IN SITU place-based **innovation** of **cultural and creative** industries in **non-urban** areas

Deliverable 3.4 (D3.4)
Toolkit for a Lab-based Approach in Non-Urban Areas

Work package WP3 – Place-based planning: Assessing needs, monitoring, supporting and benchmarking of CCIs
Version 1.0

Revision History

Author Name, Partner short name	Description	Date
Mark Justin Rainey (UG)	Draft 1	17.06.2025
Antonija Letinic (KNF), Pilar Damião de Medeiros (UAc), Susan Luckman (University of South Australia)	Review and comments	23.06.2025
Mark Rainey (UG)	Draft 2	26.06.2025
Nancy Duxbury and Paola Di Nunzio (CES)	Review and finalisation	30.06.2025

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List of contents

List of figures

Executive Summary

This Toolkit (Deliverable 3.4) offers guidance for Lab-based research and activities in non-urban areas. It was written by the University of Galway and includes contributions from all IN SITU Lab partners. The guidance was developed through individual interviews and discussions with the IN SITU Labs in April and May 2025 as well as an in-person collaborative workshop in Borganes, Iceland, held on June 2, 2025.

The Toolkit is divided into three stages: **Understanding**, **Insight** and **Actions. Understanding** provides an overview of the foundational concepts behind Lab-based approaches including asking 'What is a Lab?' as well as offering definitions of creative and cultural ecosystems, non-urban and place-based development. **Insight** outlines the Cultural Mapping programme undertaken by the IN SITU Labs which serves as an example of the diverse methods Labs can utilise. **Actions** highlights three key activities for Lab-based approaches to development: Participation, Networking and Methods. Each is accompanied by examples from the IN SITU Labs.

The three stages are followed by a set of Guiding Principles for Lab-based approaches to development. Each principle is accompanied by a definition and advice for its implementation. These Principles are:

- **Meaning.** Meaning is providing value to participants.
- **Collaboration.** Collaboration involves bringing together a range of stakeholders through a variety of activities in order to create shared understandings of a region and its future development.
- **Presence.** Being present means being embedded in a place and the creative ecosystem within it.
- **Experimentation.** Experimentation means deploying inventive research methods that not only describe and diagnose the creative ecosystems of a region, but also participate in their making and enhancement.

To operationalise the insights of this Toolkit, it also includes preparation worksheets for Lab activities. These cover stakeholder identification and mapping, identifying areas of activity, venues and methods of activity as well as communication strategies.

1. Introduction

1.1 About IN SITU

IN SITU: Place-based innovation of cultural and creative industries in non-urban areas is a four year Horizon Europe project that combines research and experimental actions to advance the innovation related practices, capacities and potentials of Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) based in non-urban areas of Europe. It aims to recognise the social and economic contributions of CCIs in peripheral regions and elaborate on the role the sector plays in local development. This involves assessing the barriers and opportunities facing creative practitioners in non-urban areas as well as identifying needs and building on strengths. A core feature of the project is the work being carried out by the six IN SITU Labs. The Labs serve as hubs for collaboration, networking and analysis, linking creative practice to issues surrounding local development. Ultimately, the IN SITU project is bearing witness to a paradigm shift in how we imagine and understand peripheral regions as sites of creativity and centres of cultural production. It is challenging established narratives that have confined non-urban areas to a passive role in relation to metropolitan centres and, through the work of the IN SITU Labs, is making way for new perspectives that recognise them as crucial contributors to social and economic development.

1.2 Toolkit aims and structure

This *Toolkit for a Lab-Based Approach in Non-Urban Areas* aims to develop an understanding of Lab-based research and activities in non-urban areas. Labs serve as 'third spaces' (Soja, 1996) that bring different voices together to identify local development challenges and opportunities while also building a shared understanding of the future. In particular, this toolkit explores the links between creative practice and local development. Grounded in community-engaged research (Mahoney et al., 2021), Labs serve as spaces of experimentation and collaboration where a variety of methods and participatory practices are used to develop new and deepened understandings of creative ecosystems in non-urban regions. These ecosystems are set of within specific and unique geographical contexts and Labs gather a diverse range of stakeholders in order to diagnose, assess and strategise for the future. This toolkit provides information, resources and tools for Lab-based approaches to development in order for researchers and practitioners to refine and reflect on their activities and co-create a shared vision for their region.

The toolkit draws on the work being carried out by the Horizon Europe IN SITU project that explores the innovative potential of the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs) in shaping non-urban areas of Europe. Using multiple methods of research and engagement across six different Lab regions, IN SITU provides a basis through which similar projects can adopt and refine Lab-based practices. Labs are geographically embedded and diverse in their organisational structures, locations and stakeholder needs. Lab-based approaches to development are highly flexible, adaptable and contextualised yet also strive for comparability across different regions. This toolkit does not provide a definite

programme of activity for Lab-based work. Instead it provides information, guidelines and examples based on the activities and learnings of the IN SITU project. It also offers a set of core principles for Lab-based approaches to development as well as preparatory worksheets for planning Lab activities.

