

CREATIVE NEWCOMERS AND RURAL TRANSFORMATIONS: RETHINKING CULTURAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

As rural areas increasingly attract creative professionals seeking alternatives to urban living, understanding how these movements reshape rural territories has become a critical concern for both research and policy. While rural creativity scholarship has demonstrated the importance of arts and culture for rural development, existing approaches often rely on narrow or urban-centric understandings of cultural value and offer limited tools for understanding how creative newcomers shape rural areas. This article addresses this gap by proposing a conceptual and methodological framework for assessing the cultural impact of creative newcomers on rural areas. Drawing on a systematic literature review, comparative analysis of cultural policy frameworks, and existing research on rural creativity, the study identifies three interrelated dimensions of Cultural Impact Assessment (CI-Assessment): sociospatial, socioecological, and social. These dimensions are operationalised through community-oriented, place-based, and eco-cultural approaches that recognise cultural value as relational, locally embedded, and often expressed through less tangible forms of social and cultural capital. The framework advances current debates by highlighting how creative newcomers contribute to cultural vitality, socio-economic change, place-making,

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rural–urban relations, and eco-cultural resilience. By proposing a set of context-sensitive indicators aligned with these themes, the article offers a flexible tool for capturing the qualitative dimensions of cultural impact alongside quantitative and other measurable indicators. It concludes by outlining directions for future research, emphasising the empirical testing and validation of CI-Assessment indicators capable of accounting for the mobility of creative newcomers, the social heterogeneity of rural communities, and the place-specific dynamics of rural transformation.

Keywords: *Cultural Impact Assessment, creative newcomers, urban-to-rural mobility, rural creativity, cultural indicators.*

Introduction

In recent years, rural areas have increasingly become destinations for creative professionals seeking an alternative to urban living. This trend, often referred to as counterurbanisation, involves individuals relocating from densely populated urban centres to less populated rural regions in search of improved quality of life, natural amenities, and a slower pace of living [Silva, Marques & Galvão 2024]. The influx of creative newcomers – such as artists, designers, and creative entrepreneurs – has introduced new cultural practices, socioeconomic strategies, and dynamics that can significantly reshape local identities, community cohesion, and socio-economic structures. These newcomers often bring innovative approaches to work and lifestyle, contributing to the diversification of rural economies and the revitalization of local cultures [Roberts & Townsend 2016].

However, this mobility also presents challenges. New cultural norms and economic practices may create tensions with established rural communities. This can result in gentrification and sociospatial divides [Matarrita-Cascant et al. 2017; Dragan 2024]. Additionally, creative newcomers can influence ecological sustainability and land use practices as new residents may advocate for environmental conservation and sustainable development, which may differ from traditional land-use practices [Dragan 2024]. Understanding the cultural impact of urban-to-rural migration is therefore crucial for advancing academic knowledge on rural transformation. It systematically analyses its effects on rural identities, community cohesion, local economies, and environmental practices, while also informing practical strategies. By evaluating both the positive and negative effects of this mobility trend, policymakers and community leaders can implement informed, context-specific interventions that foster inclusive, sustainable growth.

Cultural Impact Assessment (CI-Assessment) emerged in the 1970s as a method for evaluating the effects of policies, projects, and developments on cultural practices, heritage, and community life. Initially rooted in environmental and social impact

assessments, its scope was relatively narrow, focusing primarily on Indigenous and heritage-related concerns. Over time, however, the framework expanded in response to evolving policy priorities, including sustainable development, creative economies, and social cohesion. Today, CI-Assessment is employed by a diverse range of actors – including governments, cultural institutions, urban planners, and private enterprises – to assess the socio-cultural dimensions of urban regeneration, tourism, and large-scale infrastructure projects. CI-Assessment takes different forms depending on the institution conducting it and the specific changes being evaluated. This diversity raises questions about its methodologies, effectiveness, and potential instrumentalization [Partal & Dunphy 2016]. In response, this paper argues for a more flexible, context-sensitive approach, rather than relying on standardized measurement systems that may overlook contextual differences [Häyrynen 2004]. The paper next presents the methodology, outlining data collection and analysis processes that inform key concepts, themes, and indicators. It then reports the findings of a systematic literature review (SLR), a detailed analysis of three policy documents, and an examination of the In-Situ Project report on socioeconomic contributions of cultural and creative industries on non-urban regions. This paper combines these reviews with a, theme-oriented review that highlights the specific role of creative newcomers in community formation and rural development. These combined insights inform the development of a Cultural Impact Assessment framework tailored to creative newcomer communities. This framework provides a foundation for further empirical research while highlighting practical applications and the development of relevant indicators.

The SLR shows that CI-Assessment is structured around three interrelated dimensions of cultural impact in rural areas: sociospatial, socioecological, and social. The sociospatial dimension emphasizes the embedding of cultural processes in rural development and community contexts. The socioecological dimension highlights resilience and the integration of cultural values into environmental governance. The social dimension focuses on community well-being. Policy reports indicate that these dimensions are implemented through community-oriented, place-based, and eco-cultural approaches to evaluating rural cultural dynamics. These findings highlight the importance of context-driven, multidimensional assessments that capture both measurable socio-economic and environmental impacts, as well as the intrinsic cultural values embedded in communities and landscapes.

1. Methodology

Because of its abstract and multidimensional character, culture is often difficult to analyse. This limitation becomes even more apparent when assessing the cultural impacts of creative newcomers, whose creative practices span across urban and

rural areas. A systematic literature review (SLR) was therefore essential to establish a transparent and comprehensive overview of how CI-Assessment has been approached in rural and non-urban contexts. At the same time, to address the limitations of the SLR's general mapping, we aimed to concretize how the main frameworks identified in the literature are applied in practice. For this purpose, we conducted a detailed analysis of three cultural impact assessment reports produced at different institutional and spatial levels. These reports include those of the International Network for Cultural Diversity (INCD), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and the Mackenzie Valley Review Board. This was followed by an examination of the In-Situ Project report, which – unlike the other three – directly demonstrates the influence of creative activities in non-urban areas by documenting how cultural and creative workers contribute to ecological sustainability, heritage revitalization, and community resilience. Finally, we complemented this with a more narrative, theme-oriented review that highlights the specific role of creative newcomers in community formation and rural development.

