



Funded by the European Union

# CULTURE MATTERS HERE.

Cultivating Creative Place-based Innovation  
in Non-urban Communities

11-13 MAY 2026  
VALMIERA • LATVIA

[insituculture.eu](http://insituculture.eu)



VALMIERA



# Table of Contents

WELCOME MESSAGE .....	4
OVERVIEW .....	5
About the IN SITU Project.....	5
What is the rationale behind IN SITU?.....	5
What are our objectives? .....	5
About the conference .....	6
Organising and scientific committees.....	6
PROGRAMME AT A GLANCE.....	8
DETAILED PROGRAMME .....	11
Day 1. Monday, 11 May 2026 .....	11
Day 2. Tuesday, 12 May 2026 .....	14
Day 3. Wednesday, 13 May 2026.....	18
CONFERENCE PRACTICAL INFORMATION .....	21
Venues and maps.....	21
Study visits .....	23
Transportation.....	27
Travelling to Valmiera.....	27
Public Transport in Valmiera.....	27
Bolt Services in Valmiera.....	28
STAYING IN VALMIERA FOR LONGER? .....	29
ABSTRACTS AND BIOS FROM CONCURRENT SESSIONS .....	30
Policy and planning frameworks for non-urban development .....	30
Inclusion, gender and intersectional agency.....	35
Heritage, local knowledge and collaborative stewardship.....	40

Interweaving agriculture, culture, and bioregional innovation.....	43
Living Traditions: Craft, music, local knowledge and sustainability.....	48
Place-based learning and living laboratories.....	52
Culture as core infrastructure: Health, employment, and civic resilience.....	59
Sustaining artistic presence and social cohesion.....	62
Narratives of place: Memory, senses, and intangible heritage.....	67
Technology, gaming, placemaking and rural innovation.....	72
Strategic agency: Funding, protecting, and collaborating rural cultural spaces.....	79
Social infrastructure and place-based rural strategies.....	82
<b>SURVIVAL KIT.....</b>	<b>85</b>

## Welcome message

Dear Participants,

The Latvian Academy of Culture, the Centre for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra, and the other IN SITU partners warmly welcome you to Valmiera, Latvia, and to the “Culture Matters Here. Cultivating Creative Place-based Innovation in Non-urban Communities” conference. The conference programme explores the diverse aspects of creative place-based innovation and the transformative power of the creative and cultural sector in forging more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable communities in rural and non-urban areas.

This document presents a brief overview of the IN SITU project, the detailed schedule of the conference, and some practical information helpful during your stay in Valmiera. We hope you enjoy the programme and feel free to give us feedback at any time.

Thank you for attending and being part of the conference!!

With kind regards,



**Ieva Zemīte**

Associate Professor at the Latvian Academy of Culture



**Nancy Duxbury**

Senior Researcher and Coordinator at the Centre for Social Studies

## Overview

### About the IN SITU Project

[IN SITU – Place-based Innovation of Cultural and Creative Industries in Non-urban Areas](#) is a four-year project (July 2022 to June 2026) 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 and rural areas of the EU. The IN SITU project consortium comprises 13 Full Partners from 12 countries, consisting of 11 research institutions, a European-wide CCIs network, and a national cultural foundation. A core defining aspect of IN SITU is the interlinking of research and practice through place-based IN SITU Labs – hubs for networking, training and capacity building, and monitoring case studies in six non-urban regions across Europe, located in Portugal, Ireland, Iceland, Finland, Latvia, and Croatia.

The project's scope includes cultural and creative industry enterprises, the arts, and heritage-related initiatives, which together form cultural and creative ecosystems within and across territories. Non-urban areas incorporate rural and remote locations as well as towns, villages, and small cities that may serve as regional hubs for broader territories.

### What is the rationale behind IN SITU?

The non-urban constituency of the cultural and creative sector has grown in visibility and significance over the last decade in Europe and internationally but is still vulnerable due to the lagging attention of research and policy to its needs, characteristics, and potential. In parallel, a small but growing body of research has been pointing to innovation taking place outside of cities, and emerging ideas and observations indicate that how innovation processes occur in rural areas differ from those in cities.

