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Community of Practice
on Green Skills for
Organizations' Human Capital

Communities of Practice as Informal Learning Environments

A comparative desk research report across
Europe, Italy, Spain and Bulgaria

Erasmus+ KA210-VET · Activity 2, Task 2.3

Project ref: KA210-VET-078AFEE2 · Research: Nov 2025 – Jan 2026

OpenCom (IT) · SYDIC (IT) · MEUS (ES) · GBG (BG) · Euro Education Bulgaria (BG)



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Partner organisations
across 4 contexts

10

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consistent across all contexts

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for Activity 3

Key findings at a glance

- CoPs are far more widespread than formal data suggests, they operate under different labels in every country studied.
- The most effective CoPs form around real, shared problems rather than around training needs.
- EU funding is both the primary enabler and the primary vulnerability of CoP activity across all partner countries.
- The weakest link in CoP practice everywhere is the ability to make learning visible through evaluation and dissemination.
- A clear connection exists between sustainability-focused CoPs and multiple GreenComp competences.

Theoretical framework: what is a Community of Practice?

"A Community of Practice is a group of people who share a concern, interest or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better through regular interaction."

Wenger-Trayner (2015)

Domain	Community	Practice
A shared domain of interest defines community identity. Membership implies commitment and a shared competence, not necessarily recognised as expertise outside the community.	Members engage in joint activities, help each other and share information. They build relationships that enable learning from each other. A website or mailing list alone is not a CoP.	Members are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems, built through sustained interaction over time.

Eight conditions that make CoP learning effective

1

Real shared problem

The most durable CoPs form around a challenge no single person can solve alone.

2

Voluntary membership

Participation is never compelled. Commitment comes from genuine interest and shared ownership.

3

Trust & horizontality

People share unfinished thinking and mistakes. Trust and reciprocity are the foundation.

4

Practical knowledge

CoPs generate solutions members can use immediately, not abstract knowledge.

5

Skilled facilitator

The facilitator sustains conversation without controlling content or outcomes.

6

Collective intelligence

Value lies in combining perspectives, not transmitting one expert's knowledge.

7

Regular interaction

Learning accumulates through sustained, repeated interaction over time. One-off events are not CoPs.

8

Visible evaluation

CoPs that make learning visible sustain themselves longer and generate wider impact.

CoPs and the GreenComp framework - sustainability competences

Most frequently identified GreenComp competences
systems thinking · collective action · adaptability · futures literacy · sustainability values

Embodying sustainability values

Sustainability values, worldviews, environmental justice

CoPs embed values through shared practice. Voluntary membership, peer solidarity and shared ownership are daily enactments of sustainability values.

Embracing complexity

Systems thinking, critical thinking, problem framing

CoPs are environments where systems thinking emerges naturally through multi-sector and multi-disciplinary exchange.

Envisioning sustainable futures

Futures literacy, exploratory thinking, adaptability

Several sustainability CoPs (Spain, Italy) work explicitly on scenario planning, transition pathways and shared visions.

Acting for sustainability

Collective action, political agency, individual initiative

CoPs generate collective actions, shared tools, advocacy strategies and new practices carried into organisations.

Findings by context - Europe and Italy

Europe (OpenCom)

- CoPs present in education, healthcare, sustainability and innovation across Europe.
- EU uses CoPs as tools for collaborative governance, Education for Climate Coalition, NetZeroCities, Blue Bioeconomy, EU Knowledge Valorisation Platform.
- GreenComp, DigComp and EntreComp recognise CoPs and peer-learning networks as key mechanisms for transversal skills.
- Many CoPs are project-dependent and dissolve when funding ends.
- Adoption remains uneven across countries and sectors.
- Measuring CoP impact is a widely recognised methodological challenge.

Italy (SYDIC)

Only partner country with a legislative mandate (DM 66/2023)

- Strongly established in education, healthcare and the social sector. Growing in public administration.
- Many CoPs operate as 'working groups' or 'learning networks', systematically underestimated.
- Policy frameworks: Ministerial Decree 66/2023, ParteciPa platform (SNA), regional laws in Tuscany and Lazio.
- Sustainability CoPs: ASviS, SDSN Italia, RUS, Enel Circularity CoPs, Organic Districts.
- PNRR-funded school CoP model and Organic Districts offer replicable examples for the OER.

Findings by context – Spain and Bulgaria

Spain (MEUS)

Clear gap 2013–2022, then resurgence from 2022, driven by green/digital transitions

- CoPs present in education, organisations and professional environments; scale difficult to quantify.
- No national CoP policy, but active frameworks in Andalucía (Colaboración Expandida) and Castilla y León.
- Instituto Cervantes uses CoPs formally for its global network of Spanish-language teachers.
- Sustainability CoPs: Valencia Triple Impact, CoP Entrack (energy transition), IEEB (biodiversity), Catalonia social innovation CoP.
- CoPs re-emerging as the response to challenges no individual or organisation can navigate alone.

Bulgaria SMEs (GBG) & NGOs (EEB)

Distinctive finding: Chitalishta, traditional community centres repurposed as digital literacy CoPs

- SMEs: CoPs concentrated in IT, R&D and digital health. SMEs face structural challenges (capacity, resources, low inter-firm cooperation).
- NGOs: CoPs widespread but almost always called 'networks', 'coalitions' or 'working groups'.
- EU funding dependency is the defining characteristic — financially incentivised, not intrinsically adopted.
- Sustainability CoPs: UN Global Compact BG, CleanTech Bulgaria, Re-Maker Community, Za Zemiata, WWF Bulgaria.
- ESG and environmental CoPs surging due to new EU regulatory requirements.
- Digital tools have significantly expanded CoP reach, especially in rural areas.