Using the PRISMA protocol, a systematic literature review (SLR) analysed cultural impact assessment (CI-Assessment) in non-urban and rural areas. The review aimed to identify definitions, tools, and application domains of CI-Assessment. Searches in the WOS database up to 14 August 2025 using *non-urban areas*, *rural areas*, and *cultural impact assessment* yielded 94 records. After applying inclusion criteria (peer-reviewed English articles, online access) and excluding duplicates, book chapters, and conference papers, 59 abstracts were screened. Full-text review for relevance to rural CI-Assessment narrowed the set to 43 records. Studies addressing creative newcomers, migrants, or ex-urbanites in rural contexts were included, resulting in 30 records. Data were analysed in RStudio, with co-occurrence analysis mapping the conceptual structure of CI-Assessment in rural studies.

The SLR, based on a co-occurrence analysis, revealed three primary clusters. The core cluster (blue) links culture, rural development, and assessment. The environmental-resilience cluster (green) highlights issues such as adaptive capacity and revitalization, while the weaker-connected public-health cluster (red) focuses on well-being, risk, and quality of life. This initial step offered an identification of the reoccurring themes and key dimensions (socio-spatial, socioecological, social) related to cultural impact assessment while also highlighting their relations. In the second stage, we turned to a detailed analysis of three cultural impact assessment reports produced at different institutional and spatial levels in order to examine how the emerging clusters are translated into practical applications.

- INCD: operates at regional and national scales, engaging international organizations, policymakers, and development agencies to preserve and promote cultural diversity.

- UCLG: targets cities and local governments, integrating cultural sustainability into urban governance while placing communities at the centre.
- Mackenzie Valley Review Board: focuses on town and community scales, with particular emphasis on indigenous groups and culturally embedded values.

These reports were examined with a particular focus on the indicators they mobilize to assess cultural impacts. The analysis confirmed the emphasis on cultural diversity, sustainable development, and the integration of multi-scalar perspectives ranging from town (local) to city (urban) and regional/national scales – into assessment frameworks.

While initial reports revealed limited attention to the cultural impacts of creative activities by creative newcomers in non-urban areas, the In-Situ Project report offered a place-based perspective on cultural change in rural European communities and creative industries. A targeted literature review on creative newcomers further highlighted several themes essential for the framework. These include cultural vitality, cultural value, entrepreneurship, innovation, digital

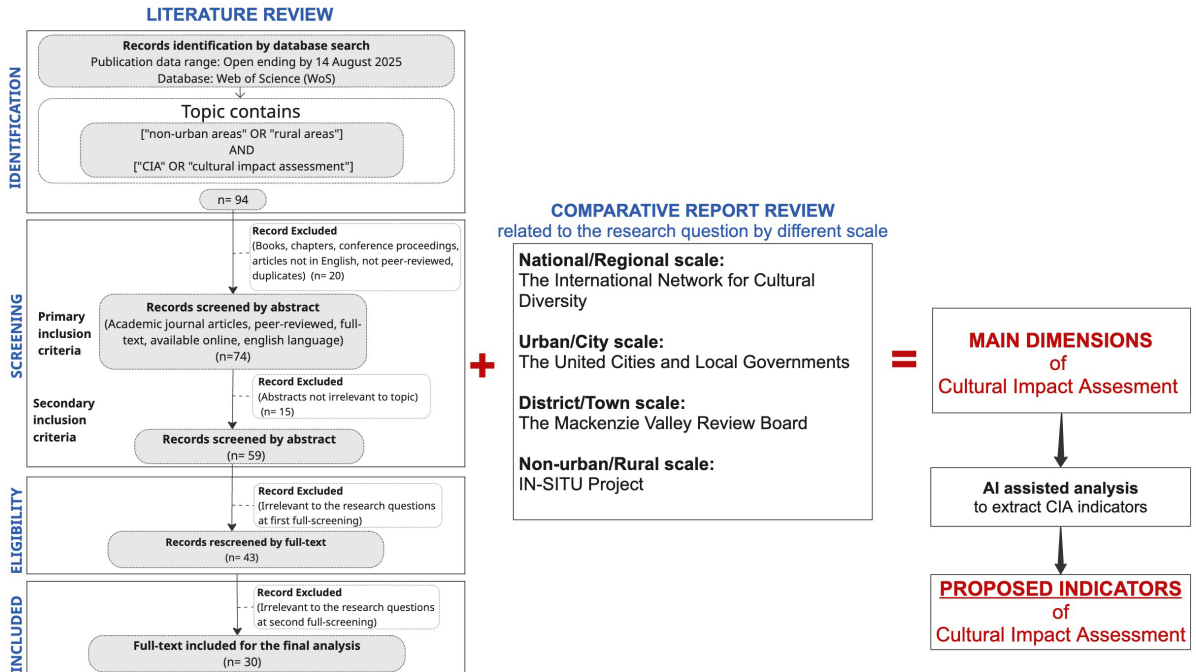


Figure 1. Methodology of the study

infrastructure, and the contribution of creative practices to social cohesion and well-being. Together, these stages enabled the identification of key themes and keywords for indicator development. AI (GPT-5 mini) facilitated the systematic organization, categorization, and refinement of indicators, proposing both qualitative and quantitative measures, detecting overlaps or gaps, and ensuring coverage of socio-cultural, economic, and place-based dimensions. The authors then critically reviewed and refined these indicators by merging overlaps, clarifying ambiguous terms, adding missing measures from field insights, removing irrelevant items, and prioritizing a balanced representation of qualitative and quantitative dimensions relevant for rural contexts.