### What are our objectives?

The IN SITU project aims to better understand the forms, processes, and governance needs of cultural and creative organisations, enterprises, and other cultural workers located in non-urban areas of Europe and to advance their ability to act as drivers of innovation, competitiveness, and sustainability for the locales in which they live and work. Involving both Europe-wide research and place-based experimentation, we aim to provide an in-depth knowledge of the direct and indirect effects, cross-sectoral connections and spillovers, innovative strategies and systems, and the needs of cultural and creative practitioners in non-urban areas. With these as background, the project has been generating new empirical and conceptual insights of value to academics, CCIs, and policymakers. Overall, we aim to contribute to a more informed and enabled future for cultural and creative practitioners based in non-urban areas.

*If you wish to stay up-to-date about IN SITU activities, please follow our social media (we are on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#)) and/or subscribe to our Newsletter through our website – <https://insituculture.eu/> (at the bottom of the page).*

*You are also encouraged to join the EU Rural Pact Community Group on [“Culture and Creativity in Rural Areas”](#)*

## About the conference

The IN SITU Final Conference, “Culture Matters Here. Cultivating Creative Place-based Innovation in Non-urban Communities,” is held in Valmiera, Latvia, from 11 to 13 May 2026. The conference is a dynamic forum for exploring cutting-edge research and practices in place-based innovation and creativity of the cultural and creative industries in non-metropolitan areas. It is a space for networking and knowledge sharing among researchers from an array of disciplines and practitioners pioneering innovative place- and culture-based initiatives. The event aims to be a collective declaration – Culture Matters Here.

The conference aims to be a catalyst for networking, exchange, and knowledge-building among diverse participants and across nations and territories, furthering understanding of the issues and opportunities for rural creative work, and contributing to a more supportive environment for cultural and creative actors in non-urban areas. Three overarching themes inspire and guide our discussions:

- Strengthening cultural and creative practice and place-based innovation.
- Fostering cross-sectoral collaboration and partnerships for local benefit.
- Advancing planning and policy frameworks for creative work in non-urban areas.

We welcome contributors from 26 different countries, including Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Serbia, Spain, The Netherlands, UK, and USA.

All presentations offer original contributions to the vital topic of place-based innovation and the transformative power of the creative and cultural sector in forging more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable communities in rural and non-urban areas. We will also share insights from our research, highlight key project results, and look ahead to future trajectories. Additionally, the event will host the premiere of the IN SITU documentary, offering an inside look at our Labs and case studies.

This conference is co-organised by the Latvian Academy of Culture and the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra in cooperation with the European Network of Cultural Centres, Culture Action Europe, and all the IN SITU project partners, and in conjunction with our local associates, Valmiera County Municipality and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences. The IN SITU project receives support from the European Union’s Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme (Grant Agreement no. 101061747).

## Organising and scientific committees

### Organising committee members

- **Ilona Asare**, Latvian Academy of Culture, Latvia
- **Daiga Bokuma**, Latvian Academy of Culture, Latvia
- **Laura Brutane**, Latvian Academy of Culture, Latvia
- **Ieva Zemite**, Latvian Academy of Culture, Latvia
- **Maria Batle**, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal
- **Nancy Duxbury**, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal
- **Paola Di Nunzio**, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal
- **Sílvia Silva**, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal

- **Michaela Charisi**, European Network of Cultural Centres, Belgium
- **Natalie Giorgadze**, Culture Action Europe, Belgium

#### **Scientific committee members**

- **Bergsveinn Þórsson**, Bifröst University, Iceland
- **Einar Hreinsson**, Bifröst University, Iceland
- **Nancy Duxbury**, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal
- **Sílvia Ferreira**, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal
- **Hugo Pinto**, Faculty of Economics, University of Algarve & Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal
- **Piotr Michalowski**, European Network of Cultural Centres, Belgium
- **Sara Turra**, European Network of Cultural Centres, Belgium
- **Maryline Filippi**, INRAE – Agroparistech, France
- **Andrè Torre**, INRAE – Agroparistech, France
- **Antonija Letinić**, Kultura Nova Foundation, Croatia
- **Tamara Zamelli**, Kultura Nova Foundation, Croatia
- **Ilona Kunda**, Latvian Academy of Culture, Latvia
- **Josune Prieto**, Mondragon Innovation & Knowledge, Mondragon University, Spain
- **Nevena Dobрева**, National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts “Kr. Sarafov”, Bulgaria
- **Lidia Varbanova**, National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts “Kr. Sarafov”, Bulgaria
- **Isabel Albergaria**, University of the Azores, Portugal
- **Pilar Damião de Medeiros**, University of the Azores, Portugal
- **Maria Leonor Sampaio**, University of the Azores, Portugal
- **Daniela Soares**, University of the Azores, Portugal
- **Mark Justin Rainey**, University of Galway, Ireland
- **Julius Heinicke**, University of Hildesheim, Germany
- **Helena Walther**, University of Hildesheim, Germany
- **Oleksandra Nenko**, University of Turku, Finland
- **Katriina Siivonen**, University of Turku, Finland
- **Carolina Castaldi**, Utrecht University, The Netherlands
- **Nicola Cortinovis**, Utrecht University, The Netherlands
- **Andris Klepers**, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, Latvia

