Reimagining government in Europe

What we're learning

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2022

Centre for Public Impact
A BCG FOUNDATION

About the Centre for Public Impact

At the Centre for Public Impact, we believe in the potential of government to bring about better outcomes for people. Yet, we have found that the systems, structures, and processes of government today are often not set up to respond to the complex challenges we face as a society. That's why we have an emerging vision to reimagine government so that it works for everyone.

A global not-for-profit organisation founded by the Boston Consulting Group, we serve as a learning partner for governments, public servants and the diverse network of changemakers leading the charge to reimagine government. We work with them to hold space to collectively make sense of the complex challenges we face and drive meaningful change through learning and experimentation.

Acknowledgements

Contents

Shaping a new future for government

The challenge, as we see it

Governments are under increasing pressure to bring about the results people expect while remaining trusted and relevant. And yet, government systems, structures, and processes are not set up to respond to today's challenges. In recent years, complex problems like the COVID-19 pandemic, climate crisis, and persistent racial and economic inequity have brought into sharp focus the need for government to work differently.

At the Centre for Public Impact, we're working with changemakers to build a new future for government – one which embraces the complexity of the challenges we face, and places learning and relationships at the heart.

How we help

We work alongside governments, public servants, civil society and communities, offering support and guidance to help make government work better for people everywhere.

As a learning partner, we work collaboratively with leaders, teams and organisations to change how they work. We do this by supporting them to centre their work in learning, experimentation, data gathering, sensemaking, and reflection.

We co-create every partnership based on the unique organisational context and community we're working within. There are many ways we work alongside partners. Some of the main ways we support them are:

Action research and storytelling
We push the boundaries of our current understanding, exploring new topics critical to the future of government. We share what we're learning and tell the stories of the people spearheading change worldwide.

Capability building and transformation
We work alongside governments to help them build the mindsets, capabilities, tools and frameworks to lead in complexity. We support them in transforming structures and cultures to orient them towards learning and experimentation.

Supporting learning communities and spaces
We convene public servants to connect, share knowledge, and accelerate learning in response to complex challenges.

Partnering to deliver impact through innovation
We work with partners to design and deliver global philanthropic impact challenges to support systems and communities to deliver better outcomes through the transformative power of technology.

Our work in 2021-22

Reimagining government across Europe

In 2021-22, our team in Europe worked with partners from across government, the public sector and civil society to build the mindsets, cultures, capabilities, and tools needed to realise our <u>vision for better government</u>.

550+
public servants and changemakers across government and the public sector

60+
governments and organisations

3000+
community members engaged

Our work spanned 46 cities and places across 24 countries, covering a broad range of topics. We enhanced city life across Eastern Europe and Central Asia and created networks to promote collaboration and learning. We supported digital transformation efforts in European capital cities and partnered with UK local authorities to rethink public services and transform community relationships.

Where we worked

1. **United Kingdom**
   – Edinburgh
   – Greater Manchester
   – London
   – Newcastle
   – Scottish Borders
   – Warrington
   – West Dunbartonshire
2. **Belgium**
   – Brussels
3. **Netherlands**
   – Amsterdam
4. **Denmark**
   – Copenhagen
5. **Sweden**
   – Stockholm
6. **Ireland**
   – Dublin
7. **Slovakia**
   – Bratislava
8. **Hungary**
   – Budapest
9. **Finland**
   – Helsinki
10. **Slovenia**
    – Ljubljana
11. **Spain**
    – Madrid
12. **Cyprus**
    – Nicosia
13. **Czechia**
    – Prague
14. **Latvia**
    – Riga