2. Results

2.1. From key dimensions to core approaches in cultural impact assessment

This section presents the findings of the systematic literature review, which identified three relational clusters corresponding to sociospatial, socioecological, and social dimensions (see Figure 2). The blue cluster (sociospatial) centres on terms like “locality”, “rural”, “culture”, “assessment”, and “development”. It highlights how cultural impact is often framed within sustainability and rural development contexts, linking culture to spatial settings, community, and socioeconomic transformation.

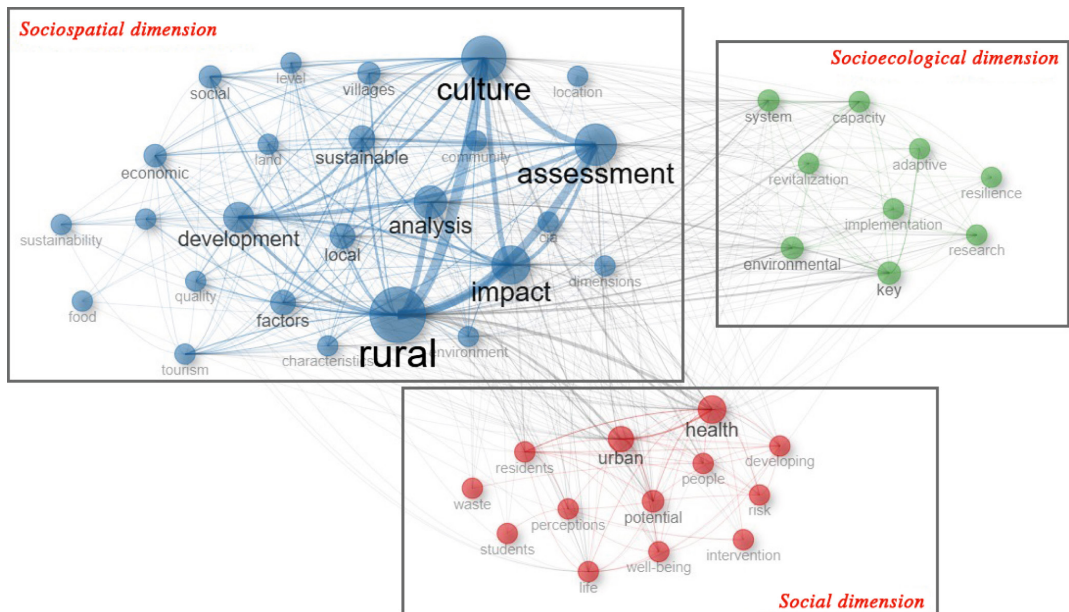


Figure 2. Result of the co-occurrence network analysis based on articles' abstract

The green cluster (socioecological) emphasizes “environmental”, “revitalization”, “resilience”, and “adaptive”, reflecting systemic approaches where cultural impact is integrated into environmental governance and resilience thinking. The red cluster (social) revolves around “health”, “residents”, “perceptions”, and “well-being”, showing a focus on human-centered outcomes and quality-of-life impacts, often in urban contexts.

To better understand how these dimensions are applied in practice, we examined CI-Assessment reports. This analysis shows that the social dimension is operationalized through community-oriented approach, the socioecological dimension through eco-cultural approach, and the sociospatial dimension through place-based approach. These operationalizations guide thematic priorities and the development of relevant indicators.

Community-oriented approach: All three frameworks place local communities at the centre of cultural impact assessments, emphasizing participation and engagement in the evaluation process. As outlined in Appendix B, the INCD Framework examines the cultural life of local communities by assessing verbal, musical, performative, and visual expressions, as well as broader cultural practices and value systems. This ensures that community voices, experiences, and traditions are prioritized. Similarly, the UCLG Framework frames culture as a central domain of social life, highlighting key aspects such as local identity, creativity, engagement, and well-being. The Mackenzie Valley Review Board Framework focuses on Indigenous communities, incorporating marginalized groups including women and youth, and assessing cultural impacts of environmental developments on these communities. Across these frameworks, the evaluation of cultural impacts is grounded primarily in the social and cultural dimensions of community-making.

While these frameworks prioritize community voices and social dimensions, debates around the definition and measurement of cultural value reveal tensions between intrinsic, community-centred approaches and advocacy-driven, outcome-oriented perspectives. Belfiore [2016] distinguishes between a humanities-based perspective, emphasizing the intrinsic socio-cultural value of culture, and an advocacy-driven perspective, which prioritizes measurable outcomes aligned with economic or policy agendas. The latter approach gained prominence during the late 1990s and early 2000s with neoliberal development policies, linking cultural interventions to urban regeneration and economic growth. As a result, CI-Assessments often focused on organizational or economic benefits rather than community-centred outcomes. Early assessments tended to measure visitor numbers and economic contribution [Formica & Uysal 1994; Crompton & McKay 1994], whereas by the 2000s, there was a growing recognition of multidimensional approaches that consider social inclusion, community well-being, and urban identity

[Richards & Wilson 2003; Langen & Garcia 2009]. Balancing advocacy-driven and humanities-based perspectives remains crucial to ensure that CI-Assessment supports policy goals while fostering a holistic understanding of culture's role in communities.

Place-based approach: All three frameworks emphasize assessing cultural impacts within the unique geographical and territorial conditions of each community, ensuring cultural identities and practices are understood in their proper environmental and social contexts. As shown in Appendix B, the INCD Framework is inherently place-based, using qualitative methods like oral history and storytelling to document tangible and intangible cultural assets linked to local landscapes and heritage sites. The UCLG Framework adapts global frameworks to local contexts, balancing broad applicability with the specificity of each town or city, emphasizing place-specific cultural sustainability through tailored indicators. The Mackenzie Valley Review Board Framework integrates cultural landscapes and spiritual sites into environmental assessments, respecting the close connection between people and land and preserving traditions amid development. This approach is reinforced by recent research linking cultural policies to local environmental and social structures [Duxbury & Jeannotte 2015; Soini & Birkeland 2014] and by the widespread adoption of cultural mapping [Duxbury 2021].

