

Educational business tactics in architectural enterprises – Business modelling for financial sustainability

Armina Letiția Popeanu^{1*}

¹“Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urban Planning, Bucharest, Romania.

*armina@popeanu.ro

Received: September 20, 2025

Accepted for publication: October 6, 2025

Abstract

In recent years, cultural and creative industries have expanded significantly and have come to occupy rapidly a central position in the European economy. Yet, despite this economic prominence and its cultural influence that flows from it, many specialists within these sectors—artists, architects, interior designers, or fashion entrepreneurs—still struggle to achieve sustainable business development and financial stability. A sizeable portion of that challenge arises from an inclination to place the process of the creative act and experimental innovation ahead of disciplined, intentional business planning. Because creative output is complex and market appetite can shift suddenly, practitioners need, alongside professional hard skills, also solid commercial and business acumen. This article affirms that architects, interior designers, and creatives stand to gain sustainability from systematic training, a need that the aBC Business Modelling was consciously designed to address. Grounded in academic inquiry, real-world entrepreneurial practice, and experiential learning exercises, the toolbox was designed to offer a step-by-step framework, from value to customer, financial activities, and operations, with the final goal of running daily operations with clarity and priority, based on their vision.

Keywords: Business Modelling Toolbox, Financial Sustainability Development, Architecture, Design, Creative Industries, Entrepreneurial Education, Acumen.

© 2025 Armina Letiția Popeanu

This is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International license (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

Introduction

The wider creative sector, containing 16 domains as defined by the European Union, notably architecture, interior design, and design, has now become among the strongest engines of global economic growth, especially in developed countries (*Creative Industries Sector Vision*, 2023). Paradoxically, many professionals in these fields continue to struggle with sustainability issues because their formal training often lacks essential business skills (Bilton, 2010; Popeanu, 2024). As architecture is a discipline that converges from art, science, and service, the profession demands a nuanced balance between creative vision and operational viability, as a liberal profession. In this case, the industry recognizes the necessity of business education (Powell & Shankar Nayak, 2022), and traditional business education often fails to address and understand the creative mindset, who balance artistic ambition with concrete project demands. This paper, therefore, explores how a structured toolset, the aBC Toolbox of business modelling can guide architects, interior designers, and other creative entrepreneurs to decide on their long-term business vision, considering their professional purpose. To situate the discussion within the conference theme of “Convergence—Architecture as a Framework for Collaboration and Trust,” this study further emphasizes that business education is not solely a technical requirement but a mechanism for cultivating trust among stakeholders. Transparent business structures, ethical remuneration models, and clearly articulated value propositions allow architects and designers to enter more equitable partnerships with clients, suppliers, and collaborators. In this sense, financial sustainability is directly tied to trust-building: reliable delivery, transparent pricing, and accountable project management foster long-term professional relationships. Moreover, by framing entrepreneurship as a collaborative rather than solitary activity, the aBC Business Modelling Toolbox positions architectural enterprises to engage in multi-stakeholder environments marked by climate change, social responsibility, and economic volatility.

Literature Review

Creativity and Creative Mindset • Scholars commonly define creativity as the ability to produce work that is both *new* and *relevant* to its context (Guilford, 1950; Haynie et al., 2010). This process usually draws on three interlinked elements: intrinsic motivation, domain-specific skills, and thinking styles that support the result of the creative process (Amabile, 1996). A creative mindset features divergent thinking, originality, and a will to propose alternatives to taken-for-granted ideas or practices (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009). Evidence shows that such thinkers produce a higher volume of divergent ideas, especially when tasks allow open-ended exploration rather than rigid step-by-step rules (White et al., 2006).

Creativity often unfolds in a responsive exchange among a person's thoughts, their specific domain of work, and the wider environment, a concept that (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) is described as *creativity-as-a-system*. This model supports the *flow experience* and underscores the contributions of neurodivergent thinkers to fields such as architecture and design. (Glăveanu, 2014a; Kaufman & Glăveanu, 2021, 2025) adds a social layer by treating creativity as a culturally and socially situated process, focusing on *creativity as a process* and recognizing the role of possibility thinking in imagining alternatives and envisioning new business models (Glăveanu, 2021).

