it is intended to increase activity and footfall, strengthen Sligo's cultural and tourism offer and improve the attractiveness and identity of the wider East City area.

Housing is not part of the current Gaol project. Its contribution is instead housing-supportive, complementing housing renewal and development elsewhere in East City by improving civic, cultural and community infrastructure and the quality of place. Nearby regeneration and housing sites are expected to increase residential density within walking distance of the Gaol.

At a glance:

Project: Sligo Gaol THRIVE Regeneration Project

City/Town: Sligo with 20,608 inhabitants

Region: Northern and Western Region

THRIVE pathway: Integrated strategy & project readiness → capital delivery

Funding: c. €200,000 project readiness | €7m THRIVE capital

Future Use: Heritage visitor attraction, community facility and cultural destination



From Integrated Strategy to Capital delivery

The project builds on over a decade of regeneration planning, conservation work and community engagement. Strand 1 supported technical studies, design, business planning and statutory approvals, strengthening readiness for Strand 2 capital delivery.

Key Challenges

- High conservation and technical complexity associated with a protected historic complex
- Long project-development and delivery timelines
- Balancing heritage conservation, accessibility, sustainability and contemporary use
- Establishing a financially sustainable long-term operating and governance model
- Translating investment in the Gaol into sustained social and economic benefits for surrounding communities

Key Actors & Enablers

- Sligo County Council, supported by a multidisciplinary team spanning planning, architecture, engineering, conservation, heritage, biodiversity, tourism and sustainability
- Northern and Western Regional Assembly, with a longstanding working relationship with the Council
- Friends of Sligo Gaol and local communities, whose involvement helped shape the project and its future uses
- Public ownership and 100% grant funding, enabling a strategically important but technically complex project to progress
- European peer learning, including URBACT and EUI activity, which informed thinking on community engagement, sustainability and adaptive reuse

Lessons from Sligo

Heritage-led regeneration can contribute to changing perceptions of place. Opening a historically inaccessible asset to residents and visitors can strengthen local identity and civic pride while complementing wider physical, social and economic regeneration in an area historically associated with disadvantage.

- Build on long-term regeneration pipelines. THRIVE was effective because it could build on years of previous planning, conservation and community work.
- Fund project readiness. Technical studies, statutory approvals, design and business planning were essential to moving the Gaol from longstanding ambition towards capital delivery.
- Embed participation. Community engagement shaped future uses.
- Recognise the wider compact-growth role of civic and cultural infrastructure. The Gaol demonstrates how non-residential regeneration can support urban living, investment and future housing by strengthening the wider quality and attractiveness of place.

2.2.5 Longford, Connolly Barracks

CASE STUDY CONNOLLY BARRACKS, LONGFORD

From military heritage to a civic and cultural anchor



Context and regeneration challenge

Longford Town has a population of 10,952 and is an important urban centre in the Eastern and Midland Region. Connolly Barracks occupies a prominent town-centre site at the end of Main Street, within an area affected by significant vacancy and dereliction.

The regeneration challenge is to bring this strategically important former military complex back into productive use while strengthening the wider town centre. Longford currently lacks a significant flexible civic and event space, and the Barracks is seen as an opportunity to provide new cultural and community infrastructure while supporting activity, footfall and confidence in the town centre.

The THRIVE intervention

The project will adaptively reuse Connolly Barracks as a multi-functional cultural, community and visitor destination. Proposed uses include a multi-purpose hall, music and historical society museums, maker-space, café, classrooms, offices, recording facilities and flexible community space.

The project builds on the Longford Town Centre First Strategy and earlier URBACT MAPS Integrated Action Plan. THRIVE provides the pathway from this strategic and participatory work towards implementation, bringing a landmark heritage asset back into active use as a long-term civic and cultural anchor.

Compact Growth Contribution

The project supports compact growth by reusing and retrofitting an existing heritage asset in a central location rather than relying on peripheral expansion. It is intended to increase footfall, strengthen Longford's town-centre offer, improve connections to the Camlin corridor and reinforce civic identity.

Its contribution to compact growth is primarily regenerative rather than residential. By providing civic, cultural and community infrastructure, the project can help make the wider town centre more attractive and liveable and support conditions for future mixed-use and residential regeneration.

At a glance:

Project: Connolly Barracks Regeneration Project

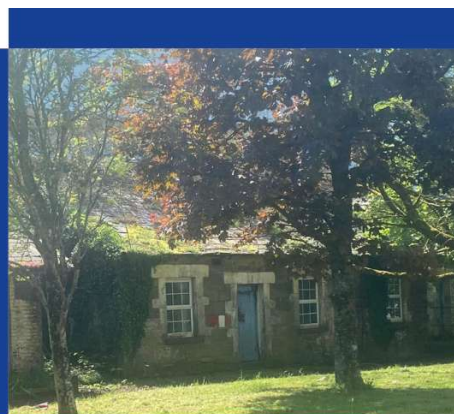
Town: Longford – 10,952 inhabitants

Region: Eastern and Midlands Region

THRIVE pathway: Integrated strategy & project readiness → capital delivery

Funding: c. €199,020 project readiness | €7m THRIVE capital

Future use: Cultural, community and visitor destination



From Integrated Strategy to Capital delivery

THRIVE's strategy and project-readiness phase (Strand 1) built on Longford's Town Centre First Strategy and URBACT MAPS Integrated Action Plan through stakeholder engagement, technical studies, design, statutory preparation and business planning.

This strengthened project maturity and helped move Connolly Barracks towards capital delivery (Strand 2), demonstrating how early-stage funding can turn an established regeneration ambition into an implementation-ready project.

Key Challenges

- Compressed timelines between project preparation and capital delivery
- Conservation, accessibility and servicing complexity
- Significant staff, consultant and coordination requirements
- Managing multiple funding streams and reporting requirements
- Securing long-term operational sustainability

Key Actors & Enablers

- Longford County Council multidisciplinary team and THRIVE Steering Group
- Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, providing programme support
- Town Team, education, arts, heritage and community partners
- Strong public ownership and strategic alignment with Town Centre First and URBACT MAPS
- Early community engagement, building ownership and confidence

Lessons from Longford

The case shows how heritage-led regeneration can support compact growth even where housing is not the direct project outcome. A major civic and cultural anchor can strengthen town-centre vitality, confidence and liveability and contribute to the conditions needed for wider regeneration and future housing.

- Fund readiness as well as construction. Strand 1 strengthened technical readiness, partnerships and delivery confidence.
- Build on existing integrated strategies. THRIVE enabled earlier Town Centre First and URBACT MAPS work to move towards delivery.
- Compact growth needs supporting infrastructure. Civic, cultural and community investment can help make town centres attractive places in which to live and invest.

2.2.6 Monaghan, St Louis Convent Chapel

CASE STUDY ST LOUIS CONVENT, MONAGHAN

From a closed institutional site to a new civic and cultural heart



Context and regeneration challenge

Monaghan Town has a population of 7,894 and is the principal settlement in County Monaghan, within the Northern and Western Region. The St Louis Convent Lands comprise a major town-centre heritage site that was largely inaccessible to the public for generations.

Acquired by Monaghan County Council in 2024, the lands include the former chapel and convent buildings, Convent Lake and extensive parkland. The regeneration challenge is therefore wider than the reuse of a single building: it is to open this strategic site to the town, address vacancy and underuse and create new civic, cultural and green infrastructure.

The THRIVE intervention

The project focuses on the conservation, restoration and adaptive reuse of St Louis Convent Chapel as a shared cultural, community and creative space. Planned functions include performance, exhibition, learning, community gathering and heritage interpretation.

The chapel is the first major capital project within the wider regeneration of the St Louis Lands. It is intended to provide a new civic and cultural anchor while helping reconnect a previously enclosed institutional site with Monaghan Town Centre.

Compact Growth Contribution

The project supports compact growth by bringing an underused, centrally located heritage asset back into productive use and opening a substantial publicly owned site to the town. It will improve connections to the Ulster Canal Greenway, support active travel and provide new cultural, community and green amenities.

Its contribution extends beyond the chapel itself. Housing is being considered elsewhere within the St Louis Lands, making the project a strong example of housing-supportive regeneration: civic, cultural and environmental investment helping create the conditions for a more attractive, liveable and mixed-use town centre.

At a glance:

Project: St Louis Convent Chapel and Lands Regeneration Project

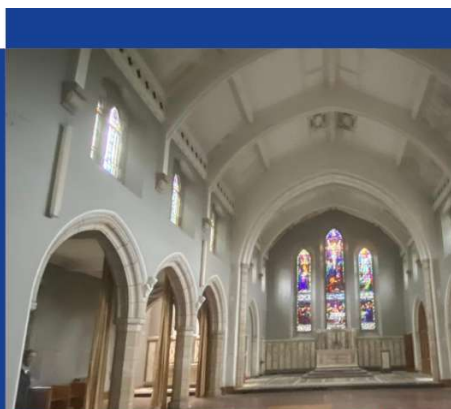
Town: Monaghan with 7,894 inhabitants

Region: Northern and Western Region

THRIVE pathway: Integrated strategy & project readiness → capital delivery

Funding: c. €199,341 project readiness | €7m THRIVE capital

Future use: Cultural, community, creative and heritage hub



From Integrated Strategy to Capital delivery

THRIVE's strategy and project-readiness phase (Strand 1) supported integrated planning, community engagement, options testing, technical preparation and development of the St Louis Options Paper.

This helped move the project from broad aspiration towards an implementation-ready position before Strand 2 capital funding was sought, while establishing a longer-term regeneration vision for the wider St Louis Lands.

Key Challenges

- Compressed period between Strand 1 preparation and Strand 2 application
- Heritage complexity, construction costs and unforeseen-work risks
- Limited availability of specialist consultants and conservation contractors
- Significant staff and coordination requirements for a smaller local authority
- Long-term operational and financial sustainability

Key Actors & Enablers

- Monaghan County Council multidisciplinary regeneration team
- Northern and Western Regional Assembly, providing programme support
- Town Team, community, youth, heritage and accessibility stakeholders
- Public ownership of the St Louis Lands
- 100% THRIVE funding, enabling a complex heritage project

Lessons from Longford

The case shows how a heritage project can act as the first delivery step within a much wider town-centre regeneration strategy. Opening the St Louis Lands and creating new civic, cultural and green infrastructure can strengthen place quality and help create conditions for future housing and mixed-use development.

- Start with people, not buildings. Extensive engagement helped shape project priorities and build community ownership.
- Fund readiness as well as construction. Strand 1 helped turn a long-term ambition into an implementation-ready project.
- Connect the asset to the wider site. The chapel's value lies partly in its role as an anchor for the regeneration of the wider St Louis Lands.

2.3 Cross-case analysis by analytical dimension

Having established the programme context and individual case-study evidence, this section examines recurring patterns across the six cases through the four dimensions of the Compact Growth Enabling analytical framework. Its four dimensions are applied consistently here and subsequently to the European comparator evidence.

For each dimension, the analysis incorporates **evidence from the six cases**, reflection sessions with the managing authorities (regional assemblies) and the **cross-case findings arising from the analysis**.

2.3.1 Strategic Mainstreaming

The first CGE dimension examines the integration of NEB within ERDF programming, Town Centre First implementation and national and regional policy frameworks.

From the evidence

Across the six cases, THRIVE operated within an established tiered planning and policy framework. National compact-growth objectives established through the NPF are translated through the RSES, while Town Centre First provides a collaborative and plan-led approach to town-centre regeneration. Within this framework, THRIVE provides targeted ERDF support for eligible designated settlements and links integrated strategy and project development to investment in the adaptive reuse of built heritage.

Across the cases, Strand 1 was consistently experienced as more than an application-preparation stage. It provided resources to prepare or enhance Integrated Urban Strategies, deepen citizen and stakeholder participation, develop project pipelines and undertake technical work required to move priority projects towards delivery. This included design development, surveys, costing and other technical preparation, alongside the planning and statutory processes required for projects progressing towards capital delivery.

The cases illustrate different starting points. Cork's Shandon Integrated Urban Strategy was the first dedicated regeneration strategy for the district and used an extensive community-led process; experience from the process has subsequently informed work on an Integrated Urban Strategy for another city district, Blackpool. Monaghan combined development of its Town Centre First Plan with work on the St Louis Convent Lands and the priority heritage project. Longford, by contrast, built on the Integrated Action Plan developed through the URBACT MAPS network and an established multi-stakeholder approach to regeneration. Strand 1 therefore supported authorities entering THRIVE at different levels of strategic and project maturity.

The cases also demonstrate the practical **mainstreaming of NEB** through THRIVE. Across all six, sustainability, inclusion and quality of place were incorporated into strategy and project development, with different expressions according to local context. Limerick and Dún Laoghaire explicitly incorporated NEB into their integrated strategies; Monaghan applied it through inclusive engagement and Living Lab thinking; and Sligo connected heritage conservation with community and wider regeneration objectives. Longford provides a particularly developed example, carrying NEB values into procurement criteria and key performance indicators, helping to maintain these objectives as the project moves from strategy into implementation.

Participation and co-design are particularly visible expressions of this mainstreaming. Engagement across the six cases extended beyond consultation on predetermined proposals and, in several instances, influenced proposed uses and design priorities. Cork's *Let's Talk Shandon* process helped shape the proposal towards a civic "third space"; consultation in Limerick influenced the inclusion of a café within the Forge Design Factory concept; Monaghan undertook structured engagement with groups including young people, people with disabilities, older people and minority communities; and long-standing community involvement in Sligo helped broaden the Gaol project from conservation towards wider social and community value.

What the Irish case studies tell us

The evidence indicates that the value of THRIVE's strategy and project-readiness function lies in its capacity to resource integrated strategy, meaningful participation, NEB and project preparation where these are needed. The cases also demonstrate differing levels of strategic and project maturity, reinforcing the importance of distinguishing between authorities requiring readiness support and those already sufficiently prepared to progress directly to capital delivery. Mainstreaming NEB beyond programme criteria also depends on sufficient time, specialist expertise and continuity of project knowledge through implementation.

2.3.2 Multi-Level Governance Integration

The second CGE dimension examines the alignment of DHLGH, the Regional Assemblies and local authorities in directing funding and coordinating planning and delivery responsibilities.

From the evidence

THRIVE is delivered through a multi-level governance structure connecting national spatial policy, regional programme management and local project delivery. The NPF establishes national spatial and compact-growth objectives, with the RSES translating these into regional priorities and identifying the settlements targeted for significant development. THRIVE was co-designed by DHLGH and the Regional Assemblies, with the Southern Regional Assembly and Northern and Western Regional Assembly acting as Managing Authorities for the two ERDF Regional Programmes and local authorities responsible for developing and delivering strategies and projects.

The case-study evidence identifies this governance structure as a strength. Across the six cases, local authorities described the Regional Assemblies as accessible, responsive and solution-oriented throughout strategy and project development. Their role extends beyond funding administration to guidance, training, knowledge exchange and support in applying THRIVE requirements, including Town Centre First and NEB principles.

Within local authorities, THRIVE also required multidisciplinary working across functions including planning, architecture, heritage, climate, arts, community development, procurement and finance. Several authorities associated the programme with stronger internal working relationships and a more integrated approach to regeneration. Cork's subsequent application of experience from Shandon to the development of an Integrated Urban Strategy for Blackpool

provides one example of practice developed through THRIVE informing further regeneration activity.

The principal governance challenge identified across the cases concerns the organisational and specialist capacity required to translate integrated strategies and project ambitions into delivery, including the continued application of NEB values and principles. Authorities reported pressures relating to staff time, specialist professional expertise, procurement, EU funding and compliance requirements, and access to suitable consultants and contractors. These demands frequently fall to staff alongside their core responsibilities. Limerick illustrates the value of strong in-house architectural and procurement expertise in progressing a complex heritage project, while the wider evidence suggests that authorities with more limited internal resources can face greater delivery challenges.

The evidence therefore distinguishes between **knowledge and capability building** and **organisational capacity**. The Regional Assemblies already perform an important role in knowledge exchange, training and building local-authority capability around THRIVE, NEB and integrated project development. This cannot, however, substitute for sufficient staff time and specialist resources within individual local authorities.

A further issue is **continuity of capacity**. Reflection with the Regional Assemblies highlighted the importance of retaining the people and institutional knowledge developed through Strand 1 as projects move into capital delivery. Where teams remain involved, knowledge of NEB, co-design, community commitments and the rationale underpinning project decisions is more readily carried forward. Where teams change, additional knowledge transfer and capacity building may be required, with potential implications for project quality and delivery time.

European peer learning also contributed to institutional capability across several cases. Longford's THRIVE project built directly on its URBACT MAPS Integrated Action Plan. Limerick drew on URBACT GreenPlace and EUI capacity-building and exchange; Monaghan's Living Lab thinking was informed by EUI learning through the national capacity building events that have been organised; and Sligo drew on experience through URBACT Cities@Heart, EUI capacity building events organised in association with the managing authorities and other European initiatives. Cork and Dún Laoghaire also identified European place-based and integrated-regeneration learning as influencing local practice.

The value of this learning was accompanied by a consistent caveat: participation in European networks and capacity-building activity requires staff time and does not always reach the professional groups that could benefit most. Knowledge exchange is therefore most useful where it is accessible, targeted and capable of being retained and applied within the organisation.

What the Irish case studies tell us

The cross-case evidence points to three related but distinct dimensions of capacity: knowledge and **capability**; organisational resources; and continuity of capacity between project stages. The Regional Assemblies already provide substantial support in the first area, while the more difficult constraint concerns sufficient staff time and specialist resources within individual local authorities. Continuity of project knowledge between strategy, project preparation and capital implementation also emerges as an important

What the Irish case studies tell us

delivery condition. Peer learning and capacity-building can strengthen institutional capability, but cannot substitute for adequate organisational resources.

2.3.3 Funding Architecture & Leverage

The third CGE dimension examines how ERDF, national funding and complementary EU funding programmes interact to enable scalable regeneration.

From the evidence

The combination of funded project preparation and 100% capital support emerged as a central strength of the THRIVE funding architecture. Across the cases, the 100% grant was regarded as particularly important for complex heritage assets where conservation requirements, uncertain costs and limited commercial returns can make conventional development difficult to finance. Strand 1 complemented this by providing resources for strategy development, participation and project preparation before capital investment. Together, these mechanisms address distinct but connected financial and readiness barriers.

The principal funding challenge identified by the cases concerns the coordination, sequencing and assembly of investment around the THRIVE grant. Combining different funding sources can be complex, particularly where programmes have different eligibility rules, application cycles, match-funding requirements or restrictions on overlapping expenditure.

Cork encountered difficulties in accessing Enterprise Ireland Smart Regions funding because of concerns regarding overlap between ERDF-supported expenditure. Monaghan identified challenges arising from fragmented funding streams, different programme requirements, short application windows and cumulative match-funding pressures across the wider regeneration process. Sligo combined THRIVE with local-authority capital and operational contributions, while the wider regeneration area also benefits from collaboration involving climate-resilience, decarbonisation and research initiatives. Longford provides the clearest example of a local authority seeking to assemble a wider package around THRIVE. Project development was supported through local-authority resources and consultant inputs, while the authority was also exploring a proposed Housing Finance Agency loan, EU START technical assistance, Horizon Europe opportunities associated with furnishing and activation, and potential LAWPRO support for SUDS and landscape interventions on adjoining lands. These cases demonstrate the range of support that may contribute to integrated regeneration, but also the substantial institutional effort required to identify, develop, coordinate and manage those opportunities.

The evidence also points to a capability dimension. Identifying relevant funding opportunities, understanding how different instruments can be combined or sequenced, and maintaining compliance across multiple programmes requires specialist knowledge and experience that is not distributed evenly across local authorities. Longford benefits from significant accumulated experience in European programmes and funding, while authorities with less exposure to EU and multi-programme funding may face a steeper learning curve. The challenge is therefore not only the availability of complementary finance, but also the institutional capacity to identify, assemble and manage it effectively.

The relatively demanding timetable also reflected a programme-design emphasis on activation and delivery, with the competitive process intended to favour authorities capable of mobilising quickly and progressing sufficiently mature projects towards implementation. The resulting tension is therefore not simply between longer and shorter programme periods. It is between maintaining momentum and rewarding readiness, on the one hand, and allowing sufficient time for meaningful participation, technical investigation and the development of complex heritage projects, on the other. Future programme design should seek to preserve a clear expectation of local commitment and timely progression while providing greater forward visibility so that authorities can assemble the necessary resources and project pipeline in advance.

Project readiness is cumulative, and the case-study evidence indicates that integrated strategy preparation and detailed project development are related but distinct stages. An integrated strategy establishes the place-based rationale, priorities and project pipeline, while implementation readiness requires further expenditure on surveys, technical and conservation investigations, options appraisal, design development, cost planning, statutory approvals, business and operational planning, procurement preparation and continued engagement. In Longford, the actual cost of progressing from Strand 1 to Strand 2 significantly exceeded the €200,000 Strand 1 allocation because of the extent of the technical, governance, design and engagement work required. Across the other cases, the need to advance these activities within compressed programme timelines also created substantial demands on local-authority staff and specialist resources. Project development should therefore be treated as a substantive and adequately resourced phase of regeneration investment, rather than as a limited extension of strategy preparation or an unfunded precursor to capital delivery.

Long-term operation represents a further dimension of delivery capacity. THRIVE already requires applicants to identify a sustainable viable end use and, at Strand 2, to demonstrate arrangements for operational and maintenance costs. The case-study evidence nevertheless shows that developing a robust business and operating model can require specialist expertise that is not always readily available within local-authority project teams. Longford provides a clear example of detailed revenue planning, with café, event-hire and workspace income being considered within the future operating model. Reflection with the Northern and Western

Regional Assembly also identified weaknesses in proposed end use and business models as one reason some projects had been unsuccessful in the competitive Strand 2 process.