The toolkit offers the following:

- An understanding of Lab-based approaches and methods;
- An understanding of creative ecosystems;
- An understanding of non-urban areas and place-based development;
- Recommendations and examples for co-production and participation;
- Recommendations and examples for building, nurturing and enhancing networks;
- Recommendations and examples for deploying effective research and engagement methods;
- A set of guiding principles for Lab-based approaches to development; and
- A set of preparatory worksheets for Lab-based activities.

This toolkit was informed by interviews and workshops with partners in the six IN SITU Lab regions: West Region, Iceland; Azores, Portugal; Western coastal region, Ireland; Rauma and Eurajoki, West Coast and Baltic Sea Archipelago, Finland; Valmiera County, Latvia; and Šibenik-Knin County, Croatia.

1.3 How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is aimed at organisations, groups, collectives, researchers and creative practitioners who want to adopt a Lab-based approach to local development in non-urban areas. However, anyone involved in community-engaged research, particularly within the creative and cultural industries, should find it useful.

This toolkit is divided into four sections: Understanding, Insight, Actions and Guiding Principles. These are followed by a set of preparatory worksheets for planning Lab work.

Understanding – This section explores the foundational concepts and questions of Lab-based approaches to development. These includes asking 'What is a Lab?' as well as offering definitions of creative and cultural ecosystems, non-urban and place-based development.

Insight –This section provides an overview of the multifaceted Cultural Mapping exercise carried out by the IN SITU Labs. It serves as an example of the diverse methods Labs can employ in relation to local development and a basis for the actions, examples and principles offered in the rest of the toolkit.

Actions – This section breaks Lab-based approaches to development down into three key activities: Participation, Networking and Methods. Each activity is outlined and described, utilising a set of

related concepts. Examples from the IN SITU project are used to provide real-world illustrations of these activities.

Guiding principles – This section provides a set of four guiding principles for Lab-based research. These principles are *collaboration, meaning, experimentation* and *presence*. Each is accompanied by a definition and advice and tips for their implementation.

Preparatory worksheets – The final section provides preparatory worksheets for planning Lab work. They cover the topics of identifying stakeholders, communication, spaces and activities.

2. Stage 1: Understanding

2.1 What are Labs?

Labs are collaborative spaces tasked with developing conceptual and practical tools to engage with, and occasionally steer, local change and development (Collins et al., 2021; Strohmayer et al., 2022). They are hubs for networking and capacity-building while also providing living descriptions and grounded analysis of the creative and cultural ecosystems in their area, linking creative practice to issues of local development. Labs deploy collaborative, multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral approaches to local issues and involve a variety of stakeholders, including creative practitioners, in their activities. Labs can vary in their organisational structures, but are typically attached to an 'anchor institution' (Harris & Holley, 2016; Harris, 2019). In the IN SITU project, for example, most Labs are connected to higher education institutions or cultural foundations. Labs may also be connected to a local authority or emerge from a grassroots network of cultural and community organisations. They use a range of qualitative, quantitative and participatory methods to assess and inform local change and engage with civil society, policymakers, creative practitioners and the public in all their variety. This can include cultural mapping exercises, workshops, forums, interviews, events, future studies activities, creative interventions and training, among many other things. Community-engaged research is at the heart of this practice. This means focusing on local causes and challenges as well as creating spaces for communities, organisations, institutions and individuals to work in collaboration with researchers. In this respect, Labs can be considered experimental spaces as they use inventive (Lury & Wakefield, 2012) and adaptive research methods and present results in locally relevant and resonant ways.

When we talk about Labs, we are talking about spaces of collaboration and knowledge sharing. They bring together a range of voices with sometimes differing and sometimes overlapping interests to create a shared understanding of a place. Labs are 'network weavers' (Krebs & June, 2002; Webb, 2010; Webb et al., 2018), serving as sites of exchange between different actors within a locale, and

facilitating co-production in the service of making better and more sustainable places. Labs are also hybrid entities, operating at the interface between anchor institutions and the community, offering an open, generative and productive relation between the two. In all of this, it should also be recognised that Labs are both fluid and fragile entities that require adaptability, flexibility, time, resources, sustained inter-personal and inter-organisational relationships, trust and meaningful outputs in order to achieve longevity and success.

Here are some key capacities for Labs:

- *Access to space to host activities*. Labs do not need to use the same space for every activity, but spaces need to be appropriate for the activity, whether a workshop, forum or event;
- *Access to digital platforms to host online activities*. This can include video conferencing platforms and collaborative online platforms;
- *Members with the skills to engage different stakeholders and diverse communities*, lead activities and communicate Lab actions through different media; and
- *Members with research skills to collate, analyse and present data*.

