



The role of the social entrepreneur for sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration

Federica Scaffidi ^{a,*}, Ezio Micelli ^b, Matt Nash ^c

^a Leibniz University Hannover, Germany

^b Iuav University of Venice, Italy

^c Center for Social Innovation, Stanford Graduate School of Business, USA

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ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurs have emerged as a powerful force driving societal change in today's dynamic and interconnected world. They identify societal problems and leverage entrepreneurial principles to create, manage, and implement innovative solutions that foster social change. While the state of the art in social entrepreneurship and its effect on urban regeneration is well-documented, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the specific role of the social entrepreneur in sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration. This study aims to test the hypothesis that social entrepreneurs play a crucial role in this context.

This article provides new insights into urban planning and design, highlighting the role of social entrepreneurs as drivers of sustainable urban growth in remote areas by answering the following questions: What are the characteristics of social entrepreneurs in sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration? What actions do social entrepreneurs take to achieve this transformation sustainably? What factors influence their work? What challenges do social entrepreneurs face in achieving sustainable heritage-led regeneration?

This paper examines 17 European cases where social enterprises manage regenerated industrial heritage to test the research hypothesis. The study employs qualitative research methodologies, including unstructured interviews, exploratory and dialogic surveys, data analysis, and comparative analysis.

The results reveal common characteristics and actions among social entrepreneurs in the selected cases. Additionally, the study identifies three main factors that influence their actions, as well as the challenges impacting their sustainable efforts. These findings contribute to the body of knowledge and open new theoretical scenarios in sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration involving social entrepreneurs.

The results encourage social enterprises, policymakers, and public administrations, as they underscore the need for projects and policies that promote new careers and practices in sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration.

1. Introduction

Social entrepreneurs have emerged as powerful and innovative drivers of social change in today's cities and regions. Several studies confirm that social entrepreneurs play a fundamental role in combating poverty, creating new educational pathways, and contributing to social sustainability (Dees, 1998; Nash, 2010; Ubels et al., 2019). Pioneering studies have emphasized their importance in meeting collective needs and desires (Caroli, 2015; Moulaert et al., 2017; Tricarico, De Vidovich, & Billi, 2022). Other studies have highlighted social entrepreneurs' ability to contribute to economic growth in urban areas, land value

enhancement, and improvement in urban quality of life (Mangialardo & Micelli, 2016; Scaffidi, 2019). Recent evidence also underscores the importance of social enterprises in territorial innovation (Scaffidi, 2024).

However, the role of social entrepreneurs in sustainable urban regeneration of heritage remains underexplored in the literature. The state of the art defines who social entrepreneurs are and the concept of social entrepreneurship. However, multiple perspectives still exist on whether social enterprises - as innovative entrepreneurial practices - should be profit-oriented or non-profit. In architecture and urban planning, studies are referencing social entrepreneurship in urban

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: scaffidi@staedtebau.uni-hannover.de (F. Scaffidi).

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regeneration; however, studies on the role of social entrepreneurs in sustainable urban regeneration of heritage are lacking.

Despite the absence of studies verifying the actual role of social entrepreneurs in heritage-based sustainable urban regeneration, the authors of this article argue that social entrepreneurs are crucial for this development. Therefore, this article aims to test the hypothesis that social entrepreneurs play an essential role and thus have an impact in developing a sustainable path for neglected heritage regeneration. The study seeks to analyze the figure of the social entrepreneur in this specific field and understand their role in the sustainable urban regeneration of heritage.

This study provides new insights into urban planning and design, highlighting how social entrepreneurs act as engines for heritage-based sustainable urban regeneration by addressing the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of social entrepreneurs in sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration?
- What actions do social entrepreneurs take to achieve this transformation sustainably?
- What factors influence the work of social entrepreneurs?
- What challenges do social entrepreneurs face in achieving sustainable heritage-led regeneration?

To test the research hypothesis, the article focuses on analyzing the role of social entrepreneurs in the regeneration of industrial heritage in Europe. Industrial heritage is often in a state of neglect, and its conservation and regeneration are not always seen as crucial. There are numerous cases of demolition across Europe (such as the recent cases of Continental in Hannover or the industrial area facing the MeetFactory cultural center in Prague). For this reason, this study focuses on industrial areas that have succeeded in preserving their heritage. In these cases, the role of the social entrepreneur is not only crucial for the conservation and regeneration of the heritage but also for their innovative impact on the local community and the surrounding urban context. Therefore, this article showcases 17 cases¹ where the management of regenerated industrial heritage is entrusted to social entrepreneurs. Qualitative research methodologies included semi-structured interviews, exploratory and dialogic surveys, data analysis, and comparison.

The results reveal common characteristics and activities among social entrepreneurs in the selected cases. Three main factors influence social entrepreneurs' actions, while multiple challenges affect their sustainable actions.

These findings contribute to the body of knowledge and open new research opportunities in heritage-based sustainable urban regeneration with social entrepreneurs. The results are encouraging for social enterprises, policymakers, and municipalities, as they confirm the need for projects and policies that promote new careers and pathways for social entrepreneurs in heritage-based sustainable urban regeneration.

2. Material and methods

This paper focuses on the role of social entrepreneurs in sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration. It examines and showcases 17 cases of industrial heritage regeneration. The study confirms that the social entrepreneur has a crucial role in this regeneration.

The research methodology was focused on the following steps:

- **Literature review:** The state-of-the-art analysis was oriented towards the study of the literature on social entrepreneur and social

entrepreneurship, their effect on the urban space and ground rent, and the role of the social entrepreneur in urban regeneration;

- **Case study selection:** The research is based on the analysis of 17 cases of industrial heritage regeneration with social entrepreneurship (see Table 1), selected from a database of over 100 examples in Europe of heritage regeneration with social innovation (Scaffidi, 2024), using specific selection criteria: the presence of a regeneration process of former and neglected industrial heritage sites, located in several European regions, managed by innovative entrepreneurial 'entities', namely profit or/and non-profit, and where the role of the social entrepreneur is crucial for creating cultural, social, environmental, economic innovation;
- **Data gathering:** This step was a key part of the research through which it was possible to get information on the examples of industrial heritage, their uses, activities, places and connections. Data were collected through the website investigation, semi-structured interviews (Corbetta, 2015), and dialogic and exploratory surveys (Fava, 2008; Guarrasi, 2006; Sclavi, 2006), which were carried out to conduct a qualitative evaluation based on the interaction with local actors. These methods were considered the most suitable for this research, as they allow the most sensitive data to be obtained through informal conversations as opposed to other more rigid methods;
- **Case studies analysis and discussion:** The data were analysed using qualitative research methods as they provide a qualitative understanding of the role of social entrepreneurs in sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration. A subjective evaluation of the data acquired through website investigation, surveys and interviews has been given. Comparative tables were developed to compare and assess former and current uses, the managing entity, if profit or non-profit and the sustainable aspects of each case.

Table 1

The 17 selected cases of industrial heritage regeneration with social enterprises. Graphics by the authors.

Case study	Location	Website
APARAADITEHAS	Tartu, Estonia	https://www.aparaaditehas.ee/
DOLOMITI HUB	Fonzaso, Italy	https://dolomithub.it/
EX ROTAPRINT	Berlin, Germany	https://www.exrotaprint.de/en/
KULTURZENTRUM FAUST	Hannover, Germany	https://www.kulturzentrum-faust.de/
KAAPELITEHDAS	Helsinki, Finland	http://www.kaapelitehdas.fi/
HILDESHEIM KULTURFABRIK	Hildesheim, Germany	https://www.kufa.info/
KULTURZENTRUM SCHLACHTHOF	Bremen, Germany	www.schlachthof-bremen.de
MANIFATTURE KNOS	Lecce, Italy	https://manifattureknos.org/knos/
MUSEO MINA DE ARNAO	Arnao, Spain	http://museominadearnao.es/en/home/
PERIFERICA	Mazara del Vallo, Italy	http://www.perificaproject.org/
REAL FÁBRICA DE CRISTALES	La Granja, Spain	https://www.realfabricaeventos.com/
SALINAS DE AÑANA	Salinas de Añana, Spain	https://vallesalado.com
SPAZIO PUNCH	Giudecca, Italy	https://www.spaziopunch.com/about
SPINNEREI	Leipzig, Germany	https://www.spinnerei.de
UFA FABRIK	Berlin, Germany	http://www.ufafabrik.de/en
VERKATEHDAS	Hämeenlinna, Finland	http://www.verkatehdas.fi/
WUK	Vienna, Austria	https://www.wuk.at/

¹ The cases were selected from a database of 100 examples in Europe of heritage regeneration with social innovation whose content is partially published in the paper Scaffidi (2024), "Average social and territorial innovation impacts of industrial heritage regeneration", *Cities*, 148, pp. 1–23.

3. Theory: social entrepreneur and entrepreneurship in heritage-led urban regeneration

This theoretical section will provide an overview of the literature on the social entrepreneur and entrepreneurship in heritage-led urban regeneration. The main lines of thought and theoretical arguments were critically and thoroughly examined. It provides a summary of the most important studies in the international literature and the main themes, and sows why further research on the topic is needed and why the research presented in this article contributes to filling this need.

The “theory” section is, therefore, organized into the following four subsections:

- Who is the social entrepreneur today?;
- A yet debated issue: Is social entrepreneurship profit or non-profit?;
- The social entrepreneur and their effect on the urban space and ground rent;
- The role of social entrepreneur in heritage-led urban regeneration.

3.1. Who is the social entrepreneur today?

A social entrepreneur identifies societal problems and leverages entrepreneurial principles to create, manage, and implement innovative solutions that lead to social change (Mulgan, 2007; Phills et al., 2008; Moulaert et al., 2017; Nordberg et al., 2020). The modern social entrepreneur is a unique blend of visionary thinkers, pragmatic problem solvers, and creative leaders (Caroli, 2015; Hausmann & Heinze, 2016; Dobrova & Stanislav, 2020; Vercher, 2022; Wise et al., 2022). Gregory Dees (1998), often regarded as the “father of social entrepreneurship education,” defines social entrepreneurs as those who “play the role of change agents in the social sector by adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value).” Dees emphasizes that social entrepreneurs innovate by finding a new product, a new service, or a new approach to a social problem and act as change agents by performing the following actions (Dees, 1998, p.4):

- «• Adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value),
 - Recognizing and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve that mission,
 - Engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning,
 - Acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand and.
 - Exhibiting heightened accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created.