The cases provide more direct evidence on the interaction between THRIVE and existing complementary funding than on emerging EU instruments e.g. NEB Facility. Nevertheless, the experience of assembling funding around wider regeneration pipelines highlights the importance of understanding how ERDF-supported investment can connect with national and EU support for housing, climate, mobility, innovation and related urban-development objectives. The potential interaction with emerging EU instruments is considered further in Chapters 3 and 4.

What the Irish case studies tell us

The cross-case evidence shows that project readiness is a progressive process rather than a single preparatory step. Complex regeneration projects move from integrated strategy and participation through technical development, statutory approvals, costing and procurement preparation before major capital commitment. The effectiveness of capital investment is also shaped by wider delivery conditions, including programme timing, organisational capacity, cashflow, operational sustainability and the coordination and sequencing of complementary funding.

The evidence further indicates that funding leverage depends partly on institutional capability. Local authorities need sufficient knowledge and specialist capacity to identify relevant funding opportunities, understand how different programmes can be combined or sequenced, and manage eligibility, compliance and double-funding risks. Funding availability and the capacity to assemble it therefore represent distinct but interdependent conditions for delivery.

2.3.4 Housing & Infrastructure Supporting Conditions

The fourth CGE dimension examines the wider conditions through which regeneration can support compact forms of urban development and town-centre living, including housing-enabling potential, infrastructure readiness, site and project pipelines, viability and the relationship between individual regeneration projects and wider site, neighbourhood and settlement-level development.

Context for interpretation

The relationship between THRIVE and housing needs to be understood in the regulatory and programme context in which the scheme and the six case-study projects were developed.

During the earlier part of the 2021–2027 programming period, Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 provided for ERDF investment in housing in particular circumstances, including interventions associated with energy efficiency, social inclusion and support for marginalised communities. THRIVE was designed within this context as an integrated sustainable urban development intervention under Policy Objective 5, with Strand 2 focused on the renovation and adaptive reuse of **vacant or derelict publicly owned or controlled heritage buildings**. Housing was therefore not established as a direct investment purpose of the Strand 2 projects examined through the six case studies.

The regulatory context has since evolved. Amendments to Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 have strengthened the position of affordable and sustainable housing within Cohesion Policy,

introducing explicit provision across Policy Objectives 2, 4 and 5, including within integrated territorial development. This creates greater scope for future ERDF-supported approaches to connect affordable and sustainable housing with integrated urban regeneration and compact development. It does not, however, retrospectively change the programme conditions under which the existing THRIVE projects were developed.

Against this background, the contribution of the six THRIVE cases to housing and compact growth is most appropriately examined at site, neighbourhood and settlement scale, including the wider regeneration conditions that can support town-centre living. This distinguishes **direct housing delivery** from **housing enablement** and avoids assessing individual heritage projects as though they were housing interventions.

From the evidence

Wider regeneration pipelines. Several of the THRIVE-supported heritage assets form part of larger regeneration areas or project pipelines. Monaghan's St Louis Chapel forms part of the wider St Louis Lands, where residential and other complementary uses can be considered across the site. Longford's Connolly Barracks similarly sits within a larger campus regeneration context, while Sligo Gaol forms part of the wider regeneration of East City and Cranmore. These cases demonstrate that the individual heritage asset can form one component of a broader regeneration process rather than operate as an isolated investment.

Integrated planning and site context. Across the six cases, the relationship between the individual project and wider place-based objectives is established through the relevant Integrated Urban Strategy. THRIVE Strand 2 also requires the heritage building concerned to be publicly owned or controlled. Public ownership or control is therefore a programme condition rather than a finding arising from the case studies. The cases nevertheless provide evidence of how this condition operates in different regeneration contexts. On larger sites, particularly the St Louis Lands in Monaghan and Connolly Barracks in Longford, local authority ownership or control provides a basis for coordinating the reuse of the THRIVE-supported heritage asset with complementary uses and longer-term development across the wider site.

Infrastructure and amenity. Across the cases, interviewees highlighted the importance of civic, cultural, educational, green and public-realm infrastructure, services and amenities to the attractiveness and functioning of existing urban areas. The THRIVE projects contribute to this wider environment by bringing vacant or underused assets back into productive use, providing new civic, community, cultural or educational functions and, in several cases, forming part of wider investment in public realm, accessibility and regeneration. These interventions can complement housing and other development occurring elsewhere within the regeneration area.

Participation and local ownership. Citizen and stakeholder engagement influenced proposed uses and design priorities across the cases and helped establish local support for projects before capital delivery. This was particularly relevant where the regeneration of long-vacant or prominent heritage assets formed part of a longer-term process of town- or neighbourhood-level regeneration.

What the Irish case studies tell us

The Irish evidence indicates that THRIVE's relationship to housing and compact growth is most appropriately assessed at site, neighbourhood and regeneration-pipeline scale rather than through direct housing output from the individual heritage asset. Across the cases,

What the Irish case studies tell us

adaptive reuse and investment in civic, community, cultural, educational and public-realm infrastructure contribute to the wider conditions that can support compact urban living and complementary development.

The evolving ERDF framework now provides greater scope to connect affordable and sustainable housing with integrated territorial development. For the six projects examined, however, THRIVE's contribution is principally **housing-supporting rather than direct housing delivery**. The evidence therefore supports assessing THRIVE as one component of a wider place-based regeneration system, alongside complementary housing, infrastructure and other regeneration interventions.

2.4 Key findings from the Irish evidence

Taken together, the analysis across the four CGE dimensions and the learning arising from the case-study interviews and reflection process point to the following cross-cutting findings from the Irish evidence.

The six case studies demonstrate that THRIVE operates as more than a capital funding mechanism. Its distinctive contribution lies in connecting established national and regional spatial objectives with integrated local strategy, participation, project preparation and capital delivery. Across the four CGE dimensions, eight principal findings emerge.

1. Project readiness is a substantive regeneration intervention

Strand 1 provided resources not only for application preparation but for integrated strategy development, citizen and stakeholder participation, technical investigations, design development and project pipeline formation. The cases entered Strand 1 at different levels of maturity, demonstrating the value of a readiness mechanism capable of responding to differing local circumstances.

2. THRIVE helps translate established policy principles into delivery

Ireland already has a strategic framework for compact and integrated urban development through the NPF, RSES and Town Centre First. THRIVE's contribution lies in resourcing the translation of these objectives into high-quality locally integrated strategies, participatory project development and investment-ready regeneration projects. NEB reinforces this process by providing a practical framework for sustainability, inclusion and quality of place.

3. The combination of project-development support and 100% capital funding addresses distinct barriers

The capital grant removes a fundamental viability constraint for complex heritage projects characterised by conservation costs, uncertainty and limited commercial returns. Readiness funding addresses a different challenge: developing sufficiently mature, technically robust and publicly supported projects capable of progressing to implementation. The effectiveness of the model depends on these functions working together.

4. Delivery capacity is layered

Successful delivery requires knowledge and capability, sufficient staff time and specialist expertise, continuity between project stages, external consultant and contractor capacity, and

access to the business, revenue and asset-management expertise needed to develop sustainable operating models for completed assets. The Regional Assemblies already play an important knowledge-sharing and capacity-building role, but this cannot substitute for organisational capacity or access to specialist expertise within or available to individual local authorities.

5. Programme timing affects project readiness and quality

Meaningful co-design, conservation-led development, technical investigation, statutory processes and procurement preparation require time. The cases indicate that compressed project-development periods can place these processes under pressure, particularly for complex heritage assets. The evidence therefore identifies forward visibility and sufficient preparation time as important conditions for both project quality and deliverability.

6. THRIVE provides a practical mechanism for operationalising NEB

Across all six cases, sustainability, inclusion and quality of place were translated into strategy, engagement and project development rather than remaining programme-level principles. The evidence includes practical examples of these principles being carried into delivery mechanisms, including Longford's incorporation of NEB considerations into procurement and performance criteria. Effective operationalisation nevertheless depends on time, expertise, resources and continuity of project knowledge.

7. Compact growth and housing enablement operate beyond the individual building

The cases demonstrate the role of heritage reuse, civic and cultural activity, public realm, green infrastructure, services and amenity in creating viable and attractive town-centre environments. Housing was not established as a direct investment purpose of the six Strand 2 projects examined, reflecting the regulatory and programme context in which THRIVE was designed. Several projects nevertheless form part of wider regeneration areas in which housing or complementary development is an important component. THRIVE's contribution to housing and compact growth is therefore most appropriately assessed at site, neighbourhood and regeneration-pipeline scale rather than solely through direct housing output from the individual heritage asset.

8. THRIVE is a targeted component of a wider compact-growth system

Its contribution to town-centre living and compact growth should be assessed in conjunction with wider place-based strategies and complementary housing, infrastructure and regeneration instruments, rather than by expecting individual heritage projects to deliver every compact-growth outcome.

Taken together, the Irish evidence suggests that **THRIVE functions as an enabling chain linking spatial policy, integrated local strategy, participation and NEB, project readiness, capital investment and local delivery capacity**. Its effectiveness depends not only on the strength of the individual components but on their sequencing and continuity.

The case studies also identify a set of practical approaches with potential relevance to other authorities undertaking integrated urban regeneration. As the Strand 2 projects remain under implementation, these should be understood as emerging practices rather than as completed models whose longer-term outcomes have already been demonstrated. Their wider relevance lies in the methods used and the enabling conditions identified, rather than in replication of the individual projects.

Table 2.4 Practical approaches emerging from the Irish THRIVE cases

Practical approach	Evidence across the six cases	Potential wider application
Connect the project to an integrated place-based strategy	All six cases connected the selected heritage asset to an Integrated Urban Strategy and a wider regeneration context. Cork positioned the Butter Exchange within the Shandon strategy; Limerick connected the Fireplace site to King's Island and Nicholas Street; Dún Laoghaire situated the Carnegie Library within the George's Place strategy; Longford connected Connolly Barracks to its Town Centre First Strategy and earlier URBACT planning; Sligo located the Gaol within the regeneration of East City and Cranmore; and Monaghan situated the chapel within the wider St Louis Lands and town-centre strategy.	Use the integrated strategy to establish the rationale for investment, identify complementary interventions and demonstrate how the capital project contributes to wider place objectives.
Engage communities before project uses and designs are fixed	All six cases provide evidence that engagement influenced project development. In Cork, engagement helped shape the proposed civic, community and enterprise functions; in Limerick, feedback contributed to the inclusion of more welcoming and activating everyday uses; in Dún Laoghaire, the preferred educational, creative and community use emerged through consultation; in Longford, early engagement helped shape preferred uses and inclusion objectives; in Sligo, community participation broadened the project from conservation towards community, cultural and educational activity; and in Monaghan, targeted engagement influenced the proposed uses and wider vision for the St Louis Lands.	Treat participation as part of project definition and options appraisal rather than consultation on a substantially predetermined proposal. Provide resources for targeted outreach, accessible materials and continued engagement through project development.
Fund project readiness as a substantive phase	All six cases used Strand 1 to advance activities such as integrated strategy preparation, surveys, technical and conservation investigations, options appraisal, design, costing, statutory processes, business planning, economic or climate assessment, engagement and preparation for capital delivery. The balance of activity differed according to each project's starting point and maturity.	Provide a funded pathway between integrated strategy and capital investment, with sufficient flexibility to respond to different levels of strategic and technical readiness.
Use multidisciplinary and cross-departmental project structures	All six cases required coordination across several professional and organisational functions. The combinations varied but included planning, architecture, heritage and conservation, procurement, community development, economic development, climate, biodiversity, housing, tourism, culture, finance and asset management. Cork, Limerick, Longford, Sligo and Monaghan particularly demonstrate the importance of multidisciplinary local-	Establish a sufficiently senior multidisciplinary structure early, define responsibilities clearly and retain key knowledge between strategy, project-development and capital-delivery stages.

Practical approach	Evidence across the six cases	Potential wider application
	authority working, while Dún Laoghaire highlights the importance of maintaining appropriate architectural and technical expertise through successive project stages.	
Develop the future use and operating arrangements alongside the physical project	All six cases considered the relationship between physical investment and future use, although their proposed models differ. Cork combines community, creative and enterprise activity; Limerick is developing the Forge Design Factory with cultural, educational, enterprise and café uses; Dún Laoghaire is developing a partnership with IADT combining educational activity, community access and long-term stewardship; Longford is considering civic uses supported by café, workspace and event income; Sligo combines visitor, heritage, cultural, educational and community functions; and Monaghan is developing a flexible cultural, community, performance and learning model within the wider St Louis site.	Develop the proposed use, operator or delivery partnership, management responsibilities, revenue assumptions and community-access commitments alongside technical project preparation.
Translate NEB principles into project decisions and delivery mechanisms	All six cases applied sustainability, inclusion and quality-of-place principles, although in different ways. Cork emphasised inclusive placemaking, adaptive reuse and low-carbon conservation; Limerick combined heritage conservation, circularity, accessibility and environmental measures; Dún Laoghaire connected adaptive reuse with community and educational access; Longford translated NEB objectives into procurement and measurable performance criteria; Sligo incorporated biodiversity, rainwater management, community gardens and inclusive community use; and Monaghan combined targeted participation, material reuse, low-carbon systems, biodiversity and nature-based drainage thinking.	Translate NEB from high-level values into engagement plans, design briefs, technical specifications, procurement criteria, project indicators and monitoring arrangements.
Use peer learning to inform local practice	All six cases reported some influence from European or wider place-based learning, although the extent and form varied. Limerick adapted learning from URBACT, EUI and exchanges with European cities; Cork drew on previous URBACT participation and wider European integrated-development learning; Dún Laoghaire drew on European place-based regeneration and NEB approaches; Longford built on its URBACT MAPS Integrated Action Plan; Sligo drew on URBACT Cities@Heart, EUI and other European projects; and Monaghan's Living Lab	Connect peer learning to live strategies and projects, and create mechanisms through which knowledge can reach colleagues beyond those directly participating in European networks.

Practical approach	Evidence across the six cases	Potential wider application
	thinking was influenced by EUI exchange and related European learning.	
Treat the heritage asset as a catalyst within a wider regeneration area	All six cases demonstrate that the THRIVE-supported building forms part of a wider place-based process. This includes Shandon in Cork, King's Island and Nicholas Street in Limerick, George's Place in Dún Laoghaire, Connolly Barracks in Longford, East City and Cranmore in Sligo, and the St Louis Lands in Monaghan. The wider interventions include public realm, accessibility, housing potential, green infrastructure, cultural and educational activity, enterprise and other complementary uses.	Assess the project's contribution at building, site, neighbourhood and strategy level. Identify complementary interventions separately and coordinate them through the wider regeneration strategy rather than expecting the individual heritage project to deliver every outcome.

The table does not imply that every approach is equally developed in every case or that it can be transferred without adaptation. The cases differ in scale, institutional capacity, project maturity, local conditions and proposed use. The transferable value lies principally in the processes and enabling conditions identified: integrated strategy, early participation, funded readiness, multidisciplinary working, operational planning, practical NEB implementation, peer learning and coordination with wider regeneration activity.

These findings provide the Irish evidence base against which the comparator evidence is considered in Chapter 3 and the consolidated assessment is developed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 then translates the resulting evidence and conclusions into recommendations for Ireland, other Member States, the European Commission and URBACT.

3. The European comparators

Chapter purpose

This chapter examines how Germany, Poland and the Netherlands enable compact urban development and integrated urban regeneration, using the same four dimensions of the Compact Growth Enabling (CGE) analytical framework applied to the Irish evidence in Chapter 2. The comparison considers how strategic frameworks, governance arrangements, funding architecture and wider housing and infrastructure conditions interact to support regeneration and the reuse of existing urban assets.

The three comparator countries provide contrasting institutional, policy and funding contexts. Each is considered at national and programme level, through a relevant regional or intermediary tier and through a city example illustrating how the wider system operates in practice. Particular attention is given to the treatment of integrated urban strategies, adaptive reuse, participation, the New European Bauhaus (NEB), institutional capacity and peer learning.

The comparison does not seek to rank the three systems or identify a single model for replication. Institutional and legislative arrangements are considered within their particular national contexts. The purpose is to identify common enabling conditions, differences and context-dependent approaches, and to assess which principles or programme-design lessons may have wider relevance. The resulting cross-comparator findings provide the European evidence base for the consolidated assessment in Chapter 4.

3.1 Approach and rationale

The comparator countries were selected through the screening process described in Chapter 1. Germany, Poland and the Netherlands were chosen because they provide contrasting approaches to integrated urban development, regeneration and compact growth, including different relationships between spatial planning, public investment, municipal delivery and European funding.

A common structure is used for each country. The analysis first establishes the national and programme context, then considers the role of the relevant regional, intermediary or programme tier, before using a city example to illustrate how the system operates in practice. The evidence is then considered through the four dimensions of the CGE analytical framework:

Strategic Mainstreaming – how compact development, integrated regeneration and NEB principles are embedded within policy, planning and programme design, and translated into place-based strategies and regeneration pipelines.

Multi-Level Governance Integration – how responsibilities and capabilities are distributed across levels of government, including institutional coordination, participation, administrative capacity, peer learning and knowledge exchange.

Funding Architecture & Leverage – how European, national, regional and local funding interact, including co-financing, project preparation, sequencing and the capacity to connect complementary sources of investment.

Housing & Infrastructure Enabling Conditions – how regeneration and reuse interact with housing, infrastructure, viability, heritage, wider site development and the conditions required for compact urban living.

In line with the analytical framework established in Chapter 1, NEB and peer learning are not treated as additional CGE dimensions. NEB is examined principally through Strategic Mainstreaming, while peer learning and knowledge exchange are considered principally through Multi-Level Governance Integration. Both are also considered elsewhere where relevant to the evidence.

3.1.1 Evidence base and limitations

The comparator analysis draws on desk research and targeted interviews or written contributions at national, regional or programme, and city level in each of the three countries. Germany is examined through the national framework, the Free State of Saxony and Leipzig; Poland through the national framework, the Mazovia Voivodeship and Warsaw; and the Netherlands through the national framework, the Province of Zuid-Holland and Rotterdam. Supplementary examples are used where they illuminate a particular programme-design feature, including Lower Saxony's Resilient Inner Cities programme.

The analysis also draws on relevant programme documentation, national evaluations and wider European research, including the [2020 ESPON study of urbanisation and land-use practices](#). As set out in Chapter 1, the comparator evidence provides selected perspectives on different institutional settings rather than a comprehensive assessment of the three national systems. City examples are illustrative, and findings are interpreted in relation to the institutional, policy and funding context in which particular approaches operate.

3.2 Germany

Germany combines a long-established national framework for urban regeneration with federal, Land and municipal delivery arrangements. Compact development is embedded in national planning law and strategic policy, while integrated urban development concepts provide the local framework through which regeneration priorities, participation and different funding sources are brought together. The analysis considers the national framework, the Free State of Saxony as the principal regional/programme lens and Leipzig as the city example. Lower Saxony is included as a supplementary programme example where it provides additional evidence relevant to integrated town-centre regeneration and participation.

MEMBER STATE | Germany

A mature, co-financed national town-centre programme (the Urban Development Support Programme, [Städtebauförderung](#), and within it the Lively Centres strand), built on a standing integrated-concept requirement (ISEK) and the compact-city rule of the National Building Code.

3.2.1 National framework for compact development

Germany is a federal state in which the national level provides funding, research and strategic direction, the sixteen federal states (*Länder*) manage and allocate funding, and municipalities hold planning and building responsibilities. Compact development is embedded in the National Building Code ([Baugesetzbuch](#)) through the principle of prioritising inner development over

outward expansion and is reflected strategically in the New Leipzig Charter (2020). At local level, the Integrated Urban Development Concept ([Integriertes Stadtentwicklungskonzept](#), ISEK) provides an important operational framework. Prepared with citizen participation, it establishes longer-term regeneration priorities and can provide the basis for accessing federal and ERDF-supported investment.

A central national regeneration instrument is the Urban Development Support Programme (*Städtebauförderung*), in place since 1971 and jointly supported by federal, Land and municipal funding. Since 2020 it has operated through three programmes: Lively Centres, Social Cohesion, and Growth and Sustainable Renewal. [The Lively Centres strand](#) is particularly relevant to this study because it supports the preservation, adaptation and reuse of existing buildings and historic urban fabric within wider area-based regeneration. Between 2020 and 2023, approximately 4,800 buildings were renovated or reused through the strand, including around 1,700 listed buildings.

Support extends beyond physical works to activities including centre and vacancy management, cooperation with local businesses, and measures to secure vacant buildings pending future reuse. Co-funding is normally shared between federal, Land and municipal levels, with the municipal contribution capable of being reduced for municipalities facing particular fiscal constraints. Smaller municipalities can also draw on specialist regeneration agencies (*Sanierungsträger*) to support preparation and delivery. These arrangements sit alongside ERDF-supported urban development managed through the *Länder*.

Alongside the *Städtebauförderung*, a separate federal programme, Future-Ready Town and District Centres ([Zukunftsfähige Innenstädte und Zentren](#)), ran from 2021 to the end of 2025 and funded preparation and experimentation rather than construction alone. Its experience is now to be carried into the main programme.

PROGRAMME EXAMPLE | National | Funding the preparation phase

Between 2021 and 2025, the federal Future-Ready Town and District Centres programme (*Zukunftsfähige Innenstädte und Zentren*) supported 217 municipalities. Alongside physical interventions, it funded town-centre strategies, participation, feasibility studies, reuse concepts, interim uses, advice to property owners and local networks. The programme therefore provides an example of project preparation and experimentation being funded as substantive components of regeneration rather than solely as precursors to capital investment.

Federal evaluation of the programme also highlights the importance of interdisciplinary municipal management and of treating centre regeneration as a continuing process requiring sustained networks and a long-term perspective.