2.2 Creative and cultural ecosystems

Labs work within, as well as inquire into, creative and cultural ecosystems. Creative and cultural ecosystems are adaptive networks composed of different cultural and creative actors and institutions within a geographical area. These actors may include organisations, education institutions, cultural institutions, collectives, individual practitioners and producers, events, festivals, venues and spaces while also encompassing local and regional authorities and policymakers at all levels, among others. Importantly, the people and organisations that form an ecosystem contribute to a vibrant environment that supports creative activities, intangible community value and place identity. Each creative and cultural ecosystem is unique, with particular networks of actors intertwined within a geographical context with its own histories, trajectories and intensities. A key component of such an ecosystem are CCIs, which are understood as enterprises and activities that produce and disseminate artistic and creative products, contribute to the economy and make use of cultural assets. This can include more traditional forms of artistic creation as well as new practices that emphasise innovation and the use of digital technologies in the production and distribution process. Importantly, the notion of a creative and cultural ecosystem, which includes CCIs, places emphasis on the social dimension of arts and culture, particularly in their role in creating and shaping belonging, social cohesion and place-identity. Labs can be a key node in such an ecosystem as they not only offer a space of reflection, but also to identify needs and opportunities, building towards a shared vision for the future.

2.3 What is the non-urban?

Non-urban areas include rural, remote territories and peripheral locations as well as towns, villages and small cities that may serve as regional hubs for broader territories. Located outside and beyond metropolitan centres, such areas are in many ways defined simply in opposition to the 'urban' of large cities. Yet, different approaches can further define the non-urban. For example, Eurostat – the statistical office of the European Union – uses NUTS [Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics] to gather economic, social and other data at various geographical levels. NUTS3 classification focuses on small regions which are divided into the 'predominantly urban', where less that 20% of the population is living in rural areas; the 'intermediate', where between 20% and 50% of the population is living in rural areas; and the 'predominantly rural', where more than 50% of the population is living in rural areas (Eurostat, 2019). Within the IN SITU project, the non-urban includes both 'intermediate' and 'predominantly rural' areas.

Yet while population density and location in relation to metropolitan centres offer insight into the non-urban, it can also be approached through more social and qualitative characteristics. In public discourse, the non-urban is often linked to conceptions of 'the countryside', the 'outdoors', remoteness and peripherality. This can easily slip into notions of social isolation and rigidity. Still, the great diversity within the non-urban – from rural hinterlands to regional towns and small cities – opens out to a wide variety of experiences, geographical contexts, social conditions, histories and futures. In the context of creative and cultural ecosystems this expanded perspective matters as it does not limit non-urban creativity to heritage sites or traditional forms of cultural expression, but extends out to contemporary and innovative creative practices in unique geographical settings.

2.4 Place-based development

Place-based development advocates for respecting the nuances of a place when devising policies and actions to support its development. It champions agency at a local level and constitutes a movement away from a 'one-size fits all' approach to development (Barca, 2019). This shift towards a spatially aware approach involves an acknowledgement that geographical context matters and this is understood in a multidimensional sense to include social, cultural, political and institutional specificities (Pugalis & Bentley, 2014; Barca, 2019). This includes the recognition that non-urban areas, in particular, have their own unique needs and potential. Development initiatives and strategies should involve input from a variety of non-urban stakeholders in order to inform a shared vision of the future. Democratic experimentalism and new participatory approaches at a local level are therefore a key aspect of place-based development (see Sabel & Zeitlin, 2012). Place-based development is also tied to the notion that place is socially constructed and related to feelings, emotions, identity, belonging and imagination (Cresswell, 2014). In other words, place is imbued with values and these values resonate with, and emerge from, the people who live, work or regularly visit an area. Such values offer a basis for a shared vision of what a place means and how it can and should

change. Creative and cultural ecosystems can contribute to these values through creative practice and expression, whether utilising traditional or contemporary forms. At the same time, the values and environment of a place can shape the creative and cultural expressions within it. Lab-based approaches to development must take into account place-based values while also helping to identify and nourish them, thereby highlighting the important bonds between people and place within local development initiatives and actions.

3. Stage 2: Insight

3.1 Cultural mapping

In 2023, the IN SITU project initiated a multifaceted cultural mapping exercise across its six Lab regions. Cultural Mapping is a field of interdisciplinary research and a methodological tool in community development and planning that aims to make visible the ways in which creative practices and cultural assets, both tangible and intangible, form meaningful places (Duxbury et al., 2015). It is both a means of inquiry into a place and a platform for citizen engagement in the making and remaking of place. Within the IN SITU project the cultural mapping programme not only offered descriptions of the six regions and the creative ecosystems within them, but also provided a basis for re-orienting understandings of these places and therefore opportunities for positive change and transformation. The exercise took shape as four different activities that combined qualitative and quantitative research methods with community-engaged research practices, all of which were adapted for the local context of each Lab.

Figure 1. IN SITU cultural mapping exercise

3.1.1 Inventories

An inventory of CCIs was created in each region as well as an inventory of events, festivals and organisations. The former was based on NACE [Nomenclature des Activites economiques dans la Communauts Europeenne] coding, a pan-European classification system of economic activities through which CCIs could be classified as cultural, creative and craft industries. The second was an inventory of creative and cultural activities and supporting organisations in each region. Together, these inventories provided captured the economic strengths and make-up of the creative and cultural ecosystem in each region, providing a base for assessing and strategising for the future. Gathered primarily from national data sources, in many instances this was the first time such regionally specific data had been collected.