Architectural Practice and Profession • The architecture profession stands out, blending deep technical skill, familiarity with building codes, and creative outcomes into a single process (Cuff, 1991; Gutman, 1988). Practitioner architects have to follow clear and ethical rules, and, in return, the recipients of the built environment expect them to blend health, safety, and culture together. Despite these demands, many companies that operate in this field still skip the business training needed, leaving them structurally weak. Current data confirm the risk: more than 70 per cent of European studios, according to the ACE Reports (Mirza & Nacey Research Ltd, 2023), are tiny micro-enterprises, which makes them especially vulnerable to

market changes, without adequate business modelling and strategic planning (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2013; Popeanu, 2024).

Architecture as Collaboration • Research today views architecture as an act of coordinated pattern-making rather than solitary genius (Glăveanu, 2014a; Quinan & Alexander, 1981). Models that actively invite and engage with clients, builders, developers, investors and even future users to sketch ideas side by side help build trust, spark creative solutions, innovate and merge diverse points of view (Luck, 2007; Manzini, 2015; Yabes, 2000). When the architectural culture of the profession meets business sense and infinite possibilities of creativity, teams are better trained to tackle fast-moving social challenges that affect the creative businesses, including core public housing shortages, climate change, globalization and evolving city life. (Bilton, 2010; Glăveanu, 2014b; Teece, 2010)

Entrepreneurship in Creative Industries • Entrepreneurship within creative industries centres on spotting, assessing, and pursuing opportunities that promise future market value (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). This practice depends on opportunity recognition, mental agility, and a measured willingness to embrace both risk and uncertainty (Haynie et al., 2010; Ireland, 2003). Evidence shows that traits often linked with neurodivergence, such as impulsivity, appetite for novelty, and bold risk-taking, correlate strongly with entrepreneurial direction and innovative output (Miller et al., 2017). When these profiles receive the proper support, they can transform into powerful engines of business in creative industries (Caves, 2002; Drucker, 1991). In creative sectors, an entrepreneurial mindset therefore means sensing and acting in a fluid, unpredictable set-up, pivoting perspectives, and framing problem-solving when strange business situations appear (Haynie et al., 2010; Popeanu, 2024).

Financial Sustainability in Creative Industries • Sustainable financial development in the creative sector requires fair remuneration for all parties involved, from founders, employees, suppliers or partners, to healthy development of the creative company, following ethics, values,

ecological, social, and economic drivers across a product lifecycle (Potts & Cunningham, 2008; Teece, 2010). Intentional business strategy, structure of the organization, and lean financial modelling—reflected in a business model framework—bridge creative objectives and market constraints, promoting operational resilience and scalable growth (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2013; Powell & Shankar Nayak, 2022).

While creativity and entrepreneurship literature has highlighted collaboration as a driver of innovation, fewer studies explicitly address the link between business acumen and trust-building in architectural practice. Scholars in participatory design emphasize that co-creation builds confidence (Luck, 2007; Manzini, 2015), yet the financial dimension remains underexplored. Recent studies (Powell & Shankar Nayak, 2022; Popeanu, 2024) stress that business literacy enhances transparency in decision-making, aligning expectations between architects and clients. Trust is, therefore, not only an abstract cultural value but a measurable outcome of financial stability, creating conditions in which creativity can flourish. This paper positions the aBC Toolbox as a bridge: transforming abstract entrepreneurial theories into concrete methods that cultivate both professional credibility and collective trust.

Methodology

To examine business tactics in architectural enterprises, the study uses a mixed-methods design that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques. First, a comprehensive literature review of scholarly and professional writings on creativity, business model development, and sustainable entrepreneurship within architecture and design has been conducted (Bilton, 2010; Bock & George, 2018; Caves, 2002; Dailey, 2025; Gutman, 1988; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2013). Second, thematic semi-structured interviews were conducted with 33 architects and designers, selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across firm size (sole practitioners, micro-enterprises, and medium-sized offices) and sector focus (residential, HoReCa, healthcare, and retail). Each interview lasted

between 45 and 90 minutes and followed a protocol covering education, entrepreneurial journey, financial strategies, and collaboration practices. Thematic analysis was applied, combining inductive coding with cross-case comparison, and triangulated with quantitative insights from ACE (2022, 2024) and OAR (2024) reports. The survey component included 113 respondents, measured on Likert scales addressing confidence in financial planning, client trust, and operational resilience. Quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations, enabling comparison between age cohorts, business size, and reported profitability. The methodology diagram has been refined to highlight sequential phases: (1) literature review, (2) interviews, (3) survey analysis, (4) toolbox testing, and (5) synthesis into recommendations, illustrating how qualitative insights and quantitative validation converge. Finally, a side-by-side look at statistics from the Chamber of Romanian Architects (SiOAR Report, 2024) and the Architects Council of Europe (Mirza & Nacey Research Ltd, 2023), enabling a comparative view of firm size, financial performance, and educational shortfalls of the profession. These three methods were **combined**, and the data gathered from this study point to a clear and pressing need to weave systematic business training into programs designed for artists, creatives, architects, designers, and entrepreneurs acting in the creative industries markets.