15. **Iceland**
    – Reykjavik
16. **Bulgaria**
    – Sofia
17. **Estonia**
    – Tallinn
18. **Lithuania**
    – Vilnius
19. **Poland**
    – Warsaw
20. **Armenia**
    – Alaverdi
    – Ashtarak
    – Charentsavan
21. **Georgia**
    – Poti
    – Rustavi
    – Samtredia
    – Tskaltubo
22. **Moldova**
    – Cahul
    – Calarasi
23. **Azerbaijan**
    – Mingachevir
    – Naftalan
    – Sabail
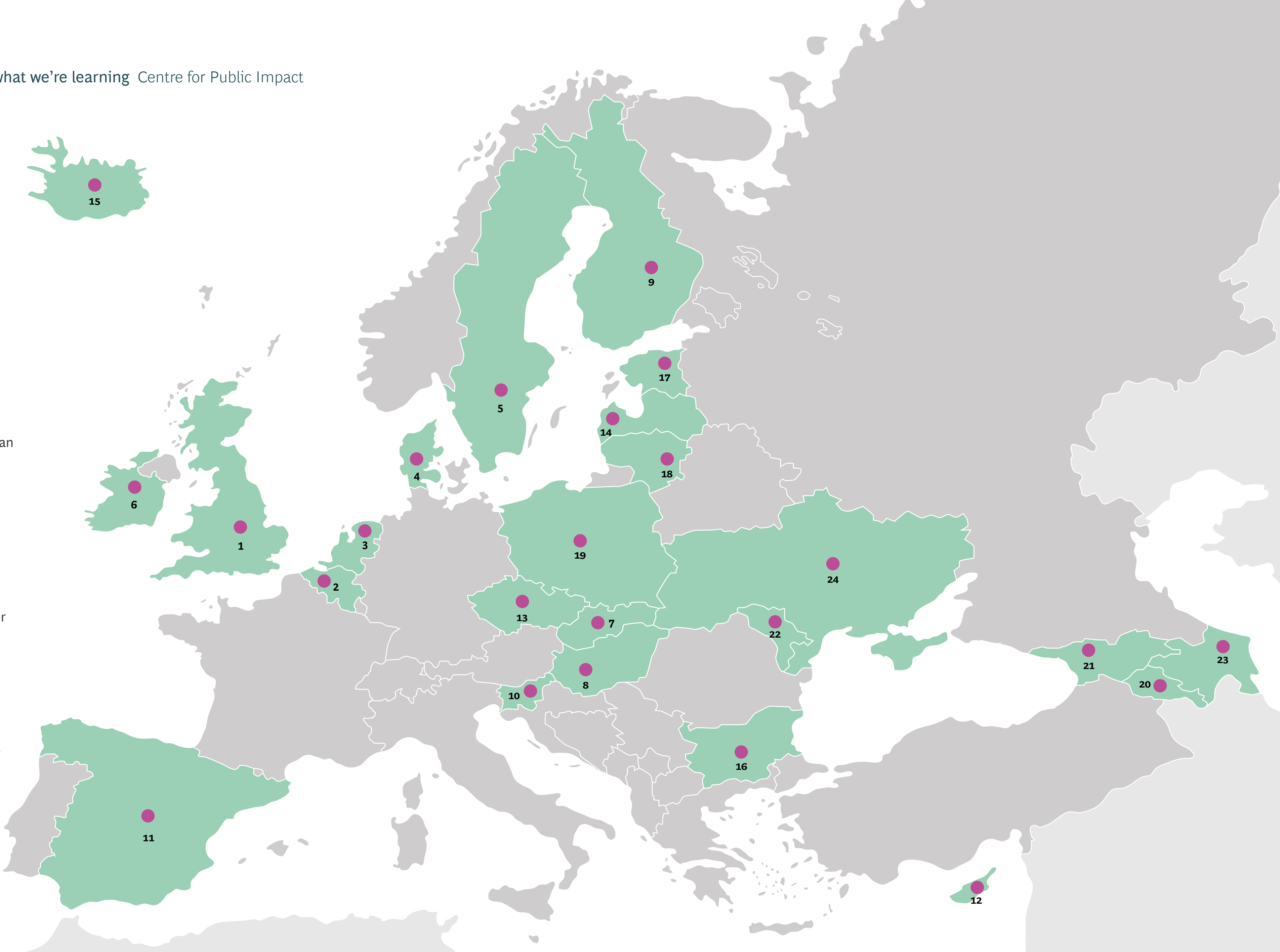   – Urva
24. **Ukraine**
    – Lviv
    – Melitopol
    – Poltava
    – Trostyanets
    – Sumy

A closer look at our work

Government innovation and digital transformation

Reimagining city life
A new 10-month initiative, Urban Imaginaries is a learning journey that supports cities across Eastern Europe and Central Asia to develop solutions to their most pressing urban challenges through complexity-informed approaches. In 2022, 50 public officials from 18 cities across five Eastern Partnership countries benefited from training and support. Urban Imaginaries is co-designed and delivered under the Mayors for Economic Growth (M4EG) Facility with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Union's support.

Unlocking digital transformation across Europe
We supported Bloomberg Philanthropies in designing and implementing the European Digital Cities initiative. This 18-month programme helped 19 European capital cities accelerate digital innovation, providing them with the tools and capabilities to design citizen-centred services that deliver better results for residents. The programme upskilled more than 300 staff across 19 cities in digital transformation, and engaged over 2000 residents in testing new services.

Advancing digital equity
We partnered with the BCG Center for Digital Government to host a roundtable exploring digital equity. We brought together global leaders and experts worldwide, enabling knowledge-sharing about critical strategies governments can use to address today's digital divide and ensure digital transformation benefits everyone.

Exploring a different approach to public management

Improving health and social care services across Scotland
We partnered with Healthcare Improvement Scotland and Iriss to develop and publish *A Practical Guide for the Curious*. The guide aims to enable organisations and places to apply the Human Learning Systems approach to the health and social care sector.

Catalysing public service reform
With support from Lankelly Chase, we convened the Human Learning Systems Collaborative, a network of changemakers dedicated to supporting change in how we plan and deliver public services using a Human Learning Systems approach. We facilitated several learning sessions to understand how we can help organisations to explore this approach for themselves.