3.1.2 Focus groups

A series of workshops and focus groups were held across the six regions with creative practitioners and participants from local governance, industry and the social-cultural fields. The workshops were intended to offer a space for reflection on the creative and cultural ecosystem of each region, including its strengths and weaknesses. It was also a space imagine the future and identify the potential within each ecosystem.

Figure 2. Cultural mapping – focus group in the IN SITU Lab of Rauma and Eurajoki, West Coast and Baltic Sea Archipelago, Finland (Rauma)

3.1.3 Speak Outs

Speak Outs are public forums where local residents can present issues on local development and discuss the future of their areas. They are spaces where a diverse range of voices can be heard. In the IN SITU project, the Speak Outs connected local development to creative practice as the feedback from the forums was used to select two case studies in each region. These were creative and cultural projects that responded to issues that were identified.

Figure 3. Speak Out session in the IN SITU Lab of the Azores, Portugal (Ponta Delgada)

3.1.4 Horizontal Networks

The Horizontal Networks are small groupings of creative practitioners, community organisers, policymakers and educators who could reflect on the data gathered in the cultural mapping activities, offering insight from outside the Lab but from within the creative and cultural ecosystem.

Figure 4. Horizontal Network meeting in the IN SITU Lab of Valmiera County, Latvia (Valmiera)

4. Stage 3: Actions

4.1 Participation

Lab-based approaches to development are dependent on meaningful engagement from a range of participants, whether community members, institutions or organisations. This not only means that participants find value in being involved, but also that they work in collaboration with each other and the Lab to create shared understandings of a place and the creative ecosystem within it. Labs are spaces of **co-production** as they bring together a variety of voices with sometimes overlapping and sometimes differing visions within a set of activities with a common purpose. Appreciating the needs and aspirations of all participants is vital for encouraging participation.

This requires, as much as possible, a connection to the place and embeddedness within the community. Most importantly, it requires listening to the voices within it. Lab activities should include, at the earliest stage, a space to articulate needs, concerns and hopes whether through forums, workshops, focus groups or other methods. As with any community-engaged research, it is imperative to **balance** the timelines and objectives of a project with the expectations and availabilities of potential participants. In other words, while the internal timeline and logic of a project may not be relevant to participants, activities can still be developed in a way that are meaningful and productive for those joining in. Project objectives should be articulated at an early stage and throughout activities. When a set of activities are taking place over time that involve new or returning participants, it is important to indicate the relation and progression between these activities. It is also vital to express appreciation for the valuable input that participants have made and will continue to make in the project.

People lead busy lives. Their time is valuable. Building and maintaining **trust** within the Lab between participants as well as creating **value** for participants is essential. Trust can emerge from existing personal and professional relations, including previous projects, but also from participants viewing activities as meaningful, relevant and beneficial for them. Value can be found by participants in simply being heard and listened to, sharing ideas and concerns with others and opportunities for networking with others (see section 4.2). It can also be found in sharing project findings, which can be used as a basis for action, strategising and policymaking.

It is also important to be present in the community and meet people where they are. This is particularly the case in non-urban areas, where there may be long distances between communities and people. Making the Lab 'present' may mean repeating project activities in different locations. It may also mean Lab members attending events and activities outside the project, yet inside the region. It may also mean hosting some activities online so that participants do not have to commute or journey to a single location. Among the IN SITU Labs, both online and offline activities took place, but stress was always placed on the importance of being physically present as much as possible, meeting people and going to them. Being present and building trust take time, but are essential pillars that can spill out and bring

further participants into the project. Presence can also be gained through effective use of digital and established media, including announcements, press releases for activities and events and media interviews.

4.1.1 Example: Speak Out sessions in the IN SITU Lab of the Western coastal region, Ireland

The western coastal region consists of County Galway, County Mayo and County Roscommon on the Atlantic-facing edge of Ireland. The total population of the three Counties is 450,000 with Galway being the largest city with a population of 80,000. The region is known for its natural beauty, with the Wild Atlantic Way and Connemara attracting international visitors. The region also has an established cultural sector, particularly around traditional and contemporary music, theatre and performance as well as a significant cluster of film and television production companies. It also has a high population of students who attend higher education institutions in Galway City, including the University of Galway and Atlantic Technical University. In 2023, UrbanLab Galway hosted two Speak Outs where local residents could present key issues about their area and discuss its future. The first was held in the historic Druid Theatre in the centre of Galway City. There were 7 speakers with over 40 people in attendance. The second was held in Gort, a small town of 2,500 people. There were 6 speakers and over 20 people attending. The local development issues discussed included transport and infrastructure, sustainable futures, engaging young people and the importance of community organising.

The Lab used a variety of media to advertise the Speak Outs. This included regular posts on multiple social media accounts and press releases to local media outlets which led to articles in a local paper and live interviews on a local radio station. The Lab also contacted potential participants directly via email.