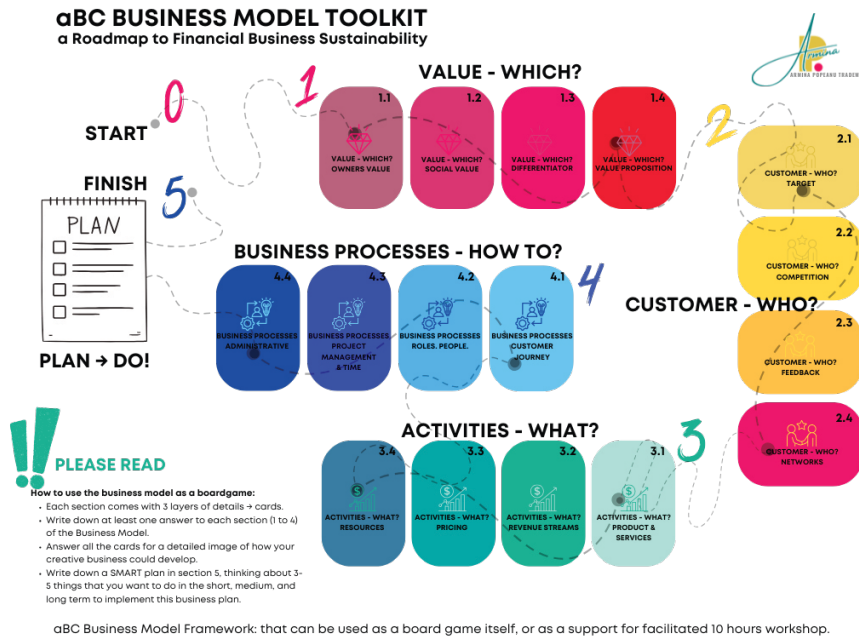


Fig. 1 aBC Business Model Framework Designed for Creative Entrepreneurs

Results

The survey results underscore a pressing need for Architecture Entrepreneurs to converge business literacy into the architectural, design, and professional curricula. Quantitative findings revealed that 78% of respondents reported low confidence in financial planning, and 65% acknowledged that the lack of clear business models eroded client trust. However, 82% of participants in the aBC Toolbox workshops reported improved clarity in articulating value propositions and aligning fees with client expectations, with 71% linking this to strengthened professional relationships. Profitability metrics indicated that practices applying structured modelling experienced, on average, 12–15% higher annual turnover than peers without such structures, particularly among two-person and five-person offices.

*Table. 1 Heritage Impact
Key Components of the
aBC Business Model
Toolbox*

Component	Questions Answered	Creative output aligned with market relevance
Value Proposition	Which Value is brought to the market?	Alignment of creative output with market relevance and both personal and social value.
Customer Segments	Who are the key people involved?	Identification of niche and mainstream audiences, detailed buyer persona profile.
Activities: Services or Products	What activities are brought to the market?	Revenue streams, diverse income sources, including pricing strategies and financial planning.
Business Processes	How to bring value into the market?	Structured design process, management of resources, use of feedback and agile processes to adjust strategies.
Actionable Plan	Plan -> Do!	SMART short-, medium- and long-term planning according to the business model.

Qualitative data supported these numbers, with participants consistently emphasizing that transparent business processes increased credibility and reduced conflicts with clients and contractors. These results confirm that financial sustainability is inseparable from trust-building mechanisms in architectural enterprises.

Respondents generally reported that their formal architectural training provided little systematic exposure to management theories and market realities. Yet the respondents welcomed hands-on methods, learning by doing, role-playing, and simulation workshops from both the aBC Business Modelling Toolbox workshop, as well as from the mini-MBA for creative industries leaders. Purpose-built courses for entrepreneurs in creative industries were especially prized, provided they honour the non-linear creative mind and build lively peer networks, which is sometimes more valuable than the hard business knowledge itself. While conventional business models often feel distant, locally adapted tools like the aBC Toolbox were judged accessible and empowering, especially in a facilitated workshop.