Eco-cultural approach: The frameworks also highlight the interconnection of cultural and environmental sustainability within CI-Assessment, often grounded in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) practices. The INCD Framework emphasizes cultural heritage in local environmental policy, while the UCLG Framework links cultural vitality to ecological, social, and economic systems. The Mackenzie Valley Review Board Framework prioritizes traditional land use and heritage sites, considering development impacts on both natural and social-cultural systems. This approach aligns with recent literature that increasingly integrates ecological and cultural perspectives [Bernard et al. 2022] and emphasizing eco-cultural resilience and civilization, which advocate for better integration of human and natural systems and an ecological turn in understanding sustainable development [Soini & Birkeland 2014].

We argue that all three approaches – community-oriented, place-based, and eco-cultural – illustrate a context-driven framework for CI-Assessment by embedding cultural evaluation within the social, geographical, and ecological contexts of local communities. The community-oriented approach prioritizes local experiences and participatory assessment of cultural values and well-being. The place-based approach highlights the influence of landscapes, heritage, and spatial dynamics and the eco-cultural approach integrates cultural and environmental considerations to the cultural impact assessment. Together, these approaches underscore the need for

situated CI-Assessments that move beyond generic indicators to capture the diverse ways culture manifests in specific communities and places.

2.2 A thematic literature review of creative newcomers' impact on rural areas

In the previous section, an in-depth analysis of three policy documents identified three key approaches – community-oriented, place-based, and eco-cultural – that shape CI-Assessment guidelines in line with the contemporary cultural policy debates. Although these approaches provide a conceptual foundation for assessing the cultural impact assessment, they do not recognize creative urbanites' pathways within rural cultural impact assessment. To address this gap, we first analyse the outcomes of In-Situ Project Report, then we review the literature specifically addressing the creative practices of urban newcomers and their role in rural development.

To begin with, the In-Situ Project prioritizes local communities and workers in cultural and creative industries, highlighting their capacity to sustain cultural life and strengthen resilience in non-urban and rural areas. Accordingly, the In-Situ Project adopts a place-based approach in non-urban and rural European regions, highlighting cultural change in the practices of local communities and worker in cultural and creative industries. 12 case studies that have been investigated across Europe demonstrated how cultural transformations emerge in non-urban and rural areas. The examples include Art in Gort in Ireland, which embeds artistic practice within community life; The Voice of Youth in Portugal, which foregrounds youth participation in cultural decision-making; and Transmalhar, also in Portugal, which links agricultural traditions with community identity and sustainability. These case studies show that cultural impacts in non-urban areas cannot be reduced to single indicators (like attendance or heritage preservation). Instead, they cut across community-oriented (youth, identity, well-being), place-based (livelihoods), and eco-cultural (landscape stewardship, sustainability) dimensions. They also foreground the agency of creative newcomers who often bring new networks, skills, and practices that catalyse these transformations. Building on these insights, this section reviews the literature on the cultural and creative practices of urban newcomers. It examines how the previously identified approaches (community-oriented, place-based, and eco-cultural) are manifested in this literature and how the scope of these approaches is further extended. This review not only broadens the conceptual and empirical content but also helps identifying more specific themes and keywords, which will guide the assessment of their cultural impact on rural communities.

Rural creative migration – community building at the intersection of cultural and socioeconomic values: The mobility of creative professionals to rural areas has attracted growing scholarly attention for its role in reshaping rural

communities through intertwined cultural, social and economic processes. Rather than viewing creative activities solely as individual artistic pursuits, this body of work emphasises their collective dimensions and their capacity to foster local engagement, social interaction and community development. From a community-oriented perspective, creative practices are understood as relational processes that connect people, places and forms of labour, generating socio-cultural as well as socio-economic impacts.. A key insight emerging from this literature is that the sustainability of creative practices in rural areas depends not simply on the presence of artists, but on how artistic labour is recognised, valued and supported within local communities [Mahon 2018]. This recognition is closely linked to what is often conceptualised as cultural vitality: the community's capacity to sustain and engage with cultural practices thereby reinforcing collective identity, social bonds and quality of life [McHenry, 2011; Duxbury & Campbell, 2011]. Empirical studies illustrate how cultural vitality is generated through shared creative practices embedded in everyday rural life. For example, Gibson and Gordon's [2018] analysis on community-based music initiatives illustrate how cultural vitality in rural areas is generated through shared creative practice. They argue that such initiatives contribute to regional development in two ways: by enriching cultural life, strengthening social relations, and supporting newcomers in establishing social ties and longer-term attachments to place.

Beyond these social and cultural contributions, research has also examined the socioeconomic dimensions of creative mobility. Studies show that the mobility of creative professionals fosters hybrid cultural expressions that blend urban and rural traditions [Bell & Jayne 2010] and can lead to the formation of artistic clusters in non-urban areas, which act as hubs of cultural production and innovation [Markusen 2006]. Unlike urban agglomerations, however, rural creative economies tend to rely on dispersed networks, multi-sector collaborations and inter-regional connections that facilitate knowledge exchange and economic resilience [Roberts & Townsend, 2016]. Entrepreneurship, often led by women, has been highlighted particularly important in sustaining cultural and social networks in rural areas and translating creative practice into viable livelihoods [Herslund 2012; 2019]. Balfour et al. [2018] emphasise that creativity and entrepreneurship are deeply intertwined: sustaining artistic practice often requires entrepreneurial skills, while creative ventures can play a key role in reinvigorating rural development. Arts-based development initiatives in rural areas can strengthen local entrepreneurship and community capacity, but their effects depend on how they are organised and accessed.

Crucially, these creative and entrepreneurial practices are contingent on access to enabling infrastructures. Broadband access, for example, supports remote work, entrepreneurship, and market access [Bowles 2008; Malecki 2003]. Meanwhile,

the access to such infrastructure remains uneven, and digital disparities can limit economic opportunities and undermine community resilience, reinforcing existing inequalities within and between rural places [Malecki 2003].