Building leadership mindsets and learning networks

Enhancing collaboration across Newcastle's mental health services
Collaborative Newcastle is an innovative new partnership which aims to improve the health, wealth, and wellbeing of everyone in the city. We partnered with 40 leaders across NGOs, NHS and local mental health associations, which form Collaborative Newcastle, working with them to transform how they design and deliver services to encourage a more human and collaborative approach.

Promoting active ageing
Supported by the Centre for Ageing Better, we partnered with the Live Longer Better (LLB) network. Made up of Active Partnerships across England, the LLB network encourages active ageing through physical activity and increases people's health spans. In our role, we helped the network to learn collectively.

Driving climate action

Advancing a net zero future
A longer-term approach to climate action is essential, which means that more future-oriented COP conferences are needed. We worked with the UK Climate Champion, Nigel Topping, and his team to synthesise learning from the COP26 Futures Labs and make a case for futures-focused events as a core part of COP going forward.

Strengthening relationships between government and communities

Supporting community engagement in Redbridge
The London Borough of Redbridge has been exploring how to enhance relationships with the local community through its Community Hubs programme. We supported them to keep learning central to efforts, helping them to establish the systems, processes, and culture to enable them to learn as they work.

Reimagining children's social care
In partnership with Frontline, the UK social work charity, we incubated and supported Crescendo – a social worker-led team. Working with Crescendo, we supported three local authorities across England to rethink children's social care, helping them make the changes needed to do their best work. We helped Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth, and Warrington to design a blueprint that outlines a different approach to delivering children's services, which enables them to spend more time building relationships with children and families.

Encouraging collaboration around regulation to improve public services
We worked with Greater Manchester Combined Authority and regulatory and inspection partners – including CQC and Ofsted – to design more collaborative ways of working together to improve public services for those who experience multiple disadvantage.

What we're learning

In the true spirit of a learning partner, we're continually reflecting and learning how to support change in government.

We know there is never a silver bullet solution. The world is complex, which necessitates an agile and learning-focused approach. Moreover, every community, government, city, and country has unique circumstances. Nevertheless, here are some things we've learned over the past year that can help shape governments that work better for everyone.

Relationships and leadership

When governments work alongside communities, they can build better public services that meet people's needs.

Putting people first and co-designing public services *with* the community rather than for them, can create more effective public services. This approach can also foster trust, paving the way for stronger relationships between government and communities. Leaders are vital to enabling these relationships and creating the conditions to prioritise this work. Here are some key factors to consider when working with communities:

Centre communities and their lived experiences
Whether at the research, ideation or experimentation phase, regular engagement with communities can help build more trusting relationships. Our work has shown that to design services alongside communities, governments must first create internal structures and cultures that enable professionals to listen and centre the lived experiences of communities. By creating an environment where communities can lead the design and implementation of this work, governments can improve service-delivery outcomes and learn from those tasked with navigating services daily.

Apply human-centred design principles
These approaches can help government teams better understand communities' needs and experiences, and enable them to design solutions together.

Understand and rethink power dynamics
The role of government officials is not to be the expert in the room. Instead, it's essential to understand that communities often have the best understanding and answers to the problem. Therefore, government officials should focus on creating the conditions to give communities a stronger voice.

◉ **Adopt the right mindsets to do things "with" not "to"**
Humility, empathy, and listening are essential to building relationships and genuine partnerships with communities. However, trusting, open, honest relationships are only possible when leaders foster an organisational environment that enables relationship-based working.

Spotlight: Redesigning waste collection with residents

Like many towns, Cahul, in Moldova, has a waste management problem. As part of the Urban Imaginaries programme, they have actively engaged the local community to reimagine this public service.

❝ *What I liked from conversations with residents is that residents value us engaging with them. We've learnt that it is important to engage all citizens of Cahul municipality, as they can become part of the problem-solving to transform our cities into a better place."*

– **Cahul municipality, Moldova**

When government leaders think of their role as a convener and a steward, they can unlock partnerships able to tackle complex challenges.

Governments have a unique role as conveners. They can gather people from different sectors and areas of expertise, such as local communities, the private sector, civil society, and beyond. By bringing together diverse views, they can discover new perspectives, establish new partnerships and find better strategies for challenges that governments cannot solve alone. Here are some essential considerations when seeking to collaborate across boundaries:

◉ **Prioritise and invest in relationship-building**
Establishing successful partnerships and collaborations requires investing time and energy into building legitimacy, trust, and relationships. These factors are critical to the success of any partnership. Therefore, it is essential to prioritise them from the outset.

◉ **Break down silos to harness the collective power of institutions**
Many government teams are already reimagining their purpose and devising new ways of working. However, these changes are often isolated and incremental. Governments should strive to dismantle barriers across teams and departments by searching for opportunities to collaborate and learn from one another. This can also be a powerful way to build quality relationships within and across teams.