A consistent tension appeared between planned, rational decisions and the snap, instinctive calls that many creatives routinely make.

Those who used the Toolbox to frame goals and long-term vision, services and products that offer a revenue stream, detailed buyer persona and clear unique value proposition and timelines cited increased confidence, clearer operations, and, notable, more **confidence in their business capabilities** — due to the clarity and structure obtained after the business model after the business model has been reviewed and the scenarios have been imagined.

Discussion

The study reveals a critical difference between running a business on purpose and simply following instinct to deliver your profession. By embedding trust-building mechanisms—such as open financial communication, fair pricing, and structured processes—architectural firms reinforce credibility across their networks. The intentional–intuitive tension in creative entrepreneurship suggests that intuition fuels innovation, while intentional business structures generate stability and trust. The findings therefore, call for embedding entrepreneurship modules in architectural curricula, emphasising real-life simulations of financial negotiations, client collaboration, and risk management. Beyond profitability, the results carry broader societal implications: resilient creative businesses are better positioned to engage with climate adaptation, social housing, and equity-oriented projects. In this sense, entrepreneurial education in architecture not only sustains studios but also supports the societal trust placed in the profession to deliver responsible, future-ready environments.

Intentional vs. Intuitive Business • In many creative fields, especially in architecture and design, gut feelings, following ideas, and quick pivots keep creative professionals agile, yet a thoughtful business model brings clarity, structure, coherence, room to grow, and finally the trust clients and staff expect. Most creative entrepreneurs work from gut feeling and enthusiasm, sometimes leaving careful planning on the sidelines. The aBC Toolbox offers a step-by-step guide that stays loose enough to honour that instinct while nudging users toward

clearer intent. Adding more real-life examples from architecture and design would make the framework even easier to use and more attractive to practice.

Future research could explore: • These insights also point to fresh questions for scholars and practitioners: • In what ways should basic management, finance, client understanding and strategy be woven into architectural degree programmes? • Over the long run, what role do consultancy and mentoring processes and real-world exercises play in strengthening a creator's entrepreneurial confidence? • How can living business plans stay nimble enough to protect originality yet steady enough to fund it in a fast-moving market? • How can hands-on formal learning programs be redesigned so they feel worth the time for creative professionals: artists, designers, and architects?

Conclusion

By blending a rigorous management and business structure with the flexible thinking of creativity, collaboration, and trust as measurable outcomes of entrepreneurial education, the aBC Business Model Toolbox fills a long-noted gap in business schooling for creative industries leaders. Its frame and red thread between the business elements help architects and designers build clear, structured, time-bound plans, share them openly, and secure the revenue needed for healthy, lasting studios, impacting and creating a ripple effect across the wider creative economy. The study shows how experiential business acumen transfer is better than hard, abstract knowledge. Also, it suggests educational techniques that could help formal architectural and design education, from the introduction of dedicated entrepreneurship courses to real-life scenarios that simulate future situations in which architectural entrepreneurs will be in the market.

References

Amabile, T. (1996). Creativity in context. Westview Press.

- Bilton, C. (2010). Manageable creativity. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 16(3), 255–269.
- Bock, A. J., & George, G. (2018). *The business model book: Design, build and adapt business ideas that thrive*. Pearson.
- Caves, R. E. (2002). *Creative industries: Contracts between art and commerce* (First paperback edition). Harvard University Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention* (1st ed). HarperCollinsPublishers.
- Cuff, D. (1991). *Architecture: The story of practice*. MIT press.
- Dailey, C. (2025). *The Creative Entrepreneur*. Penguin.
- Drucker, P. F. (1991). *Innovation and entrepreneurship: Practice and principles* (6th pr). Harper & Row.
- Glăveanu, V. P. (2014a). *Distributed Creativity: Thinking Outside the Box of the Creative Individual*. Springer International Publishing.
- Glăveanu, V. P. (2014b). *The Psychology of Creativity: A Critical Reading. Creativity: Theories – Research – Applications*, 1(1), 10–32.
- Glăveanu, V. P. (2021). *The possible: A sociocultural theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Guilford, J. P. (1950). Creativity. *American Psychologist*, 5(9), 444–454.
- Gutman, R. (1988). *Architectural practice: A critical view*. Princeton Architectural Press.
- Haynie, J. M., Shepherd, D., Mosakowski, E., & Earley, P. C. (2010). A situated metacognitive model of the entrepreneurial mindset. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 25(2), 217–229.
- Ireland, R. (2003). A Model of Strategic Entrepreneurship: The Construct and its Dimensions. *Journal of Management*, 29(6), 963–989.
- Kaufman, J. C., & Beghetto, R. A. (2009). Beyond Big and Little: The Four C Model of Creativity. *Review of General Psychology*, 13(1), 1–12.
- Kaufman, J. C., & Glăveanu, V. P. (2021). An Overview of Creativity Theories. In J. C. Kaufman & R. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *Creativity* (1st ed., pp. 17–30). Cambridge University Press.