Creative practices, place-making, and rural cohesion – negotiating identities and exclusions: Community formation in rural areas aligns with place-making, whereby people shape and give meaning to environments through social, cultural, and economic practices [Massey 2005]. Within this context, creative practitioners can strengthen ties to their new environments, influencing social and cultural landscapes, reinforcing local identities, or introducing external influences [Graugaard 2012; Harvey et al. 2012]. Through cultural events and artistic activities, they foster shared cultural environments and community cohesion [McHenry 2011; Duxbury & Campbell 2011; Brouder 2012]. At the same time, the literature cautions that the impacts of creative place-making are not uniformly positive. Influxes of urban creative newcomers may raise property values and create tensions between newcomers and long-standing residents, reflecting critiques of neoliberal place-making where external investments overshadow local needs [Smith & Phillips 2001]. In such contexts, creative practices, particularly when originating externally, can also generate social divides and uneven forms of participation, rather than inclusive community-building [Roberts & Townsend 2016; Herslund 2012].

In response to these tensions, the creative economy plays a crucial role not only in local economic revitalization but also in fostering new forms of communal organization through socially engaged art practices and the repurposing of local assets [Crashaw and Gkartzios 2016]. Place-based approaches emphasize inclusive, community-driven creative practices that respect local identities, histories, and aspirations. Correspondingly, scholars warn against transferring urban-centric models to rural contexts, advocating recognition of rural creativity as an intrinsic strategy for economic adaptation, identity negotiation, and alternative cultural expression [Gibson & Klocker 2005; Woods 2012].

Yet, not all cultural initiatives succeed in realising this inclusive potential. As Balfour et al. (2018) argue, when cultural initiatives function primarily as commodities for culturally privileged locals or visiting urban audiences, they risk reproducing barriers to participation similar to those associated with elite urban cultural institutions. Such dynamics can obscure the collective and inclusive potential of rural creative activity. To foster community well-being and an enhanced sense of belonging in rural areas, creative initiatives must therefore be accessible to a broad cross-section of the rural community from the earliest stages of planning.

Creative practices and eco-cultural resilience in rural areas – place-based pathways to sustainability: Creative activities in rural areas intersect

with eco-cultural resilience, which refers to the capacity of cultural and ecological systems to co-adapt and persist amid environmental and social change [Berkes et al. 2003; Folke 2006]. Scholars highlight that ecological and cultural diversity are deeply interconnected, with cultural practices shaping sustainable resource use and environmental stewardship [Maffi & Woodley 2010]. While eco-cultural resilience has been explored in Indigenous knowledge systems and traditional land-use practices, its relevance to rural creativity remains underexamined [Jeannotte 2003; Kangas et al. 2018; Sesana et al. 2020]. Extending this discussion, Brady [2025] calls for a broader understanding of ecological interdependence that connects local environments to planetary systems, suggesting that creative and ethical sensibilities can foster care across multiple ecological scales. Conceptualizing the commons in this expanded sense, challenges the idealization of the local often found in site-specific art, while acknowledging the importance of emotional and cultural ties to particular places [Kwon 2002; Brady 2025]. This multi-scalar perspective complements the notion of eco-cultural resilience by situating rural creativity within wider processes of global environmental change and shared ecological responsibility.

Within this framework, place-based transformative learning becomes a means of translating planetary awareness into local practice. Sustainability-oriented art projects, community gardens, and artist residencies encourage participants to develop sustainable habits and collective environmental care rooted in their immediate surroundings, yet informed by a consciousness of global ecological interconnection [Pisters et al. 2021]. Eco-art and community-led environmental initiatives further merge artistic expression with activism, advancing sustainability while strengthening community bonds [Miles 2014]. By linking creative production with ecological awareness, such practices reinforce eco-cultural resilience as both a conceptual and practical approach to navigating cultural and environmental transitions [Pisters et al. 2021].

Drawing upon the literature review, Figure 3 outlines the key themes and corresponding keywords that will inform our approach to cultural impact assessment. Cultural value is captured through key words such as creativity, social cohesion, and hybrid cultural expressions. Socio-economic value focuses on creative entrepreneurship, digital infrastructure, and multi-sectoral collaborations that shape rural-urban dynamics. Place-making considers aspects like local identity, place-attachment, and sociospatial transformations, including gentrification. Rural-urban community relations are assessed through cultural and economic interdependencies, social divides, and territorial tensions. Lastly, eco-cultural resilience highlights sustainability initiatives, ecological awareness, and community-led environmental projects. We propose to link the identified themes – cultural value, socio-economic