Several unique characteristics distinguish today’s social entrepreneur. They are innovative thinkers, capable of approaching existing problems from fresh perspectives and devising creative solutions that traditional methods might overlook. Their innovation extends beyond products and services, encompassing new business models, strategies, and approaches to social challenges. Unlike traditional entrepreneurs who primarily focus on profit maximization, social entrepreneurs are propelled by a deep commitment to their mission of creating social value and responding to the needs and desires of communities. Their primary goal is to address urgent social issues, such as poverty, education, healthcare, or environmental sustainability, while simultaneously fostering renewed and innovative societies.

The journey of a social entrepreneur is fraught with challenges, from securing funding to navigating regulatory environments and supportive policies. However, modern social entrepreneurs demonstrate remarkable resilience and determination. They are willing to take risks and persist despite failures to achieve their goals, and they bring innovation even at the cultural level. Successful social entrepreneurs possess a high degree of empathy and a keen awareness of the social problems they aim to address. This empathy allows them to understand the needs and perspectives of the communities they serve, ensuring that their solutions are relevant, creative, and effective.

Collaboration is a defining feature of modern social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurs recognize the value of partnerships and often work closely with governments, non-profit organizations, businesses, and other stakeholders to amplify their impact. The motivations driving social entrepreneurs are manifold and deeply rooted in the desire to bring about positive change. Many social entrepreneurs are motivated by personal experiences with the issues they seek to address (Guclu et al., 2002). These experiences often ignite a passion for finding solutions and promoting significant changes in their communities. Social entrepreneurs are skilled at recognizing gaps in existing systems and services. They are driven by the desire to fill these gaps and provide solutions where traditional methods have failed. A strong sense of moral and ethical responsibility often underpins the work of social entrepreneurs. They are guided by the belief that it is their duty to use their skills and resources to improve society and help those in need. Many social entrepreneurs are motivated by the desire to leave a lasting legacy. They aspire to create sustainable change that will benefit future generations and have a significant impact on society.

The impact of social entrepreneurship is profound and far-reaching. Social entrepreneurs address many issues, from poverty reduction to education reform, healthcare innovation to environmental conservation, and the regeneration of disused areas to territorial innovation (Scaffidi, 2024). Their work addresses immediate needs and creates systemic changes that can transform societies. Social entrepreneurs often create jobs and stimulate economic development in disadvantaged communities (Caroli, 2015; Ubels et al., 2019). By providing job opportunities and fostering economic growth, they reduce poverty and improve quality of life. Through innovative solutions, social entrepreneurs enhance access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and clean water. Their efforts ensure that marginalized and disadvantaged populations receive the support they need. Social entrepreneurship promotes social inclusion by giving a voice to marginalized groups and empowering them. It fosters a sense of community and belonging, which is fundamental for social cohesion. Many social entrepreneurs focus on environmental sustainability, developing solutions addressing climate change, resource reuse, waste management, and renewable energy. Their work creates a more sustainable and resilient world (Nash, 2010).

Therefore, today’s social entrepreneur is a vital change agent, addressing some of the world’s most pressing challenges with innovation, empathy, and determination. They are driven by a mission to create social value and improve the lives of others. Social entrepreneurs make significant contributions to economic development, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability through their work. As society continues to evolve, the role of the social entrepreneur will become increasingly critical, highlighting the need for continued support and recognition of their efforts.

3.2. A yet debated issue: is social entrepreneurship profit or non-profit?

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a significant force for social change, addressing various societal challenges through innovative and sustainable solutions. However, a critical issue that continues to spark debate is whether social entrepreneurship should be classified as profit or non-profit. This question delves into the fundamental nature of social entrepreneurship and examines its dual mission of creating social value while achieving financial sustainability.

As the literature shows, the mission to create and sustain social value is at the heart of social entrepreneurship (Gupta et al., 2020). Gregory Dees (1998) defines social enterprises as entities that foster change in the chosen social sector by adopting a mission to create and sustain social value. This mission-driven approach distinguishes social entrepreneurship from traditional entrepreneurship, whose primary goal is profit maximization (Lisetchi & Brancu, 2014; Caroli, 2015). However, the question arises: can social enterprises pursue profit while staying true to their social mission?

Proponents of the profit-driven model argue that financial

sustainability is crucial for the longevity and scalability of social enterprises. By generating profits, social entrepreneurs can reinvest in their initiatives, expand their impact, and reduce dependence on external funding sources (Nash, 2010; Doherty et al., 2014). This approach allows social enterprises to achieve self-sufficiency and maintain operations without constant reliance on donations or grants (Scaffidi, 2019). Additionally, profit-driven social enterprises can attract investors interested in financial returns and social impact, thus broadening the available capital base. On the other hand, advocates for the non-profit model emphasize that prioritizing profit can potentially dilute the social mission of a social enterprise. They argue that the primary focus of social entrepreneurship should be on creating social value rather than generating financial returns (Bedi & Yadav, 2019; Mair et al., 2012; Pless, 2012; Santos, 2012). Non-profit social enterprises can devote all their resources to addressing social issues, ensuring their mission remains at the forefront of their operations (Ellmeier, 2003; Van Meerkerk et al., 2013; Barberá-Tomás et al., 2019).

Moreover, non-profit status can enhance credibility and trust among stakeholders, including beneficiaries, donors, and partners, who view profit-driven models skeptically. The hybrid model offers a middle ground in this debate (Nash, 2010; Doherty et al., 2014; Milana et al., 2021). Hybrid social enterprises combine elements of both profit and non-profit models, seeking to achieve social impact while generating revenue (Weller & Ran, 2020). This approach allows social entrepreneurs to balance their social mission with financial sustainability. For instance, a social enterprise might operate a revenue-generating business that supports its non-profit activities, thus creating a diversified income stream that ensures stability and growth. Hybrid models also enable social enterprises to leverage the strengths of both sectors, such as the innovation and efficiency of the private sector and the social focus of the non-profit sector (Doherty et al., 2014; do Adro et al., 2021). The debate over whether social entrepreneurship should be profit or non-profit is further complicated by varying legal and regulatory frameworks across countries. In some regions, social enterprises can register as for-profit entities with social missions, while in others, they must choose between for-profit and non-profit legal structures. These differences impact the operational strategies, funding opportunities, and stakeholder perceptions of social enterprises.

Ultimately, the classification of social entrepreneurship as profit or non-profit depends on each social enterprise's specific context and goals. Both models have advantages and challenges, and the choice often reflects the social entrepreneur's unique mission, vision, and resources. It remains clear that social entrepreneurship, regardless of its profit orientation, is driven by a commitment to creating positive social change and new cultural vitality (Sacco & Segre, 2009; OECD, 2021). The focus should be on the impact rather than the classification, ensuring that social entrepreneurs continue to innovate and address society's pressing issues.

In conclusion, the debate over whether social entrepreneurship should be profit or non-profit is complex and multifaceted. While financial sustainability is essential for scaling impact, the importance of the social mission must not be compromised. Hybrid models offer a promising approach to balancing social and economic goals. As the field of social entrepreneurship continues to evolve, it is crucial to recognize and support diverse models that prioritize social value and sustainability. By doing so, we can ensure that social entrepreneurs remain effective agents of change, driving solutions that benefit society.

3.3. *The social entrepreneur and their effect on the urban space and ground rent*

In the rapidly evolving urban development landscape, social entrepreneurship has become crucial for transforming city spaces and addressing urban challenges. Social entrepreneurs identify and leverage opportunities within urban environments to create innovative solutions that promote social inclusion, economic development, and

environmental sustainability. Social entrepreneurs play a fundamental role in the regeneration of urban spaces (Micelli et al., 2023; Micelli & Scaffidi, 2022). By addressing issues such as affordable housing, community development, and urban regeneration, they contribute to creating vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable cities. These entrepreneurs often focus on underutilized or neglected areas, transforming them into thriving community hubs (Plevoets & Sowinska-Heim, 2018; Pinto et al., 2020). Through projects such as co-working spaces, social housing, and creative and educational activities, they bring new life to urban areas, fostering social cohesion and economic activity (Scaffidi, 2019; Ost, 2021; OECD, 2022). The innovative approaches of social entrepreneurs often lead to significant improvements in urban spaces (Scaffidi, 2022b). For example, social housing initiatives provide affordable living options for low-income residents, helping to mitigate the effects of gentrification and displacement (Mangialardo & Micelli, 2016; Micelli, 2018). Community centers and co-working spaces foster collaboration, creativity, and entrepreneurship, providing residents access to essential services and opportunities. Environmental awareness initiatives, energy efficiency, consumption reduction, and creating green spaces enhance environmental sustainability, improving urban quality and providing new spaces for city dwellers. These initiatives address immediate needs and create long-term benefits for urban communities. The activities of social entrepreneurs also profoundly affect ground rent (Micelli, 2018). Ground rent, the income generated from leasing land, is influenced by various factors, including the demand for urban space, the value of real estate, and the socio-economic dynamics of the area. By revitalizing and enhancing urban spaces, social entrepreneurs can increase these areas' attractiveness and desirability, leading to changes in ground rent (Mangialardo & Micelli, 2016). On the one hand, the positive impact of social entrepreneurship on urban spaces can lead to an increase in ground rent. Property demand rises as neglected or underdeveloped areas are transformed into vibrant, innovative, and desirable neighbourhoods. This increased demand can drive up property values and ground rent. While this can benefit landowners and investors, it can also pose challenges for residents and small businesses, particularly if it leads to higher living costs and gentrification. Conversely, social entrepreneurs have the potential to implement strategies that counteract the negative effects of rising ground rent. By focusing on inclusive development and affordable housing, they can ensure that urban revitalization benefits all residents, not just those who can afford higher rents. Social entrepreneurs can collaborate with local governments and communities to establish policies and practices that promote equitable development, such as rent control, community land trusts, and cooperative housing models. These measures can help stabilize ground rent and prevent displacement, ensuring that the benefits of urban transformation are shared broadly. The collaborative nature of social entrepreneurship is pivotal in addressing the complexities of urban development and ground rent dynamics. Social entrepreneurs often work closely with stakeholders, including local governments, community organizations, and private sector partners. This collaborative approach enables them to navigate the regulatory landscape, secure funding, and implement projects that have a meaningful impact. By fostering partnerships and engaging with diverse groups, social entrepreneurs can create holistic solutions that address the root causes of urban challenges and promote sustainable development. Broader socio-economic and policy contexts also shape the impact of social entrepreneurs on urban spaces and ground rent. Government policies, economic trends, and demographic shifts influence urban development dynamics and ground rent. Social entrepreneurs must navigate these complex and evolving landscapes, adapting strategies to ensure their initiatives remain effective and sustainable. This requires a deep understanding of urban issues, innovative thinking, and a commitment to social justice.