⊙ **Find and share power with trusted local partners**
Working effectively in partnership requires collaboration with a wide range of local partners, who can act as connectors to the community and other stakeholders. Once found, forming genuine partnerships where power is shared is vital. It is not about extracting information from partners on the ground and sending that to authority in the hierarchy. Instead, leaders should see their roles as enabling and devolving decision-making rights to local partners so they can take action.

⊙ **Look and listen beyond usual boundaries**
Governments can gain valuable learning experiences by taking a more systemic approach and intentionally engaging relevant actors across the system. This includes making space for listening and exchanging ideas with the seldom heard, which partners and community actors can facilitate.

⊙ **Build connections between local and national governments to share knowledge**
Improving collaboration and learning between national and local partners is crucial. Currently, information sharing tends to be one-way, with regional parties sharing their knowledge with national partners. However, it is essential that national partners also reciprocate this relationship by dedicating time to observe and participate in local-level work.
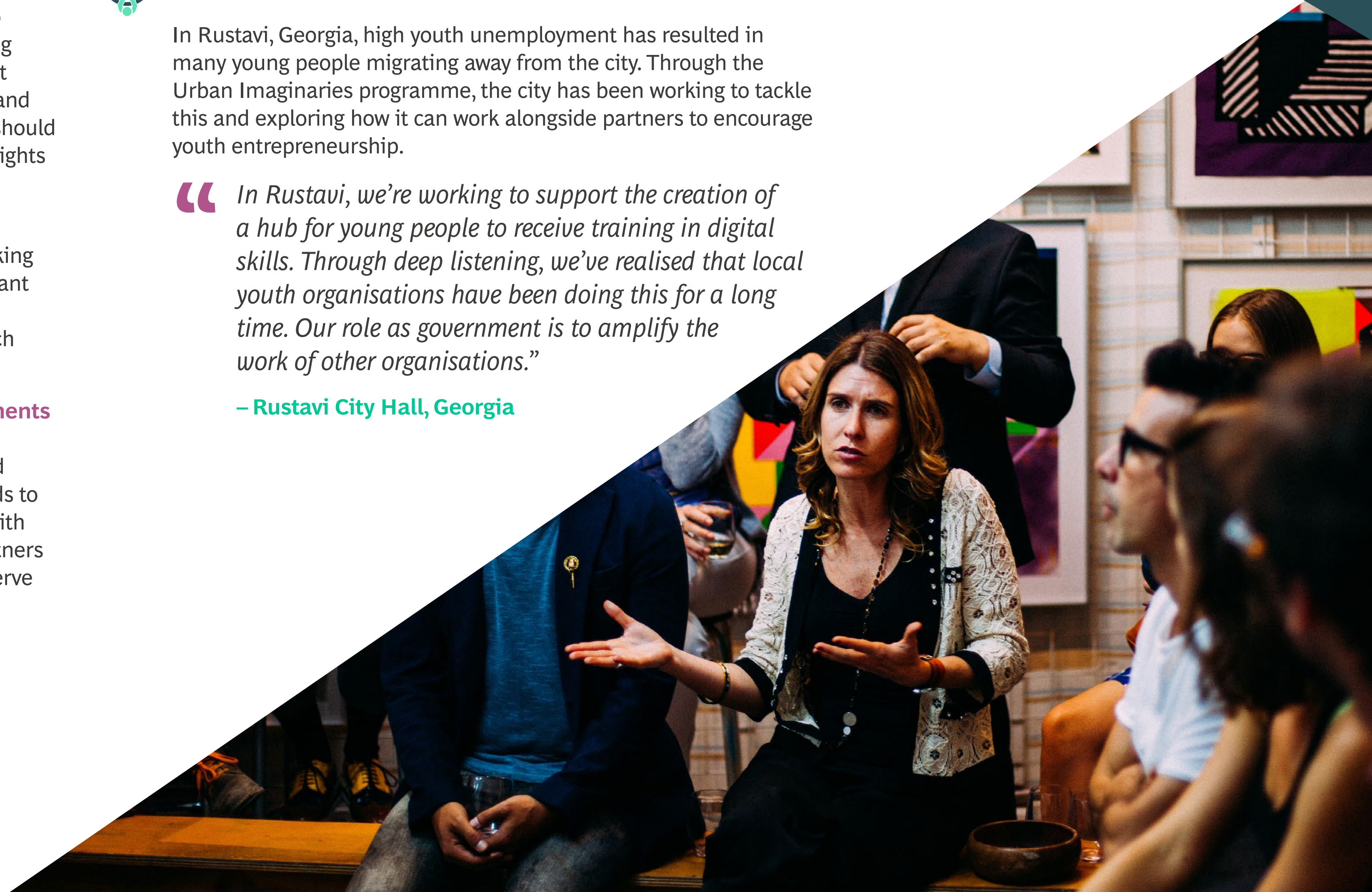
Spotlight: Reimagining youth entrepreneurship in Rustavi

In Rustavi, Georgia, high youth unemployment has resulted in many young people migrating away from the city. Through the Urban Imaginaries programme, the city has been working to tackle this and exploring how it can work alongside partners to encourage youth entrepreneurship.