Figure 5. Speak Out session in the IN SITU Western coastal region, Ireland (Galway)

4.1.2 Example: Focus Group sessions in the IN SITU Lab of the West Region, Iceland

The West Region of Iceland is on the northern periphery of Europe and is an area defined by its unique natural landscape with various beaches, glaciers, geothermal sites, wetlands and mountains. There are 16,700 inhabitants across 10 municipalities. In 2023, the IN SITU Lab in the West Region hosted six mini focus groups across the locality in order to gain an understanding of its creative and cultural ecosystem. These ranged in size from two to four participants and were held in cultural and community spaces in different towns. It was important for the Lab to meet people where they were in order to gain clearer insights into the perspectives of residents and creative practitioners and their sense of local culture. Going to people also enhanced the Lab's appreciation of the unique characteristics of each locale as well as the diverse attitudes of the people there. The series of in-person meetings also built trust between researchers and participants and were followed up by online meetings and interviews. Researchers were also able to document important cultural and heritage sites in the region. Importantly, for this Lab community-engaged research emphasises respect for and interest in the community and its members. This necessitates direct engagement between the

researchers and participants on-site, rather than exclusive reliance on digital communication. Ideally, personal interactions should precede digital exchanges, allowing for stronger rapport and more varied data collection.

Figure 6. Cultural mapping – focus group session in the IN SITU Lab of the West Region, Iceland (Borganes)
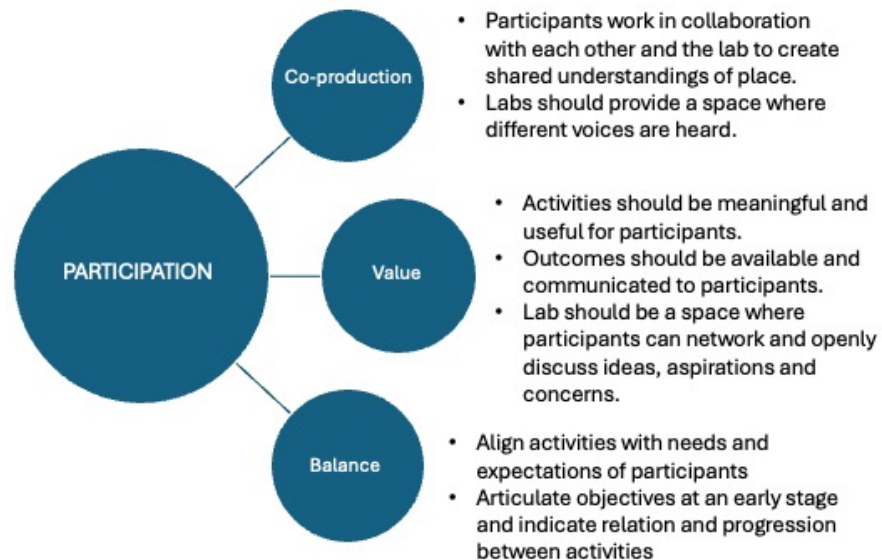
Figure 7. Participation principles

4.2 Networking

Labs can serve an important role as '**network weavers**' within a creative ecosystem as they facilitate the coming together of different stakeholders and knowledge sharing between them. In this respect, through their activities, Labs can function as a bridge between and across creative practitioners, policymakers and wider civil society, all of whom play a role in shaping creative and cultural ecosystems and informing place-based development. Network weaving does not mean attempting to create relations from scratch or in a top-down fashion. Rather this 'weaving' can involve nurturing and enhancing existing networks between people or creating a space where they can emerge organically. Network weaving is essential to effective collaboration and like in the participation section above, the ability to bring people together is built on trust and presence and takes time and effort.

Networks can be founded on and developed from common experiences, goals and actions as well as everyday proximities, particularly in small non-urban areas. Through their activities, Labs can serve as a space to refine common needs, concerns and opportunities and a space to articulate pathways for transformative change. Opportunities for networking can be an important motivation for people to take part in a Lab activity, particularly when they become spaces for knowledge sharing between participants and between the Lab and the participants. It is essential to remember that Labs are not separate from networks just as they are not outside their creative and cultural ecosystem. Rather they are embedded within them and through their activities they can serve as a key node, strengthening

and supplementing the relations between different stakeholders. As network weavers, Labs can also serve as advocates for creative practitioners particularly in relation to cultural and creative policymakers and as spaces to put forward the voices and ideas of community members in relation to local development

4.2.1 Example: Horizontal Network session in the IN SITU Lab of the Azores, Portugal

The Azores is an autonomous region of Portugal located 1500 km from the European mainland. It is a volcanic archipelago that is comprised of nine islands. From the outset of the project, the Azores Lab aimed to cultivate a culture of participation, positioning creative practitioners and other residents as active contributors to long-term cultural and creative transformation. A particularly important activity was the Horizontal Networks. These were meetings that aimed to foster an understanding of local development and the creative and cultural ecosystem through discussions based on data gathered by the IN SITU project. They served as a platform to bring people from different sectors together who seldom met each other. These included participants from local and regional governance, public and private cultural institutions, educators, and cultural and creative practitioners. The Horizontal Networks offered a safe space of collaboration to discuss local policies, practices and development processes and helped to bridge the gap between policymakers and creative practitioners. For the Lab, it was important to give participants from the creative and cultural sector a voice and an opportunity to express themselves. Through discussion with others, shared understandings and shared problems can emerge.