In conclusion, social entrepreneurs are vital in transforming urban spaces and influencing ground rent dynamics. Their innovative and inclusive approaches to urban development create vibrant, sustainable, and equitable cities. While their activities can lead to increased ground

rent, they also have the potential to implement strategies that promote affordable housing and prevent displacement. The collaborative nature of social entrepreneurship and a deep understanding of urban challenges enable social entrepreneurs to create lasting positive change. As urbanization continues to accelerate, the role of social entrepreneurs in shaping the future of cities will become increasingly important, highlighting the need for continued support and recognition of their efforts.

3.4. The role of social entrepreneur in heritage-led urban regeneration

In the contemporary urban context, heritage-based urban regeneration has emerged as a crucial strategy for revitalizing cities while preserving their historical and cultural assets (Mattone & Frullo, 2022). Social entrepreneurs play a fundamental role in this process, leveraging their innovative and community-oriented approaches to breathe new life into heritage sites and promote circular development in surrounding urban areas (Girard & Nocca, 2017; Gravagnuolo et al., 2021; Oevermann & Mieg, 2021; Scaffidi, 2023). Heritage-based urban regeneration focuses on revitalizing urban areas through the conservation and adaptive reuse of disused buildings and urban contexts (Gravagnuolo et al., 2021; Niu et al., 2018). This approach conserves cultural heritage, stimulates economic growth, and enhances residents' quality of life (Scaffidi, 2023). Social entrepreneurs are particularly well-suited to lead this type of regeneration due to their commitment to social value, community well-being, and sustainable development (Dey & Steyaert, 2016; Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Scaffidi, 2019; Teasdale, 2012). One of the main contributions of social entrepreneurs to heritage-based urban regeneration is their ability to create innovative solutions that balance conservation and regeneration of assets while developing services and activities aligned with modern needs (Scaffidi, 2022a, 2024). They often repurpose historic buildings for contemporary uses, such as community centers, cultural hubs, co-working spaces, and affordable housing. In doing so, they ensure these structures remain relevant and functional, extending their lifespan and significance. This type of regeneration not only preserves the architectural integrity of heritage sites but also infuses them with new vitality and purpose. Community involvement is another critical aspect of heritage-based urban regeneration where social entrepreneurs excel (Oevermann et al., 2016; Tricarico, 2017; Plevoets & Sowinska-Heim, 2018). They actively engage local communities in the regeneration process, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in their cultural heritage (Cornwall, 2008; Williams, 2004). Social entrepreneurs organize workshops, public consultations, and collaborative projects to ensure that residents' voices and needs are heard and addressed. This inclusive approach strengthens community bonds and ensures that regeneration efforts are responsive to local contexts and priorities.

Social entrepreneurs also play a vital role in mobilizing resources for heritage-based urban regeneration. They often operate at the intersection of public, private, and non-profit sectors, leveraging diverse funding sources and partnerships to support their initiatives. By attracting investments and securing grants, social entrepreneurs can finance the conservation and regeneration of heritage sites. Additionally, they often implement social enterprise models that generate revenue to sustain their projects in the long term, reducing dependence on external funding.

The impact of social entrepreneurs on heritage-based urban regeneration extends to economic development and job creation (Scaffidi, 2019; Scaffidi, 2022a, 2022b; Scaffidi, 2024). Revitalizing heritage sites attracts tourism, cultural activities, and businesses, stimulating local economies. Creating new artistic and commercial spaces generates job opportunities and supports local artisans, entrepreneurs, and service providers. This economic activity not only enhances the viability of regeneration projects but also contributes to the broader socio-economic development of the community. Environmental sustainability is another significant contribution of social entrepreneurs to heritage-based urban regeneration. By preserving and repurposing existing buildings, they

reduce the need for new construction and minimize associated environmental impacts. Social entrepreneurs often incorporate sustainable practices into their projects, such as using eco-friendly materials, implementing energy-efficient systems, and promoting green spaces. These efforts contribute to creating resilient and sustainable urban environments that respect cultural heritage and ecological integrity.

The challenges faced by social entrepreneurs in heritage-based urban regeneration are considerable. They must navigate complex regulatory frameworks, secure adequate funding, and balance the interests of diverse stakeholders. However, their resilience, creativity, and collaborative spirit enable them to overcome these obstacles and achieve significant results. Social entrepreneurs bring a unique combination of passion, innovation, and pragmatism (Dees, 1998; Nash, 2010) to the regeneration process, ensuring that heritage sites are preserved and revitalized in ways that benefit both present and future generations.

In conclusion, social entrepreneurs play an indispensable role in heritage-based urban regeneration. Their innovative approaches to adaptive reuse, community engagement, resource mobilization, and sustainable development drive the success of heritage site revitalization and surrounding metropolitan areas. Social entrepreneurs create vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable cities by preserving cultural heritage and promoting economic and social benefits. As urbanization continues to transform our landscapes, the role of social entrepreneurs in heritage-based regeneration will become increasingly important, highlighting the need for ongoing support and recognition of their efforts.

4. Results

4.1. Cases of sustainable heritage-led regeneration with social entrepreneurship in Europe

As evidenced by qualitative interviews, and dialogic and exploratory surveys, social entrepreneurs play a crucial role in sustainable heritage regeneration across Europe. The analysis of several case studies confirms what is stated in the literature review and demonstrates how social entrepreneurship has transformed heritage sites into innovative and vibrant urban communities, significantly contributing to spatial development, environmental responsibility, social sustainability, local economic development, and cultural enrichment.

Table 2 shows that in Berlin (Germany), Ex Rotaprint, a former printing press factory, has been regenerated into a mixed-use space featuring artist and architectural studios and workshops managed by a non-profit entity. Similarly, Ufa Fabrik, also located in Berlin and formerly a celluloid factory, is now a cultural center and urban farm with theaters, studios, and sustainable living projects managed by a non-profit organization. Other exploratory and dialogic surveys in Germany show other cases of sustainable heritage-led regeneration with social entrepreneurship. An example is in Hannover, which is home to the Kulturzentrum Faust, a cultural center established in a former bed feather factory. Today, it includes concert venues, art studios, and community areas managed by a non-profit entity. As mentioned in the literature (Ellmeier, 2003; Sacco & Segre, 2009; Tursie, 2017; Ost, 2021; Tricarico, Jones, & Daldanise, 2022) the heritage-led urban regeneration can promote the development of artistic and cultural spaces (Scaffidi, 2019, 2024; Sacco & Segre, 2009; OECD, 2021). The Kulturzentrum Schlachthof in Bremen, for example, was once a slaughterhouse while now serves as a cultural center with concert halls, rehearsal rooms, and community spaces managed by a non-profit organization. In Hildesheim, the Hildesheim Kulturfabrik was a former fiber factory, which has been converted into a cultural and social center with workshops, studios, and event spaces, thanks to the interest of a non-profit entity. Qualitative interviews also reveal that Spinnerei, a former cotton mill in Leipzig, now serves as a cultural and creative space with artist studios, galleries, and workshops. Spinnerei is an interesting case because it is managed as a profit and non-profit entity, like Aparaditehas in Tartu, Estonia. This was formerly a widget factory and was

Table 2

Case studies of sustainable heritage-led regeneration with social entrepreneurship in Europe. Graphics by the authors.

Case study	Former use	Current use	Entity	Location	Website
APARAADITEHAS	Widget factory	Creative and cultural hub with studios, galleries, and event spaces	PROFIT & NON-PROFIT	Tartu, Estonia	https://www.aparaadi.tehas.ee/
DOLOMITI HUB	Commercial space	Co-working space, innovation center, and community hub	NON-PROFIT	Fonzaso, Italy	https://dolomitihub.it/
EX ROTAPRINT	Printing press factory	Mixed-use space with artist and architectural studios and workshops	NON-PROFIT	Berlin, Germany	https://www.exrotaprint.de/en/
KULTURZENTRUM FAUST	Bed feather factory	Cultural center with concert venues, art studios, and community spaces	NON-PROFIT	Hannover, Germany	https://www.kulturzentrum-faust.de/
KAAPELITEHDAS	Cable factory	Cultural and event center with studios, galleries, and offices for creative industries	NON-PROFIT	Helsinki, Finland	http://www.kaapelitehdas.fi/
HILDESHEIM KULTURFABRIK	Fiber factory	Cultural center with workshops, studios, and event spaces	NON-PROFIT	Hildesheim, Germany	https://www.kufa.info/
KULTURZENTRUM SCHLACHTHOF	Slaughterhouse	Cultural center with concert halls, rehearsal rooms, and community spaces	NON-PROFIT	Bremen, Germany	www.schlachthof-bremen.de
MANIFATTURE KNOS	Metalworkers' school	Cultural and social innovation center with workshops, event spaces, and community programs	NON-PROFIT	Lecce, Italy	https://manifattureknos.org/knos/
MUSEO MINA DE ARNAO	Coal mine	Cultural center and museum focusing on mining history	NON-PROFIT	Arnao, Spain	http://museominadearnao.es/en/home/
PERIFERICA	Limestone quarry	Cultural and social innovation hub with art studios, event spaces, and community programs	PROFIT & NON-PROFIT	Mazara del Vallo, Italy	http://www.perifericaproject.org/
REAL FÁBRICA DE CRISTALES	Glass factory	Museum and educational center dedicated to glassmaking	NON-PROFIT	La Granja, Spain	https://www.realfabricaeventos.com/
SALINAS DE AÑANA	Saltworks	Productive and cultural space focusing on traditional salt production	NON-PROFIT	Salinas de Añana, Spain	https://vallesalado.com
SPAZIO PUNCH	Brewery	Art space and cultural center with exhibitions and events	NON-PROFIT	Giudecca, Italy	https://www.spaziopunch.com/about
SPINNEREI	Cotton mill	Art space and cultural center with exhibitions and events	PROFIT & NON-PROFIT	Leipzig, Germany	https://www.spinnerei.de
UFA FABRIK	Celluloid factory	Social community, cultural center and urban farm with theaters, studios, and sustainable living projects	NON-PROFIT	Berlin, Germany	http://www.ufafabrik.de/en
VERKATEHDAS	Baize factory	Cultural and conference center with theaters, event spaces, and offices	NON-PROFIT	Hämeenlinna, Finland	http://www.verkatehdas.fi/
WUK	Locomotive factory	Cultural center with event spaces, workshops, and community programs	NON-PROFIT	Vienna, Austria	https://www.wuk.at/