❝ *In Rustavi, we're working to support the creation of a hub for young people to receive training in digital skills. Through deep listening, we've realised that local youth organisations have been doing this for a long time. Our role as government is to amplify the work of other organisations."*

– Rustavi City Hall, Georgia

Learning

When governments are proactive in building learning environments, they lead by example and are far better at navigating complex challenges.

Learning and adapting is critical to making governments more effective and improving things for people. But learning is only sometimes prioritised and can be viewed as optional rather than a necessity. Therefore, teams need the tools and frameworks to develop a continuous listening and learning culture. We have identified the following essential factors to help governments make learning central to their work:

⊙ **Resource and prioritise learning as the strategy**
To optimise for learning, leadership must provide support and allocate time and budget. A good starting point is to prioritise building capacity into people's roles, allowing them to dedicate time to learning and reflection.

⊙ **Build mechanisms and infrastructure that support experimentation**
Creating effective governance structures and clear decision-making mechanisms are essential to facilitate experimentation.

In addition, it is crucial to eliminate constraints that prohibit the exploration of new ideas. As part of this, governments should work to move the focus of governance and accountability towards learning rather than delivery.

⊙ **Create spaces explicitly for reflection and learning across boundaries**
Setting aside time in schedules for regular meetings to discuss learning can facilitate a learning culture. On a larger scale, learning networks can be incredibly beneficial for sharing evidence, resources, and best practice. These networks also provide a platform for government officials and frontline practitioners to connect with experts.

⊙ **Develop and use tools to share learning**
Government teams can enhance their ability to communicate and reflect on learning by developing learning inquiries, engaging in shared sensemaking, creating theories of change, and building learning dashboards that make learning easy to access.

⊙ **Make use of stories**
Storytelling is critical in enabling governments to understand their story of change and how they have transformed their thinking and working. Teams can reflect on their learning, disseminate knowledge and gain the internal leadership support required to promote change in government by creating opportunities for storytelling, such as organising show and tells.

◉ **Share failures and successes**
Fear of failure and a lack of psychological safety can hinder innovation, learning, and experimentation. However, regular discussions analysing what works and doesn't can foster a psychologically safe and learning-oriented environment. When leaders create the safety to fail and see this as part of the success story, cultures of learning and experimentation can flourish.

◉ **Reimagine evaluation to demonstrate the benefits of learning**
In many contexts, learning may be undervalued, with teams focusing on impact, evaluation, and reporting. Rethinking evaluation and applying different methods like storytelling can bring a more nuanced approach to assessing and evidencing the impact of learning, which can help overcome barriers.

Spotlight: Putting learning at the heart of health and social care

Scotland has achieved a remarkable consensus that public service needs to be radically different to support people to create better life outcomes. We worked with Healthcare Improvement Scotland and Iriss to help organisations to make this change by adopting a Human Learning Systems approach to public management.

"*…unless we have learning at the heart of what we do, we will end up actually making everything worse. But if we have that focus on constantly assessing what's the impact? What are we learning? What do we need to adapt? Then it's that focus that enables us to deliver genuine improvement for the people who need and use services across Scotland.*

"*We learn an enormous amount from what other people do, and we're certainly not the experts here. It's not about other countries learning from us. It's about how we learn together, and I suppose if there is something that other countries could learn, it would be that a lot of what we do in Scotland is based on that constantly looking to other countries and looking internally to see who is doing something well. And then how might we adapt that into our context…*"

– **Ruth Glassborow, Director of Improvement, Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS). Listen to hear more about HIS' work.**

Complexity

When we re-frame how we approach innovation and what we mean by impact, we can drive meaningful change in how government works.

Innovation is central to government transformation. Given governments' constantly evolving challenges, it is crucial to innovate, experiment, test, and adopt new approaches to respond to a rapidly changing world. Yet, innovation in public services is often sporadic and restricted to specialised innovation teams, leading to silos.

We also often think about measuring the impact of innovation in a narrow way. To unleash its full potential, governments must systemically integrate innovation into public administrations and nurture the conditions to enable different working methods. In addition, they must shift their public management practice to create the conditions for that approach to stick. Here are some key takeaways we've identified to support innovation in government:

◉ **Understand innovation more expansively and consider what impact means**
Innovation in government shouldn't be confined to digital transformation. Innovation – more accurately, the people who work in the conditions that enable innovation – has the potential to foster systemic change. It involves altering processes, cultures, and mindsets and transforming the relationships between governments and communities.

◉ **Think beyond tools and focus on supporting mindsets**
Many tools and frameworks can support innovation. But fostering a culture of change takes a mindset and culture shift. Leadership and commitment are critical to this. Senior leaders have a role in helping teams understand how they can all drive change and support the framing of everyone as an innovator, so it isn't a label given to just the chosen few.