3.2.2 Regional/programme lens: Free State of Saxony

The regional tier for the city case is the Free State of Saxony. Its ERDF urban strand sits under Policy Objective 5, sustainable urban development, with about €156m for 2021-2027, and is built on the local integrated concept. It funds building reuse where the reused building ends in public use, targeted at disadvantaged neighbourhoods rather than at heritage restoration for its own sake.

Grant rates are 75%, or 70% for the three largest cities, with a minimum 10% municipal contribution, and delivery runs through the Saxon Development Bank (*Sächsische Aufbaubank, SAB*) acting as the EU intermediate body, separate from the Managing Authority. The budget is allocated per resident in a way that favours small towns: the smallest participating town, of about 5,000 people, receives roughly €550 per resident against about €17 for Leipzig. A parallel ESF+ strand supports social urban development, providing an example of physical and social investment operating through related area-based approaches.

As ERDF urban-development arrangements vary between Germany's federal states (*Länder*), a supplementary example from Lower Saxony is included to illustrate a different programme approach with particular relevance to this study.

SUPPLEMENTARY PROGRAMME EXAMPLE | Lower Saxony: Resilient Inner Cities

Lower Saxony (*Niedersachsen*) is a separate federal state from the Free State of Saxony, which provides the principal regional/programme lens for the German comparator. It is however included as a supplementary example because its Resilient Inner Cities programme reaches smaller towns of a scale relevant to the Irish context and provides a contrasting ERDF approach to town-centre regeneration.

Its Resilient Inner Cities (*Resiliente Innenstädte*) programme is a place-based territorial instrument under Article 28(c) of the Common Provisions Regulation, allocated by competition: 36 towns applied and 15 were selected, each receiving a fixed budget of about €3.95m to €4.2m (roughly €61.5m in total) to be spent by the end of September 2029. It reaches genuinely small towns, from Lüchow in the Wendland with just over 6,000 inhabitants to places such as Zeven, Soltau and Verden in the 14,000 to 28,000 range, and its eligible actions include the revitalisation of town-centre buildings within tightly drawn central boundaries.

Its most distinctive feature is the formal role given to community representatives in project selection. Delivery runs through local steering groups in which civil-society members hold the voting majority and carry out the merit assessment of projects, while the Land's development bank checks only formal eligibility. In one town the steering group has 23 voting members with civil society in the majority, operates to defined quorum rules and publishes its minutes. Community control therefore extends beyond design to the funding decision itself and to which projects pass the merit test.

URBAN PRACTICE | Regional | Participation with decision-making power

The steering groups carry out the merit assessment themselves; the delivery bank checks only eligibility. Participation becomes a formal role in project selection rather than consultation; the published records include an instance of a group scoring its own council's project at zero. This represents a particularly formalised form of participation within the comparator evidence, but it is also highly specific, resting on one programme in one federal state. It should therefore not be interpreted as representative of German urban-regeneration practice more generally, for which the integrated concept described above provides the more representative basis for participation.

3.2.3 City lens: Leipzig, Parkbogen Ost and Ostwache

Leipzig provides a city-level example of long-term, area-based regeneration combining green infrastructure, public space, adaptive reuse and multiple funding sources. The *Parkbogen Ost* is an approximately eight-kilometre green corridor being developed along former railway infrastructure in the city's eastern districts. Initiated through citizen involvement and embedded within Leipzig's wider integrated urban-development framework, it connects neighbourhood regeneration with green infrastructure and improved accessibility.

Parkbogen Ost is not a direct equivalent to the heritage-building projects supported through THRIVE. A closer building-reuse example is the nearby *Ostwache*, a vacant historic fire station being brought back into use as a community-led neighbourhood facility. Considered together, the two projects illustrate how adaptive reuse and investment in green and public infrastructure can form complementary elements of a wider area-based regeneration process.

Leipzig also illustrates the practical coordination of different funding sources over an extended period. Municipal, federal and European funding have supported different components of the wider regeneration process, while citizen participation has continued through project development and implementation. The case therefore provides evidence of how integrated strategy can support the sequencing of different forms of investment within a longer-term regeneration area.

COMPARATOR CASE STUDY

LEIPZIG, GERMANY

A green corridor as the anchor for heritage reuse in the Leipziger Osten



The Parkbogen Ost corridor along the disused railway viaduct, looking towards the city centre. Visualisation: MAU Atelier für SINAI Landschaftsarchitekten, produced for the City of Leipzig. Reproduced with permission.

Context and compact growth challenge

The eastern districts were hit hardest by the city's population loss, and much of the vacant stock was demolished. Demand now exceeds the space that demolition left behind, so the task has shifted from managing decline to steering renewed growth back into the existing city.

How the system works here

Compact development is carried by national building law and given local form by the city's integrated concept, which sets priorities across several overlapping funding areas so that federal, Land, ERDF and municipal money work behind one plan. Saxony delivers its ERDF urban strand through the Saxon Development Bank, whose value to the city lies in a single expert point of contact and in the support it gives to municipal capacity over long programmes.

At a glance

City: Leipzig, Free State of Saxony. Large city, 632,562 inhabitants at the end of 2024

Challenge: Shrinkage to growth. About 100,000 residents lost in the 1990s and 2000s, since regained

Strategic framework: Integrated Urban Development Concept (ISEK), a standing ten-year strategy guiding investment across the funding areas

Delivery: City of Leipzig, with the Saxon Development Bank as EU intermediate body

Case: Parkbogen Ost, an 8 km green corridor on a disused railway ring, with the reuse of the Ostwache former fire station

Timeframe: 2012 to about 2035, ongoing

Funding: About €40m in total, of which about €10m ERDF, blended with federal and municipal funds

Housing: Enabled indirectly through place quality

The case in practice

The corridor follows a disused railway ring that once cut the eastern districts off from the centre. It began as an idea raised by citizens, was shaped through a master plan with wide public involvement and has kept that involvement through delivery. It works as a catalyst: a visible, high quality public realm that reconnects neighbourhoods, raises confidence and draws reuse and investment into the surrounding blocks. Nearby, the Ostwache, a vacant former fire station, is being returned to use as a community led neighbourhood centre.



The viaduct arches reopened as a public space linking the eastern neighbourhoods. Visualisation: MAU Atelier für SINAI Landschaftsarchitekten, produced for the City of Leipzig. Reproduced with permission.

Key actors and enablers

- City of Leipzig, coordinating overlapping federal, Land, ERDF and municipal funding behind one concept
- Citizens and local associations, from the original idea through the master plan and on into delivery
- Community organisations carrying the reuse of the Ostwache
- Free State of Saxony, whose ERDF urban strand supports reuse where the building returns to public use
- Saxon Development Bank, a single point of contact that carries much of the procedural load
- Deutsche Bahn, whose sale of about 70,000 m² of railway land in 2019 unlocked the corridor

What the case shows

- A city can move from population loss to renewed attraction where regeneration is integrated and sustained across decades rather than delivered project by project
- An idea that begins with citizens, and keeps them involved throughout rather than once at the start, holds public support through a long delivery
- A visible public realm anchor can draw building reuse in behind it
- Peer exchange is part of delivery: study visits arrive every month or two from across Germany and abroad, and the learning travels both ways
- Averages can hide need: a region that looks prosperous overall may still contain districts that require support, a point worth weighing in post 2027 eligibility

3.2.4 Germany: findings through the analytical dimensions

The national, regional/programme and city evidence presented above is considered here through the four CGE dimensions. The purpose is to identify the principal characteristics of the

German approach that are relevant to the wider comparative analysis, while recognising that arrangements vary between Länder and municipalities.

Strategic mainstreaming. Compact development is embedded through a combination of national planning law, strategic policy and integrated local planning. The National Building Code establishes the principle of prioritising inner development, while the New Leipzig Charter provides a wider strategic framework for integrated and sustainable urban development. At municipal level, the ISEK provides a relatively durable framework within which regeneration areas, priorities, participation and project pipelines can be established and connected to different funding sources. NEB is not generally treated as a separate national programme architecture; national interview evidence instead identified substantial continuity between NEB principles and the integrated, sustainable and participatory approach already reflected in the New Leipzig Charter.

Multi-level governance. Germany's federal structure gives national, Land and municipal levels distinct roles in urban regeneration. Saxony illustrates the use of a Land-owned development bank as an intermediate body, concentrating procedural expertise and providing municipalities with a specialist point of contact. The wider German evidence also demonstrates substantial institutionalisation of knowledge exchange through national urban-development networks, advisory structures and support for smaller municipalities. Lower Saxony provides a more programme-specific example in which civil-society representatives have a formal role in project selection. These arrangements vary across Länder and should therefore be understood as different expressions of multi-level governance rather than as a single German model.

Funding architecture and delivery. German urban regeneration combines long-term federal and Land support with municipal co-financing and, where relevant, ERDF and other European resources. Co-financing arrangements can be adjusted for municipalities facing particular fiscal constraints, while some programmes provide proportionally greater support to smaller towns. The evidence also demonstrates that strategy development, feasibility work, management, participation and interim uses can themselves receive regeneration funding alongside capital investment. Leipzig illustrates how different funding sources can support complementary components of a longer-term regeneration process. Evidence of funding being returned or remaining unspent in some municipalities also indicates that grant availability and co-financing rates interact with administrative and specialist delivery capacity.

Housing and infrastructure enabling conditions. The German evidence demonstrates a predominantly area-based approach in which building reuse operates alongside public realm, green infrastructure, centre management, vacancy activation and wider neighbourhood investment. The Lively Centres programme can support the securing and reuse of vacant buildings, while Leipzig illustrates how green infrastructure and adaptive reuse can form complementary components of a wider regeneration process. Housing is not necessarily a direct output of these interventions: their contribution can also lie in improving the wider conditions for residential use and compact urban living. Other planning and regulatory instruments, including social-preservation measures in designated areas, are used to address pressures such as displacement arising from neighbourhood change.

- ### 3.3 Poland

Poland's distinctive feature is a regeneration system set in statute, backed by national urban policy, linked to regional funding programmes and implemented principally at municipal level. This account draws on the evidence base set out at the start of the chapter and, for the wider system picture, on the national rules for delivering territorial instruments, on a ministerial evaluation of those instruments (Evaluation of the territorial instruments ZIT and IIT, 2025) and on the audit of regeneration programmes by the Supreme Audit Office (NIK, 2021).

MEMBER STATE | Poland

A statutory, plan-led approach to regeneration. Under the Revitalisation Act (2015), municipalities can designate areas for regeneration and prepare a Municipal Revitalisation Programme (GPR), with public participation built into the process through a Revitalisation Committee. A registered GPR provides the basis for accessing EU regeneration funding. Municipalities can also establish a Special Revitalisation Zone (SSR), which provides additional tools to support regeneration, including property acquisition, development control and renovation grants.

3.3.1 National framework for compact development

Compact development is an explicit goal of Poland's National Urban Policy 2030 ([Krajowa Polityka Miejska 2030](#), KPM 2030), which provides the overarching framework for government policy towards cities and their functional areas. The compact city is the first of six interconnected goals, alongside green, productive, digital, accessible and well-run cities. The policy also establishes a clear order of preference for development: first, the reuse and adaptation of previously developed land and buildings; second, infill within existing urban structures; and only as a last resort, development on previously undeveloped land. A separate planning reform requires every municipality to adopt a binding general plan, extending statutory land-use planning across areas where previously only about a third of the territory was covered by binding local plans.

The regeneration system itself is established through the [Revitalisation Act](#) (2015). Municipalities can designate a degraded area and, within it, a revitalisation area, which is limited to 20% of the municipal area and 30% of its population. A Municipal Revitalisation Programme (GPR) then sets out the integrated approach to regeneration and is prepared with mandatory public participation. The national framework explicitly rules out isolated or cosmetic interventions: physical works must form part of a wider regeneration approach and connect with the social actions planned for the area.

Participation is also embedded in the statutory framework through a Revitalisation Committee representing relevant municipal services and local stakeholders, including residents, property owners, civic organisations and local institutions. Its role is consultative rather than decision-making. Municipalities may also establish a Special Revitalisation Zone (SSR), which provides additional powers including first refusal on property sales, development-control measures, renovation grants and tools to address fragmented ownership.

A significant feature of the Polish system is the formal link between integrated regeneration planning and access to funding. Where Cohesion Policy funding is involved, the GPR can serve as the territorial strategy required under the Common Provisions Regulation. Regional Managing Authorities maintain a register of approved programmes, and regeneration projects seeking relevant EU funding must derive from a GPR included on that register. The statutory regeneration framework and the regional funding system are therefore directly connected: the municipality establishes an integrated regeneration strategy before individual projects access programme funding.

Regional programmes can support regeneration through both grants and repayable finance. Grants are used particularly where projects have a strong social, public or heritage purpose, while repayable instruments can be used where regeneration investment is capable of generating a financial return. This provides a broader funding mix than a grant-only regeneration model.

The system operates at considerable scale across Poland's regional programmes. Integrated Territorial Investment is used across 95 functional areas, while 229 municipalities use a registered regeneration programme as their territorial strategy for Cohesion Policy support. However, the funding available for regeneration through regional programmes has reduced compared with the previous programming period, and the value of projects identified in local regeneration programmes substantially exceeds the regional funding available. The statutory framework therefore supports a wider regeneration pipeline than Cohesion Policy alone can finance.

Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI/ZIT) provides a separate mechanism for cooperation across functional urban areas. In the Warsaw metropolitan area, it is coordinated through the Warsaw Metropolis Association, supporting voluntary cooperation between Warsaw and surrounding municipalities in the absence of formal metropolitan government.

Peer learning is supported nationally through the [Cities Partnership Initiative](#), sometimes described as the “Polish URBACT”. Through thematic networks, cities and functional areas work with one another and with ministry experts to develop local responses to shared urban challenges. Around 100 cities and functional areas have participated across three editions.

STATUTORY TOOL | National | Special Revitalisation Zone

The Special Revitalisation Zone (SSR) gives municipalities additional powers within designated regeneration areas, including first refusal on property sales, development-control measures, renovation grants and tools to address fragmented ownership. It is an optional instrument rather than a standard feature of every regeneration area. At the time of the research, Warsaw was preparing an SSR for selected parts of its revitalisation area.

3.3.2 Regional tier: the Mazovia Voivodeship

Mazovia provides the regional/programme lens for the Polish comparator and is the Managing Authority for the [European Funds for Mazovia 2021–2027 programme](#). Regeneration is supported principally under Policy Objective 5, alongside wider sustainable urban development and Integrated Territorial Investment. The programme prioritises the reuse of existing infrastructure, with rebuilding or extension permitted only in justified cases, and gives preference to measures including design competitions, circular and climate-resilient approaches and alignment with New European Bauhaus principles.

The Warsaw metropolitan ITI and local regeneration are treated as distinct territorial instruments. The ITI addresses functional-area issues such as transport, accessibility and services across municipalities, while regeneration funding addresses the needs of specific degraded areas within individual towns and cities.

REGIONAL CASE | Mazovia| Connecting strategy, funding and capacity

Mazovia supports regeneration through grants under Policy Objective 5, preferential treatment for eligible projects in designated regeneration areas under other programme objectives, and preferential loans. A registered Municipal Revitalisation Programme provides the basis for accessing regeneration funding.

The programme also differentiates between territorial contexts. Co-financing rates vary between the Warsaw Capital Region and the rest of Mazovia, with additional state support available to some financially weaker municipalities. Smaller towns are protected from direct competition with Warsaw and other larger cities through a separate funding stream. Alongside funding, advisory centres and the Revitalisation Regions programme provide municipalities with technical support and opportunities for knowledge exchange.

PROGRAMME PRACTICE | Regional | Regeneration support within the Managing Authority

Regional Managing Authorities maintain dedicated Revitalisation Teams that support municipalities in preparing, delivering and monitoring their regeneration programmes. The teams also assess programmes for inclusion on the regional register and maintain information on registered regeneration areas. This brings advisory and assessment functions together within the funding authority and allows municipalities to engage with the team while their regeneration programme is being prepared, before individual funding applications are submitted.

PROGRAMME PRACTICE | Regional | Regeneration support within the Managing Authority

Some regions have built further on this: the *Podlaskie* region has adopted a regional regeneration policy to 2030 organised around six components, covering the principles of regeneration, the continuing training of municipal officers, networks of cooperation within the region and nationally, communication, the procedural roadmap, and the range of funding sources and instruments available.

3.3.3 City lens: Warsaw and the Praga district

Warsaw's revitalisation focuses on the long-neglected right-bank district of Praga, a lived-in, socially mixed historic district rather than a set of isolated heritage assets, which places the question of who benefits from regeneration at the centre of the case.

COMPARATOR CASE STUDY

WARSAW, POLAND

Regeneration of a lived-in historic district, held together by public ownership



Markowska 16, Praga-Północ. A tenement of the 1920s rebuilt in its historic form to house Synergia, the city's social innovation laboratory. Photograph: Filip Springer, provided by the City of Warsaw. Reproduced with permission.

Context and compact growth challenge

Warsaw concentrates its revitalisation on Praga, the long-neglected district on the right bank of the Vistula. It is a lived-in, socially mixed historic district rather than a set of isolated heritage assets, so the case raises not only how vacant buildings return to use but who benefits when they do.

How the system works here

Regeneration here is set in law. The Revitalisation Act of 2015 gives the municipality a registered revitalisation programme, and it is that programme that opens the door to money, since a project becomes eligible only if it derives from it. The regional Managing Authority both advises municipalities and issues the opinion that admits a programme to the public register, so advice and assessment sit in the same standing team. The strongest statutory tools sit a tier higher, in the Special Revitalisation Zone, which carries first refusal, public-purpose purchase for social housing and the power to block conflicting building permits.

At a glance

City: Warsaw, Mazovia Voivodeship. Capital city, 1,860,281 inhabitants at the 2021 census

Challenge: Regenerating a lived-in historic district without displacing the people who live there

Strategic framework: Revitalisation Act (2015) and the city's registered Integrated Revitalisation Programme

Delivery: City of Warsaw and its district property management offices, with a non-profit municipal company letting the stock

Case: Praga and the right bank. A revitalisation area of about 7% of the city and some 150,000 residents

Timeframe: First stage of building renovations delivered 2018 to 2021

Funding: Mostly national. About PLN 15m from the national housing subsidy fund for three renovations in one district in one year

Housing: Central. About 30% of the residential stock in the revitalisation area is publicly owned

The case in practice

Two strands run in parallel. The first is the conversion of vacant heritage buildings to cultural and community use, shaped with residents: a former residential palace closed for about seven years became a cultural centre through citizen-led design between 2013 and 2015, and the historic Konopacki manor house was renovated for social and economic activation. The second, and the larger one, is steady building-by-building work on the city's own residential stock. In one right-bank district the municipal property management office renovated some nineteen pre-war tenement buildings between 2018 and 2021, returning six buildings containing 126 dwellings to use in 2021 alone. Enabling conditions are treated as part of the same job, from connection to the district heating network to external lifts fitted to multi-storey municipal blocks so that older residents and residents with reduced mobility can stay in them. The Special Revitalisation Zone takes time to put in place, and the city is preparing one for two areas.



Pałac Konopackiego, the restored Konopacki manor house, now a cultural centre.



Willa Siarczana, a restored villa housing the Culture and Activity Centre in Targówek.

Photographs: Filip Springer, provided by the City of Warsaw. Reproduced with permission.

Key actors and enablers

- City of Warsaw, running revitalisation as a rolling programme of works on buildings people already live in
- District property management offices, which carry out the renovations building by building
- A non-profit municipal housing company, which lets the renovated stock rather than selling it
- Mazovia Voivodeship, whose standing revitalisation team advises municipalities and admits programmes to the public register
- The national housing subsidy fund, which finances most of the residential renovation
- Residents, whose citizen-led design shaped the conversion of vacant buildings to cultural use

What the case shows

- Public ownership of housing is what allows a city to renovate and keep existing residents in place, and it has to pre-exist: it cannot be assembled once regeneration has begun
- A statutory link between a registered local programme and eligibility for funding gives regeneration a permanent legal identity rather than a project-by-project one
- Restoring ornate protected buildings to a social-housing standard is very expensive, and the city manages the tension by letting or selling some at higher value while building to a good standard elsewhere
- Advice and assessment held by one standing regional team means a municipality is met before its first application rather than after an unsuccessful one
- The strongest instruments operate at district scale and take time to put in place

Strategic mainstreaming. Poland combines an explicit national commitment to compact development with a statutory framework for integrated regeneration. National urban policy establishes a development hierarchy that prioritises reuse and infill before expansion onto undeveloped land, while the Revitalisation Act provides municipalities with a structured process for identifying regeneration areas and preparing integrated programmes. The requirement for relevant EU-funded regeneration projects to derive from a registered GPR creates a direct connection between integrated strategy and programme funding. NEB principles are also reflected in parts of the regional programme, including through project-selection criteria, although the Mazovia evidence indicates that the criterion is broad and therefore not strongly selective in practice.

Funding architecture and delivery. Poland combines Cohesion Policy funding with national, regional and municipal resources and uses both grants and repayable instruments for regeneration. Mazovia illustrates differentiated co-financing and separate arrangements for smaller settlements, while Warsaw demonstrates the greater financial capacity of a large city to combine municipal resources with national and European funding. Smaller municipalities can face greater difficulty in preparing projects, assembling their own contribution and competing successfully for funding. The evidence therefore points to the interaction between funding design, local fiscal capacity and administrative and technical capability.

Housing and infrastructure enabling conditions. The Polish evidence demonstrates how regeneration of existing urban areas can interact directly with occupied housing, heritage buildings, public space and social infrastructure. Warsaw's substantial municipal housing ownership gives the city greater influence over renovation, affordability and ground-floor uses within the regeneration area, while the Special Revitalisation Zone provides additional statutory tools available to municipalities within designated areas. The Warsaw case also illustrates tensions between heritage conservation, renovation cost and the provision of affordable housing. Housing investment and regeneration funding draw on different national and European instruments, reinforcing the importance of coordination across the wider funding system.