regenerated into a creative and cultural hub with studios, galleries, and event spaces. In Finland, Kaapelitehdas in Helsinki, formerly a cable factory, is now a thriving cultural and event center with studios, galleries, and offices for creative industries managed by a non-profit organization. At the same time, the surveys reveal that Verkatehdas in Hämeenlinna previously was a baize factory and has been transformed into a cultural and conference center with theaters, event spaces, and offices under non-profit management. These surveys showcase how important social enterprises are in managing these spaces and creating sustainable urban development and new purposes for these former factories. Among them are also the cases of Manifatture Knos in Lecce (Italy), once a metalworkers' school and now a cultural and social innovation center with workshops, event spaces, and community programs. As mentioned in the interviews, Manifatture Knos is managed by a non-profit entity, like Periferica in Mazara del Vallo (Italy). The latter was previously a limestone quarry, which has been regenerated into a cultural and social innovation hub with art studios, event spaces, and community programs managed by a non-profit organization. As stated in the literature (Scaffidi, 2022b, 2024), regenerated heritage can also be used in co-working spaces, innovation centers, and community hubs, as in the case of Dolomiti Hub in Fonzaso (Italy). This innovative center in the region was once a commercial space in an industrial zone. It now functions as a hub for this mountain area in the Dolomites and connects several regional professionals thanks to the non-profit entity managing the site. Another interesting space from the surveys in Italy is Spazio Punch, a former brewery in Giudecca (Venice). Today, it is an art space and cultural center hosting exhibitions and events managed by a non-profit organization. As pointed out by several studies (Gravagnuolo et al., 2021; Oevermann et al., 2016; Oevermann & Mieg, 2021; Scaffidi, 2019, 2023), the regeneration of neglected heritage, especially industrial heritage, contributes to recovering the local memory and identities and new cultural pathways. An example is the WUK in Vienna (Austria),

once a locomotive factory, which has been regenerated into a cultural center with event spaces, workshops, and community programs managed by a non-profit organization. Another example is the Museo Mina de Arnao in Asturias (Spain), previously a coal mine, which has been transformed into a cultural center and museum focusing on mining history and heritage, managed by a non-profit entity. The surveys in Spain also reveal two important examples that focus on the cultural aspect and promote local production. Table 2 shows the case of Salinas de Añana in Álava. These traditional saltworks now operate as a productive and cultural space focusing on traditional salt production under non-profit management. The second case is Real Fábrica de Cristales in La Granja, previously a glass factory, which now serves as a museum and educational center dedicated to glassmaking, managed by a non-profit organization. These cases illustrate the profound impact of social entrepreneurship on sustainable heritage-led regeneration in Europe. These initiatives foster economic vitality, environmental stewardship, social inclusiveness, spatial development and cultural vibrancy by transforming disused heritage sites into dynamic community. This confirms what it is stated in the literature (Dees, 1998; Sacco & Segre, 2009; Lisetchi & Brancu, 2014; Weller & Ran, 2020; Scaffidi, 2024). The active involvement of social entrepreneurs in these projects underscores their essential role in building resilient and prosperous communities while regenerating the urban space and neglected heritage.

4.2. Social entrepreneurs in sustainable heritage-led regeneration in Europe

The transformative impact of social entrepreneurs on sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration in Europe is evident and emerges through qualitative interviews, and exploratory and dialogic surveys. Across various case studies, social entrepreneurs have revitalized neglected sites into innovative and vibrant urban hubs (Scaffidi, 2024),

significantly influencing local economy and communities (Caroli, 2015, Ubels et al., 2019; Scaffidi, 2019, 2022b), promoting environmental sustainability (Nash, 2010), and innovating the cultural scene (Sacco & Segre, 2009; Tursie, 2017), the heritage and the urban space (Moulaert et al., 2017).

One of the most evident impacts is on local economic development. The analysis of case studies presented in Table 3 documents how the presence of social entrepreneurs has stimulated job development in all the cases, encouraged local economy by: i) boosting local economy through cultural tourism (e.g. Kulturzentrum Faust, Kulturzentrum Schlachthof, Mina De Arnao, Real Fábrica De Cristales); ii) promoting local economic activities through studios, galleries, festivals, and event spaces (e.g. Aparaditehas, Periferica) or workshops and events (e.g. Hildesheim Kulturfabrik, WUK); iii) fostering creative industries and entrepreneurship (e.g., Ex Rotaprint, Kaapelitehdas, Spazio Punch, Spinnerei, Verkatehdas); iv) supporting local entrepreneurship and creative industries through social innovation (e.g. Manifatture Knos), and innovation in local production (Salinas de Añana, Real Fábrica De Cristales); v) connecting regional professionals and developing new networks (e.g. Dolomiti Hub); vi) encouraging local arts, sustainable living projects, and community activities e.g. (Ufa Fabrik). These developments have not only increased employment but also contributed to the local economic dynamics by generating new commercial opportunities. As mentioned in the interviews, a significant result of the initiatives promoted by social entrepreneurs is the development of professional networks. Dolomiti Hub and other examples have shown how collaboration among professionals from various sectors can promote continuous urban and regional development. These networks not only facilitate knowledge exchange but are also crucial for integrating new ideas and innovative approaches into urban heritage regeneration, as evidenced by surveys and interviews in Salinas de Añana and Spinnerei. Environmental responsibility is another fundamental pillar of social entrepreneurs' initiatives in heritage-led urban regeneration. They actively counteract negative environmental impacts by reusing disused heritage sites instead of demolishing them, thus significantly reducing CO2 emissions.

Furthermore, they implement sustainable practices in their operations (e.g. Aparaditehas, Ex Rotaprint, Kulturzentrum Schlachthof, Periferica, Salinas de Añana, Verkatehdas, WUK), including energy efficiency and waste management (e.g. Dolomiti Hub, Kaapelitehdas, Hildesheim Kulturfabrik, Spinnerei, Ufa Fabrik, Verkatehdas), as emerged in the interviews.

Eco-friendly initiatives, such as the use of photovoltaic panels and the recycling of rainwater by Ufa Fabrik and improved waste management by Verkatehdas, illustrate a concrete commitment to environmental sustainability. Furthermore, the safeguarding of biodiversity, as implemented in Salinas de Añana, demonstrates how social entrepreneurs can integrate the conservation of the natural environment into their regeneration projects. They also adopt sustainable practices in site management and cultural activities (e.g. Spazio Punch) and Mina de Arnao mitigates environmental impact associated with mining heritage. From a social and cultural perspective, social entrepreneurs improve the local economy and preserve architectural heritage. They are also actively involved in the social fabric of communities, and create more livable and beautiful urban spaces. As stated in the interviews, they organize cultural events contributing to the local cultural identities (e.g., Aparaditehas, Salinas de Añana, Ex Rotaprint, Hildesheim Kulturfabrik, Kaapelitehdas), encourage local artists (e.g. Spinnerei, Kulturzentrum Schlachthof, Manifatture Knos, WUK) and create educational programs (e.g. Dolomiti Hub, Verkatehdas, Ufa Fabrik, Periferica, Kulturzentrum Faust), thereby strengthening the cultural and social identity of regenerated neighbourhoods. Participation in international artistic events (e.g. Spazio Punch) and the curation of museum pathways (e.g. Real Fábrica de Cristales, Periferica, Mina de Arnao) are further evidence of their significant impact in the cultural sector. Social entrepreneurs are instrumental in driving social responsibility and fostering

community development through a range of impactful initiatives. As emerges from the surveys and the interviews, these individuals and organizations recognize the intrinsic value of community cohesion and inclusiveness, and they work tirelessly to create environments where these values can flourish. As shown in Table 3, Aparaditehas, Kulturzentrum Schlachthof, Manifatture Knos, Spinnerei, WUK and Verkatehdas, for instance, serve as a hub for cultural events and social gatherings, fostering a sense of belonging and unity among community members. By organizing such events, they not only entertain but also bridges social divides, bringing together people from various backgrounds. Similarly, Dolomiti Hub exemplifies the role of social entrepreneurs in promoting community engagement and social interaction. By developing educational programs and social events for children, Dolomiti Hub invests in the future of the community, ensuring that young people grow up with a strong sense of social responsibility and community awareness. These programs provide children with valuable skills and experiences, fostering their personal development and encouraging them to contribute positively to their community. Kulturzentrum Faust takes a holistic approach by offering a wide range of community programs and supporting local initiatives. This organization goes beyond merely providing spaces for social gatherings; it actively supports vulnerable groups such as women and migrants, ensuring they have access to essential resources and opportunities. By doing so, Kulturzentrum Faust promotes social inclusion and helps to build a more equitable society. Moreover, as stated in the interviews, organizations like Kaapelitehdas, Ufa Fabrik, Periferica And Hildesheim Kulturfabrik enhance community life by providing venues for a diverse array of events, from cultural exchanges to educational workshops. These activities enrich the cultural fabric of the community and provide opportunities for individuals to learn from one another, fostering mutual respect and understanding. Such platforms are crucial for social integration, as they encourage people to engage with different perspectives and cultures. Preserving local history and cultural heritage is another significant aspect promoted by social entrepreneurs, as demonstrated in the interviews by Mina de Arnao and Real Fábrica de Cristales. These organizations not only offer educational programs but also work to recover and celebrate the local memory of workers and traditional crafts (e.g. Salinas de Añana). By doing so, they ensure that the contributions of past generations are recognized and valued, fostering a sense of pride and continuity within the community.