CoP prevalence by sector and context

SECTOR	EUROPE	ITALY	SPAIN	BULGARIA SMEs	BULGARIA NGOs
Education	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM
Healthcare	HIGH	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM
Business / SMEs	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	LOW
Public sector	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	LOW	MEDIUM
NGOs / Civil society	MEDIUM	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	HIGH
Environment / Sust.	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	HIGH

Cross-cutting findings - consistent across all five contexts (1/2)

1

CoPs are everywhere, but almost never called CoPs

The real scale of CoP activity is systematically underestimated in every country because the label is absent even when the practice is fully present.

2

CoPs form around real problems, not around training needs

The most durable and impactful CoPs formed because a group faced a shared challenge they could not resolve alone. The problem precedes the community.

3

EU funding is both the main driver and the main vulnerability

Erasmus+, ESF+, Active Citizens Fund, Norway Grants and PNRR are the primary enablers. When funding ends, many CoPs dissolve.

4

Policy recognition is exceptional, not the norm

Only Italy has a legislative mandate for CoPs. CoPs lack institutional continuity, professional credit and systematic evaluation in all other partner countries.

5

Voluntary membership and trust are non-negotiable

No CoP was effective when participation was compelled or when hierarchical relationships dominated. Trust and horizontal structures are the mechanism through which learning occurs.

Cross-cutting findings - consistent across all five contexts (2/2)

6

Facilitators matter, but cannot substitute for shared ownership

The most resilient communities distributed responsibility across members. Communities dependent on a single convener were among the most fragile.

7

Digital tools expand reach without replacing in-person trust

Digital platforms accelerate learning in communities where trust already exists. They do not generate trust where it is absent.

8

Digital tools expand reach without replacing in-person trust

Systems thinking, collective action, adaptability, futures literacy and sustainability values all emerge together through shared practice , not one at a time.

9

The most distinctive CoP models are the ones that pre-date the concept

Italy's Organic Districts, Bulgaria's chitalishta and Spain's Triple Impact community were not designed as CoPs — they evolved organically from shared challenges.

10

Evaluation and dissemination are the weakest links everywhere

CoPs consistently fail to make their learning visible. Evaluation is absent or treated as an administrative requirement rather than a learning tool.

Structural gaps and genuine opportunities

Persistent structural gaps

Gap 1: The recognition deficit

CoPs are not formally recognised in any partner country except Italy. No professional credit, no institutional acknowledgement, no systematic evaluation.

Gap 2: The measurement gap

No partner country has a robust methodology for evaluating CoP impact. Evidence is largely anecdotal. Particularly acute for sustainability CoPs.

Gap 3: Geographic & organisational concentration

CoP activity is concentrated in large cities, large organisations and well-resourced sectors. Rural SMEs, small NGOs and grassroots associations are least likely to have access.

Genuine opportunities

Opportunity 1: EU competence frameworks as connective tissue

Mapping CoPs against GreenComp makes the invisible visible: showing funders and policy makers what informal learning actually produces in competence terms.

Opportunity 2: Green and digital transitions as accelerators

The scale and complexity of these transitions exceed what any individual can navigate alone — creating structural demand for the peer-based, practical knowledge sharing CoPs provide.

Opportunity 3: Cross-sector collaboration

The greatest untapped opportunity: deliberate design of cross-sector CoPs connecting SMEs, NGOs, public bodies and cultural associations around shared sustainability challenges.

Opportunity 4: Making learning visible through the OER

The OER itself is an act of dissemination — a practical, evidence-based introduction to CoPs as a green skills mechanism, grounded in real recognisable examples.

Section 5 of the comparative report

Design implications for Activity 3 - the CoP model

1

Start with the problem, not the community

Begin with a problem identification phase, not a membership recruitment phase.

2

Design the facilitator role, do not assume it

Define who performs it, how it is resourced, how it can be distributed, and how it transitions as the community matures.

3

Embed sustainability as the domain, not just a theme

The most effective sustainability CoPs are those where sustainability is the shared problem itself.

4

Build evaluation in from the start

Include simple, immediately usable evaluation tools that small organisations can apply without specialist support.

5

Build trust before building tools

Include an explicit trust-building phase with synchronous interaction before asynchronous tools are introduced.

6

Apply the eight success facets framework

Vision · Governance · Leadership · Convening · Collaboration · Community Management · User Experience · Measurement.
Design the CoP to address each explicitly.

7

Design for small organisations

Flexible enough for low-resource participants. If the model only works for well-resourced organisations, the project has not solved the problem it was funded to address.

8

Make the model transferable, not just replicable

A flexible framework adaptable to different domains, sizes and contexts, the OER should clarify which elements are non-negotiable and which can be adjusted.

Closing statement

The desk research has established that CoPs work as informal learning environments for green skills development. The evidence is consistent, multi-country and multi-sector.

The task of Activity 3 is not to demonstrate that CoPs are effective: it is to design a model that makes their effectiveness accessible to the organisations that need it most.

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consistent across all contexts

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evidence-based, for Activity 3

5 partner organisations

IT • IT • ES • BG • BG

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Section 6 of the comparative report - design requirements for Activity 3 OER



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