◉ **Buy-in at all levels is vital**
For government innovation to be successful, buy-in at all levels is crucial. This means everyone on the public service team or department, from frontline workers to senior leaders, must embrace the approach.

◉ **Small changes can catalyse more innovative cultures**
Creating an environment where all staff feel empowered to spot the small changes needed to improve things and act on them can build the conditions for more significant shifts in working. Of course, more fundamental change in how we approach public management is needed. But the culture in an organisation must be nurtured first to enable meaningful exploration of new approaches.

◉ **Scale capacity for learning and innovation**
Innovation is often about finding and scaling solutions, but we are learning to change how we think about scaling. The world is complex, so what works in one place won't necessarily work in another. Therefore, governments need to scale capacity for learning and innovation rather than scaling solutions.

⊙ **Fund for learning and consider how current models might restrict learning:**
Current funding models are often short-term, making them a significant barrier to innovation. To overcome this, shifting towards sustained, long-term funding for learning and experimentation, earmarked explicitly for transformation, is essential. Failure and discussion of challenges also needs to be encouraged, not punished. This would give government teams the necessary space to test new approaches, de-risk their work, and unlock financing as a key enabler to navigating complexity, building quality relationships, and promoting learning.
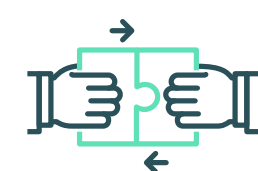
Spotlight: Making changes in children's services

Alongside Crescendo – a social worker-led team dedicated to reimagining the social care system – we supported the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in making the necessary changes to enable social workers to do their best work.

I think the key enabler for successfully delivering small changes has been the motivation and passion from within my team and from management; everyone's got lots of ideas they want to see implemented and they're aware of the positive effects that small changes are having. That sense of having regular and enthusiastic buy-in from stakeholders across our service has been so important in successful uptake; we need to hear that change is good and that people want change to happen."

– Syeda, London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Read more about this work.

Being a learning partner

CPI acts as a learning partner for changemakers striving to make governments work better for everyone. We are learning more and more about what it takes to be an effective learning partner and support change towards a reimagined vision for government. We continually reflect on how we show up as a partner and will endeavour to continue learning. Here are some things we've learned from our work in Europe:

◉ **The how matters as much as the what**
Our values and how we show up as a learning partner matter as much as what we do. We need to be trusting and trustworthy to be effective learning partners. We need to be kind and empathetic. We need to be patient with how hard change is, but also challenging, to continue to nurture the belief that change is possible. And, we must be committed to being on the journey with the partner – no matter how bumpy.

◉ **Encourage learning by doing for more effective capacity building**
Combining theory with practical application is more effective when designing programmes to facilitate and guide government transformation.

◉ **Model the change we support partners to make, so we act with integrity**
We help organisations to learn but do not have the answers to their complex challenges, so part of being a learning partner is about being humble. We also actively experiment with how to champion the principles in our vision for government. This is critical to our approach as it ensures we bring our learning to each partnership.

◉ **Understand the readiness of an organisation and meet people where they are through deep listening**
Some governments, public servants, communities, and changemakers may not be aligned or think that change is possible. We need to listen deeply to understand their starting point, adapting the support in a way that best enables them.