Figure 8. Horizontal Network meeting in the IN SITU Lab of the Azores, Portugal (Ponta Delgada)

4.2.2 Example: International conference in the IN SITU Lab of Šibenik-Knin County, Croatia

Šibenik-Knin is located on the Southern European periphery and is one of 21 counties in Croatia. It has a population of 109,000 with Šibenik being the largest city with 44,275 inhabitants. The region can be geographically and socially divided into its coastal and continental areas. The coastal region includes 285 islands and is popular with seasonal tourists. In the former Yugoslavia, Šibenik-Knin was an industrial and military centre for the region. However, it was devastated during the Croatian War of Independence and has not recovered its former prominence. There are major historical sites in Šibenik-Knin, including the St. Michael's Fortress and St. John's Fortress. In 2016, the organisation Fortress of Culture was established to manage this infrastructure and use the site as a centre for creativity and culture. It also manages the House of Arts Arsen, a multi-purpose arts venue. In 2024, these three sites were host to the IN SITU Horizons of Sustainability Conference, which was hosted by the Šibenik-Knin Lab. Not only did the conference bring an international audience to Šibenik, it provided a platform for the perspectives of creative and cultural practitioners from the region through programmed interviews and panel discussions. These encounters with a wider audience enabled them

to further articulate a common understanding of the creative ecosystem of Šibenik-Knin and its future development, building on the work undertaken by the Lab during the cultural mapping programme.

Figure 9. Panel discussion with creative practitioners from Šibenik at the IN SITU Horizons of Sustainability Conference, Šibenik-Knin, Croatia, 25 September 2025
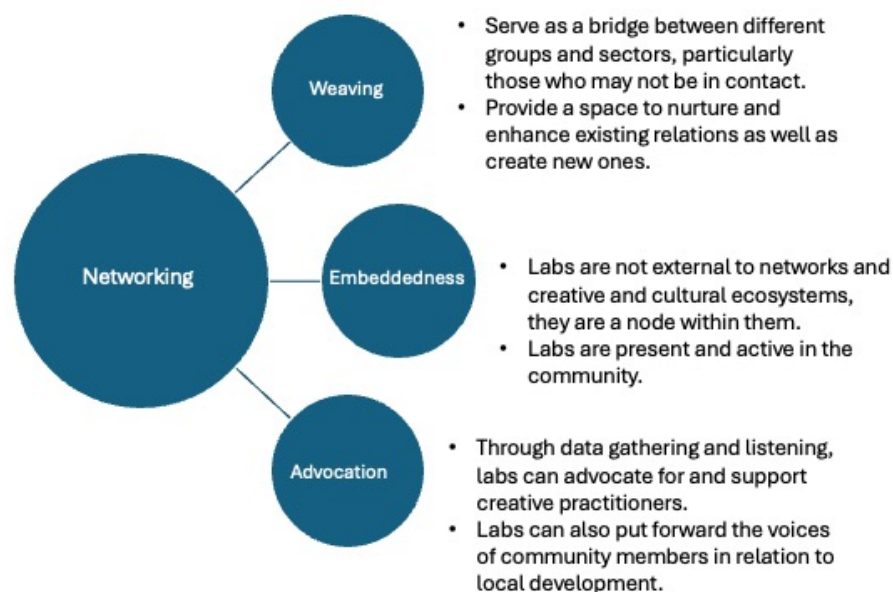
Figure 10. Networking principles

4.3 Methods

At their best, Labs are spaces that bring different actors together to diagnose and assess creative and cultural ecosystems and initiate and prototype place-based change (Collins et al., 2021; Strohmayer et al., 2022). Effective research and participatory methods are essential to achieving these actions. Labs should strive to be 'inventive' (Lury & Wakefield, 2012) in their approach. Being 'inventive' does not simply mean deploying new or novel methods (although it may include this) but, rather, it means that Lab-based practices not only describe and diagnose social worlds and ecosystems, they also participate in their making and enhancement. Labs are spaces for generating new and deeper understandings of an area and, through collaboration, offering pathways for transformative change. This can be through more established methods, such as interviews and focus groups, or more imaginative activities, such as collaborative mapping and future studies exercises. Inventive methods draw on different disciplines and traditions and can also be both quantitative and qualitative. For example, the creation of inventories of the 'Creative and Cultural Industries' and 'Events, Festivals and Organisations' in each IN SITU Lab region provided fresh insight on the economic and social make-up of the sector and its economic and social roles in each region. Through the use of inventive methods, Labs can become effective spaces of locally resonant **experimentation** in pursuit of place-based change. Such experimentation can be tactical, through the use of bespoke participatory methods and creative interventions in the area, and vernacular, drawing on existing cultural practices and ongoing, grassroots responses to local development issues.