Additionally, organizations like Spazio Punch and Ufa Fabrik provide vital spaces for artistic expression and cultural exchange, which are essential for a vibrant community life. These spaces allow for creative collaboration and innovation, bringing together individuals with diverse talents and perspectives. Through these efforts, social entrepreneurs not only enhance the cultural richness of their communities but also drive social change by encouraging creative problem-solving and new ways of thinking.

In conclusion, social entrepreneurs are key to promoting social responsibility and building stronger, more inclusive communities. Through a variety of programs and initiatives, they create opportunities for engagement, interaction, and personal growth. By highlighting the efforts of organizations, it becomes evident that social entrepreneurs are essential for fostering community cohesion, supporting local artists and cultural identity, regenerating the urban space, preserving cultural heritage, promoting environmental responsibility and supporting vulnerable groups. These efforts ultimately lead to more resilient and vibrant communities, where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Finally, social entrepreneurs with their visionary leadership, passion and commitment, and innovative thinking – to mention some among several other characteristics (see Table 4 for more information on the characteristics of social entrepreneurs per each case), influence urban planning, enhancing not only the aesthetic but also the functionality of regenerated urban spaces. Through the implementation of new design techniques, co-design and the creation of accessible and more inclusive public spaces, as well as the promotion of social engagement, economic

Table 3
The role of the social entrepreneur in the sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration. Graphics by the authors.

Case study	Economic development	Social responsibility	Cultural development	Environmental responsibility	Urban design and heritage regeneration
APARAADITEHAS	-Promotes local economic activities through studios, galleries, and event spaces; - Develops new jobs.	-Provides community programs and cultural events, fostering social cohesion and inclusiveness	-Supports local artists and cultural initiatives, enhancing the cultural vibrancy of Tartu; -Organizes cultural events.	-Implements sustainable practices in its operations, contributing to environmental stewardship; -Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	-Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban aesthetics and redesign public spaces.
DOLOMITI HUB	-Stimulates local economy by connecting regional professionals and developing a network; -Develops new jobs.	-Promotes community engagement and social interaction through collaborative projects and cultural activities; -Develops an educational programs and social events for children in the region.	- Serves as a cultural and innovation hub, supporting local arts, tourism and cultural initiatives in the Dolomites region.	- Adopts sustainable practices, possibly including energy efficiency and waste management; -Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	- Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; - Regenerates the industrial space into a modern hub; - Improves urban aesthetics and redesign public spaces.
EX ROTAPRINT	-Fosters creative industries and entrepreneurship; -Develops new jobs.	-Provides platforms for community engagement, cultural exchange, and social initiatives.	-Supports arts and cultural production, contributing to Berlin’s artistic scene and cultural diversity	-Implements sustainable building practices and possibly green technologies; -Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	- Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban aesthetics and redesign public spaces.
KULTURZENTRUM FAUST	-Boosts local economy through cultural tourism; -Supports the opening new shops and sme(s); -Develops new jobs.	-Offers community programs; -Supports local initiatives; -Provides spaces for social gatherings. -Provides support for women and migrants.	-Hosts concerts, exhibitions, and performances, enriching Hannover’s cultural life	-Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	- Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban aesthetics and co-design public spaces.
KAAPELITEHDAS	-Fosters creative industries and business activities; -Supports the opening new shops and sme(s); -Develops new jobs.	-Provides spaces for community events, workshops, and cultural exchanges.	-Supports local artists and cultural organizations, enhancing Helsinki’s cultural and tourist landscape.	- Integrates sustainable practices, such as energy-efficient systems and waste management; -Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	- Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban aesthetics and redesign public spaces.
HILDESHEIM KULTURFABRIK	-Generates economic activities through workshops and events; -Develops new jobs.	-Provides platforms for community engagement, social integration, and educational programs.	-Supports arts, performances, and cultural events, enriching Hildesheim’s cultural fabric.	-Implements eco-friendly practices, potentially including sustainable energy and waste management; -Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	- Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban aesthetics and redesign public spaces.
KULTURZENTRUM SCHLACHTHOF	-Stimulates local economy through cultural tourism; -Develops new jobs.	-Provides venues for community gatherings, cultural exchanges, and educational programs.	-Hosts concerts, exhibitions, and cultural events, enhancing Bremen’s cultural identity.	-Implements sustainable practices in its operations and facilities; -Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	- Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban aesthetics and redesign public spaces.
MANIFATTURE KNOS	-Supporting local entrepreneurship and creative industries through social innovation; -Develops new jobs.	-Provides community programs, workshops, and spaces for social interaction and cultural activities.	-Supports local arts, crafts, and cultural initiatives, enriching Lecce’s cultural landscape.	-Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	- Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with

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Table 3 (continued)

Case study	Economic development	Social responsibility	Cultural development	Environmental responsibility	Urban design and heritage regeneration
MINA DE ARNAO	-Promotes tourism and local economic activities related to heritage tourism; -Develops new jobs.	- Preserves local history and cultural heritage by also recovering the local memory of workers; -Provides educational programs, and supports community engagement.	-Organizes cultural events such as exhibitions and other activities of the museum; -Focuses on mining history and cultural preservation, contributing to Asturias' cultural identity.	-Mitigates environmental impact associated with mining heritage; -Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban aesthetics and co-design public spaces. - Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban aesthetics and redesign public spaces.
PERIFERICA	-Promotes local economic activities through festivals and event spaces; -Develops new jobs.	-Provides community programs, cultural events, and spaces for social interaction and educational activities.	-Organizes cultural events such as festivals and other activities of the museum; -Supports arts, crafts, and cultural initiatives, enriching Mazara del Vallo's cultural scene.	-Implements sustainable practices in site management and operations; -Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	- Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban aesthetics and redesign public spaces.
REAL FÁBRICA DE CRISTALES	-Attracts tourism and supporting local economic and tourist activities related to glassmaking heritage; -Develops new jobs.	-Preserves local craftsmanship and cultural heritage; -Provides educational programs; -Promotes community engagement.	- Organizes cultural events and activities related to the museum; -Focuses on glassmaking history and cultural preservation, contributing to La Granja's cultural identity.	-Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	- Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban aesthetics and redesign public spaces.
SALINAS DE AÑANA	-supports local salt production and tourism; -Innovates the product; -Contributes to the opening of new shops and sme(s); -Develops new jobs.	-Engages local community through cultural events, inclusive educational programs and workshops, and promotion of traditional crafts.	-Organizes of cultural events, conferences and festivals; -Focuses on preserving traditional salt-making techniques and cultural heritage, contributing to Álava's cultural landscape.	-Implements sustainable practices in salt production and site management; -Preserves the local biodiversity; -Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	- Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban aesthetics and redesign public spaces, new wooden paths and a wellness area.
SPAZIO PUNCH	-Attracts tourism and supports local arts and creative industries; -Develops new jobs.	-Provides platforms for artistic expression, cultural exchange, and community engagement.	-Hosts exhibitions, performances, and cultural events, enriching Venice's cultural offerings. -Participates in international artistic events, such as La Biennale di Venezia.	-Adopts sustainable practices in site management and cultural activities; -Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	- Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban aesthetics and redesign public spaces.
SPINNEREI	-Supports local artists, galleries, and creative industries; -Supports the opening of new shops and sme(s); -Develops new jobs.	-Provides spaces for community events and workshops.	-Organizes exhibitions and cultural events; -Fosters arts, creativity, and cultural production, contributing to Leipzig's cultural vibrancy.	-Integrates sustainable practices, possibly including energy efficiency and waste management; -Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	- Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban aesthetics and redesign public spaces.
UFA FABRIK	-Supports local arts, sustainable living projects, and community activities; -Develops new jobs.	-Provides spaces for community gatherings, cultural events, educational programs and social initiatives; -Supports the commune and its residents.	-Promotes arts, theatre, and cultural performances, enriching Berlin's cultural	- Integrates sustainable practices, possibly including energy efficiency and waste management; -Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding	- Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban

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Table 3 (continued)

Case study	Economic development	Social responsibility	Cultural development	Environmental responsibility	Urban design and heritage regeneration
VERKATEHDAS	-Stimulates local economy through cultural events and tourism; -Develops new jobs.	-Provides spaces for community gatherings, educational programs, and cultural activities.	-Supports local arts, performances, and cultural exhibitions and talks, enriching Hämeenlinna cultural offerings.	the demolition and CO2 emissions. - Implements sustainable practices, potentially including energy efficiency and waste management; -Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	aesthetics and redesign public spaces. - Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban aesthetics and redesign public spaces.
WUK	- Stimulates local economy through cultural events, workshops, and community programs; -Develops new jobs.	-Provides platforms for community engagement, cultural exchange, and educational initiatives.	-Supports arts, performances, and cultural events, enhancing Vienna's cultural scene.	- Implements eco-friendly practices in operations and facilities management; -Repurposes the abandoned asset avoiding the demolition and CO2 emissions.	- Preserves and maintain industrial heritage; -Regenerates the industrial space with new modern and creative uses; - Improves urban aesthetics and redesign public spaces.

development and environmental responsibility and, the development of cultural programs and monitoring activities, they contribute to making cities more welcoming, creative, sustainable and inclusive for all citizens (see Table 4 for more information on the actions of social entrepreneurs per each case). In summary, social entrepreneurs represent a driving force in the sustainable regeneration of neglected urban heritage, integrating economic development, environmental responsibility, social sustainability, and cultural development. Their actions not only preserve historical heritage but also promote innovative and prosperous communities, playing an essential role in building a sustainable and inclusive urban future.

5. Discussion

5.1. The characteristics of the social entrepreneur promoting sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration

The results of this research clearly show that each social enterprise involved in heritage-led urban regeneration projects is led by a social entrepreneur endowed with great passion and commitment towards their work, the place, the regenerated heritage, and the social enterprise's mission, as mentioned in the literature (Dees, 1998; Guclu et al., 2002; Gupta et al., 2020). According to the literature, the entrepreneurs are characterized by a clear vision and innovative thinking aimed at the sustainable enhancement and regeneration of cultural heritage and territory (Scaffidi, 2019, 2024). They can inspire others to achieve common goals, creating a motivating and collaborative work environment (Ellmeier, 2003; Van Meerkerk et al., 2013; Barberá-Tomás et al., 2019).