Country findings

- 1. Integrated regeneration is connected directly to programme funding.** The registered Municipal Revitalisation Programme provides a statutory, place-based framework through which regeneration priorities, participation and relevant EU funding are connected.
- 2. The statutory framework provides additional tools, but their use depends on local circumstances and capacity.** Instruments such as the Special Revitalisation Zone can support property acquisition, development control and renovation, but they are optional and are not uniformly used.
- 3. Regional programme design and capacity support respond to differences between municipalities.** Differentiated co-financing, separate arrangements for smaller settlements and advisory support can reduce some barriers to participation, while financial, administrative and technical capacity continue to influence municipalities' ability to prepare and deliver investment.
- 4. Regeneration operates across inhabited urban areas as well as individual buildings.** Warsaw demonstrates how housing renovation, adaptive reuse, public space, social infrastructure and participation can be combined at neighbourhood scale, while also highlighting the need to manage affordability and the costs associated with historic building stock.

3.4 Netherlands

The Netherlands provides a contrasting model of compact urban development in which spatial planning, regulation and market conditions (the level of demand and whether redevelopment is financially viable) play a more prominent role than dedicated regeneration funding. Compact development and the reuse of existing urban fabric have a long history in Dutch spatial policy, while acute housing demand and pressure on land create strong incentives to make intensive use of existing urban areas.

The Dutch context differs from Ireland in important respects. Large cities such as Rotterdam experience relatively little town-centre dereliction of the kind addressed through THRIVE, although vacancy, fragmented ownership and declining retail areas remain issues in some medium-sized cities. The comparison therefore focuses on the mechanisms through which the Dutch system directs development towards existing urban areas, coordinates investment across levels of government and supports the reuse of buildings and land.

The analysis draws on evidence at national level, from the Province of Zuid-Holland as the regional lens, and from Rotterdam as the city example. The West Netherlands ERDF programme (Kansen voor West) is also considered as part of the funding architecture. Its Managing Authority is hosted by the City of Rotterdam rather than the province, so the programme and regional governance roles are considered separately.

MEMBER STATE | Netherlands

A planning-led approach to compact development. The Dutch system directs growth towards existing urban areas principally through spatial planning and regulation, with national, provincial and municipal authorities performing different roles. Dedicated funding also supports particular urban challenges, but ERDF is not the principal mechanism for building reuse. In strong urban markets such as Rotterdam, planning controls, public-sector coordination and market investment play a particularly important role in enabling redevelopment.

3.4.1 National and programme context

Compact urban development has been a longstanding feature of Dutch spatial policy. Rather than relying on a single national regeneration programme, the system combines spatial-planning requirements with policies for housing, mobility, economic development and environmental management. Municipalities prepare an Environment Vision (*Omgevingsvisie*) setting out their long-term approach to the physical environment, while provincial spatial instruments provide a further framework for the location and form of development.

The national Ladder for Sustainable Urbanisation ([*Ladder voor duurzame verstedelijking*](#)) has historically supported an infill-first approach by requiring the need for new urban development to be considered and, for development outside existing urban areas, explaining why it cannot be accommodated within them. Its role is now changing as national housing policy responds to acute housing demand, with greater scope being given to outward development. The Zuid-Holland evidence considered below shows how the compact-development objective is increasingly being maintained through provincial spatial policy.

Cohesion Policy plays a more limited role in this system. The West Netherlands ERDF programme, [*Kansen voor West*](#), has an urban strand representing around a quarter of the programme and focused on designated districts in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht. Although this substantially exceeds the minimum ERDF allocation for sustainable urban development, the urban strand is not primarily a building-reuse programme. Its interventions address issues including the circular and energy transitions and labour-market participation in disadvantaged urban areas. Medium-sized cities do not have access to this urban strand.

Town-centre transformation is also supported through national instruments outside Cohesion Policy. The Shopping Areas Impulse Programme ([*Impulsaanpak Winkelgebieden*](#)) supported municipalities to restructure declining retail areas, including reducing vacant commercial floorspace, introducing housing and improving public space.

PROGRAMME EXAMPLE | National | Shopping Areas Impulse Programme

The Shopping Areas Impulse Programme supported municipalities to transform declining retail areas through measures including the conversion of surplus retail space, introduction of housing and improvements to public space. Operating outside ERDF, it illustrates how national funding can complement the planning system where market conditions alone are insufficient to deliver town-centre transformation.

Alongside these funding instruments, the national Urban Agenda ([Agenda Stad](#)) provides a structured mechanism for peer learning. Its [City Deals](#) bring municipalities, ministries, private-sector partners and knowledge institutions together in time-limited partnerships to test approaches to shared urban challenges and feed the resulting experience into national policy. The City Deal Dynamic City Centres, launched in 2023, focuses on issues including municipal capacity, transformation finance and the reuse of vacant premises. The approach has also been extended to smaller and rural municipalities through Town Deals.

3.4.2 Regional/programme lens: Province of Zuid-Holland

The Province of Zuid-Holland is the planning authority for the densely populated southern Randstad. The Managing Authority of the West Netherlands ERDF programme is hosted by the City of Rotterdam rather than the province. The provincial role considered here therefore concerns principally spatial planning, regional coordination and the translation of national objectives into regional policy.

A recurring theme in the regional evidence is that compact development responds to competing demands on limited land. Housing must be accommodated alongside energy infrastructure, water management, agriculture, nature, biodiversity and climate adaptation. Zuid-Holland's analysis indicates that the area used for living and working has expanded considerably faster than its population over recent decades. The provincial approach therefore seeks to use existing urban areas more intensively while retaining sufficient space for other regional needs.

REGIONAL CASE | Province of Zuid-Holland

Regional coordination of compact development. Zuid-Holland uses a Spatial Strategy setting its regional objectives, a Spatial Ordinance containing planning rules that municipalities must follow, and a delivery programme setting out how those objectives will be implemented. As the national Ladder for Sustainable Urbanisation (which has required new urban development to be justified against opportunities within the existing urban area), is being withdrawn for housing, the province has reinforced the compact-development objective through its own spatial policy, including stronger protection of land outside existing towns and villages while retaining defined scope for necessary development.

The provincial role also extends beyond regulation. Zuid-Holland coordinates spatial issues that operate across municipal boundaries, including housing, accessibility, water, energy and economic development, and provides municipalities with a shared evidence base. Its recent approach places greater emphasis on area-based cooperation with municipalities and other regional partners, reflecting the limits of relying on regulatory rules alone.

3.4.3 City lens: Rotterdam M4H and Keilepand

Rotterdam, a city with a strong development market, reuses buildings largely without subsidy. M4H is a combined port-and-city redevelopment area mixing making, working and living, while the *Keilepand* provides a building-level example of adaptive reuse: a former municipal warehouse that was retained and repurposed rather than demolished. The city's most distinctive instruments protect and enable reuse through the planning system rather than through grants.

URBAN PRACTICE | City | Neighbourhood heritage surveys linked to planning protection

Rotterdam surveys neighbourhood heritage and records the value of non-monument buildings within its statutory planning framework. This means that buildings identified as having neighbourhood value cannot simply be demolished without consideration of their potential for reuse. The approach provides a way of protecting and enabling reuse through the planning system, including where capital subsidy is not required.

COMPARATOR CASE STUDY

ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

Reuse steered through the planning system in a strong development market



Photograph: Martens Multimedia, provided by the City of Rotterdam. Reproduced with permission.

Context and compact growth challenge

The Dutch challenge is less town-centre dereliction than accommodating growth on scarce land shared with agriculture, nature, water and energy. The southern Randstad expects more than 500,000 additional residents over the next twenty to thirty years, while the land already given over to living and working is being used less intensively than it once was. Densifying what is already built is what keeps land available for everything else.

How the system works here

The system regulates location rather than funding reuse. A national Spatial Strategy is backed by a binding Spatial Ordinance, and the province translates European and national goals into binding regional rules; its 2025 revision, in force from 1 September 2026, designates a protection area for unbuilt space and puts a floor of 33 dwellings per hectare into the ordinance. Money plays a smaller part than rules. Rotterdam is itself the Managing Authority of the West Netherlands programme, whose urban strand is directed at the energy and circular transitions and at labour potential rather than at building reuse.

At a glance

City: Rotterdam, Province of Zuid-Holland.
Large city, 672,960 inhabitants at 1 January 2025

Challenge: Accommodating growth on scarce land, with more than 500,000 additional residents expected in the southern Randstad

Strategic framework: National Spatial Strategy and binding Spatial Ordinance, with heritage value in the statutory land-use plan

Delivery: City of Rotterdam, with about 65 urban designers and 30 planners in house

Case: Merwe-Vierhavens (M4H), a port-and-city redevelopment mixing making, working and living, with the Keilepand warehouse

Timeframe: Ongoing

Funding: Largely without subsidy. Reuse is steered through planning and land policy rather than through grant

Housing: Delivered within the area as part of a mixed making, working and living programme

The case in practice

The anchor is the Merwe-Vierhavens district, the Rotterdam Makers District or M4H, a combined port-and-city redevelopment that mixes making, working and living. The building-level case within it is the Keilepand, a municipally owned former warehouse once slated for demolition. Because demand is strong, the city steers reuse through the planning system and selective municipal intervention rather than through grants, supported by an unusually deep in-house capacity of around 65 urban designers and 30 planners. Two instruments carry most of the weight. The city surveys neighbourhood cultural heritage and writes the value of buildings that are not monuments into the statutory land-use plan, so that they cannot be demolished without a reuse debate. And rather than selling public assets to the highest bidder, it can dispose of key sites by value: the Keilepand was sold to its tenant cooperative to secure the intended maker use, a choice of long-term value over price.



Photograph: Frank Hanswijk, courtesy of GROUP A. Keilepand by GROUP A with studio ADAMS.

Key actors and enablers

- City of Rotterdam, acting as planning authority, landowner and Managing Authority at the same time
- The city's in-house design and planning capacity, around 65 urban designers and 30 planners
- The tenant cooperative that bought the Keilepand and secured its maker use
- Province of Zuid-Holland, which holds the containment function and shares around 3,400 datasets with municipalities so that decisions rest on a common evidence base
- A strong development market, which delivers reuse once the planning system protects and enables it

What the case shows

- Where the market will deliver, protection and careful disposal can be enough, and a capital grant would largely substitute for private investment that would happen anyway
- Recording the value of buildings that are not monuments, and writing it into the binding plan, locks in reuse through zoning rather than through money
- Disposing of public land by value rather than by price is a choice available to any public owner and costs nothing to exercise
- Bringing heritage into the plan at the earliest stage is defended by what it does for predictability and lead times, not by protection alone
- Deep in-house design capacity is what makes a planning-led approach workable, and it is the part hardest to acquire quickly

3.4.4 Netherlands: findings through the analytical dimensions

The national, regional/programme and city evidence presented above is considered here through the four CGE dimensions. The purpose is to identify the principal characteristics of the Dutch approach relevant to the wider comparative analysis, while recognising the differences between national spatial policy, provincial coordination and the strong-market context represented by Rotterdam.

Strategic mainstreaming. Compact development is embedded principally through the spatial-planning system rather than through a dedicated national regeneration programme. National and provincial policy has maintained a broadly consistent emphasis on making efficient use of existing urban areas, although the instruments used to pursue this objective are changing in response to housing pressure. In Zuid-Holland, the compact-development objective is increasingly reflected through provincial spatial policy and the integration of urban and rural spatial pressures within a common framework. NEB is not a significant organising framework in the Dutch evidence: related objectives of spatial quality, sustainability and integrated design are pursued principally through established domestic planning and design approaches.

Multi-level governance. National, provincial and municipal authorities perform distinct but interdependent roles. Zuid-Holland coordinates spatial issues that extend beyond individual municipal boundaries and translates national objectives into regional policy, while municipalities retain significant responsibility for local planning and development. The evidence also points to the importance of informal and collaborative working alongside formal instruments, including cross-level workshops and area-based cooperation. Planning capacity varies considerably between municipalities, while *Agenda Stad's* City Deals and Town Deals provide structured mechanisms for peer learning and experimentation across levels of government.

Funding architecture and delivery. Cohesion Policy plays a relatively limited role in physical regeneration and building reuse. The West Netherlands ERDF programme directs its urban strand principally towards innovation, energy, circular-economy and socioeconomic objectives in designated areas of the four largest cities, while national programmes provide separate support for town-centre transformation. Development viability is an increasing concern, particularly where inner-city projects must absorb infrastructure and other costs that can make outward development appear financially more attractive. The evidence therefore points to the interaction between spatial regulation, market conditions and public investment in sustaining compact development.

Housing and infrastructure enabling conditions. Acute housing demand creates pressure both to intensify existing urban areas and to allow additional outward development. Zuid-Holland illustrates how regional spatial policy seeks to balance housing growth with competing demands for land, including water, energy, nature, agriculture and climate adaptation. Rotterdam demonstrates how a strong development market can support building reuse where the planning system protects valued urban fabric and the municipality can use its land and property role strategically. The evidence from medium-sized cities, however, also identifies commercial vacancy and fragmented ownership, indicating that market conditions and regeneration challenges vary considerably within the Dutch system.

- ### 3.5 Cross-comparator findings

Despite these differences, the comparison identifies a number of common enabling conditions and points of variation across the four CGE dimensions. The findings below draw together the principal evidence from the three countries without seeking to identify a single model for replication. Institutional and legislative arrangements remain specific to their national contexts; their wider relevance lies principally in the programme-design and delivery principles they illustrate.

3.5.1 Strategic mainstreaming

Across the three comparator countries, compact development and integrated regeneration are supported by strategic or regulatory frameworks that extend beyond individual funding rounds. The form differs considerably. Germany connects urban-development funding to integrated local development concepts within a relatively durable national policy framework. Poland uses a statutory regeneration framework through which registered Municipal Revitalisation

Programmes connect place-based strategy with relevant programme funding. In the Netherlands, compact development is embedded principally through spatial planning and coordination rather than through a dedicated regeneration programme.

The comparison therefore points to the value of using place-based strategies to guide investment decisions. This connects individual funded projects to wider regeneration priorities and helps coordinate them with other interventions required in the area.

NEB is embedded to different degrees within these systems. Poland incorporates NEB principles within elements of programme selection; Germany relates many of the same principles to its established integrated urban-development framework; and Dutch interview evidence suggests that similar spatial-quality principles are often pursued through domestic approaches rather than explicitly through NEB. The comparison therefore shows different routes through which NEB principles can interact with established national and local frameworks.

3.5.2 Multi-level governance integration

The three countries distribute regeneration responsibilities differently, but each demonstrates a role for coordination and capability between national policy and local delivery. In Germany, Länder and intermediary bodies connect national and regional funding frameworks with municipal implementation. In Poland, regional Managing Authorities combine programme responsibilities with varying forms of advisory and capacity support. In the Netherlands, the provincial role is more strongly associated with spatial coordination, data and the management of issues that cross municipal boundaries.

Across the three systems, administrative, technical and institutional capacity is a recurring condition affecting municipalities' ability to prepare and deliver integrated regeneration. The evidence also indicates that smaller municipalities can face particular challenges in maintaining specialist expertise, preparing projects and navigating multiple funding and regulatory requirements. Effective funding needs to be matched by sufficient local delivery capacity. Well-designed programmes can support project preparation and reduce financial barriers, but local authorities still need the staff and specialist expertise to identify funding opportunities, assemble complementary sources where appropriate and manage projects through delivery.

Participation is embedded in different ways, including integrated local planning in Germany, statutory regeneration processes in Poland and area-based cooperation in the Netherlands. Peer learning and knowledge exchange are similarly organised through different institutional forms, including established urban-development networks, national and regional capacity initiatives and the Dutch City Deal and Town Deal approaches. The common feature is the provision of structured opportunities for municipalities and other actors to exchange experience alongside formal programme and delivery arrangements.

3.5.3 Funding architecture & leverage

The role of European funding differs substantially across the three comparator systems. In Germany, European, federal, Land and municipal resources can operate within a wider integrated urban-development funding architecture. In Poland, Cohesion Policy funding interacts with national, regional and municipal resources, with larger cities generally having greater capacity to assemble complementary investment. In the Netherlands, ERDF plays a

more limited role in physical regeneration and building reuse, while national programmes, municipal investment and market activity address other elements of urban transformation.

The comparison shows that funding architecture is shaped both by programme design and by local fiscal and administrative capacity. Co-financing requirements, project preparation, the sequencing of different funding sources and the ability to connect investment across a wider regeneration area can all affect delivery. Approaches such as differentiated co-financing, preparation support and coordination between complementary funding streams illustrate different ways of responding to these conditions.

The comparator evidence demonstrates that sustainable urban development funding can support different policy purposes within the same broad European framework. The particular role assigned to ERDF therefore depends substantially on national and programme choices and on its relationship with other sources of public and private investment.

3.5.4 Housing and infrastructure enabling conditions

The comparator evidence demonstrates that building reuse and compact development depend on conditions extending beyond the individual regeneration project. Property-market strength, land and building ownership, heritage requirements, infrastructure, development viability and municipal capacity all influence which combination of planning, funding and public intervention is required.

The balance between these mechanisms varies considerably. German programmes demonstrate the role of public funding and municipal intervention in supporting regeneration and reuse, including in weaker-market contexts. Poland shows how regeneration can operate across inhabited neighbourhoods, connecting housing renovation, adaptive reuse, public space and social infrastructure. Rotterdam illustrates how planning controls, public-asset management and market investment can support reuse within a stronger development market. These differences reinforce the importance of matching intervention to local conditions rather than assuming that a single regeneration instrument will operate similarly across different urban contexts.

Housing is connected to regeneration in different ways. In Poland, municipal housing forms a direct component of neighbourhood regeneration, while the Dutch evidence demonstrates the strong interaction between housing demand, spatial planning, infrastructure and land availability. Across the comparator countries, the wider evidence indicates that compact development depends on coordinating regeneration with the infrastructure, services and development conditions required to support continued urban use and investment.

3.5.5 Cross-comparator synthesis

Different systems can provide different routes to the same objective. The cross-comparator evidence does not identify a single institutional or programme model that is inherently preferable for enabling compact urban development. Germany, Poland and the Netherlands pursue comparable objectives through different combinations of spatial planning, integrated strategy, multi-level governance, public investment, intermediary support and municipal delivery. Each approach reflects its own institutional, legislative, fiscal and market context and can provide an effective route to integrated urban development within that context.

The value of comparison therefore lies not in identifying a system for replication, but in understanding the functions that different arrangements perform and the opportunities for mutual learning between them. Structured peer learning and knowledge exchange can enable Member States, regions and cities to examine how others address common delivery challenges, identify relevant principles and adapt them to their own circumstances.

Taken together, the comparator evidence does not identify a single institutional or funding model for compact urban regeneration. It instead points to the interaction of four conditions: a sufficiently durable strategic framework linking place-based priorities to implementation; governance arrangements that provide coordination and capacity across levels; funding architecture capable of supporting project preparation and combining complementary investment; and planning, housing and infrastructure conditions responsive to the characteristics of individual places and markets.

The way these conditions are assembled differs substantially between Germany, Poland and the Netherlands. This distinction is important when considering their relevance to Ireland: the comparator evidence supports the identification of enabling principles and programme-design lessons, but not the direct replication of particular legislative or institutional arrangements. Chapter 4 considers these findings alongside the Irish evidence and assesses where wider application or transfer may be appropriate.

3.5.6 What the comparator evidence adds

Germany, Poland and the Netherlands support compact development and urban regeneration in different ways. The purpose of the comparison is not to identify one system that Ireland or other Member States should replicate. It is to understand what each country's approach helps cities and towns to do and what wider lessons can be drawn from it.

Germany shows the value of long-term planning and continuity. Local integrated development plans can guide regeneration over many years and provide a basis for successive funding decisions. The German system can also support planning, feasibility work, community participation, town-centre management and temporary uses, as well as physical investment. The main lesson is that regeneration works best when individual projects contribute to the implementation of a continuing local strategy rather than individually responding separately to each new funding call.

Poland shows the value of creating a clear link between a local regeneration plan and access to funding. Municipalities identify the areas requiring regeneration and prepare formal programmes setting out how those areas will be improved. Regional authorities also provide advice and support. The evidence suggests that this approach works best when municipalities also have access to the staff, technical expertise and project-development support needed to prepare and deliver projects. This is particularly important for smaller municipalities and for those required to provide match funding.

The Netherlands shows that different places may require different forms of public support. In areas where there is strong demand for housing and other uses (supportive market conditions), investment in existing buildings and urban areas may be financially viable without a large capital grant. Public authorities can support delivery through planning, coordination, management of publicly owned land and buildings, and cooperation with private partners. In places affected by commercial vacancy, fragmented ownership or more difficult development conditions, targeted public funding may still be needed. The main lesson is that the balance

between planning, public funding and private investment should reflect the circumstances of the particular place.

All three countries also show the value of having support between national policy and local delivery. This support is organised differently in each country. German regional bodies and specialist agencies, Polish regional authorities and advisory teams, and Dutch provincial authorities all help municipalities in different ways. Their roles can include explaining programme requirements, providing access to expertise and coordinating issues that extend beyond one municipality.

Five practical lessons emerge from the comparison:

1. Regeneration benefits from a long-term place-based strategy.
2. Project preparation needs to be recognised and resourced.
3. Local authorities need access to specialist advice and support.
4. Investment in individual buildings needs to be coordinated with activity across the wider regeneration area.
5. Finally, the type and level of support, including for local authorities, should reflect differences in local capacity, demand and project viability.

In Ireland, THRIVE already applies several of these principles by linking integrated strategy, project preparation and capital delivery. The comparator evidence provides a wider perspective on how these strengths can be maintained and further developed.

4. Assessment and consolidated findings

Chapter purpose

Chapters 2 and 3 examined the Irish and comparator evidence through the four analytical dimensions used in this study. This chapter brings that evidence together to assess THRIVE against the study aims and identify which findings have wider relevance and which depend on particular institutional, programme or market contexts.