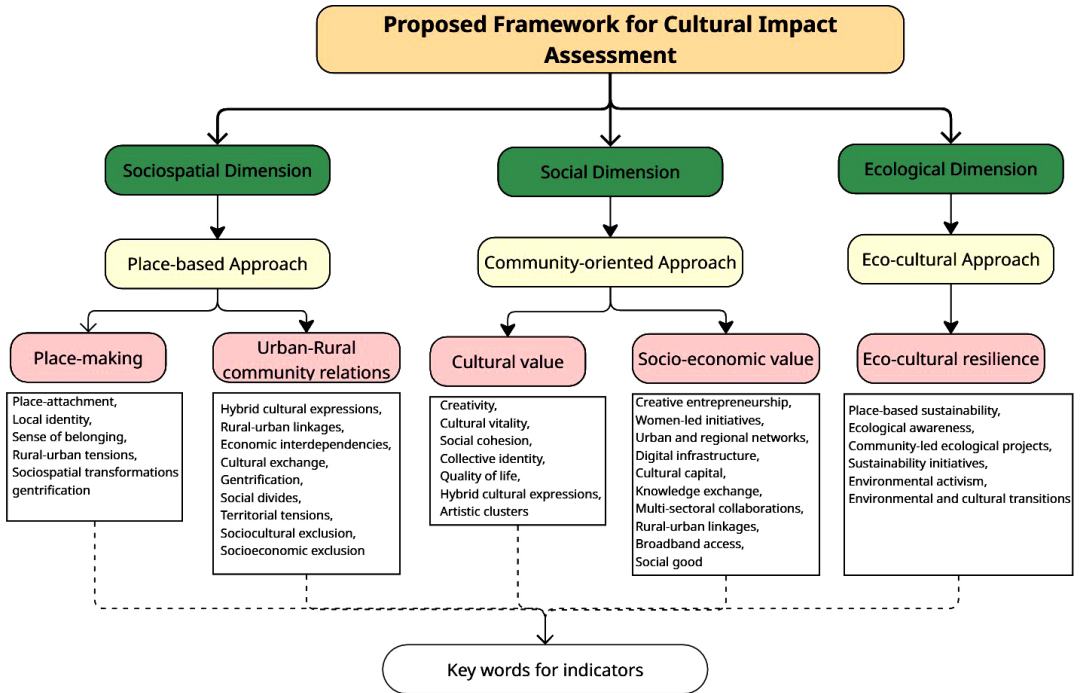


Figure 3. Proposed framework derived from three distinct literature reviews

value, place-making, rural-urban community relations, and eco-cultural resilience – to the approaches drawing upon the previous SLR and policy reports. Accordingly, we link the community-oriented approach to socio-economic and cultural value because it focuses on the ways in which local communities generate and experience value through creative activities, social cohesion, and local entrepreneurship. The place-based approach aligns with rural-urban relations and place-making, emphasizing spatial dynamics, local networks, and territorial specificities, where cultural value is considered in relation to the sociospatial context. Finally, the eco-cultural approach corresponds to eco-cultural resilience, highlighting the interdependence of cultural and socioecological processes and the role of communities in fostering sustainable and adaptive practices. These themes and key words underscore the importance of a context-sensitive approach, which enables a nuanced understanding of local dynamics and challenges. By focusing on factors such as community relationships, sociospatial development processes, and environmental transitions, a more tailored CI-Assessment framework can be developed, addressing the unique influences of creative newcomers on rural communities. After addressing the relevant debates on assessment techniques, we will use these themes and keywords as the foundation for developing our set of indicators, ensuring a context-sensitive framework.

3. Towards a set of measurement: Key debates around cultural value and indicators

Cultural value stands as a key concept in cultural impact assessment, shaping debates on the selection of indicators by questioning what aspects of culture should be measured and how. Belfiore and Bennett [2010] argue that CI-Assessment should not be limited to economic assessments but should also take into account culture's broader socio-cultural value. Their critique highlights the limitation of a toolkit mentality mentioned above, which simplifies complex cultural dynamics into easily replicable models, often overlooking the diversity of impacts that culture has on different communities. They stress that cultural activities and objects, while they may generate economic value, can simultaneously have negative impacts on marginalized groups. This highlights the need for CI-Assessment methodological frameworks that can reflect the values and norms of different community groups and the nuanced ways that culture can affect them.

Occurring debates in CI-Assessment literature about quantitative versus qualitative methods are also addressed by Partal and Dunphy [2016], pointing out one of the methodological weaknesses of cultural impact analysis. This weakness relates to "a fundamental problem for CI-Assessment that if culture is defined as pertaining to the values and norms of specific groups, seemingly similar cultural phenomena or institutions can have completely different meanings for different groups of people" [Keating et al. 2003]. Duxbury and Jeannotte [2015] also argue that cultural value cannot be fully captured through conventional economic or bureaucratic measures, as it often includes non-use values – intangible aspects that are not directly quantifiable. The authors draw a parallel to environmental valuation, noting that assigning a monetary value to a forest does not truly compensate for its loss. Similarly, assessing culture's role in sustainability through its economic impact alone fails to reflect its full value. In addition, Zemite et al. [2022] find that rooted in local community life and values, entrepreneurs in cultural and creative industries report practices aligned with all four pillars of sustainability. While most of these practices primarily contribute to economic sustainability, many also generate benefits for the environmental, social, or cultural dimensions. Therefore, previous research highlight that cultural impact extends beyond economic measures underscoring the importance of employing qualitative methods together with quantitative methods in designing CI-A frameworks.

Rural creativity debates increasingly challenge narrow, economically driven understandings of cultural value by emphasising the concept of locally retained "value-added" [Manon et al. 2018]. Rather than referring solely to measurable economic growth, value-added denotes the ways cultural activities contribute to broadening

and strengthening rural livelihoods through social and cultural capital, community vitality, and place-based meanings [Marsden, 2006; Van der Ploeg et al., 2008; Sonnino et al., 2008]. As highlighted by Manon et al. [2018], the central challenge lies not in demonstrating that arts and culture matter for rural development, but in identifying and articulating how these contributions materialise in less tangible yet consequential ways for rural places and communities. This key methodological challenge calls for assessment frameworks capable of capturing qualitative, relational and context-specific forms of cultural value, rather than relying on narrowly defined economic indicators.

When selected CI-Assessment frameworks are analysed regarding their methodology, we observe that they all combine quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of cultural impacts (see Appendix). Both types of data are crucial to fully capturing the multifaceted nature of cultural change enriched by community-centred, cultural sustainability and place-based approaches. INCD Framework utilizes a mix of qualitative methods (e.g., focus groups, oral histories, participant observation) and quantitative data (e.g., census data). The UCLG Framework combines quantitative surveys and statistical measures with qualitative participatory evaluations and public feedback. The use of comparative analysis between soft and hard data ensures that cultural participation is assessed from multiple angles. The Mackenzie Valley Review Board Framework uses a combination of qualitative methods (e.g., land use studies, oral histories, ethnographic studies) and quantitative data (e.g., statistical analysis of community wellness, demographic data). This combination allows for a rich understanding of how development projects affect both the tangible and intangible aspects of cultural identity.

Building on the discussions surrounding cultural value and the dual use of quantitative and qualitative indicators, the following tables present an example of a structured overview of potential indicators for measuring various aspects of cultural impact. These indicators are categorized under key themes such as cultural value, socio-economic value, place-making, rural-urban community relations, and eco-cultural resilience. They will form the foundation for a context-sensitive cultural impact assessment framework. This framework draws on three interlinked approaches: community-oriented, place-based, and eco-cultural. The tables emphasize both quantitative and qualitative measures, offering a balanced approach that captures the tangible impacts as well as the deeper, more subjective community experiences and perceptions. Crucially, the proposed indicators are designed to remain sensitive to the mobility of creative newcomers, the social heterogeneity of rural communities, and the place-specific dynamics of rural transformation.