◉ **Support the creation of certainty artefacts in appreciation that the journey is hard and long**
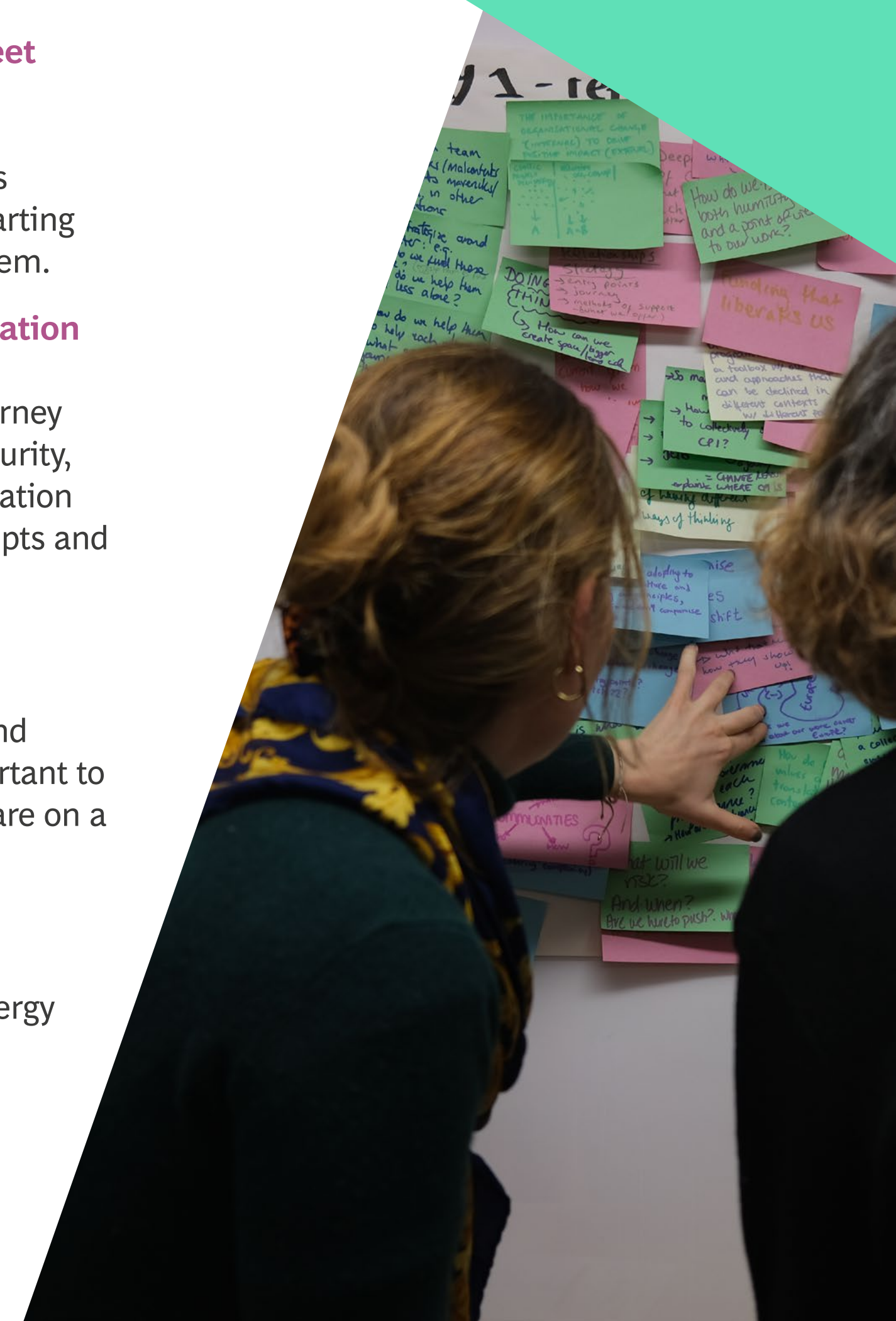Change is difficult. Sometimes partners on a learning journey need 'certainty artefacts'. These can create a sense of security, act as milestones that guide them through the transformation process, and ultimately help them to embrace new concepts and approaches.
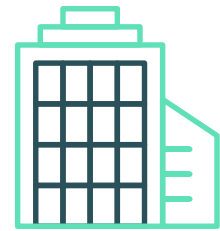
◉ **Help partners to build collective bravery**
Getting the right people in the room – decision-makers and systems stewards – is vital in ensuring the success and sustainability of the work. But beyond that, it's also important to help partners understand they are not alone and others are on a similar journey.

◉ **Inspire change in governments**
Share stories of successful transformation and create connections across government leaders to inspire the energy for change.