The interviews reveal that these entrepreneurs are deeply influenced by a strong cultural sensitivity towards the traditions, local heritage, and memory of the place where they operate. This respect and sense of belonging to the local cultural heritage motivate them to preserve and enhance the historical and cultural context of the territory. Their cultural sensitivity often translates into initiatives that respect and celebrate local identity, involving the community in inclusive and participatory regeneration processes.

Moreover, the results show that these entrepreneurs demonstrate a particular focus on sustainability issues. Their vision of development is not limited to economic growth and the creation of new jobs but includes reducing consumption and waste, CO2 emissions, environmental and biodiversity protection, and social well-being. Their predisposition

to social leadership enables them to mobilize resources and people for causes beyond profit, promoting eco-friendly and socially responsible practices within the regenerated heritage and surrounding territory. Resilience is another distinctive feature of these entrepreneurs. They can adapt to adverse situations and overcome difficulties with determination, constantly focusing on long-term goals. This resilience is essential for addressing the challenges inherent in sustainable urban regeneration projects, which often require flexibility and adaptability.

According to the literature, these entrepreneurs strongly emphasize empowering local communities (Plevoets & Sowinska-Heim, 2018; Pinto et al., 2020). Through capacity-building processes, they provide the necessary resources for development and the tools for active community participation. This approach helps create a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members, fostering sustainable and inclusive development.

Finally, the results show that these entrepreneurs are skilled in measuring and evaluating the impacts of their initiatives in the short, medium, and long term, ensuring that interventions are effective and produce tangible benefits for the community. This commitment to impact measurement ensures the continuous optimization of the strategies adopted.

Therefore, based on the literature review and the qualitative research, the following distinctive characteristics of social entrepreneurs involved in heritage-led urban regeneration projects can be identified (see Table 5):

1. Visionary Leadership;
2. Passion and Commitment;
3. Innovative Thinking;
4. Cultural Sensitivity;
5. Social Leadership;
6. Adaptive Resilience;
7. Sustainability Orientation;
8. Empowerment and Capacity Building;
9. Impact Measurement and Evaluation.

It is evident that these characteristics are representative of the social entrepreneur figure, although not each social entrepreneur has them all to the same degree. These results support the thesis of the present research, which states that the social entrepreneur plays a crucial role in the sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration. Indeed, they serve as a reference point for the leaders of social enterprises operating in urban

Table 4
 Characteristics and actions of social entrepreneurs per each case study. Graphics by the authors.

case study	Characteristics of social entrepreneurs	Actions of social entrepreneurs
APARAADITEHAS	Visionary Leadership; Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building; Impact Measurement and Evaluation	Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events; Promoting Social Engagement and Inclusive Design; Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models; Integrating Green Infrastructure and Environmental Responsibility; Monitoring and Evaluating Regeneration Projects
DOLOMITI HUB	Visionary Leadership; Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building; Impact Measurement and Evaluation	Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events; Promoting Social Engagement and Inclusive Design; Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models; Enhancing Tourism Promotion and Marketing; Integrating Green Infrastructure and Environmental Responsibility; Monitoring and Evaluating Regeneration Projects
EX ROTAPRINT	Visionary Leadership; Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building; Impact Measurement and Evaluation	Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events; Promoting Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models; Monitoring and Evaluating Regeneration Projects
KULTURZENTRUM FAUST	Visionary Leadership; Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building	Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events; Promoting Social Engagement and Inclusive Design; Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models;
KAAPELITEHDAS	Visionary Leadership; Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive	Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events, Driving

Table 4 (continued)

case study	Characteristics of social entrepreneurs	Actions of social entrepreneurs
		Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building; Impact Measurement and Evaluation
HILDESHEIM KULTURFABRIK	Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive Resilience; Sustainability Orientation	Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models; Enhancing Tourism Promotion and Marketing; Integrating Green Infrastructure and Environmental Responsibility; Monitoring and Evaluating Regeneration Projects
KULTURZENTRUM SCHLACHTHOF	Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building	Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events; Promoting Social Engagement and Inclusive Design; Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models; Integrating Green Infrastructure and Environmental Responsibility
MANIFATTURE KNOS	Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building; Impact Measurement and Evaluation	Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events; Promoting Social Engagement and Inclusive Design; Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models; Enhancing Tourism Promotion and Marketing; Integrating Green Infrastructure and Environmental Responsibility;
MUSEO MINA DE ARNAO	Visionary Leadership; Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building; Impact	Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events; Promoting Social Engagement and Inclusive Design; Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Innovating in Social

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Table 4 (continued)

case study	Characteristics of social entrepreneurs	Actions of social entrepreneurs
	Measurement and Evaluation	Responsibility and Corporate Models; Enhancing Tourism Promotion and Marketing; Integrating Green Infrastructure and Environmental
PERIFERICA	Visionary Leadership; Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building	Responsibility; Monitoring and Evaluating Regeneration Projects Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events; Promoting Social Engagement and Inclusive Design; Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Integrating Green Infrastructure and Environmental Responsibility
REAL FÁBRICA DE CRISTALES	Visionary Leadership; Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building; Impact Measurement and Evaluation	Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events; Promoting Social Engagement and Inclusive Design; Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models; Enhancing Tourism Promotion and Marketing; Monitoring and Evaluating Regeneration Projects
SALINAS DE AÑANA	Visionary Leadership; Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building; Impact Measurement and Evaluation	Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events; Promoting Social Engagement and Inclusive Design; Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models; Enhancing Tourism Promotion and Marketing; Integrating Green Infrastructure and Environmental Responsibility; Monitoring and Evaluating Regeneration Projects
SPAZIO PUNCH	Visionary Leadership; Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building	Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events; Promoting Social Engagement and Inclusive Design; Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models;

Table 4 (continued)

case study	Characteristics of social entrepreneurs	Actions of social entrepreneurs
SPINNEREI	Visionary Leadership; Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building; Impact Measurement and Evaluation	Enhancing Tourism Promotion and Marketing; Integrating Green Infrastructure and Environmental Responsibility Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events; Promoting Social Engagement and Inclusive Design; Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models; Enhancing Tourism Promotion and Marketing; Integrating Green Infrastructure and Environmental Responsibility; Monitoring and Evaluating Regeneration Projects
UFA FABRIK	Visionary Leadership; Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building; Impact Measurement and Evaluation	Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events; Promoting Social Engagement and Inclusive Design; Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models; Enhancing Tourism Promotion and Marketing; Integrating Green Infrastructure and Environmental Responsibility; Monitoring and Evaluating Regeneration Projects
VERKATEHDAS	Visionary Leadership; Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building; Impact Measurement and Evaluation	Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events; Promoting Social Engagement and Inclusive Design; Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models; Enhancing Tourism Promotion and Marketing; Integrating Green Infrastructure and Environmental Responsibility; Monitoring and Evaluating Regeneration Projects
WUK	Visionary Leadership; Passion and Commitment; Innovative Thinking; Cultural Sensitivity; Social Leadership; Adaptive	Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design; Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration; Organizing Cultural Programming and Events; Promoting Social

(continued on next page)

Table 4 (continued)

case study	Characteristics of social entrepreneurs	Actions of social entrepreneurs
	Resilience; Sustainability Orientation; Empowerment and Capacity Building	Engagement and Inclusive Design; Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development; Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models; Enhancing Tourism Promotion and Marketing; Integrating Green Infrastructure and Environmental Responsibility

Table 5

The characteristics of the social entrepreneur in sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration. Graphics by the authors.

The characteristics of the social entrepreneur in sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration	
Visionary Leadership	Ability to have a clear vision and inspire others to achieve common goals
Passion and Commitment	Strong passion and commitment towards their work, the place, the regenerated heritage, and the mission of the social enterprise
Innovative Thinking	Innovative thinking and finding creative solutions to problems
Cultural Sensitivity	Cultural sensitivity and respect for the place's traditions, local heritage, and history
Social Leadership	Predisposition to social leadership and ability to guide and motivate the community
Adaptive Resilience	Resilience and ability to adapt to changes and challenges
Sustainability Orientation	Orientation towards sustainability and the adoption of eco-friendly practices
Empowerment and Capacity Building	Commitment to community empowerment and capacity building
Impact Measurement and Evaluation	Competence in measuring and evaluating the impacts of their initiatives

regeneration.

The identified characteristics outline an ideal profile of the social entrepreneur. These qualities are essential for tackling heritage-led urban regeneration projects' complex and multidimensional challenges.

Moreover, the distinctive characteristics of social entrepreneurs significantly influence their work both within and outside the regenerated heritage, acting with the ambition to foster sustainability. The research findings highlight a wide range of actions of social entrepreneurs in various areas, including heritage preservation, the regeneration of spaces and the surrounding urban fabric, and the development of cultural and tourism initiatives.

The research results show that social entrepreneurs are firmly committed to maintaining and preserving cultural heritage sites, ensuring their protection and long-term enhancement while simultaneously regenerating and redesigning their urban spaces. This commitment includes adaptive reuse and heritage conservation projects to maintain the authenticity of historic structures and provide new uses for the heritage itself and its context. Regenerating spaces not only preserves cultural value but also ensures contemporary functionality and increased urban quality, creating new opportunities for the local community.

5.2. The actions of the social entrepreneur for urban sustainability

As revealed in the interviews, social entrepreneurs play a pivotal role that extends beyond the preservation of heritage, engaging deeply in social activities such as community involvement and inclusive design.

They act as catalysts for the active participation and inclusion of diverse stakeholders—ranging from local communities to businesses and policymakers—in the regeneration process. By fostering policies and facilitating public debates, social entrepreneurs ensure that regeneration efforts are informed by comprehensive community input, feedback, and ideas. This inclusive approach is critical to ensuring that such efforts reflect the nuanced needs, priorities, wishes, and aspirations of the local population, thereby increasing the likelihood of sustainable and meaningful outcomes.