The chapter first identifies the enabling conditions for compact, housing-supportive regeneration before considering THRIVE's effectiveness, NEB and peer learning, transferability, trade-offs and future application. These findings provide the basis for the recommendations in Chapter 5.

4.1 Enabling conditions for compact, housing-supportive regeneration

Across the Irish and comparator evidence, four interrelated conditions emerge as particularly important: a strategic framework connecting investment to wider place-based objectives; governance arrangements that provide coordination, capacity and participation; funding architecture that supports both project readiness and delivery; and housing and infrastructure conditions responsive to the needs of individual places. The following sections examine these conditions in turn.

4.1.1 Strategic mainstreaming: connecting investment to an integrated strategic framework

Across all four systems, compact development is supported by a relatively durable strategic and policy framework rather than relying on individual projects or funding calls alone. The form of that framework differs considerably. In Ireland, the National Planning Framework and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies establish the spatial direction for compact growth, statutory local plans provide the local planning framework, and Town Centre First supports an integrated and participatory approach to town-centre regeneration. Germany combines national planning legislation and strategic principles with integrated urban development concepts at municipal level. Poland connects regeneration to a statutory framework through the Revitalisation Act and Municipal Revitalisation Programmes. In the Netherlands, compact development has been pursued principally through national, provincial and municipal spatial-planning instruments, alongside housing, mobility and land-use policy.

The evidence also shows that authorities enter regeneration programmes at different levels of strategic readiness. In Germany, integrated urban development concepts can provide a relatively long-term framework to which successive funding sources and projects are connected. In Poland, relevant EU-funded regeneration projects must derive from a registered Municipal Revitalisation Programme. The Irish cases demonstrate a more varied starting point. Longford was able to build on an integrated action plan developed through an earlier URBACT network, while Cork used Strand 1 to prepare the first dedicated integrated strategy for Shandon, an experience that subsequently informed work in Blackpool. Strand 1 therefore performs an important enabling function for authorities that do not already have an appropriate integrated strategy or sufficiently developed project pipeline, while THRIVE also allows authorities with the necessary strategic and project readiness to progress directly to Strand 2.

Across the four systems, the stronger common finding is that individual investments are most effective when they form part of a wider place-based strategy and pipeline of complementary

actions. The comparator evidence illustrates different ways of achieving this. In Leipzig, a long-established integrated concept provides a common framework for combining federal, European and municipal investment. Poland links eligible regeneration investment to the municipality's registered regeneration programme. In Ireland, THRIVE connects the selected capital project to a wider Integrated Urban Strategy, with Strand 1 providing resources to develop that strategy and associated project pipeline where required. The institutional arrangements differ, but the common principle is that regeneration investment should contribute to a wider integrated approach rather than operate as an isolated intervention.

Wider European evidence supports this conclusion. The ESPON study identified legal instruments, strategies and land-use regulation among the most commonly used approaches across the interventions examined, while also finding that no single instrument guarantees success across different territorial contexts. Its broader finding is consistent with the four-country evidence considered here: interventions are more likely to be effective when they sit within a clear and comprehensive strategy addressing the relevant issues and involving the relevant actors.

Compact regeneration benefits from a relatively durable strategic framework, while programme design also needs to accommodate different levels of local strategic readiness. Investment should connect to an integrated place-based strategy and wider pipeline; that strategy may already exist or, as THRIVE Strand 1 (readiness) demonstrates, its development can itself be an important part of the enabling process.

4.1.2 Multi-level governance: coordination, capacity and participation

Across the four systems, **coordination between national, regional or intermediary bodies and local authorities is an important enabling condition**, although the institutional arrangements differ considerably. In Germany, Länder and intermediary bodies connect national and regional funding frameworks with municipal delivery, with the Saxony evidence illustrating the value of a specialist point of contact for programme requirements. In Poland, regional Managing Authorities combine programme responsibilities with varying forms of advisory and capacity support for municipalities. In the Netherlands, the Province of Zuid-Holland plays a different role, focused principally on spatial coordination, shared evidence and issues that extend across municipal boundaries. These examples demonstrate different ways of providing coordination and expertise between national policy and local implementation rather than a single institutional model.

The Irish evidence demonstrates that the Regional Assemblies already perform an important enabling role alongside programme administration. THRIVE was co-designed by the Government and the Regional Assemblies, and across the six case studies local authorities described the Assemblies as accessible, responsive and solution-oriented. Their role includes guidance, capacity building, knowledge sharing and support in applying Town Centre First and NEB requirements. The comparator evidence reinforces the wider importance of accessible intermediary expertise, while also showing that the institutional form through which this is provided varies substantially between systems.

Participation is also part of the governance architecture, although its form and timing vary. In Germany, participation is embedded in the preparation of integrated urban development concepts and can continue into project development and delivery. Poland incorporates participation within the statutory regeneration process and at project level, while the Dutch evidence demonstrates more area-based forms of co-creation. The Irish cases similarly show

Across the evidence, governance capacity is critical alongside formal institutional responsibilities. Municipalities need access to planning, technical, procurement, funding and engagement expertise, but that expertise does not necessarily have to sit entirely within each local authority. Regional and intermediary bodies, national programmes, peer networks and specialist support can all contribute. The appropriate arrangement depends on the institutional context; the common enabling condition is that local delivery bodies can access the expertise and coordination required to move from integrated strategy through project preparation to implementation.

Funding architecture differs substantially across the four systems, reflecting different institutional arrangements, market conditions and local fiscal capacity. In Germany, federal, Land and municipal resources operate alongside European funding, with differentiated co-financing arrangements providing additional support for financially weaker municipalities. In Poland, European funding interacts with national, regional and municipal resources, while larger cities such as Warsaw have greater capacity to finance regeneration from their own budgets and combine different sources of support. In the Netherlands, ERDF plays a more limited role in physical regeneration and building reuse, with national programmes, municipal investment and market activity addressing other elements of urban transformation. Ireland is distinctive in combining funded project preparation through Strand 1 with a 100% capital grant under Strand 2. Across the six Irish cases, this level of grant support was identified as fundamental to the viability of complex heritage reuse where conservation requirements, uncertain costs and limited commercial returns can make conventional development difficult to finance.

The evidence highlights an important connection between funding and capacity as the principal constraint on delivery. In the Irish cases, the 100% capital grant addresses a fundamental viability barrier, but successful delivery also depends on local-authority staff capacity, specialist technical expertise, procurement capability, programme timing and the ability to manage complex projects through successive stages. Comparator evidence similarly identifies administrative and institutional capacity as an important condition affecting municipalities' ability to prepare projects, access funding and deliver regeneration. Funding availability, funding design and delivery capacity should therefore be understood as complementary enabling conditions.

Capacity is itself layered. The Irish evidence distinguishes between the knowledge and skills required to design and manage regeneration, the organisational resources needed to apply those skills, access to specialist technical and conservation expertise, continuity between project stages, market capacity to undertake complex works and the ability to operate the completed asset. Guidance and peer exchange can strengthen knowledge and skills, but they cannot substitute for sufficient staff time or specialist resources. The comparator evidence demonstrates different ways of addressing elements of this challenge, including intermediary technical support, advisory functions and dedicated funding for strategy development, feasibility work and project preparation.

Project preparation therefore forms part of the funding architecture rather than sitting outside it. The German evidence demonstrates the use of dedicated funding for strategies, feasibility studies, participation and the preparation of complex reuse projects, while the Irish evidence shows Strand 1 performing a comparable enabling function within a different institutional model. Across the six THRIVE cases that progressed through the Strand 1–Strand 2 pathway, preparation supported integrated strategy development, participation, technical investigation, governance and project readiness before major capital investment. The evidence suggests that resourcing these activities can reduce delivery risk and improve the quality and readiness of the subsequent investment pipeline.

Compact regeneration requires both viable funding and sufficient delivery capacity. The relative constraint varies by place and project. In the Irish THRIVE cases, the 100% capital grant is a fundamental viability enabler for complex heritage reuse, while Strand 1 addresses a different but complementary requirement by resourcing strategy, participation, technical preparation and project readiness. Capacity itself is layered and cannot be addressed through knowledge exchange alone.

4.1.4 Housing and infrastructure enabling conditions: matching intervention to place

The comparator evidence shows that the combination of instruments used to enable compact development and building reuse varies with local conditions. Property-market strength is one factor, alongside ownership, heritage requirements, development viability, housing demand and the planning and institutional context. German evidence demonstrates the role that subsidy and municipal intervention can play in supporting reuse, including in weaker-market contexts. Rotterdam illustrates how planning controls, public-asset management and private investment can support reuse within a stronger development market. Poland demonstrates a different approach in which statutory regeneration tools can operate across designated regeneration areas alongside public investment and housing interventions.

The comparison also highlights differences of scale. Some instruments operate at building or project level, while others address neighbourhood- or district-level conditions. These should not be treated as substitutes. A capital investment in a reused building can form part of a wider regeneration framework that addresses housing, public space, infrastructure and other complementary uses. The relevant question is therefore how different interventions can work together at the scale required by the regeneration challenge.

The relationship between regeneration and housing also operates at different scales. In Poland, housing renovation can form a direct component of neighbourhood regeneration, while the Dutch evidence demonstrates the close relationship between housing demand, spatial planning, infrastructure and land availability. In the six Irish THRIVE cases, housing was not the direct purpose of the capital projects under the applicable ERDF and THRIVE framework. This does not mean that the projects are disconnected from housing or compact growth. Several sit within wider regeneration areas where complementary residential development forms part of the longer-term context, including the St Louis lands in Monaghan, Connolly Barracks in Longford and the wider East City and Cranmore regeneration context in Sligo. The funded heritage asset is therefore better understood as an anchor within a wider regeneration area than as a building against which direct housing delivery should be measured.

Public ownership or control also performs different functions across the evidence. In the Irish cases, public ownership or control of the heritage assets is a condition of THRIVE investment and supports long-term public use and benefit. In Warsaw, municipal ownership of a

substantial share of residential stock within the regeneration area enables a different form of intervention, including housing renovation alongside wider neighbourhood investment. Both illustrate how control over land or property can affect regeneration possibilities, but they arise from different programme and institutional contexts and should not be treated as directly transferable instruments.

Finally, the evidence shows that successful reuse depends on conditions beyond the building itself. Heritage and conservation requirements can increase costs and complexity, while accessibility, energy performance, connectivity, public realm and local services influence whether a reused asset can function effectively within the surrounding area. Vacancy also takes different forms across places and markets, requiring different responses. Compact regeneration therefore depends on coordinating building reuse with the wider infrastructure, services and development conditions needed to support continued urban use and investment.

Housing-supportive compact regeneration operates across multiple spatial and investment scales. The appropriate mix of planning, funding, property and infrastructure interventions depends on local market and institutional conditions. In the Irish THRIVE cases, the absence of direct housing delivery within the six capital projects should not be used as the principal measure of their contribution to compact growth; their contribution is better assessed through their role within wider integrated strategies, regeneration areas and future development pipelines.

4.1.5 Comparison at a glance

Table 4.1 summarises the principal features identified across the four systems. The four analytical dimensions used in Chapters 2 and 3 provide the structure for the comparison; NEB and peer learning are included as priority themes traced through those dimensions.

Table 4.1 Comparison at a glance

Analytical dimension / theme	Ireland	Germany	Poland	Netherlands
Strategic Mainstreaming	Compact growth embedded through the NPF and RSES, with Town Centre First supporting integrated, participatory regeneration; Strand 1 can develop or strengthen the local integrated strategy and project pipeline	Long-established urban-development framework, with integrated local development concepts connecting place-based priorities to investment	Statutory regeneration framework linking Municipal Revitalisation Programmes to programme funding	Compact development embedded principally through spatial planning and coordination across national, provincial and municipal levels
Multi-Level Governance Integration	Government and Regional Assemblies co-designed THRIVE; Regional Assemblies combine Managing Authority functions with guidance, capacity support and knowledge sharing	Federal, Land and municipal responsibilities, with intermediary bodies providing programme and technical support	National framework, regional Managing Authorities and municipal delivery, with regional advisory and capacity support	National, provincial and municipal coordination, with provinces contributing particularly through spatial coordination, data and cross-support

Analytical dimension / theme	Ireland	Germany	Poland	Netherlands
				boundary issues
Funding Architecture & Leverage	Funded preparation through Strand 1 combined with 100% capital grant support under Strand 2	European, federal, Land and municipal resources, with differentiated co-financing arrangements	Cohesion Policy funding combined with national, regional and municipal resources; capacity to assemble complementary finance varies between municipalities	ERDF has a more limited role in physical regeneration and reuse; national programmes, municipal investment and market activity play larger roles
Housing & Infrastructure Enabling Conditions	Heritage reuse contributes to wider integrated regeneration; housing relationship is principally evident at area, strategy and pipeline level across the six cases	Area-based regeneration combines public investment, municipal intervention and reuse, including in weaker-market contexts	Housing renovation, adaptive reuse, public space and social infrastructure can form part of neighbourhood regeneration	Planning, public-asset management, infrastructure and market investment interact strongly with housing and reuse
NEB*	Explicitly operationalised through THRIVE programme requirements and the six case-study projects	Many related principles are embedded in established integrated urban-development approaches; NEB is less prominent as a separate programme instrument	NEB principles incorporated into elements of programme selection and regional calls	Comparable spatial-quality and sustainability principles are evident, although NEB is less prominent as an explicit delivery instrument
Peer learning*	URBACT, EUI and other exchange mechanisms complement national and regional programme support	Established urban-development networks and capacity initiatives support municipal exchange and learning	National and regional initiatives provide knowledge exchange and advisory support	City Deal and Town Deal approaches provide structured collaboration and exchange across levels

**NEB and peer learning are priority themes in this study, examined principally under Strategic Mainstreaming and Multi-Level Governance Integration respectively.*

4.2 **THRIVE's effectiveness against the study aims**

4.2.1 Strategic preparation and project readiness

The Irish evidence indicates that one of THRIVE's principal strengths lies in connecting integrated strategy with the practical work required to move complex regeneration projects towards capital delivery. Across the six case studies, Strand 1 supported activities including strategy development, participation and co-design, feasibility work, surveys and technical investigations, design development, statutory processes and project planning. These activities were not simply preparatory requirements for a funding application; in several cases they materially strengthened project definition, reduced uncertainty and helped local authorities develop a more credible pipeline for subsequent investment.

This project-readiness function is particularly important for complex adaptive-reuse projects, where the condition of historic buildings, conservation requirements, future-use considerations and technical or statutory issues may not be fully understood at the outset. The evidence therefore supports treating project preparation as a substantive stage of regeneration investment. At the same time, the existence of a direct Strand 2 route remains important: where an authority already has an appropriate integrated strategy and a sufficiently mature project, the programme should not require an additional preparatory stage solely for procedural consistency.

The comparator evidence reinforces the underlying principle rather than pointing to a single model for replication. Germany and Poland demonstrate different ways in which integrated planning, project preparation and subsequent investment can be connected within wider regeneration systems. The transferable lesson is therefore the value of maintaining continuity between place-based strategy, project maturation and capital delivery, while allowing the precise pathway to reflect existing local readiness and institutional arrangements.

Readiness support does not remove the **need for local commitment and ownership**. Effective progression from strategy to capital delivery also depends on senior and political support, dedicated staff and coordination capacity, timely decision-making, cross-departmental working and continuity of the project team. The appropriate balance will vary between authorities, but preparatory investment is most effective where there is a credible local commitment to carry the resulting project pipeline forward.

4.2.2 Funding and delivery capacity

The 100% Strand 2 grant addresses a fundamental viability barrier for the complex heritage projects examined, but the effectiveness of that investment also depends on sufficient delivery capacity. Across the six cases, pressures arose in different forms, including local-authority staff capacity, specialist technical and conservation expertise, procurement and compliance knowledge, the ability to identify and assemble complementary funding, market capacity and the ability to operate completed assets. Limerick illustrates the advantages of strong in-house architectural and procurement capability, but this level of specialist capacity is not available in every authority. The Irish evidence also shows that the ability to leverage complementary finance depends on institutional experience and specialist knowledge of funding programmes, eligibility and sequencing. The assessment therefore reinforces the finding that capital funding and delivery capacity are complementary: neither can be assumed to compensate fully for weaknesses in the other.

Support for accessing complementary finance could therefore combine practical funding guidance with proportionate technical assistance which would enable authorities to assess the likely added value against the administrative cost, programme timing, match-funding exposure and risk of double funding.

4.2.3 Relationship with housing and wider regeneration

THRIVE is housing-supportive rather than housing-led, and the Irish cases demonstrate that its contribution to compact growth extends beyond the direct delivery of housing units. The six capital projects were not designed as direct housing interventions, but several form part of wider regeneration areas in which heritage reuse, public realm, services, amenity and future development are closely connected. The contribution of the funded asset therefore needs to be considered in relation to the wider site, neighbourhood and regeneration pipeline rather than only within the footprint of the individual building.

In this context, a THRIVE-supported heritage asset can act as an anchor within a wider regeneration process by restoring a strategically important vacant or derelict building, providing civic or community infrastructure and strengthening the attractiveness and functionality of the surrounding area. This does not imply that every THRIVE project should contain housing. Rather, the evidence supports considering how the funded intervention relates to housing, infrastructure and other planned investment within the wider regeneration area.

4.2.4 Capacity for operational sustainability and end-use planning

The cases also highlight operational sustainability as a distinct capacity challenge. THRIVE already requires applicants to identify a sustainable viable end use and, at Strand 2, to demonstrate arrangements for operational and maintenance costs. The issue emerging from the evidence is therefore not the absence of an operational-sustainability requirement, but the capacity required to develop sufficiently robust business, revenue, management and stewardship models for complex civic and heritage assets.

The cases demonstrate different approaches to this challenge, including combinations of public stewardship, community or civic uses and revenue-generating activity. Longford, for example, has incorporated café, event-hire and workspace uses into its proposed operating model. Developing such models can require expertise in business planning, revenue modelling, asset management and programming that may not routinely sit within local-authority regeneration teams. Operational planning should continue alongside technical project preparation, with appropriate specialist support available where required.

Overall, the evidence supports THRIVE as an effective targeted model for enabling complex heritage-led regeneration within an integrated urban framework. Its distinctive strength lies in combining strategic preparation, participation and project development with high-intensity capital support. The evidence also defines the boundaries of that role: wider compact development continues to depend on local delivery capacity, housing and infrastructure provision, market conditions, specialist operational and business-planning capacity, and complementary investment. These findings point to the importance of THRIVE's relationship with the wider regeneration system rather than to an expansion of the programme to address every enabling condition directly.

4.3 NEB and peer learning: consolidated findings

NEB and peer learning have been examined within the analysis above, principally through Strategic Mainstreaming and Multi-Level Governance Integration respectively. Given their specific relevance to this study, this section draws together the principal findings arising across the Irish and comparator evidence.

4.3.1 The New European Bauhaus: explicit mainstreaming versus implicit alignment

The evidence shows different degrees of explicit NEB integration across the four systems. In Ireland, NEB is operationalised through programme requirements and translated in the case studies into practical approaches to strategy, engagement, design and delivery. In Germany, many of the same principles are embedded within established integrated urban-development practice, particularly through the New Leipzig Charter, without necessarily being identified explicitly as NEB. In Poland, NEB has been incorporated into elements of programme selection, including as a criterion in some regional calls. In the Netherlands, the evidence indicates greater implicit alignment with NEB values than explicit application of the framework.

The distinction emerging from the comparison is therefore between alignment with NEB principles and their deliberate operationalisation through programme and project processes. The comparator evidence demonstrates that sustainability, inclusion, design quality and participation can be embedded within established domestic approaches without explicit NEB branding. The Irish evidence goes further in demonstrating how NEB can be incorporated deliberately into an ERDF-supported regeneration model and carried through strategy and project development into delivery.

Ireland therefore provides particularly relevant evidence on the operationalisation of NEB within Cohesion Policy. In this respect, the learning generated by the study is not solely inward-facing: elements of the Irish approach may also be relevant to other Member States and EU-level policy development.

4.3.2 The New European Bauhaus in selection, design and delivery

The Irish cases provide evidence that NEB principles influenced project development rather than operating solely as programme terminology. In Cork, Limerick and Dún Laoghaire, they reinforced attention to design quality, inclusion, craftsmanship and public value in the development of complex heritage projects. In Monaghan, they informed accessible engagement and Living Lab thinking. NEB principles also appear at strategic level: the King's Island Integrated Urban Strategy in Limerick explicitly considers them, while the George's Place strategy in Dún Laoghaire applies them in identifying and developing interventions. Across the cases, co-design influenced proposed uses, design priorities and the relationship between the asset and its surroundings.

The strongest evidence of operationalisation arises where these principles continue into delivery. In Longford, NEB values were incorporated into procurement criteria and key performance indicators, allowing sustainability, inclusion and design quality to be tracked as the project moves from strategy into construction. The Saxony-Anhalt comparator provides a parallel example in which co-creation is incorporated as a funding condition and citizen participation is monitored as an output. Both illustrate the value of connecting broad principles to requirements or indicators that can be followed through implementation.

Continuity of staff between project phases is also recommended. The Irish evidence points to the value of retaining institutional knowledge developed during strategy and project preparation as projects move into capital delivery. Where teams or personnel change, effective handover and knowledge transfer become important to maintaining the rationale behind earlier engagement and design decisions.

Operationalising NEB has resource implications at both process and project-delivery level. At process level, meaningful participation and co-design require staff time, facilitation, targeted outreach, accessible engagement materials, communication with participants and continued involvement as proposals develop. These requirements are particularly significant where authorities seek to involve groups that may not participate through conventional consultation processes. They should therefore be treated as substantive project-development activities rather than as limited additions to statutory consultation.