4.3.1 Example: Emotional mapping in the IN SITU Lab of Rauma and Eurajoki, Finland

The Rauma, Eurajoki, West Coast and Baltic Sea Archipelago region in Western Finland is a landscape of fields, forests and coastal islands. The small city of Rauma has a population of 40,000 and its Old Town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Eurajoki has a population of 9,300 and is home to the Olkiluoto nuclear power plant and Onkalo spent nuclear fuel repository. In 2023, the IN SITU Lab in Finland carried out a series of emotional mapping workshops as part of the cultural mapping programme. The workshops were run with local residents who worked with large maps of the Eurajoki or Rauma areas, discussing local sites and places in terms of the feelings, emotions and values associated with them. Out of this, a shared understanding of important places in the landscape emerged. During the mapping, participants were invited to use stickers with specifically designed emoticons and symbols to designate tangible and intangible place-based values. They could also invent their own types of emotions and values and mark them on white empty stickers. Participants were asked to describe the stories behind stickers and wrote these stories on post-its and attached them to the map next to stickers. This collaborative emotional mapping focused participants' attention on the spatial and geographical dimensions of the area, the *locale*, and drove thinking about specific places. It also legitimated an intimate place-based experience as valuable and worthy discussion. In the overall discussion following the mapping, moderators invited people to think about local development issues and whether these solutions could involve creative and cultural practices.

Figure 11. Emotional mapping in the IN SITU Lab of Rauma and Eurajoki, Finland (Rauma)

4.3.2 Example: Creative and cultural industry inventories in the IN SITU Lab of Valmiera County, Latvia

Valmiera is a historic inland region in Latvia that borders Estonia. Valmiera City, with a population of 25,000, has long been recognised for its strong industrial base and this has left little space for cultural narratives to emerge. As part of the IN SITU project's cultural mapping programme, the Valmiera Lab used NACE codes to gather data on the region's CCIs. According to this coding, Valmiera Glass, despite identifying as an industrial manufacturer, was revealed to be part of the creative and cultural industries. This marked a perspective shift about the region as a space of design, innovation and creative potential. In this way, the cultural mapping process, through the gathering of economic data, made culture more visible. Via workshops, presentations, and informal exchanges, the Valmiera Lab consistently shared these findings with municipal policymakers. Over time, the narrative of Valmiera as a cultural region began to take root. Today, local policymakers acknowledge that this redefinition has shifted how they see and speak about the city. Valmiera is now increasingly referred to not just as an industrial centre, but as a cultural and creative city. This new framing has opened doors for cross-sector collaboration, with Valmiera Glass participating in cultural initiatives and engaging the community in unexpected ways.

Figure 12. Presentation of creative and cultural industry inventories in the IN SITU Lab of Valmiera County, Latvia (Valmiera)
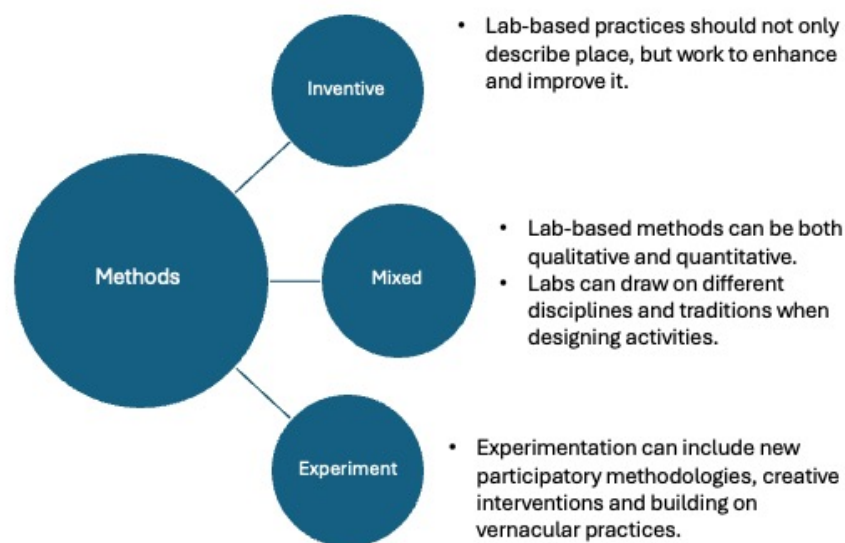
Figure 13. Methods principles

5. Guiding principles

Based on individual interviews with the IN SITU Labs and a collaborative workshop in Borganes, Iceland, held on June 2, 2025, four guiding principles for Lab-based approaches to development were identified. These are: **meaning**, **collaboration**, **presence** and **experimentation**.
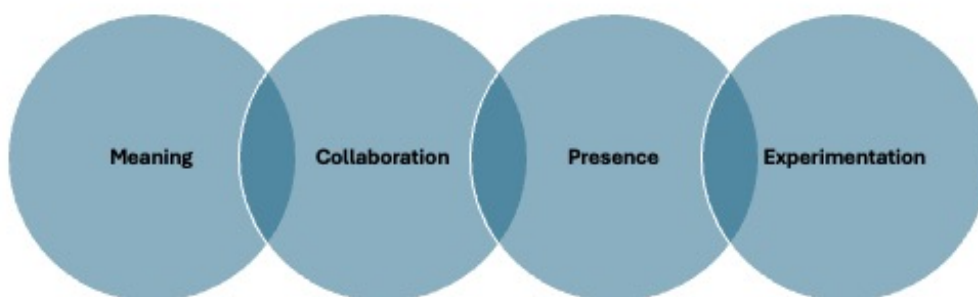