Kaufman, J. C., & Glăveanu, V. P. (2025). The Products of the Process: Toward Exploring and Expanding the Benefits of Being Creative. *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 59(1), e70006.

Luck, R. (2007). Learning to talk to users in participatory design situations. *Design Studies*, 28(3), 217–242.

Manzini, E. (Ed.). (2015). *Design, when everybody designs: An introduction to design for social innovation*. The MIT Press.

Miller, D., Le Breton-Miller, I., Amore, M. D., Minichilli, A., & Corbetta, G. (2017). Institutional logics, family firm governance and performance. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 32(6), 674–693.

Mirza & Nacey Research Ltd. (2023). *The Architectural Profession in Europe 2022 Sector Study*. (p. The Architects' Council of Europe.).

Osterwalder, A., & Pigneur, Y. (2013). *Business model generation: A handbook for visionaries, game changers, and challengers*. Wiley&Sons.

Popeanu, A. (2024). The Importance of Business Education in Creative Industries. In A. Valqueresma, L. Dantas De Paula, & T. K. Rodney (Eds.), *Creativity and Learning* (pp. 239–263). Springer Nature Switzerland.

Potts, J., & Cunningham, S. (2008). Four models of the creative industries. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Volume 14, 2008(3), Pages 233–247.

Powell, P., & Shankar Nayak, B. (Eds.). (2022). *Creative Business Education: Exploring the Contours of Pedagogical Praxis*. Springer International Publishing.

Quinan, J., & Alexander, C. (1981). *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*. Leonardo, 14(1), 80.

Shane, S., & Venkataraman, S. (2000). The Promise of Entrepreneurship as a Field of Research. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), 217–226.

Teece, D. J. (2010). Business Models, Business Strategy and Innovation. *Long Range Planning*, 43(2–3), 172–194.

Yabes, R. (2000). Community Participation Methods in Design and Planning. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 50(4), 270–271.

Tactici de afaceri educaționale în firmele de arhitectură – Modelare de afaceri pentru sustenabilitate financiară

(rezumat)

În ultimii ani, industriile culturale și creative s-au extins semnificativ și au ocupat rapid o poziție centrală în economia europeană. Cu toate acestea, în ciuda acestei proeminențe economice și a influenței culturale care decurge din aceasta, mulți specialiști din aceste sectoare – artiști, arhitecți, designeri de interior sau antreprenori din lumea modei – se confruntă în continuare cu dificultăți în a obține o dezvoltare sustenabilă a afacerilor și stabilitate financiară. O parte semnificativă a acestei provocări provine din tendința de a prioritiza procesul actului creativ și inovația experimentală în detrimentul unei planificări de afaceri disciplinate și intenționate. Deoarece producția creativă este complexă, iar apetitul pieței se poate schimba brusc, practicanții au nevoie, pe lângă competențele profesionale de bază, și de un simț comercial și de afaceri solid. Acest articol afirmă că arhitecții, designerii de interior și creatorii pot obține sustenabilitate prin formare sistematică, o nevoie pe care modelul de afaceri aBC a fost conceput în mod conștient să o abordeze. Bazat pe cercetare academică, practică antreprenorială din lumea reală și exerciții de învățare experiențială, acest set de instrumente a fost creat pentru a oferi un cadru pas cu pas, de la valoare la client, activități financiare și operațiuni, cu scopul final de a gestiona operațiunile zilnice cu claritate și prioritate, pe baza viziunii lor...