The impact of social entrepreneurs is particularly evident in the cultural sphere. They organize a plethora of cultural programs and events, including art exhibitions, musical and theatrical performances, training sessions, and both in-person and virtual guided tours. These initiatives are designed to enhance local heritage and identity, fostering a deep sense of community pride and belonging. By highlighting the community's unique attractions and experiences, these cultural activities not only entertain and educate but also serve to unify diverse community members. As emerged in the interviews, this cultural engagement is crucial for the promotion of heritage and cultural tourism, driving both local and external interest in the community's cultural assets. Moreover, social entrepreneurs are instrumental in integrating green infrastructure within these initiatives, thereby promoting environmentally sustainable practices that are increasingly essential in contemporary urban regeneration. The results show that economically, social entrepreneurs are at the forefront of developing innovative business models that promote corporate social responsibility while driving economic urban growth. These models are not merely about profitability; they are designed to create new jobs and invigorate the local economic fabric, making it more dynamic and resilient while also responding to social needs and wishes. By fostering a vibrant and sustainable local economy, social entrepreneurs contribute to the overall socio-economic health of the community. As confirmed in the interviews, social entrepreneurs provide essential resources, training, and mentorship, which are particularly valuable in preserving local traditions, products and crafts. This support helps to sustain and grow the economic viability of heritage sites and the surrounding urban fabric, ensuring that cultural preservation goes hand-in-hand with economic development. In their role as facilitators of social responsibility, social entrepreneurs are committed to rigorous monitoring and evaluation of their initiatives. They assess the impact and effectiveness of regeneration projects, utilizing feedback to optimize and refine their strategies continually. This commitment to accountability and continuous improvement ensures that the benefits of regeneration efforts are maximized and that any negative impacts are mitigated.

In conclusion, the role of social entrepreneurs is multifaceted and critical in shaping sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration (see Table 6). They drive significant social, cultural, economic, environmental and spatial impacts through various actions, including:

1. Facilitating Heritage Preservation and Design
2. Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration
3. Organizing Cultural Programming and Events
4. Promoting Social Engagement and Inclusive Design
5. Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development
6. Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models
7. Enhancing Tourism Promotion and Marketing
8. Integrating Green Infrastructure and Environmental Responsibility
9. Monitoring and Evaluating Regeneration Projects

These actions underscore the profound and wide-ranging impact of social entrepreneurs in urban regeneration projects. Their work is essential in promoting sustainable development, preserving cultural heritage, regenerating urban space and fostering inclusive, resilient communities. Through their dedicated efforts, social entrepreneurs not only enhance the physical and economic landscape of their regions but also enrich the social and cultural fabric, ensuring that regeneration is

Table 6
The actions of the social entrepreneur for urban sustainability in heritage-led regeneration. Graphics by the authors.

The actions of the social entrepreneur for urban sustainability in heritage-led regeneration	
Facilitating Heritage Preservation, Regeneration and Design	Social entrepreneurs spearhead initiatives that protect and celebrate local heritage, ensuring that historical sites and cultural landmarks are preserved long-term and regenerated for future generations through design.
Leading Heritage and Urban Regeneration	They lead regeneration activities that revitalize urban areas, improving the quality of life in the territory and balancing development with the preservation of cultural and historical identity.
Organizing Cultural Programming and Events	By curating a wide array of cultural events that celebrate the heritage and traditions of communities, they foster community engagement and cultural exchange, enhancing the local cultural landscape.
Promoting Social Engagement and Inclusive Design	They advocate for inclusive design principles that address the needs of all community members and promotion of supportive policies and collaboration among various stakeholders in the regeneration process through community meetings, debates, workshops, festivals, and working groups.
Driving Entrepreneurship and Economic Development	Social entrepreneurs support other entrepreneurs through training and mentorship and implement business models that stimulate local economies, create jobs, and foster economic resilience.
Innovating in Social Responsibility and Corporate Models	They introduce and promote corporate social responsibility initiatives that align business objectives with social and environmental goals for creating positive impact on the territory, as well as the promotion of innovative approaches to meeting the needs and desires of the community.
Enhancing Tourism Promotion and Marketing	By highlighting local attractions and heritage, they boost tourism, which in turn supports local economies and cultural preservation.
Integrating Green Infrastructure and Environmental Responsibility	Social entrepreneurs prioritize sustainable practices, integrating green infrastructure to promote environmental health and resilience.
Monitoring and Evaluating Regeneration Projects	They maintain a commitment to assessing the impact of their initiatives, ensuring that projects are effective and beneficial to the community.

holistic, innovative and inclusive.

5.3. Influencing factors and challenges impacting the actions of the social entrepreneur

Social entrepreneurs involved in heritage-led urban regeneration projects navigate a complex landscape of influencing factors and challenges that shape their motivations, actions, and effectiveness in promoting positive change within heritage and the urban context. As revealed in the interviews, contextual factors such as the historical context and local identity of the community significantly impact the role of social entrepreneurs. The historical assets, cultural traditions, and past development patterns within a community provide a backdrop that informs the entrepreneurs' approach to conservation, regeneration, and community engagement. A deep understanding of these elements is crucial for tailoring their initiatives to resonate with local heritage and foster a renewed sense of identity and continuity. Moreover, as shown in the results, local socio-economic conditions play a critical role in

determining the strategies employed by social entrepreneurs. Variations in income levels, employment opportunities, and provided community services necessitate a nuanced approach to address social inequalities and economic disparities. Social entrepreneurs must design initiatives that effectively respond to these local socio-economic realities, ensuring their efforts are relevant and impactful. The political and regulatory environment further shapes their actions by either facilitating or hindering progress. Supportive policies, planning regulations, heritage conservation and regeneration laws, and funding mechanisms can provide a conducive environment for social entrepreneurship, whereas restrictive regulations and bureaucratic hurdles can pose significant challenges. Furthermore, community dynamics and stakeholder engagement are pivotal in the success of heritage-led urban regeneration projects. As emerged in the surveys, the local community's dynamics, including the level of stakeholder involvement, trust, and collaboration, influence the social entrepreneur's ability to build partnerships, manage conflicts, and foster a collective vision for regeneration. Effective community engagement strategies are essential for garnering local support and ensuring the sustainability of initiatives. On an individual level, personal values, motivations, leadership skills, and vision are fundamental attributes that drive social entrepreneurs. Their commitment to social, cultural, and environmental values guides their decision-making processes and actions. Strong leadership skills, coupled with a clear vision for revitalizing underutilized cultural areas and heritages, enable social entrepreneurs to inspire and mobilize others, set strategic goals, and overcome challenges. Creativity and innovation are also critical, as social entrepreneurs must leverage innovative approaches to address complex issues and identify new opportunities for positive change. Their willingness to challenge conventional wisdom and explore novel solutions is a defining characteristic of their work. Resilience and adaptability are essential traits for social entrepreneurs, enabling them to navigate the uncertainties and setbacks inherent in heritage-led urban regeneration projects. These qualities allow them to remain flexible, overcome obstacles, and adjust their strategies to achieve their objectives despite changing circumstances. As emerged in the results, organizational factors, including capacity, resources, partnerships, networks and a culture of innovation and learning, significantly impact the effectiveness of social entrepreneurship in heritage-led urban regeneration. The availability of funding, skilled staff, and infrastructure determines the scale and scope of their initiatives. Strategic collaborations, partnerships and networks with various stakeholders enhance their ability to leverage resources, expertise, and support, thereby amplifying their impact. Organizations that foster a culture of creativity, experimentation, and continuous improvement are better equipped to adapt and innovate, promoting sustainable development in the heritage context.

Lastly, robust monitoring and evaluation practices are crucial for assessing the impact, effectiveness, and sustainability of heritage-led urban regeneration projects. These practices enable social entrepreneurship organizations to gather data, measure outcomes, and solicit stakeholder feedback, thereby informing future decision-making and planning processes. Through continuous learning and adaptation, social entrepreneurs can refine their approaches and enhance their contributions to sustainable urban growth and heritage regeneration.

Social entrepreneurs involved in heritage-led urban regeneration projects are influenced by contextual, individual, and organizational factors that determine their motivations, actions, and effectiveness in promoting positive changes in heritage and the surrounding urban context. In the [Table 7](#) are some specific factors within each category that influence the role of social entrepreneurs.

By considering these contextual, personal and operating factors, social entrepreneurs can effectively navigate the complexities of heritage-led urban regeneration projects and drive positive and sustainable change in historic communities.

Furthermore, social entrepreneurs engaged in heritage-led urban regeneration exhibit remarkable resilience and tenacity when

Table 7
Influencing factors impacting the actions of the social entrepreneur. Graphics by the authors.

Influencing factors impacting the actions of the social entrepreneur		
CONTEXTUAL FACTORS	PERSONAL FACTORS	OPERATING FACTORS
<p>Historical Background and Local Identity The historical context and local identity of the community, including heritage assets, cultural traditions, and past development patterns, influences the role of social entrepreneurs in heritage-led urban regeneration projects. Understanding the community's history and context informs their conservation, regeneration, and community engagement approach.</p>	<p>Core Values and Motivations Social entrepreneurs are driven by personal values, beliefs, and motivations that shape their role in heritage-led urban regeneration projects. Their commitment to social, cultural, and environmental values influences their decision-making and guides their actions in pursuing positive social change.</p>	<p>Resource Capability The capacity and resources of social entrepreneurship organizations influence their role in heritage-led urban regeneration projects. Factors such as funding, staff skills, partnerships, and infrastructure impact their initiatives' scale, scope, and impact.</p>
<p>Socio-Economic Landscape Socio-economic conditions, such as income levels, employment opportunities, and community services influence the role of social entrepreneurs in addressing social inequalities and economic disparities in heritage regeneration projects. They must tailor their initiatives to respond to local needs and priorities effectively.</p>	<p>Visionary Leadership Skills Effective social entrepreneurs possess strong leadership skills and a clear vision for revitalizing underutilized cultural areas. Their ability to inspire and mobilize others, set strategic goals, and tackle challenges is crucial in advancing revitalization efforts.</p>	<p>Partnerships, Networks and Strategic Collaborations Social entrepreneurship organizations form partnerships, networks and strategic collaborations with various stakeholders to advance heritage-led urban regeneration projects. The extent and quality of these partnerships affect their ability to leverage resources, expertise, and support for their initiatives.</p>
<p>Political and Regulatory Framework The political and regulatory environment, including planning regulations, heritage conservation and regeneration laws, and funding mechanisms, shapes the role of social entrepreneurs by creating opportunities or barriers for their initiatives. Supportive policies and incentives can facilitate their efforts, while regulatory constraints hinder progress and innovation.</p>	<p>Creativity and Innovative Mindset Social entrepreneurs leverage creative thinking and innovative approaches to address complex challenges and identify opportunities for positive change in heritage-led urban regeneration projects. They are willing to challenge conventional wisdom and explore new ideas and solutions.</p>	<p>Culture of Innovation and Learning Organizations with a culture of innovation and learning are better equipped to adapt to changing circumstances and experiment with new ideas and approaches in heritage-led urban regeneration projects. They promote a culture of creativity, experimentation, and continuous improvement that supports entrepreneurial action and innovation.</p>
<p>Community Dynamics and Stakeholders Engagement The dynamics of the local community and the level of stakeholders' engagement influence the role of social entrepreneurs in heritage-led urban regeneration projects. Building trust, fostering</p>	<p>Resilience and Flexibility Social entrepreneurs demonstrate resilience and flexibility in the face of challenges and setbacks encountered in heritage-led urban regeneration projects. They can navigate uncertainty, overcome obstacles, and adjust</p>	<p>Monitoring and Evaluation Practices Effective monitoring and evaluation practices enable social entrepreneurship organizations to assess their heritage-led urban regeneration projects' impact, effectiveness, and sustainability. They gather data, measure outcomes, and solicit stakeholder</p>