Figure 14. Guiding principles

5.1 Meaning

Meaning is providing value to participants. This value can be as simple as offering a space for participants to be listened to and heard as well as an opportunity to network with other creative and cultural practitioners or people with shared experiences, concerns and aspirations. Meaning can also be given through Lab activities and practices that offer new understandings and perspectives on a place and the creative and cultural ecosystem within it. Meaning is providing data and information that can be used as a basis for strategising and advocating for creative practitioners and positive local change.

Advice from the IN SITU Labs:

a. From the beginning of a project, carry out a needs analysis of the community you are working with;
b. Look at your Lab's work as a service you are providing to the community.

5.2 Collaboration

An effective Lab brings a range of stakeholders together through a variety of activities that engage with and occasionally steer local change and development. Collaboration means collectively identifying needs and issues, opportunities and aspirations and using these to co-create a vision for the future. In this respect, Labs function as network weavers within a place and its creative ecosystem, connecting different groups, institutions and individuals together. Such collaborations can also lead to new insights and a shared understanding of a place.

Advice from IN SITU Labs:

a. It can be useful to undertake an initial mapping of creative actors and practitioners in the region before engaging in activities. This can help identify key stakeholders and potential participants;
b. Coordinate activities so that they do not place burdens on the participants, but rather create a sense of progression towards common objectives and goals.

5.3 Presence

Being present means being embedded in a place and the creative ecosystem within it. It means going to communities and meeting people where they are and hosting activities in different locations. Being present is a basis for building trust and effective networking and collaboration. Yet presence also extends beyond the physical and includes being present in digital and established media, to communicate events, activities and promote Lab-based projects.

Advice from IN SITU Labs:

a. Meaningful engagement includes going to people and reaching out to people where they are – it means making personal connections, even knocking on doors;
b. Effective presence also means using digital and established media to announce events and activities and to communicate findings to a wider audience.

5.4 Experimentation

Experimentation means deploying research methods and participatory methods that are inventive but also locally appropriate. Inventive methods are not necessarily new or novel, but rather are methods that both describe and give account of a place and effect positive change within it. Experimentation can also involve programmed creative interventions in a place or building on existing grassroots actions.

Advice from IN SITU Labs:

a. Emphasise the purpose of the Lab activities and ensure that people see the results;
b. Keep telling the story of your findings. Keep repeating the key insights. Change will not begin with the first or second conversations but will take time.

6. Lab activities preparation worksheets

1. **Title of project**

2. **Project description** (3 or 4 sentences)

3. **Project aims and objectives** (List 2 or 3)

    1._____

    2._____

    3._____

4. Identifying stakeholders

Who are the key stakeholders involved in the project?

Name	Type (creative practitioner, cultural institutions, local & regional government, community organisation, etc.)	Role in creative ecosystem	Potential needs from and interests in project	Potential contributions to and resources for project	Contact

5. Stakeholder network diagram

    a. With your list of stakeholders, draw a network map.

    b. Include: Known collaborations, Shared audiences, Funding providers and recipients, etc.

    c. Consider: Where are connections strong? Where are they weak? Who is under-connected? What gaps and opportunities exist?

6. Lab activity areas

In what geographical areas do you want you Lab to be active? These can be towns, municipalities, counties, neighbourhoods etc.

1._____

2._____

3._____

4._____

5._____

7. Venues and spaces (in-person)

Name	Location	Venue type (seminar room, open room, theatre or lecture hall, etc.)	Capacity	Facilities and equipment (What equipment and facilities does the venue have? Can it host hybrid activities?)	Potential activity (How do you plan to use the space?)	Costs (What costs are associated with the space?)

8. Digital platforms

What online platforms do you plan to use for Lab activities?

Name	Type (co-working space, meetings, interviews)	Activity (interviews, focus groups, meetings, workshops, etc.)	Costs (Are there costs associated with the platform?)

9. Communication: Social media

What social media does your Lab plan to use to advertise activities gain an audience?

Name	Audience (community groups, public, creative practitioners, cultural sector, etc)	Communication goals (announcements, events, policy engagement, making connections, etc)	Content type (text, image, video, stories, etc.)	Post frequency

10. Communication: Established media

What established media does your Lab plan to use?

Name	Format (radio, newspaper, website, etc.)	Audience	Communication goals	Contact

11. Lab activities

Name	Type (workshop, interview, focus group, event, etc.)	Participants	Objectives (What is the purpose?)	Outcomes (What will be produced from the event?)	Equipment/materials (What equipment, materials, facilities are needed?)	Venue	Documentation (How will the activity and outputs be documented?)

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