At physical and project-delivery level, NEB objectives can require access to specialist design, conservation, engineering, energy, accessibility and circular-procurement expertise, together with the resources needed to translate these inputs into technical specifications, procurement criteria and monitoring arrangements. Relevant complementary support may include guidance and capacity-building from the Regional Assemblies and the national NEB contact point, European Urban Initiative capacity-building activities and appropriate European technical-assistance mechanisms. Such support can strengthen capability but does not remove the need for sufficient project budgets, staff resources and specialist expertise within or available to the delivery authority.

The consolidated finding is that NEB is more likely to influence outcomes where its principles are connected to practical processes for strategy, engagement, procurement, delivery and monitoring rather than expressed only as general programme values. The Irish cases provide particularly strong evidence of this operational pathway.

4.3.3 Peer learning and capacity development

Peer learning and knowledge exchange emerge across the Irish and comparator evidence as important complements to formal programme and funding arrangements. They can strengthen knowledge, skills, project preparation and institutional learning, although they do not substitute for the staff resources and specialist expertise required for delivery. The comparator systems provide different forms of structured exchange at national, regional and European levels, while several of the Irish cases demonstrate how participation in European networks has influenced subsequent regeneration practice.

The evidence identifies several practical contributions from peer learning. It can support the development of integrated strategies and better-prepared projects; transfer methods that are subsequently applied in local practice; provide access to expertise that individual authorities may struggle to maintain internally; and create channels through which municipalities can exchange experience with peers and communicate common delivery issues to higher levels of government. The comparator evidence illustrates different institutional approaches to these functions, while the Irish cases demonstrate their practical influence.

The evidence also suggests that peer learning is more likely to influence delivery where Member State and regional actors help connect it to domestic policy, technical support and investment pathways. National URBACT Points, Managing Authorities and relevant national and regional bodies can perform an important brokering role by disseminating learning beyond

participating cities, helping authorities interpret it within their own administrative context and connecting them with appropriate project-development or funding support. At European level, clearer links and signposting between URBACT, the European Urban Initiative, Interreg, NEB-related support and relevant technical-assistance mechanisms could help cities identify the appropriate next step from strategy and learning towards experimentation, investment readiness or delivery.

Longford provides the clearest Irish example: its THRIVE project developed from an integrated action plan prepared through an earlier URBACT network. European exchange and capacity-building also influenced approaches in Limerick, Monaghan, Sligo, Cork and Dún Laoghaire, including engagement methods, integrated regeneration practice and organisational learning. Peer learning therefore has value where knowledge acquired through networks is subsequently incorporated into strategy, project development or institutional practice.

Peer learning nevertheless has clear limits. Knowledge and skills are not equivalent to the organisational capacity required to apply them. Exchange, training and guidance can strengthen understanding and capability, and the Regional Assemblies already perform an important role in supporting this in Ireland, but these activities cannot substitute for sufficient staff time, continuity and specialist expertise within or available to local authorities. Peer learning and delivery capacity are therefore complementary rather than interchangeable.

The Irish evidence also identifies practical constraints on participation in peer-learning activity. Exchange can be resource-intensive for participating staff, and its benefits may remain concentrated among practitioners already engaged in regeneration networks rather than reaching colleagues in housing, engineering, procurement, finance and other relevant functions. The effectiveness of peer learning therefore depends partly on accessible formats, efficient use of participants' time and the ability to share learning beyond those directly involved.

The six Irish cases examined in this study represent only part of the practical experience being generated through THRIVE. Strand 1 beneficiaries are developing experience in integrated strategy preparation, participation, project prioritisation and readiness, while Strand 2 beneficiaries are generating learning on procurement, adaptive reuse, NEB implementation, capital delivery and future operation. A structured repository or practical toolbox drawing on this wider body of experience could help local authorities identify relevant methods, examples and transferable lessons without implying that individual projects could be replicated. To remain useful, such a resource could capture delivery challenges and enabling conditions as well as successful outputs, and could be connected to facilitated peer exchange rather than operating solely as a static collection of case studies.

Taken together, the evidence shows that Ireland operates within European knowledge exchange as both a learner and a contributor. European networks have influenced several of the Irish cases, while THRIVE's operationalisation of NEB provides experience with potential relevance beyond Ireland. The evidence also shows that learning can be uneven between authorities and vulnerable to staff turnover or changes between project phases. Capturing and transferring institutional knowledge therefore remains an important part of sustaining the benefits of peer learning over time.

Comparative learning requires a distinction between principles and programme-design features that can transfer between systems and arrangements that depend on particular legal, institutional or market contexts. The comparator evidence is therefore assessed using four categories:

The categories are analytical rather than prescriptive. In particular, legislative and institutional arrangements identified in the comparator countries are treated as contextual features that help explain how those systems operate; they are not presented as models that other Member States should replicate.

Portable. Across the comparator evidence, the most portable elements are generally programme-design principles rather than specific legal or institutional instruments. These include connecting investment to an integrated place-based strategy; resourcing project preparation; providing accessible technical and advisory support; supporting structured peer learning; coordinating complementary investment across a regeneration area; and adjusting programme requirements or support to reflect differences in local capacity. These principles appear in different institutional forms across the comparator countries, indicating that the functions they perform can transfer more readily than the particular mechanisms through which they are delivered.

Adaptable. Other approaches have wider relevance but require adjustment to national and local circumstances. These include intermediary expertise between programme and municipal levels, area-based approaches that coordinate several regeneration actions, early integration of heritage and other site information into planning and project preparation, and differentiated support for authorities with different levels of capacity. The comparator evidence demonstrates the potential value of these approaches, but their design and delivery necessarily depend on existing governance arrangements, institutional capacity and programme structures.

System-dependent and context-specific. Statutory regeneration mechanisms in Poland, particular governance arrangements within German programmes and patterns of municipal property ownership are system-dependent. They help explain how those systems operate but do not provide a basis for recommending equivalent legislative or institutional arrangements elsewhere. Similarly, the appropriate balance between subsidy, planning intervention, public

ownership and market investment is context-specific and depends on factors including property-market conditions, asset type, ownership and development viability.

4.4.3 Relevance of the comparator evidence to Ireland

For Ireland, the comparator evidence is most useful at the level of enabling functions rather than institutional replication. Several are already present within THRIVE, including funded project preparation, the connection between capital investment and integrated strategy, and intermediary support through the Regional Assemblies. Comparator experience provides useful reference points for strengthening these functions, particularly in project preparation, differentiated capacity support, area-based coordination and structured knowledge exchange. Statutory, property and governance mechanisms that depend on particular national systems are not treated as prescriptions for Irish institutional change.

4.4.4 Transferable elements of the Irish model

Comparative learning also runs outward from Ireland. Two elements of the THRIVE model have particular relevance beyond the Irish context.

The first is the explicit operationalisation of NEB principles within an ERDF-supported regeneration programme. The Irish evidence demonstrates how sustainability, inclusion and design quality can be connected to integrated strategy, participation, project development, procurement and monitoring rather than remaining solely as high-level programme values. The underlying principle is portable, although the mechanisms used to embed NEB within programme design and delivery would need to be adapted to the relevant national and programme context.

The second is the use of a distinct, funded preparation stage. Strand 1 makes integrated strategy development, participation, technical preparation and project readiness visible and fundable in their own right before major capital investment. Comparator countries support similar functions through different arrangements, including preparation funding and area-based programmes, but the Irish model provides a clear programme-level sequence through which these activities can be supported. The principle of resourcing project readiness is portable, while the form and sequencing of that support are adaptable to different programme and institutional arrangements.

Both elements can therefore transfer at the level of **programme-design principle without requiring replication of Ireland's wider institutional arrangements**. Their precise application should reflect the governance, funding and delivery context of the Member State or programme concerned.

4.4.5 Scope and limitations of the analytical framework

The four analytical dimensions were developed and used to organise the evidence gathered for this study. They enabled consistent consideration of strategic frameworks, governance and capacity, funding and project readiness, and housing and infrastructure conditions across Ireland, Germany, Poland and the Netherlands, while recognising the different institutional, planning and funding systems in each country.

Its use in this report is limited to structuring the comparative analysis and does not establish the framework as a validated methodology. The findings arising from the analysis may inform

wider policy dialogue, but any future use of the framework would require further development and testing beyond the scope of this study.

Accordingly, the framework should be understood as a study-specific analytical device rather than a prescriptive approach, an established methodology or a model for replication. The substantive findings concern the enabling conditions identified through the research, not the future adoption of the framework itself.

4.5 Conflicting objectives and trade-offs

The enabling conditions identified in this study can also create competing pressures. Programmes need to balance project quality with accessibility, timely delivery with adequate preparation and participation, conservation quality with financial viability, and a clear programme purpose with the wider range of interventions required for compact regeneration. These tensions are not necessarily weaknesses in programme design; they reflect legitimate objectives that need to be balanced. The Irish and comparator evidence highlights five in particular.

4.5.1 Competitive selection and differences in local capacity

Competitive selection can support quality by requiring authorities to demonstrate strategic fit, project maturity and deliverability. At the same time, competition assumes that applicants have sufficient staff, expertise, documentation and organisational capacity to prepare a credible application. These conditions are not distributed evenly, and authorities with smaller teams or less specialist capacity can face particular challenges.

The comparator evidence consistently identifies this challenge, particularly for smaller municipalities, while also illustrating different responses through project-preparation funding, advisory support and simplified programme requirements.

THRIVE addresses part of this tension through Strand 1, which funds the preparation that competitive capital selection requires. Across the six cases that progressed through the Strand 1–Strand 2 pathway, this support contributed to strategy development, technical preparation, participation and project readiness. It does not remove all differences in local capacity or the uncertainty inherent in competitive funding, but it reduces the extent to which preparatory costs must be absorbed before a capital award is secured.

4.5.2 Speed of delivery and adequate preparation

Programme deadlines provide accountability and can help move long-standing projects towards decisions. They can also create pressure where complex heritage projects require technical investigation, statutory approvals, options appraisal and meaningful community engagement before capital delivery. These activities do not always progress predictably, particularly where the condition of historic fabric becomes fully apparent only during investigation or works.

Both effects are evident in the Irish cases. Several authorities reported compressed timelines between preparation and capital application, sometimes requiring technical, statutory and engagement processes to proceed in parallel. At the same time, the pace of the programme was credited in at least one case with helping to resolve decisions that had remained open for a prolonged period. The trade-off is therefore between maintaining momentum and allowing

sufficient time for the preparation, participation and statutory processes required for a robust project.

4.5.3 Heritage quality and financial viability

Adaptive reuse of protected and historic buildings can generate substantial public value, but conservation requirements, uncertainty about existing fabric and specialist construction needs can also increase costs and delivery risk. Across the Irish cases, these characteristics combine with limited commercial returns to create projects that would be difficult to deliver through conventional market finance. The 100% capital grant is therefore a fundamental viability enabler within the THRIVE model.

Capital viability does not, however, remove the challenge of long-term operation. THRIVE already requires attention to viable end use and operational and maintenance costs, but developing a robust operating model can require specialist business, revenue and asset-management expertise. Once the asset is restored, management, maintenance and revenue arrangements become important to sustaining its use and public benefit. The trade-off therefore extends beyond the initial conservation cost to the relationship between investment quality, affordability of use and the long-term operating model.

Comparator evidence demonstrates different balances between subsidy, municipal intervention, planning controls and market investment, reinforcing the finding that the appropriate approach depends on the asset and local market context.

4.5.4 A clear programme role within a wider regeneration system

A tightly defined programme can provide clarity about its purpose, eligibility and assessment criteria. Broader eligibility can respond to a wider range of urban needs, but it can also weaken the distinctive role of an instrument if its objectives become too diffuse.

The Irish cases demonstrate that compact regeneration depends on conditions extending beyond the individual THRIVE-supported heritage asset, including housing, infrastructure, public realm, mobility, services, vacancy activation and wider site or neighbourhood development. They also show how heritage-led investment can contribute to these wider objectives by reactivating strategically important vacant assets, providing civic, cultural, community or educational infrastructure and strengthening the attractiveness and functionality of surrounding areas.

The implication is not that THRIVE itself should fund all of these components. Its value lies in retaining a clear role in supporting integrated strategy, project readiness and complex heritage-led regeneration, while connecting effectively with complementary investment operating at building, site, neighbourhood and settlement scale. The comparator evidence reinforces this point: sustainable urban development funding can serve different purposes depending on national and programme choices, and no single instrument can reasonably address every condition required for compact growth.

The relevant trade-off is therefore between maintaining a sufficiently clear programme purpose and ensuring that the intervention does not operate in isolation. Effectiveness depends on how THRIVE-type investment is coordinated and sequenced with complementary housing, infrastructure, vacancy, public-realm and wider regeneration measures around a coherent place-based strategy.

4.6 THRIVE's future application and new funding routes

The study was asked to consider the future application of the THRIVE model, including its potential relationship with housing and vacancy, emerging European funding opportunities and the post-2027 Cohesion Policy framework. This section considers those opportunities in light of the findings above. It identifies areas of potential alignment and future application without prescribing a particular programme design; recommendations are set out in Chapter 5.

Figure 4.6 Future positioning of THRIVE

A targeted programme with a distinctive role, better connected to complementary investment



4.6.1 The future role of a THRIVE-type instrument

The evidence supports THRIVE as a targeted regeneration instrument rather than a general-purpose compact-growth fund. Its distinctive features are the connection between integrated strategy and project delivery, funded preparation through Strand 1, meaningful participation and NEB integration, and high-intensity capital support for the adaptive reuse of vacant or derelict heritage assets. These features address a particular regeneration challenge: complex

public-value projects that can be difficult to bring forward through conventional development finance.

The six case studies that progressed through the Strand 1–Strand 2 pathway demonstrate the value of combining preparation and capital support, while also identifying conditions that affect delivery, including local-authority capacity, specialist expertise, realistic programme timing and the capacity to develop viable operational arrangements. These findings are relevant to any future iteration of the model, but they do not imply that THRIVE should be expanded to address every condition required for compact urban development.

The emerging post-2027 framework is relevant in this respect. The Commission's proposals explicitly contemplate support for the preparation of integrated territorial and urban development strategies. While the legislative framework remains under negotiation, this direction is consistent with one of the clearest findings from the Irish evidence: project preparation can be a substantive investment in its own right rather than an unfunded precursor to capital delivery.

4.6.2 Vacancy, housing and wider regeneration

The European policy context increasingly connects housing supply with the better use of the existing building stock, neighbourhood regeneration and the reuse of vacant and underused buildings. The European Affordable Housing Plan emphasises renovation, repurposing and bringing vacant properties back into use alongside new construction, while the 2026 Council Recommendation on the New European Bauhaus promotes the efficient use of the built environment, the revitalisation of neighbourhoods, the reuse of brownfields and the transformation of suitable vacant buildings. European Parliament work on housing similarly highlights the potential reuse of unused public building stock where appropriate.

This creates a stronger policy context for connecting vacancy, adaptive reuse and housing than existed when the current THRIVE framework was designed. It does not, however, mean that housing should simply be added to the existing THRIVE capital model. The six Irish cases demonstrate that heritage-led investment can support housing and compact growth at site, neighbourhood and strategy level without housing being the direct purpose of the individual capital project. Future programme design therefore needs to distinguish between direct housing investment and the wider housing-supportive role of regeneration.

The regulatory context has also changed. Under the ERDF route through which THRIVE was originally programmed, housing was not included as a direct investment purpose of the six capital projects. Amendments to the ERDF framework adopted in 2025 now provide more explicit scope for affordable and sustainable housing, including under Policy Objective 5. This creates greater flexibility for future programme design, but it does not automatically necessitate altering the scope or rules of the existing THRIVE programme.

4.6.3 The European framework after 2027

The emerging post-2027 EU framework continues to place integrated urban development, housing and local administrative capacity within the European policy agenda. The EU Agenda for Cities identifies affordable and sustainable housing and buildings among its priority areas and recognises the particular capacity and funding challenges faced by smaller and medium-sized cities. The Commission's proposals for the post-2027 funding framework similarly retain

support for integrated urban development, with particular attention to issues including housing and cultural heritage.

The proposals would change aspects of how European funding is planned and allocated, including through National and Regional Partnership Plans. As the framework remains under negotiation, it is too early to draw conclusions about the precise funding architecture that will apply after 2027. The relevant finding for this study is that integrated urban strategies, local participation and support for strategy preparation remain visible within the proposed framework, while housing has acquired substantially greater prominence within EU policy and Cohesion Policy.

For a future THRIVE-type instrument, this suggests continued alignment between the Irish model's emphasis on integrated strategy and project readiness and the direction of European policy. The eventual opportunities will depend on the final regulatory framework and on choices made through national and regional programming.

4.6.4 Complementary instruments and funding opportunities

The future application of THRIVE also needs to be considered in relation to complementary national and European instruments rather than in isolation. The Irish evidence demonstrates that integrated regeneration often depends on several forms of investment operating at different scales and stages. THRIVE's future role should therefore be understood alongside the wider Irish framework for town-centre regeneration, vacancy, housing and place-based investment.

Within Ireland, Town Centre First provides the overarching policy context, while complementary instruments address different parts of the regeneration challenge. These include the Town and City Regeneration Investment Fund, the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant and the Living City Initiative, alongside housing and infrastructure investment. Their purposes, geographies and eligibility differ, but together they reinforce the importance of defining THRIVE's distinctive role and coordinating complementary investment around wider regeneration strategies and project pipelines.

At European level, emerging opportunities similarly span different functions. Housing investment is receiving increased attention through Cohesion Policy and the European Affordable Housing Plan, while the New European Bauhaus Facility creates a more explicit connection between research and innovation and the wider roll-out of NEB-aligned approaches. URBACT and the European Urban Initiative continue to support integrated urban development, capacity building, experimentation and knowledge exchange. These instruments do not constitute a single funding route, but they provide potential complements to national and regional investment depending on the purpose, maturity and development stage of individual projects.

The research and innovation dimension is particularly relevant where regeneration projects can provide a setting for testing or demonstrating approaches that go beyond the capital works themselves. The earlier programme mapping identified potential connections with innovation in areas such as low-carbon and circular construction, adaptive reuse, design and delivery processes, energy performance and other built-environment solutions. A future THRIVE-type model could therefore provide a project pipeline from which suitable projects may connect with research, innovation or demonstration activity, where this adds value and where appropriate

partnerships with universities, research organisations, enterprises or other specialist actors can be established. This could be understood as a complementary opportunity rather than as a requirement for every THRIVE project.

Universities and technological universities could play a more active partnership and intermediary role in enabling local authorities to engage with these opportunities. Local authorities can provide live regeneration settings or demonstration sites in which new approaches can be developed, tested and evaluated, while higher-education and research institutions can contribute specialist expertise, research capacity, consortium development and experience of programmes such as Horizon Europe. Potential areas of collaboration include low-carbon and circular building materials, adaptive reuse, delivery and business models, participatory methods, digital tools and the monitoring of regeneration outcomes. Such collaboration should not be confined to the larger cities in which higher-education institutions are located. Ireland's relatively compact institutional and geographical context provides scope for universities and technological universities to work with smaller towns and local authorities across a wider regional or national area, including THRIVE beneficiaries that may have limited research or innovation capacity of their own.

Access to these opportunities also depends on the support architecture available to local authorities. Managing Authorities, programme contact points, URBACT and European Urban Initiative capacity-building activities, JASPERS and peer-learning structures perform different but potentially complementary functions. Their practical value depends on authorities being able to identify the appropriate route and access support at the relevant stage of project development. This is particularly important for smaller or less-resourced authorities, for which the staff and specialist resources required to assess opportunities, establish partnerships and prepare competitive applications may themselves represent a barrier to access.

The principal finding is therefore one of complementarity. THRIVE has demonstrated particular value in combining integrated strategy, participation, project readiness, NEB and high-intensity support for complex heritage reuse. Future opportunities lie in connecting that role effectively with housing, infrastructure, vacancy, research and innovation, relevant partnerships and wider regeneration investment, rather than requiring THRIVE itself to absorb all of those functions. The appropriate connections will vary by project and should be driven by the regeneration objective and stage of development rather than by a requirement to combine multiple funding programmes in every case.