Table 1. Proposed quantitative indicators and measurement methods

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Quantitative Indicators</i>	<i>Methods</i>
Place-Based Approach	Place-Making	- Number of community-led place-making initiatives - Percentage of residents expressing a strong sense of place-attachment - Number of heritage sites, public spaces, or cultural landmarks preserved or revitalized by urban newcomers - Number of local identity-based projects - Gentrification rate	- Spatial analysis of revitalization projects - Heritage site monitoring - Survey on local identity and belonging - Real estate price tracking - Population displacement analysis
	Rural-Urban Communities' Relations	- Number of cultural exchanges between rural and urban communities - Number of hybrid cultural expressions documented - Economic transactions between rural creative businesses and urban markets - Number of projects engaging in local cultural activities - Number of projects addressing social divides or exclusion - Number of projects engaging in cultural and natural heritage sites - Rate of gentrification-induced displacement in rural areas, Women-led programs fostering social cohesion and cultural participation	- Monitoring cultural exchange programs - Business transaction analysis - Migration and census data - Cultural impact surveys - Housing and displacement tracking, Focus groups with residents on women's leadership impact
Community-Oriented Approach	Cultural Value	- Number of cultural events, festivals, and projects per year - Percentage of residents participating in cultural activities - Number of creative businesses and artistic clusters - Funding allocated to cultural initiatives	- Surveys/questionnaires - Analysis of funding records - Business registry data - Event attendance records - Cultural mapping

Table 1 (continued).

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Quantitative Indicators</i>	<i>Methods</i>
Community-Oriented Approach	Socio-Economic Value	- Number of creative entrepreneurs and startups in the region - Percentage of employment in creative and cultural sectors - Income levels of creative entrepreneurs compared to other sectors - Digital infrastructure coverage - Number of knowledge exchange programs, workshops, or training sessions - Number of multi-sectoral partnerships involving cultural and creative industries, Number/Percentage of women-led initiatives	- Cultural mapping - Business and employment statistics - Economic impact assessments - Digital infrastructure data collection - Survey on creative sector wages - Network analysis of collaborations, Surveys on women's contributions to community development
Eco-Cultural Approach	Eco-Cultural Resilience	- Number of community-led ecological and sustainability projects - Percentage of cultural initiatives incorporating ecological awareness - Funding allocated to eco-cultural sustainability programs - Participation rate in environmental activism within cultural communities - Number of traditional ecological practices revived through cultural projects	- Project documentation review - Participation rates in sustainability programs - Funding and grant allocation analysis

Table 2. Proposed qualitative indicators and methods

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Qualitative Indicators</i>	<i>Methods</i>
Place-Based Approach	Place-Making	- Narratives on sense of belonging and place attachment - Role of cultural initiatives in strengthening local identity - Community discussions on gentrification and its social effects - Perceptions of sociospatial transformations	- Oral histories with long-term residents - Photovoice (residents documenting spatial changes) - Ethnographic fieldwork
Place-Based Approach	Rural-Urban Communities' Relations	- Local perceptions of rural–urban linkages and economic interdependencies - Impact of urban newcomers on local culture and economy - Stories of social divides and territorial tensions - Narratives of inclusion/exclusion from both rural and urban perspectives - Evolution of hybrid cultural expressions due to rural–urban interactions	- Focus groups with both rural and urban stakeholders - Life histories of both communities - Ethnographic studies of community interactions - Analysis of local media discourse on migration
Community-Oriented Approach	Cultural Value	- Perceived impact of cultural activities on social cohesion and local identity - Narratives from artists and creative practitioners on cultural vitality - Community engagement in cultural decision-making - Perceived changes in collective identity and quality of life through cultural participation	- In-depth interviews with artists and cultural organizers - Focus groups with community members - Ethnographic observations
Community-Oriented Approach	Socio-Economic Value	- Perceived barriers and opportunities for creative entrepreneurship - Impact of digital infrastructure on cultural production and creative businesses - Case studies of rural–urban creative collaborations - Influence of cultural capital on local economic development - Stakeholders' perspectives on the role of cultural industries in social good	- Semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs - Policy analysis on cultural capital investments - Participant observation in creative business hubs - Case study analysis of rural–urban projects

Table 2 (continued).

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Qualitative Indicators</i>	<i>Methods</i>
Eco-Cultural Approach	Eco-Cultural Resilience	- Perceptions of environmental and cultural transitions - Case studies on place-based sustainability initiatives - Narratives on integration of ecological awareness in cultural practices - Impact of sustainability initiatives on community well-being	- Storytelling and oral histories of environmental changes - Community workshops on sustainability practices - Interviews with environmental and cultural activists - Media and policy review on eco-cultural initiatives

Conclusion

The systematic literature review identified three core dimensions of CI-Assessment – sociospatial, socioecological, and social – while the analysis of policy frameworks (INCD, UCLG, Mackenzie Valley Review Board) demonstrated their operationalization through community-oriented, place-based, and eco-cultural approaches. These models emphasize incorporating local voices, acknowledging territorial specificities, and recognizing the interdependence of cultural and ecological systems, underscoring the need for multidimensional, context-sensitive assessments. Furthermore, insights from the In-Situ Project and related research on rural creativity illustrate how rural cultural change unfolds through youth engagement, community identity, livelihoods, and sustainability. They also highlight the catalytic role of newcomers in introducing networks, skills, and hybrid practices that reshape rural life.