Table 7 (continued)

Influencing factors impacting the actions of the social entrepreneur		
collaboration, and managing conflicts are essential for effective community engagement and partnership building.	their strategies to achieve their goals.	feedback to monitor progress, identify lessons learned, and inform future decision-making and planning processes.

confronted with a multitude of challenges. These hurdles, which encompass both internal and external factors, can significantly influence various stages of the regeneration process. As evidenced in the interviews, the primary challenge for these entrepreneurs is the lack of long-term funding and investments. Securing sufficient and long-term financial resources is often a daunting task due to the scarcity of public funds or the hesitance of private investors to back projects with uncertain and non-immediate returns. This issue is particularly acute in marginalized areas, as revealed by the surveys and interviews, where economic challenges or uncertain property values elevate the perceived risk.

Additionally, as shown in the results, the lack of policies and discouraging regulations poses a substantial obstacle. Sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration projects are subject to intricate regulatory frameworks and planning processes, including bureaucratic delays, property issues, zoning restrictions, and historical conservation and urban regeneration discouraging regulations. These elements make the process more complex and full of challenges and obstacles for the social entrepreneur, adding time, costs, and uncertainty to their initiatives.

As mentioned earlier, property ownership and acquisition further complicate the social entrepreneur's path. Among the various challenges social entrepreneurs face are analyzing unclear property deeds, investigating and locating property owners, negotiating with them, and initiating legal processes for acquiring property. These challenges are often compounded by some opposition from local municipalities and citizens who do not always support the process, both before the regeneration phase and during the actual activities of the center. As reported in the interviews, social entrepreneurs frequently face conflicts, disinterest, political and social pressures, intimidation, and moral blackmail to carry out their activities and fulfil their mission. Initiating informal and formal engagement processes with residents and local administrators, both in the regeneration planning phase and during the reuse phase of the heritage, is crucial. This involvement ensures that these stakeholders feel part of the regeneration and perhaps share its mission. Moreover, stakeholder involvement also helps alleviate concerns about the impact of activities and regeneration projects on their neighbourhoods, cultural heritage, and urban quality of life. However, building trust, consensus, and collaboration among these diverse groups is time-consuming and labour-intensive for social entrepreneurs. They must manage communication barriers, competing interests, and conflicting priorities to build effective partnerships with government agencies, non-profit or for-profit organizations, and community members. Therefore, social entrepreneurs must be supported by equally passionate collaborators who share the same mission and love for the heritage and the place. These partnerships are fundamental for ensuring greater understanding and acceptance of the social enterprise's activities and securing resources and support from various stakeholders.

In addition to these challenges, long-term environmental and social challenges that social entrepreneurs must consider to ensure ethically sound conduct also represent ongoing challenges. They must address gentrification, social equity, economic accessibility, inclusivity, environmental responsibility, consumption reduction, better waste management, and energy efficiency. Developing sustainable business models, revenue streams, and community service management strategies is indispensable for maintaining these projects' financial, economic, social, cultural, spatial, and environmental sustainability beyond the

initial regeneration phase.

Despite these formidable challenges, overcoming these obstacles is possible through a multifaceted and collaborative approach. Strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, developing a sustainable business model, and creating and leading a passionate and proactive workgroup are fundamental components. With their innovative thinking, commitment, and determination, social entrepreneurs can utilize innovative financing mechanisms, create strategic partnerships, and mobilize community and stakeholder support. As emerged from the interviews and site visits, this collective effort helps social entrepreneurs successfully overcome obstacles, leading to sustainable, innovative, socially inclusive, and culturally sensitive heritage-led urban regeneration outcomes. The resilience and adaptability demonstrated by social entrepreneurs in the face of these challenges highlight their crucial role in driving positive changes in urban regeneration and heritage contexts. Table 8 outlines the specific barriers and challenges that influence the role of social entrepreneurs in sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration.

Table 8
Influencing challenges impacting the actions of the social entrepreneur. Graphics by the authors.

Influencing challenges impacting the actions of the social entrepreneur	
Lack of Long-Term Funding and Investments	Securing adequate long-term financial resources is often a challenge for social entrepreneurs engaged in heritage-led urban regeneration. This is often due to a lack of sufficient public funds or the hesitation of private investors interested in investing in projects with uncertain and non-immediate returns. Furthermore, this issue is particularly felt in marginal areas, which face economic challenges or uncertain property values, where the perceived risk is higher.
Lack of Policies and Discouraging Regulations	Sustainable heritage-led urban regeneration projects are often subject to discouraging regulatory frameworks and planning processes. Social entrepreneurs may face bureaucratic delays, property issues, zoning restrictions, and historical conservation and urban regeneration regulations that add time, cost, and uncertainty to their initiatives. These elements make the process more complex and full of challenges and obstacles for the social entrepreneur.
Heritage Acquisition, Negotiation	Acquiring heritage properties can be challenging for the social entrepreneur due to unclear property deeds, property ownership disputes, exhausting negotiations and legal processes with owners.
Disinterest, Conflict and Socio-Political Pressure	Social entrepreneurs engaged in heritage-led urban regeneration often experience some opposition from local municipalities and citizens who do not always support the process, both before the regeneration phase and during the actual activities of the center. They in fact face conflicts, disinterest, intimidation, political and social pressures, and moral blackmail to carry out their activities and fulfil their mission.
Long-Term Environmental and Social Challenges	Social entrepreneurs must also confront environmental and social challenges, including gentrification, social equity, economic accessibility, inclusivity, environmental responsibility, consumption reduction, improved waste management, and energy efficiency. Developing sustainable business models, revenue streams, and community service management strategies is essential for ensuring the financial, economic, social, cultural, spatial, and environmental sustainability of these projects beyond the initial phase of regeneration.

6. Conclusions

The current study was designed to explore the role of social entrepreneurs in heritage-led sustainable urban regeneration. It also aimed to test the hypothesis that social entrepreneurs play a crucial role and, therefore, impact the development of a sustainable approach to revitalizing neglected heritage.

The study identified common characteristics and activities among social entrepreneurs in the selected cases. Furthermore, it confirmed that three main factors influence social entrepreneurs' actions, alongside multiple challenges affecting their sustainable efforts.

While this research focused on analyzing 17 cases of industrial heritage in Europe, its findings offer insights into urban planning and design. The potential for extending the analyses to other cases across Europe or even beyond, as well as to different categories of heritage, opens up numerous avenues for future research. By focusing on social entrepreneurs working with industrial heritage, this study provides a framework that could be applied to other types of heritage, such as commercial or military sites, where the regeneration and redesign of the space intersects with urban development and sustainability. Additionally, future research could investigate the long-term impacts of social entrepreneurship on the sustainability of heritage-led regeneration projects. This line of inquiry could explore the broader societal effects of such practices, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of their role in shaping sustainable urban futures. By opening these new lines of inquiry, this study lays the groundwork for future research that can deepen our understanding of the diverse ways in which social entrepreneurs contribute to heritage-led regeneration and sustainability.

Based on the findings, there are several actionable recommendations for social entrepreneurs, policymakers, and practitioners. Social entrepreneurs should focus on building collaborative networks, diversifying income streams, and using more collaborative tools to promote their projects. They should also design their initiatives with long-term sustainability in mind and invest in building skills such as project management and financial planning.

For policymakers, developing policy incentives, streamlined regulations, and public-private partnerships can create an enabling environment for social enterprises. Additionally, raising public awareness and fostering educational programs about heritage regeneration will help promote sustainable urban regeneration efforts. Urban planning and architecture practitioners should integrate social entrepreneurship into their projects, adopt multidisciplinary approaches and circular regeneration strategies for sustainable and long-term heritage-led urban regeneration and establish systems for monitoring the impact of these projects. Overall, collaboration, capacity-building, and stakeholders' involvement are key to ensuring the long-term and sustainable success of heritage-led regeneration efforts. In conclusion, the findings are encouraging for social enterprises, policymakers, and local authorities, as they underscore the importance of initiatives and policies that foster new career paths for social entrepreneurs involved in heritage-led sustainable urban regeneration. Moreover, they provide a foundation for future research in this area.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Federica Scaffidi: Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Project administration, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. *Sections: Introduction; Methodology; Theory 3.2, 3.4; Results; Discussion 5.3; Conclusions.* **Ezio Micelli:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing. *Sections: Introduction; Methodology; Theory 3.3; Discussion 5.2; Conclusions.* **Matt Nash:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing. *Sections: Introduction; Methodology; Theory 3.1; Discussion 5.1; Conclusions.* All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. The author is an Editorial Board Member/Editor-in-Chief/Associate Editor/Guest Editor for this journal and was not involved in the editorial review or the decision to publish this article.

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