4.6.5 How they can be accessed and what this requires

Table 4.2 Illustrative funding and support routes (Ireland and Europe) relevant to integrated regeneration

Type of funding or support	Illustrative examples	Potential contribution	Principal access and management requirements
Core Cohesion Policy and regeneration capital	THRIVE and other ERDF-supported integrated urban-development investment; Ireland's Towns and Cities Regeneration Investment Fund; Rural Regeneration and Development Fund; Town and Village Renewal Scheme; Germany's Urban Development Support Programme (Städtebauförderung), including the Lively Centres strand; regional Cohesion Policy programmes supporting municipal regeneration in Poland	Integrated strategy, project preparation, adaptive reuse, public realm, infrastructure and area-based regeneration	Eligibility depends on programme purpose, geography and project type. Projects may require an integrated strategy, a sufficiently mature investment proposal, statutory approvals, match funding and compliance with Cohesion Policy and national programme requirements.
Housing, vacancy and building-reuse support	Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant; Living City Initiative; Repair and Leasing Scheme; Buy and Renew Scheme; Housing Infrastructure Investment Fund; relevant housing and building-renovation measures in the comparator countries	Returning vacant buildings to use; residential reuse; enabling infrastructure; renovation and energy performance; complementary housing investment within wider regeneration areas	Housing, vacancy and regeneration measures have different beneficiaries, ownership conditions and eligible costs. Their expenditure and outcomes may need to remain clearly distinct from the core THRIVE project.
EU research, innovation and demonstration programmes	Horizon Europe, including the New European Bauhaus Facility; relevant LIFE programme opportunities; European Urban Initiative Innovative Actions	Piloting or demonstrating new approaches to adaptive reuse, low-carbon construction, circularity, energy performance, participation, design and delivery; developing partnerships with universities, research organisations and enterprises	These programmes are competitive and normally require a strong innovation rationale, specialist partners, significant application preparation and dedicated project-management capacity. They should be treated as complementary opportunities rather than substitutes for

Type of funding or support	Illustrative examples	Potential contribution	Principal access and management requirements
			mainstream capital funding.
Technical assistance and investment-readiness support	JASPERS; the InvestEU Advisory Hub; European Urban Initiative capacity-building support; NEB-related technical assistance and the NEB Toolbox; specialist national or regional advisory support	Project preparation, feasibility, investment readiness, financial and economic assessment, governance, procurement, climate assessment and development of an investable project pipeline	Access routes and eligible forms of assistance vary. The authority must be able to define its support requirement, provide project information and retain sufficient internal capacity to act on the advice received. Technical assistance generally supports project development rather than funding the capital works themselves.
European territorial cooperation and peer learning	URBACT; Interreg cross-border, transnational and interregional programmes; European Urban Initiative schemes such as City-to-City Exchanges, Peer Reviews and capacity-building events; ESPON policy-support and territorial-evidence activities	Integrated action planning, transfer of tested practices, institutional learning, partnership development, small-scale experimentation and access to European expertise	Participation requires staff time, partnership development and organisational continuity. Its value depends on the authority's ability to retain learning and translate it into local strategies, project preparation and subsequent investment. Participation does not necessarily provide substantial capital funding.
Repayable and private finance	Local-authority borrowing, including Housing Finance Agency finance where appropriate; European Investment Bank lending; InvestEU-supported financial products; national or regional financial instruments; project-specific private investment	Financing potentially revenue-generating elements, bridging timing gaps, supporting energy or infrastructure investment and mobilising additional investment alongside public funding	Requires financial due diligence, an appropriate repayment or revenue model, risk allocation and clarity on ownership and long-term liabilities. Private or blended finance should not undermine affordability, inclusion, public access or the

Type of funding or support	Illustrative examples	Potential contribution	Principal access and management requirements
			wider public-value objectives of the regeneration project.
Local-authority resources and bridge finance	Local capital allocations; development-plan budgets; internal project-development resources; temporary financing pending reimbursement of grant claims	Covering early project-development costs, ineligible expenditure, cash-flow gaps, enabling works or complementary elements outside the principal grant	Creates a direct call on local-authority financial and staff resources. Capacity varies considerably between authorities and may affect their ability to advance projects or participate in programmes requiring upfront expenditure or co-financing.
Operational income and revenue support	Local-authority operational budgets; café, workspace, room and event-hire income; cultural programming; service agreements; partnerships with community, cultural or educational organisations	Activation, programming, staffing, maintenance and the long-term operation of completed assets	Capital funding does not remove the need for a credible operating model. Income assumptions should be realistic, tested and monitored, with clear responsibility for management, maintenance and financial risk.

Note: The examples are illustrative and non-exhaustive. Programme availability, calls, eligibility requirements and budgets change over time and should be confirmed with the relevant Managing Authority, government department, National Contact Point or programme secretariat. Comparator-country instruments are included to illustrate alternative funding models and support arrangements; they are not presented as funding routes directly available to Irish Local Authorities.

The mapping identifies no single additional funding source capable of replicating the function performed by THRIVE. Instead, the relevant opportunities perform different and complementary roles.

Core regeneration and Cohesion Policy funding can support strategy, project preparation and capital delivery; housing, vacancy and infrastructure programmes may support related interventions within the wider regeneration area; research and innovation programmes can support experimentation and demonstration where an appropriate partnership and innovation rationale exist; and technical assistance and peer-learning programmes can strengthen project development and institutional capability.

Accessing these opportunities requires sufficient local capacity to identify the appropriate route, develop partnerships and manage different eligibility, timing and compliance requirements. The principal opportunity therefore lies in improving coordination and access to

complementary support so that THRIVE investment can achieve greater impact and added value as a catalyst within wider place-based regeneration and compact-growth strategies.

5. Recommendations

The recommendations draw on the six Irish THRIVE case studies, the comparative review of Germany, Poland and the Netherlands, and consultation with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Regional Assemblies and URBACT. They are organised around four recurring themes emerging from the study: progressing from strategy to investment readiness; delivering integrated regeneration; connecting funding and programme support; and building institutional capacity and transferring learning.

This thematic structure reflects the finding that project readiness, delivery capacity, funding coordination, participation and peer learning are interdependent. Responsibility for acting on the recommendations is distributed across local, regional, national and European levels, and several recommendations require cooperation between more than one level of governance.

The comparative research was deliberately targeted rather than exhaustive, drawing on a limited number of interviews and illustrative national, regional and city examples. Comparator evidence is therefore used to identify adaptable principles and programme-design lessons rather than to prescribe direct institutional or legislative transfer.

5.1 Progressing from strategy to investment readiness

Recommendation 1: Protect and strengthen the project-readiness function

Maintain a dedicated project-readiness mechanism within future iterations of THRIVE or any successor programme. Review whether the scale, duration and scope of preparatory support are sufficient to move complex projects from integrated strategy to genuine capital readiness.

Support should be capable of covering, where appropriate, integrated strategy and project-pipeline development, participation and co-design, surveys and investigations, feasibility, technical design, statutory processes, costing, procurement preparation and operational planning. Future programme design should distinguish clearly between integrated strategy preparation and the more detailed project-development work required before capital delivery. This may require an intermediate project-development stage or another mechanism for projects that are strategically well developed but not yet ready for capital investment.

Readiness support should be matched by evidence of local commitment. This should include appropriate senior and political ownership, dedicated coordination capacity, cross-departmental participation, timely decision-making and a credible pathway towards capital delivery and long-term operation. Public support for readiness should reduce avoidable barriers and delivery risk, but should not remove the need for local authorities to commit their own organisational capacity and demonstrate that projects can be progressed.

Why: The six cases identify readiness as a substantive regeneration intervention rather than simply preparation of a funding application. The evidence also shows that readiness is cumulative and that its cost and duration can extend beyond initial strategy preparation.

Evidence: Six Irish case studies; Regional Assembly reflection; German evidence on funded preparation; cross-comparator findings.

Target Audience: National and regional urban-policy authorities and Managing Authorities, working with local authorities.

Time horizon: Next programme-design cycle.

Recommendation 2: Provide greater forward visibility and proportionate programme timelines

Publish future calls, indicative funding envelopes and programme timelines sufficiently in advance to allow local authorities to plan staff resources, secure specialist expertise and develop appropriate project pipelines.

Programme design should maintain a clear emphasis on activation and delivery and should continue to reward authorities that demonstrate readiness and the capacity to progress. At the same time, preparation and delivery periods should be proportionate to the complexity of adaptive-reuse projects. Participation, conservation-led design, technical investigation, statutory processes and procurement cannot always be compressed without affecting project quality or delivery risk.

Programme arrangements should also provide reasonable scope to respond to material issues arising during implementation, particularly where the condition of historic fabric or the outcome of statutory processes could not have been fully anticipated.

Why: Greater forward visibility would help authorities become ready to respond while preserving the programme's emphasis on momentum and delivery. Proportionate flexibility is also required because complex regeneration and adaptive reuse contain unavoidable uncertainty.

Evidence: Irish case studies; Regional Assembly reflection; comparator evidence on project preparation and implementation.

Target Audience: Managing Authorities and national and regional urban-policy authorities

Time horizon: Design and launch of the next programme period.

Recommendation 3: Fund delivery capacity alongside project investment

It is encouraged that future THRIVE-type programme design should recognise delivery capacity as a supported component of successful regeneration alongside strategy preparation and capital investment. This could include consideration of support for dedicated project-management and coordination capacity within local authorities and access to specialist implementation expertise where this cannot reasonably be maintained in-house.

Continuity of key personnel across project development and capital-delivery stages is recommended, recognising the evidence that changes in project teams can result in loss of programme knowledge, delays and weaker continuity in the application of participation and NEB principles.

One option to explore is nationally or regionally coordinated frameworks through which local authorities could access time-limited specialist implementation support in areas such as conservation and design, procurement, project and financial management, funding strategy and navigation, ERDF compliance, State aid, energy performance, accessibility, community

engagement, NEB and adaptive reuse. Such support should complement rather than duplicate the role of the Regional Assemblies and should include knowledge transfer to local-authority teams. Relevant EU technical-assistance opportunities should also be examined.

Why: Authorities require sufficient staff time and coordination as well as access to specialist knowledge. Guidance and peer learning can strengthen capability but cannot substitute for the organisational resources needed to prepare and deliver complex projects.

Evidence: Six Irish case studies; Regional Assembly reflection; comparator evidence on intermediary and advisory support.

Target Audience: National and regional urban-policy authorities and Managing Authorities, in consultation with local authorities and relevant professional and technical bodies.

Time horizon: Short-term feasibility work, with potential implementation in the next programme cycle.

5.2 Delivering integrated regeneration

Recommendation 4: Retain and resource meaningful participation and NEB implementation

Retain the explicit integration of NEB values and meaningful citizen and stakeholder participation within future THRIVE-type interventions. Consideration should be given to the resources required to implement these principles effectively when developing programme budgets, eligible costs and timelines alongside the imperative for project delivery.

At process level, this could reflect staff time, facilitation, targeted outreach, accessible engagement and continued involvement as projects develop. At physical and project-delivery level, it could include access to appropriate design, conservation, engineering, energy, accessibility and circular-procurement expertise, together with the resources to translate NEB objectives into technical specifications, selection criteria, procurement and monitoring.

Relevant complementary support, including the New European Bauhaus Facility, European Urban Initiative capacity-building activities and appropriate technical-assistance mechanisms, should be clearly signposted.

Why: The cases demonstrate that NEB and co-design can materially influence project uses, design and delivery. They also demonstrate that meaningful implementation requires resources and specialist input and cannot be treated as a cost-free programme requirement.

Evidence: Six Irish case studies; THRIVE programme requirements; Regional Assembly reflection; programme mapping in Section 4.6.

Target Audience: National and regional urban-policy authorities and Managing Authorities, working with local authorities and relevant European programme actors.

Time horizon: Next programme-design cycle.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen capacity for operational sustainability and end-use planning

Retain the existing emphasis on viable end use and long-term financial sustainability while strengthening the capacity available to local authorities to develop robust operational and business models.

This could include targeted guidance, capacity building and access to expertise in business and revenue modelling, asset management, stewardship, programming and long-term operational planning. Operational planning should develop alongside technical project preparation so that proposed uses, management arrangements, maintenance responsibilities and revenue requirements are sufficiently mature before projects move into capital delivery.

Why: Developing a credible operating model can be challenging where project teams do not have ready access to specialist business, revenue or asset-management expertise.

Evidence: THRIVE programme requirements; Irish case studies; Regional Assembly reflection.

Target Audience: Managing Authorities and national and regional urban-policy authorities, working with local authorities and relevant specialist bodies.

Time horizon: Next programme-design cycle.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen national coordination of funding and financing for integrated regeneration

Retain THRIVE as a targeted instrument for complex, public-value regeneration where high intensity capital support is required to overcome viability barriers, while periodically reviewing funding ceilings and eligible project-development costs against actual delivery conditions. Within the wider Town Centre First and compact-growth framework, clearly define THRIVE's relationship with complementary housing, vacancy, infrastructure, public-realm, climate and wider regeneration instruments.

Future programme design should provide clearer pathways for coordinating and sequencing these complementary investments, including early identification of relevant funding opportunities and potential overlaps, practical guidance on how different sources may be combined, and continued safeguards against duplication or double funding.

Future programme development should also respond to the evolving EU housing context by strengthening connections between regeneration and housing investment where appropriate, while retaining THRIVE's broader role in supporting heritage reuse, social and civic infrastructure, public realm, economic activity, climate objectives and place quality. The Irish evidence indicates that these wider regeneration investments can create housing-supportive conditions even where housing is not itself the primary project output.

Why: The 100% capital grant is consistently identified as a fundamental viability enabler for the complex heritage assets examined. At the same time, the cases demonstrate that wider regeneration outcomes frequently depend on several complementary interventions operating at building, site, neighbourhood or town-centre scale. THRIVE's distinctive value should therefore be retained while improving its connection to the wider funding and delivery system rather than expanding the programme to address every dimension of compact growth.

Evidence: Six Irish case studies, including evidence on complementary funding and programme interaction; Town Centre First and the wider Irish funding context; cross comparator findings on funding architecture and integrated regeneration.

Target Audience: National and regional urban-policy authorities, working across relevant departments, funding bodies, regional authorities and local government.

Time horizon: Short-term coordination work and next programme/design cycle.

Recommendation 7: Match regeneration instruments to local conditions

Design and periodically review regeneration instruments against the conditions affecting different places, including project viability, administrative and technical capacity, ownership, heritage requirements, infrastructure, housing demand and property-market conditions.

A proportionate programme-design checklist could be used to test whether the proposed instrument:

- responds to the principal delivery barriers;
- is accessible to authorities with different levels of capacity;
- provides an appropriate balance between readiness and capital support;
- requires realistic local commitment;
- complements rather than duplicates existing instruments; and
- includes suitable arrangements for monitoring and adaptation.

Comparator practices could be used to identify adaptable principles and delivery functions rather than templates for direct institutional or legislative transfer.

Why: The four countries assemble the enabling conditions for compact regeneration differently. Similar policy objectives can require different combinations of planning, funding, governance, capacity support and property intervention.

Evidence: Cross-comparator analysis and Chapter 4 assessment.

Target Audience: National and regional urban-policy authorities and Managing Authorities.

Time horizon: Future urban-policy and programme design.

Recommendation 8: Establish post-completion monitoring and a living practice resource

Establish a proportionate post-completion monitoring and evaluation framework for THRIVE. This could assess how completed projects contribute over time to vacancy and heritage reuse, social and civic value, local economic activity, NEB objectives, surrounding regeneration, housing-supportive conditions and wider compact-growth outcomes.

The resulting evidence could be fed back into local strategies, future project pipelines and regional and national programme design. It could also support a living THRIVE practice repository or toolbox drawing progressively on experience across Strand 1 and Strand 2 beneficiaries, rather than only the six projects examined in this study.

The resource could include concise case material, practical templates and implementation lessons on integrated strategies, participation, project readiness, procurement, NEB, funding coordination, capital delivery and operational planning. It could record challenges, enabling conditions and relevant local context alongside successful practice and be connected to periodic practitioner exchange rather than functioning solely as a static showcase.

Why: The current projects remain under implementation, and their longer-term outcomes cannot yet be fully assessed. Systematic monitoring would support programme learning, while the wider THRIVE cohort provides a valuable source of practical experience that could reduce repeated reinvention.

Evidence: Six Irish case studies; Regional Assembly reflection; cross-case findings on peer learning and longer-term outcomes.

Target Audience: National and regional urban-policy authorities and Managing Authorities, in partnership with participating local authorities and URBACT.

Time horizon: Development in the short term, with continuing implementation as Strand 2 projects are completed.

5.3 Connecting funding and programme support

Recommendation 9: Protect support for project readiness after 2027

Ensure that the post-2027 Cohesion Policy framework continues to enable support for integrated urban strategies, participation, feasibility, technical preparation and investment readiness alongside capital delivery.

Member States and Managing Authorities could consider recognising these activities as investments that improve the quality, maturity and deliverability of future capital projects. It would be beneficial if support were to remain accessible to cities and towns of different sizes and administrative capacities while allowing national and regional authorities to adapt delivery arrangements to their institutional context.

Why: Complex regeneration requires an investable project pipeline as well as capital funding. The THRIVE experience demonstrates the value of connecting integrated strategy, participation and project preparation to subsequent delivery.

Evidence: THRIVE Strand 1; six Irish cases; German and Polish evidence; emerging post-2027 framework.

Target Audience: European Commission, Member States and Managing Authorities.

Time horizon: Post-2027 Cohesion Policy and national and regional programme design.

Recommendation 10: Improve access to complementary EU support and research partnerships

Provide clearer practical pathways connecting Cohesion Policy with complementary EU support for housing, NEB, research and innovation, technical assistance and integrated urban development. This could include authoritative guidance on complementarity, eligible

combinations and the avoidance of double funding and continued efforts to simplify access for smaller and medium-sized urban authorities.

Member States and Managing Authorities could explore potential for facilitated structured connections between local authorities, universities, technological universities, research organisations and relevant National Contact Points. Smaller towns could be encouraged to consider identifying suitable research partners beyond their immediate area and participating in research or demonstration activity where this supports an identified regeneration objective.

These partnerships could assist with consortium development, Horizon Europe applications and the testing and evaluation of innovation in adaptive reuse, low-carbon and circular construction, delivery methods and sustainable operating models. They could complement, rather than substitute for, adequate capacity within local authorities.

Why: EU opportunities span several programmes and institutional entry points. Their practical value depends on authorities being able to identify the appropriate route, establish partnerships and manage the resulting application and delivery requirements.

Evidence: Irish case studies; cross-comparator evidence; European programme mapping in Section 4.6.

Target Audience: European Commission, Member States and Managing Authorities, working with National Contact Points and higher-education and research networks.

Time horizon: Short-term coordination and guidance, followed by incorporation into post-2027 programme arrangements.

5.4 Building capacity and transferring learning

Recommendation 11: Strengthen the institutional capacity of cities to navigate European opportunities

Develop a more explicit and sustained capacity-building offer to help cities understand and navigate the European urban-policy and funding landscape. URBACT is well placed to build on its existing strengths in integrated planning, participation and peer learning by providing cities with practical support to identify appropriate programmes, develop partnerships, connect learning to project preparation and embed European cooperation within routine municipal practice. This capacity-building offer could also support cities in applying and further developing indicators, tools and methodologies for monitoring and advancing compact growth, building on existing approaches and identifying areas where further research and development would be valuable.

Consideration could be given to ensuring this is not limited to information about individual funding calls. It could strengthen cities' institutional ability to assess opportunities, decide which are relevant, assemble appropriate partnerships and connect European learning with local investment and delivery. Particular attention should be given to smaller and medium-sized authorities and to ensuring that knowledge reaches relevant teams in planning, housing, engineering, procurement, finance and asset management.

Why: Existing capacity-building support is valuable but can appear fragmented. A more coherent capacity-building approach could also help consolidate and disseminate knowledge

on compact growth, creating a basis for shared learning around relevant indicators, tools and methodologies. Cities need continuing institutional capability to navigate the European landscape rather than support focused solely on individual applications or networks.

Evidence: Irish case studies; Regional Assembly reflection; cross-comparator evidence on local administrative capacity and intermediary support.

Target Audience: URBACT, the European Urban Initiative and relevant national and regional actors.

Time horizon: Short to medium term, including development within the remainder of URBACT IV and preparation for the next programme period.

Recommendation 12: Strengthen Member State and regional support for peer learning and project readiness

Encourage Member States, regions and Managing Authorities to play a more active role in connecting participation in European networks with domestic urban policy, capacity support and investment pathways.

This could include national or regional mechanisms through which cities adapt and transfer relevant practices; structured exchange between participating and non-participating cities; recognition of the capacity and project-development work undertaken through programmes such as URBACT and the European Urban Initiative; and clearer pathways through which learning can contribute to project readiness and subsequent investment.

Consideration could be given to the establishment of a flexible function through which Member States and regions help cities learn from one another, adapt tested practices to their own institutional context and connect softer capacity-building measures with the larger investment programmes for which they are responsible.

Why: Peer learning is more likely to influence delivery where national and regional bodies help embed it within domestic systems. It would be beneficial for responsibility for connecting learning to investment to not rest solely with European programmes or individual cities.

Evidence: Irish case studies; experience of national practice transfer; Regional Assembly reflection; comparator evidence on regional advisory and capacity-building functions.

Target Audience: Member States, regional authorities and Managing Authorities, working with URBACT and participating cities.

Time horizon: Medium term and preparation for the post-2027 programming period.

Recommendation 13: Build a more coherent European capacity-building and learning offer

Strengthen cooperation between URBACT, the European Urban Initiative, Interreg, ESPON, NEB-related initiatives and relevant technical-assistance mechanisms so that cities encounter a more coherent offer for integrated urban development.

URBACT should retain its distinctive role in integrated planning, peer exchange and institutional learning while working with complementary programmes to:

- incorporate relevant European priorities and values into practical support for cities;
- provide clearer signposting between learning, experimentation, technical assistance, project preparation and investment;
- capitalise and disseminate tested practices;
- reduce duplication between capacity-building offers; and
- enable cities to progress from knowledge exchange to institutional change and, where appropriate, funded delivery.

NEB and compact regeneration provide immediate areas in which this cooperation could be demonstrated, but the recommendation should apply more broadly to emerging European urban priorities. Cooperation could focus on helping cities identify the most relevant support rather than encouraging participation in multiple programmes for its own sake.

Why: European programmes provide complementary forms of support, but the overall offer can appear fragmented from the perspective of a city. Stronger cooperation would help translate European objectives into a more accessible pathway from learning and experimentation to readiness and delivery.

Evidence: Irish case studies; cross-comparator findings; European programme mapping; evidence on peer learning and institutional capacity.

Target Audience: URBACT, the European Commission and relevant European programmes and initiatives, working with Member States and regional partners.

Time horizon: Short- to medium-term coordination and post-2027 programme development.

Annex A: Comparator country profiles

This annex profiles the three comparator countries examined in Chapter 3: Germany, Poland and the Netherlands. Each profile is organised by governance tier, national, regional or programme, and city, and sets out the headline figures, how the system works at each tier and where the evidence is used in the report. It draws on the desk research and on the interviews and written contributions recorded in Annex C.

The profiles are descriptive. The comparative analysis across the four study dimensions is in Chapter 3, and the assessment of which elements have wider relevance is in Section 4.4, which classifies them as portable, adaptable, system-dependent or context-specific. Institutional and legislative arrangements are described here to explain how each system operates, not as models proposed for adoption elsewhere.