The thematic literature review on rural creativity furthermore enabled the translation of community-oriented, place-based, and eco-cultural approaches into five interrelated thematic clusters (cultural value, socio-economic value, place-making, rural–urban community relations, and eco-cultural resilience) and to propose both qualitative and quantitative indicators across each dimension. By combining qualitative and quantitative indicators within each thematic cluster, the proposed framework captures both measurable and less tangible cultural impacts, while remaining sensitive to local dynamics and community-specific factors. Taken together, this context-sensitive framework demonstrates that cultural impacts cannot be adequately captured through narrow indicators like participation rates or economic output but require attention to processes of rural community-building, place-making, and eco-cultural resilience.

Future research should focus on the empirical testing and validation of the proposed CI-Assessment framework and indicators in different rural contexts, particularly in ways that account for the mobility of creative newcomers, the internal social heterogeneity of rural communities, and the place-specific dynamics of rural transformation. This includes examining how newcomers' seasonal, circular, or long-term mobility shapes local cultural economies; how indicators capture differences across social groups such as long-term residents, return migrants, youth, and marginalized populations; and how locally specific dynamics such as tourism-driven change, environmental crises, or agricultural restructuring mediate cultural impacts.

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Appendix

In-depth analysis of CI-Assessment Guidelines: Scope, focus, and methodology

<i>Toolkit name, location, publishing year</i>		<i>Framework for Cultural Impact Assessment, Global Context, 2004</i>	<i>Assessing Cultural Sustainability, Spain-Barcelona, 2014</i>	<i>Developing Cultural Impact Assessment Guidelines: A Mackenzie Valley Review Board Initiative, Canada-Northwest Territories, 2009</i>	<i>In-Situ Project, Portugal-Coimbra, 2022</i>
1		2	3	4	5
Publishing organization		INCD (International Network for Cultural Diversity)	United Cities and Local Governments	Mackenzie Valley Review Board	University of Coimbra
Scope & Application Area	In what context?	In the context of development policies and projects particularly in relation to environmental and social impact assessment	Fundamentally in the context of urban policy-making and sustainable development to help cities develop indicators, protocols, and tools to measure cultural impact. It aims to be applicable across different towns and cities worldwide.	In the context of environmental impact assessments to identify and minimize any adverse cultural impacts of developments. It is used to ensure that the development projects align with the cultural needs of indigenous communities.	In the context of cultural and creative industries in non-urban and rural areas, to assess their role in local development, community resilience, and cultural sustainability.
	By whom is it used? (e.g., local governments, NGOs, researchers)	Local and national governments, NGOs, international organizations (UNESCO, the World Bank, the United Nations etc.), private sectors and developers, local communities, academic researchers	UCLG, Municipalities and Local Governments, Urban Planners and Policy Makers, Academics and Researchers, Cultural Organizations, Global Organizations	Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board, Developers and Industry Stakeholders, Indigenous Communities, Government Agencies, Researchers and Environmental Consultants	Local governments, NGOs, cultural organizations, researchers, EU institutions, policymakers

Appendix (continued)

		1	2	3	4	5
Cultural Impact Assessment (CI-Assessment) Focus	Key themes on which CI-Assessment is built		Cultural diversity, identities, norms, values, beliefs, social institutions, cultural heritage	The framework is based on the 'Circles of Social Life' approach (used by Metropolis and the UN Global Compact Cities Programme) and adapted as 'Circles of Cultural Life' for CI-Assessment The framework approaches culture as a primary domain of social life, alongside ecology, economics and politics. Key themes include cultural vitality, resilience and sustainability	The key themes include cultural values, heritage resources, community wellness, and the involvement of local communities, especially marginalized groups like women and youth. The process focuses on cultural change, vulnerability, resilience, and how these elements can be monitored and respected during development	Cultural and creative industries, local communities, social innovation, place-based development, heritage and identity
	Entity affected		Local communities	Local communities	Local communities and places, particularly Aboriginal groups, populations vulnerable to cultural changes due to development and their places	Local communities, creative professionals, cultural organizations

Appendix (continued)

1	2	3	4	5
Methodology & Data Collection Tools	Variables / Set of Indicators (if available) Cultural Life: Verbal expressions, musical expressions, performative expressions, visual expressions, religions and ritual ceremonies, cultural practices, beliefs and value systems Cultural Institutions and Organizations: Political organizations, social organizations, social networks, power relations and decision making structures Cultural Resources and Infrastructure: Indigenous knowledge systems, historic documents, systems of natural resources use, traditional architecture, historic and cultural sites	Identity and Engagement, Creativity and Recreation, Memory and Projection, Beliefs and Ideas, Gender and Generations, Enquiry and Learning, and Wellbeing and Health	1. Heritage and Physical Cultural Resources (archaeological sites and heritage buildings) 2. Cultural Landscapes and Spiritual Sites (traditional place names and meanings of landscapes) 3. Traditional Knowledge (hunting, fishing, trapping, and land-based practices essential to cultural identity) 4. Local Cultural Values 5. Change in Social Structures (including language) 6. Well-being and health	Number of CCI enterprises, employment levels, turnover, business survival rates, community participation, social inclusion, networks and collaborations, cultural identity, distribution of CCI activities in non-urban areas, accessibility to cultural infrastructure, new business models, digital adoption, cross-sector collaborations, ecological awareness in CCI, use of local resources, resilience of rural/remote areas, integration of CCI in regional development strategies, level of support from local/national government, contribution of CCI to quality of life, local pride, mental and social wellbeing
	What methodological approaches does it use? (i.e. surveys, cultural mapping, etc.) Focus groups, oral histories and storytelling, participant observation and interviews, analysis of policy documents and census data	Surveys, public engagement feedback, participatory evaluations, statistical measures related to cultural participation, comparative analysis between soft and hard data	Traditional land use studies, traditional ecological knowledge studies, physical anthropology and archaeology studies, oral histories, linguistic and kinship studies, place name research and ethnographic studies, commemoration studies, land use planning, focus groups, interviews, analysis of statistical data, community wellness surveys	Case studies in non-urban regions, participatory action research (PAR), stakeholder workshops and co-creation lab, interviews and focus groups with cultural and creative workers, policymakers, local communities, surveys on cultural and creative industries (CCI) needs and impacts, mapping of CCI ecosystems and networks, policy analysis and benchmarking