What our partners say

Putting learning at the heart of community hubs

In Redbridge, an outer London borough, the council is working to transform relationships with the community. To help keep learning central to community engagement efforts, they enlisted the support of CPI as a learning partner.
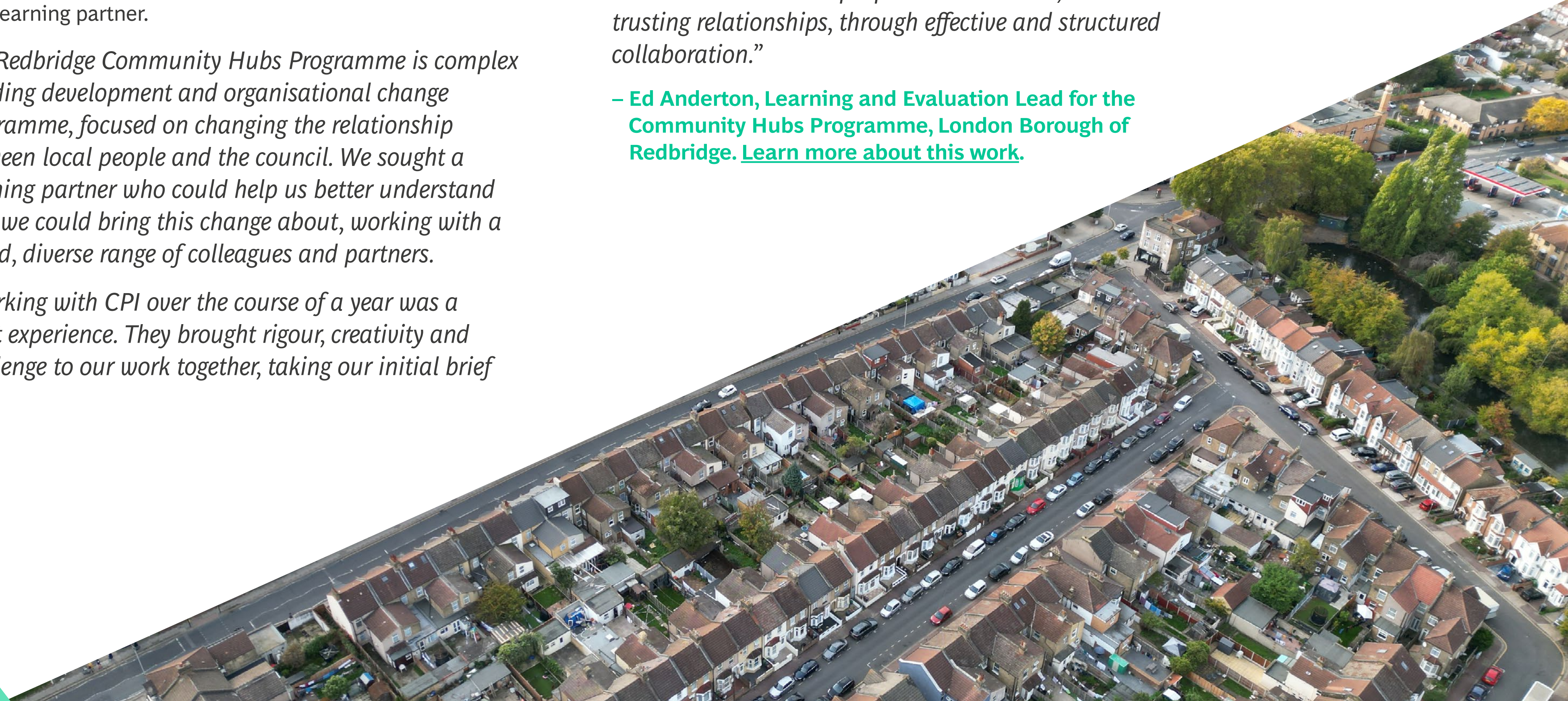
The Redbridge Community Hubs Programme is complex building development and organisational change programme, focused on changing the relationship between local people and the council. We sought a learning partner who could help us better understand how we could bring this change about, working with a broad, diverse range of colleagues and partners.

"Working with CPI over the course of a year was a great experience. They brought rigour, creativity and challenge to our work together, taking our initial brief and developing it flexibly with us, in response to what we were learning as we went along.

"Their work was instrumental in helping us develop and refine our programmatic theory of change, which identified our core purpose, and the means by which we could achieve that purpose – in our case, to build trusting relationships, through effective and structured collaboration."

– Ed Anderton, Learning and Evaluation Lead for the Community Hubs Programme, London Borough of Redbridge. Learn more about this work.

Unlocking the power of children's social care

We helped Crescendo in their work to support three local authorities to rethink how they deliver children's social care services.

As a social worker-led team, we felt we had a good idea, and we had the motivation to do things differently in terms of public sector reform. However, we didn't have that framework or that guidance to really get started, so we wanted the support of an organisation to help us do that.

"From a knowledge perspective, I think CPI working across so many different projects with local and national government, there is that expertise and that ability to bring in different ideas from different contexts or countries, which is great. We valued the ideas they brought and their ability to bring in different concepts, tools and methods from various areas. That kind of knowledge, expertise, network and connections was hugely helpful.

"Partnering with CPI has always been a collaborative process. They haven't told us what to do. Instead, they've been a critical friend that helps co-develop and co-design. Ultimately, CPI has helped us translate our ideas into action, providing structure and guidance, which has been invaluable."

– Ryan Wise, Co-Director, Crescendo. Read more about this work.

Looking ahead

We're just starting our journey to understand what a reimagined government could look like and how we, at CPI Europe, can best support that as a learning partner. We are eager to deepen our understanding of how to help changemakers reimagine government, so it works better for everyone.

We have so much more to learn across Europe and are committed to staying open to changing and adapting as we learn more.

We're looking forward to continuing working with national governments, local authorities, and public sector and community organisations across Europe to support a new future for government.

In the coming year, we will focus on five key areas:

1. Working with funders and innovation teams to change how they support organisations, and understand what is required to enable broader government transformation.

2. Working with leaders to develop the mindsets and practices needed to work in complexity and centre learning.

3. Working with cities and local authorities to implement their climate action plans at the pace and scale of transformation required.

4. Supporting organisations and collaborations move their public management practice towards a Human Learning Systems approach, which offers an alternative to that of the status quo often in government.

5. Supporting better relationships between communities, government and the public sector.

Based on our work to date, these are areas we can add value as a learning partner to support changemakers as they pioneer a new way of government.

As we continue this journey, we're motivated and inspired by the incredible work already being spearheaded. So if you're working to reimagine government in Europe, we'd love to hear from you. What challenges are you facing? How are you supporting government innovation and pioneering new ways of working? We're always curious to learn more from others about how they're shaping a new future for government.

Katie Rose,
Director, Europe

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Join the conversation

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