Germany

Headline figures

National programme	Urban Development Support Programme (Städtebauförderung), in place since 1971; three strands since 2020
Federal assistance 2020-2024	about €3.91bn, supporting more than 3,200 area-based schemes in more than 2,400 municipalities; reaching €1bn of programme funds for the first time in 2026
Lively Centres strand	about €300m a year 2020-24, close to 1,400 schemes in more than 1,200 municipalities
Buildings renovated or reused 2020-23	about 4,800, of which some 1,700 listed monuments
Concentration on centres	more than 60% of funding areas and 60% of federal assistance in inner cities, historic cores and district centres; more than 80% on both counts including areas close to the centre
Co-funding model	thirds between federal, Land and municipal levels; the municipal share can fall to 10% under a budget-consolidation regime or for intermunicipal schemes
ERDF urban dimension	about €1.07bn for 2021-2027 across the Länder programmes; at national level about 10%, above the 8% minimum set by Article 11(2) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1058
ERDF urban strand (Saxony)	about €156m for 2021-2027; grant rate 75%, or 70% for the three largest cities, with a minimum 10% municipal contribution
Per-resident allocation (Saxony)	about €550 per resident for the smallest participating town of some 5,000 people, against about €17 for Leipzig
Second Land example	Lower Saxony, Resilient Inner Cities: 36 towns competed, 15 selected, about €3.95m to €4.2m each, some €61.5m in total, to September 2029
City case	Leipzig, Parkbogen Ost: an 8-km green ring, about €40m (about €10m ERDF), 2012-2035
Second Land example	Lower Saxony, Resiliente Innenstädte: 36 towns competed, 15 selected, about €61.5m total
New European Bauhaus	no dedicated national budget line; principles treated as embodied in the New Leipzig Charter

Central finding

Germany has an area-based federal, Land and municipal programme that renovates heritage at scale and rests on a standing integrated concept held before any call opens. Its two distinctive design features are co-funding shared in thirds with a floor for weak municipalities, and a per-resident allocation weighted towards small towns.

National tier

Sixteen Länder allocate and manage the money; roughly 11,000 municipalities hold planning and building authority. Alongside the funding programmes, the national apparatus for exchange is long established: the National Urban Development Policy since 2007, whose annual congress has drawn up to 1,300 participants; the German-Austrian Urban Network, established in 1996 and coordinated by the body that is also Germany's national URBACT contact point; and a national academy for small towns, seated in Wittenberge, which networks more than 2,100 of them.

Regional tier

In Saxony the roles are split three ways: the Managing Authority sits with the Economics ministry, urban-development policy with the regional-development ministry, and delivery with the Saxon Development Bank as intermediate body and the cities' main point of contact. A European Social Fund Plus strand runs a social urban-development twin programme, understood to be unusual among the Länder. Even a reduced own share can strain weaker municipalities, and some have returned funding already awarded.

City tier

Leipzig lost around 100,000 residents through the 1990s and 2000s and has since regained them, standing at 632,562 at the end of 2024. A key enabling step for the Parkbogen Ost was the purchase of about 70,000 m² of former railway land from Deutsche Bahn in 2019.

Poland

Legal basis	Revitalisation Act (2015); Municipal Revitalisation Programme (GPR); Special Revitalisation Zone (SSR)
Revitalisation-area legal cap	no more than 20% of municipal area and 30% of population
Cost of spatial disorder	estimated at PLN 84.3bn a year (2018 study for the Polish Academy of Sciences, cited in the National Urban Policy 2030)
Territorial instruments 2021-27	95 functional areas under integrated territorial investment; 57 further partnerships and seven individual municipalities under the other route; 229 municipalities using their registered regeneration programme as the territorial strategy
Regional programme allocations	about €8.7bn to territorial instruments, ranging from 13% of the allocation in one region to 29% in another
Regeneration allocation	about €0.8bn in 2021-2027, down from about €1.3bn in 2014-2020; three regions do not support regeneration from their regional programme and four support urban areas only
Planned against funded	registered programmes in twelve regions set out about PLN 34.5bn of core projects against PLN 3.6bn allocated, roughly a third of what their authors expected
Mazovia programme (FEM 2021-27)	about €2.1bn of EU contribution; about €176m in the Policy Objective 5 priority carrying regeneration; about €407m for sustainable urban development, of which €135m to the Warsaw functional area
Mazovia revitalisation allocation	about PLN 690m (roughly €160m), through grants, an additional-points bonus and preferential loans
Co-financing	50% in the Warsaw Capital Region, 85% in the Mazovia Regional area, with a state-budget top-up for the poorest municipalities
Revitalisation-area legal cap	no more than 20% of municipal area and 30% of population
Warsaw revitalisation area	about 7% of the city and some 150,000 residents; about 30% of the area's residential stock city-owned
New European Bauhaus	a formal but broad scoring criterion in some regional calls

Central finding

Regeneration in Poland is set in statute, and the registered municipal programme is what opens the door to Cohesion Policy funding. The Polish evidence also shows the limits of a legal framework on its own: local ambition substantially exceeds what the regional programmes can fund, and smaller municipalities lack the teams and documentation that competitive calls require.

National tier

The implementing rules state the purpose in the negative as well as the positive: work confined to improving the appearance of a place without producing structural change is inadmissible. The Special Revitalisation Zone is adopted by resolution for a defined period and takes time to put in place. Peer learning is institutionalised through the Cities Partnership Initiative, three editions covering around 100 cities and functional areas, in which municipalities prepare local development plans with ministry experts working alongside them.

Regional and programme tier

Two programme rules bear directly on reuse: new buildings cannot be funded, existing infrastructure has to be used first; and grant is reserved for justified cases with a dominant social dimension, for public buildings and for national heritage, with repayable instruments where a project has a commercial component. Advice and assessment sit within the same standing team inside the funding authority. The region reports having negotiated changes to central and European requirements, including shifting support for urban-rural municipalities whose town is under 5,000 inhabitants into the non-urban stream so they do not compete against Warsaw.

City tier

About 30% of the revitalisation area's residential stock is city-owned social housing, let through a non-profit municipal company and not sold. The city is preparing a Special Revitalisation Zone for two parts of its revitalisation area. The closest parallels to a heritage-reuse scheme are the vacant-to-cultural conversions shaped with residents: a former residential palace in Praga, closed for about seven years, converted through citizen-led design between 2013 and 2015.

Netherlands

Steering	planning-led, through a national Spatial Strategy and a binding Spatial Ordinance; the Ladder for Sustainable Urbanisation is being withdrawn for housing and its function is migrating to the regional tier
ERDF West Netherlands (Kansen voor West) 2021-2027	ERDF contribution of about €207m for 2021-2027, of which about €31m in the Policy Objective 5 priority for sustainable urban development; the wider urban strand, which also runs inside the innovation and climate priorities, is put by the programme at about a quarter of the whole
Urban strand scope	reserved to the designated districts of the four largest cities; funds circular, energy and labour-market measures, not physical reuse
Shopping Areas Impulse Programme (Impulsaanpak Winkelgebieden)	four rounds 2022-24 plus two later budget increases: 47 projects and about €98.7m of grant, reported as mobilising more than €500m of direct local investment
Expected outputs of those projects	more than 135,000 m ² of retail floorspace taken out of shopping streets; over 324,000 m ² of residential floorspace created, of which 87,000 m ² social rent, some 5,000 homes; more than €90m into public space; seven years from grant decision to deliver
Demand against budget	in the fourth round the advisory committee approved 26 projects against a budget covering 13; two increases, one a parliamentary amendment in March 2026, brought that round to €32.7m
City Deal Dynamic City Centres	about €580,000 a year in total, 2023-27; extended to small and rural municipalities as Town Deals
Housing	about 900,000 new homes needed by 2030; shortage about 400,000
Zuid-Holland	some four million inhabitants; around 3,400 datasets shared with municipalities; a floor of 33 dwellings per hectare in the ordinance
Rotterdam planning capacity	about 65 urban designers and 30 planners
New European Bauhaus	largely unused; comparable spatial-quality principles pursued through domestic approaches

Central finding

In the Netherlands compact growth and building reuse are steered by the planning system rather than by a dedicated regeneration fund. The ERDF urban strand is narrow in use rather than small in amount: it is reserved to the four largest cities and funds social, circular and

labour-market measures, not physical reuse. The instruments closest to THRIVE are two national, non-EU schemes for medium-sized cities. The right instrument depends on market strength, and the Dutch case marks the boundary of the comparison: dedicated grant funding is decisive mainly where the market will not deliver.

National tier

The town-centre instruments sit outside the EU programmes. The Impulse Programme is run by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency for the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate; it requires an integral area plan covering the public space and the privately owned buildings together, is assessed by an advisory committee with no prescribed project form on the stated grounds that no two areas are alike, and has run consistently ahead of its budget. Where vacancy occurs it is mainly commercial, in smaller towns of around 20,000 to 30,000 inhabitants as retail moves online, and is increasingly reconverted to housing.

Regional tier

The Province of Zuid-Holland holds the binding spatial instruments, but its influence rests less on money or formal authority than on soft tools: it argues from the needs of systems that function regionally, holds a strong shared information position, and translates European and national goals into binding regional rules. Its 2025 policy revision, in force from 1 September 2026, dropped the fixed urban growth boundaries and moved to an area-based co-creation process across five sub-regions. The West Netherlands ERDF programme is managed by the City of Rotterdam, not the province, and the two should not be conflated.

City tier

Because demand is strong, Rotterdam can steer reuse largely through the planning system and selective municipal intervention rather than through grants, supported by an unusually deep in-house capacity. The *Keilepand*, a municipally owned former warehouse once slated for demolition, was disposed of by value rather than to the highest bidder, being sold to its tenant cooperative to secure the intended maker use.

Annex B: Templates, legislation and programme documents

This annex lists the study's own templates and the main legislation, policy and programme documents drawn on across the report, organised by jurisdiction. It is a reference inventory to let the reader trace the evidence base; it is not exhaustive, and interview transcripts are held on the project file. Full versions of the templates and any listed document can be supplied on request.

Study templates and instruments

-) Compact Growth Enabling (CGE) analytical framework: the four-dimension structure developed for and used in this study (strategic mainstreaming; multi-level governance; funding architecture; housing and infrastructure enabling conditions).
-) European case study fiche: the comparator case-study template designed for the study, structured by governance tier and the four analytical dimensions.
-) Comparator interview guide: the semi-structured guide for national, regional and city interviews, derived from the fiche.
-) Irish case study fiche: the internal analytical template used for the six Irish site visits (basic project information; delivery experience; governance; compact development and housing; funding; innovation and NEB; implications; key takeaways).

European Union legislation and policy

-) Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (Common Provisions Regulation), including the provisions on integrated territorial and urban strategies (Articles 28 to 29).
-) Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 (ERDF and Cohesion Fund Regulation), including the sustainable urban development earmark (Article 11, minimum 8% of ERDF).
-) Regulation (EU) 2025/1914 (2025 mid-term review of Cohesion Policy), including the affordable-housing objective and enhanced co-financing.
-) New Leipzig Charter (2020), the EU reference framework for integrated, place-based urban development.
-) New European Bauhaus: the Commission initiative and values; the New European Bauhaus Facility 2025-2027; and the REGIO Peer2Peer New European Bauhaus Community (DG REGIO).
-) Communication from the Commission, An EU Agenda for Cities: Driving Growth and Prosperity, COM(2025) 739 final, 3 December 2025, with SWD(2025) 389 final, and the Council conclusions on the EU Agenda for Cities, 26 February 2026.
-) Communication from the Commission, The European Affordable Housing Plan, COM(2025) 1025 final, 16 December 2025.
-) Council Recommendation on the New European Bauhaus, Council document 9128/26, adopted 11 May 2026, and the Commission proposal for it, COM(2025) 1027 final.
-) Commission proposals of 16 July 2025 for the 2028-2034 period, read for their urban provisions: the proposed Regulation on the National and Regional Partnership Plans, COM(2025) 565 final (Article 75, integrated territorial and urban development); the

proposed ERDF, Interreg and Cohesion Fund Regulation, COM(2025) 552 final (Article 5, sustainable urban development); and the proposed performance framework Regulation, COM(2025) 545 final.

-) Urban Agenda for the EU, Compact Cities partnership: Ex-Ante Assessment (May 2025) and Orientation Paper (June 2026).
-) URBACT IV programme and the European Urban Initiative (EUI), including URBACT networks referenced in the Irish cases (for example MAPS).

Ireland

-) Town Centre First Heritage Revival Scheme (THRIVE): scheme and application guidelines (Strand 1 readiness and Strand 2 capital works).
-) Town Centre First policy (2022) and the Town Centre First Framework.
-) National Planning Framework (Project Ireland 2040) and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES).
-) ERDF Regional Programmes 2021-2027: the Southern, Eastern and Midland Regional Programme (Managing Authority: Southern Regional Assembly) and the Northern and Western Regional Programme (Managing Authority: Northern and Western Regional Assembly).
-) Irish Integrated Urban Strategies and case documents: the Shandon Integrated Urban Strategy (Cork); the King's Island Walled Town Integrated Urban Strategy (Limerick); the Reimagining George's Place Integrated Urban Strategy (Dún Laoghaire); the Sligo East City, Cranmore and Environs Regeneration Masterplan (Sligo); the Monaghan Town Centre First Report and St Louis Options Paper (Monaghan); and the Longford Integrated Action Plan from the URBACT MAPS network (Longford).

Germany

-) National: Städtebauförderung (urban-development funding) and the Lebendige Zentren strand; the New Leipzig Charter (2020); the national building code (Baugesetzbuch); the National Urban Development Policy platform (position papers, stadt:pilot); the federal urban-development report (Stadtentwicklungsbericht 2025); Deutscher Verband, "The Urban Dimension in EU Cohesion Policy in Germany" (2024); Deutscher Verband, study on the territorial dimension (2025), a separate publication from the 2024 report on the urban dimension mentioned above.
-) Regional (Saxony): the Saxony ERDF and Just Transition Fund programme 2021-2027; the ERDF sustainable integrated urban development guideline; the Policy Objective 5 strategy paper and selection criteria; Saxon development bank (Sächsische Aufbaubank) delivery materials.
-) Second Land example (Lower Saxony): the Resiliente Innenstädte guideline (2022, amended 2024) and competition materials; territorial strategies of Zeven and Lüchow (Wendland); and the published steering-group rules and minutes for Soltau, Lüchow and Delmenhorst.
-) Saxony-Anhalt (New European Bauhaus): the State Chancellery presentation on the New European Bauhaus in Cohesion Policy.

-) City (Leipzig): the integrated urban development concept INSEK Leipzig 2030; the urban development plan (STEP); and Parkbogen Ost project materials (including the European Urban Initiative good-practice profile).

Poland

-) National: the Revitalisation Act (2015); the Municipal Revitalisation Programme (GPR) framework; the National Urban Policy 2030 (KPM 2030); and the new Planning Act and forthcoming Functional Areas Act.
-) Programmes and territorial: the European Funds for Mazovia 2021-2027 regional programme (FEM); the Warsaw Functional Area Integrated Territorial Investment strategy 2021-2027; and the national FEnIKS and FENG programmes.
-) City (Warsaw): the Warsaw Integrated Revitalisation Programme / GPR materials (Praga-Północ); and the Warsaw Revitalisation Committee records.
-) Evaluation of the territorial instruments in the 2021-2027 programmes (national, 2025), with its accompanying panel reports, and the corresponding regional evaluation.
-) Supreme Audit Office (Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, NIK), audit of revitalisation.
-) Mazovia Voivodeship written response (13 August 2026) and its annexes: the revitalisation allocation table; the integrated territorial investment agreement between the Voivodeship and the Warsaw Metropolis Association; and the national rules for implementing territorial instruments 2021-2027.

Netherlands

-) National planning: the national Spatial Strategy (Nationale Omgevingsvisie) and the binding Spatial Ordinance; the Ladder for Sustainable Urbanisation (largely withdrawn in 2025); Draft National Spatial Strategy (Ontwerp-Nota Ruimte, 2025) and the PBL reflection on it (2026); and supporting analyses (PBL, OECD).
-) National town-centre instruments: the Impulsaanpak Winkelgebieden (retail-areas programme, 2022-2024); Impulsaanpak Winkelgebieden programme progress report (*Voortgangsrapportage*); and the City Deal Dynamic City Centres (2023-2027) and its Town Deals extension for small and rural municipalities.
-) ERDF and Cohesion Policy: the Kansen voor West III programme 2022-2029 and its Rotterdam ITI/GTI plan; the Rotterdam ERDF call (2025); the West programme mid-term evaluation (Ecorys, 2024) and the national mid-term overview (2025); and, for contrast, the South Netherlands ERDF programme 2021-2027.
-) Province of Zuid-Holland: the Spatial Ordinance (Omgevingsverordening); the 2025 revision of the Spatial Strategy with its explanatory and consultation-response documents (Nota van Motivering, Nota van Beantwoording), in force from 1 September 2026.
-) City (Rotterdam): the Omgevingsvisie "De Veranderstad" (2021); the M4H Spatial Framework; and Resilient Rotterdam 2022-2027.

Annex C: Interview list and evidence notes

This annex records the interviews and written contributions behind the study, and the method and limits that apply to them.

Evidence base and method

The study draws on semi-structured interviews at national, regional and city level in each comparator country and on six Irish case-study site visits with local-authority teams, complemented by desk research and programme documentation. Interviews were conducted in 2026: the Irish site visits were completed by early June, and the comparator interviews and written contributions between late June and mid-August. Full transcripts are held on the project file. The mode of the regional tier varies and is stated plainly: the Saxony contribution combined an interview with a written review that corrected the Saxony figures; the Mazovia Voivodeship provided a detailed written response; and in the Netherlands the regional tier was covered by an interview with the Province of Zuid-Holland, the planning authority for the southern Randstad (the West Netherlands ERDF programme is managed by the City of Rotterdam, not a province). In line with what interviewees were told, the report uses no photographs and no direct attributed quotations; findings are reported in aggregate and attributed by governance tier.

Comparator interviews and contributions

Country	Tier	Organisation	Mode and date
Germany	National	Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building (BMWSB)	Interview, 15 July 2026
Germany	Regional	Saxony urban-development desk (State Ministry for Infrastructure and Regional Development, SMIL); delivery via the Sächsische Aufbaubank	Interview, 10 August 2026 (figures reviewed and corrected by Saxony)
Germany	City	City of Leipzig (Parkbogen Ost)	Interview, 15 July 2026
Poland	National	Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy (MFIPR)	Interview, 30 June 2026
Poland	Regional	Mazovia Voivodeship (Managing Authority, European Funds for Mazovia)	Written response, 13 August 2026
Poland	City	City of Warsaw	Interview, 14 July 2026

Country	Tier	Organisation	Mode and date
Netherlands	National	Ministry of Housing and Spatial Planning (BZK)	Interview, 25 June 2026
Netherlands	Regional	Province of Zuid-Holland	Interview, 23 July 2026
Netherlands	City	City of Rotterdam	Interview, 25 June 2026

Irish case study interviews

Case	Local authority	Date of site visit
Cork, Shandon	Cork City Council	20 May 2026
Limerick, King's Island	Limerick City and County Council	18 May 2026
Monaghan, St Louis	Monaghan County Council	4 June 2026
Sligo, the Gaol	Sligo County Council	3 June 2026
Longford, Connolly Barracks	Longford County Council	26 May 2026
Dún Laoghaire, George's Place	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	25 May 2026

Reflection sessions with the Regional Assemblies

Body	Session	Date
Southern Regional Assembly and Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly	Structured reflection session on the emerging findings from Limerick, Cork, Dún Laoghaire and Longford	29 May 2026
Northern and Western Regional Assembly (Patrick Devine)	Structured reflection session on the emerging findings from Sligo and Monaghan	17 June 2026

Annex D: Bibliography

This annex lists the published studies, evaluations and reference works consulted for the study. Legislation, programme documents and the study's own templates are listed separately in Annex B, and the interviews in Annex C. The Irish evidence is primarily first-hand (the six case-study site visits and the Integrated Urban Strategies listed in Annex B), so the secondary literature below is weighted towards the comparator countries and the cross-country evidence base.

Comparative and EU-level

-) ESPON, SUPER (Sustainable Urbanisation and land-use Practices in European Regions), including the country annexes for Germany, Poland and the Netherlands and the comparative annex.
-) ESPON, URDICO case studies (2026): Warsaw and Rotterdam.
-) OECD, Demystifying Compact Urban Growth (2018).

Germany

-) Federal Government of Germany, Stadtentwicklungsbericht (urban development report) 2025.
-) Deutscher Verband, The Urban Dimension in EU Cohesion Policy in Germany (2024).
-) National Urban Development Policy (Nationale Stadtentwicklungspolitik): position papers and the stadt:pilot series.
-) European Urban Initiative, Parkbogen Ost good-practice profile (Leipzig).

Poland

-) Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, Partnership Agreement final report (end 2023), including revitalisation grants 2014-2020.
-) ESPON, URDICO Warsaw case study (2026) and the SUPER Poland annexes.

Netherlands

-) Nabielek, H. (PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency), The Compact City in the Netherlands (2012).
-) OECD / International Transport Forum, Urban planning in the Randstad (2015).
-) van Raan, A. (2016), Urban Scaling of Cities in the Netherlands.
-) OECD, Place-Based Impact Investing in Rotterdam (2026).
-) Ecorys, Mid-term evaluation of the ERDF West Netherlands programme (2024); and the national ERDF mid-term overview report (2025).
-) PBL, A choice for 2050 (2021); the Netherlands Territorial Fiche (ESPON); and Boers, S. (2025), master's thesis on Dutch compact growth.

-) City of Rotterdam, Resilient Rotterdam 2022-2027 and the Rotterdam Climate Change Adaptation Strategy; European 15, Transforming the Productive City.

Ireland

-) The Irish evidence base is primarily first-hand: the six THRIVE case-study site visits and interviews (Annex C) and the Integrated Urban Strategies and case documents (Annex B). Supporting national policy and programme documents are listed in Annex B.