# CULTURE MATTERS HERE.

Conference venue:  
Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences

[insituculture.eu](http://insituculture.eu)

## PROGRAMME AT A GLANCE

**11 MAY**

Setting the stage: understanding  
the context and challenges

**9H00 - 9H30**

**REGISTRATION AND COFFEE**

**9H30 - 10H00**

**WELCOME AND OPENING**

**10H00 - 10H45**

**PLENARY SESSION**

*Unpacking the IN SITU legacy:  
Research, capacity-building, and policy*

**10H45 - 11H15**

**COFFEE BREAK**

**11H15 - 12H00**

**KEYNOTE SPEECH**

*'All that is old is new again': Place-Based  
Innovation and Value Creation in the Age of AI*

**12H00 - 13H00**

**PLENARY SESSION**

*The power of connection: Strengthening  
rural creators through collective action*

**13H00 - 14H30**

**LUNCH BREAK**

**14H30 - 16H00**

**CONCURRENT THEMATIC SESSIONS**

**16H00 - 16H15**

**COFFEE BREAK**

**16H15 - 17H30**

**PLENARY SESSION**

*Culture in action: Practical lessons  
from non-urban creative practices*

**18H00 - 22H00**

Evening with dinner and mingling at  
Valmiera Theatre.  
Short presentation of Valmiera & Mayor's  
greetings

# CULTURE MATTERS HERE.

Conference venue:  
Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences

[insituculture.eu](http://insituculture.eu)

## 12 MAY

From knowledge to action: translating  
research findings into strategies

**9H30 - 11H00**

### **PLENARY SESSION**

*Vibrancies at the European peripheries:  
Cultural sprouts from the IN SITU Labs*

**11H00 - 11H30**

### **COFFEE BREAK**

**11H30 - 13H00**

### **CONCURRENT THEMATIC SESSIONS**

**13H00 - 14H00**

### **LUNCH BREAK**

**14H00 - 15H30**

### **CONCURRENT THEMATIC SESSIONS**

**15H45 - 18H00**

### **STUDY VISITS**

- *Option 1: Cultural heritage / Valmiera museum*
- *Option 2: Contemporary art / KURTUVE art space*
- *Option 3: Creative industries / Future Innovation quarter*
- *Option 4: Rural culture / Valmiermuiža manor*

**19H00 - 21H30**

### **CONCERT AND DINNER AT VALMIERA CULTURAL CENTRE**

# CULTURE MATTERS HERE.

Conference venue:  
Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences

[insituculture.eu](http://insituculture.eu)

## 13 MAY

Looking ahead: defining  
pathways forward

**9H30 - 10H30**

### **PLENARY SESSION**

*Capacity building for the future: Tools and strategies for creative innovation in non-urban areas*

**10H30 - 11H00**

### **COFFEE BREAK**

**11H00 - 12H30**

### **CONCURRENT THEMATIC SESSIONS**

**12H30 - 13H30**

### **LUNCH BREAK**

**13H30 - 14H30**

### **PLENARY SESSION**

*Where is innovation coming from? Rethinking place-based creativity through a non-urban lens*

**14H30 - 15H30**

### **PLENARY SESSION**

*Shaping future policies: EU policy frameworks for non-urban creative ecosystems*

**15H30 - 16H00**

### **COFFEE BREAK**

**16H00 - 17H00**

### **PLENARY SESSION**

*Closing considerations and future directions*

# Detailed programme

## Day 1. Monday, 11 May 2026

### Setting the stage: understanding the context and challenges

Conference Venue: [Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences \(Cēsu Street 4, Valmiera\)](#)

Time	Session details
9:00 - 9:30	<b>Registration &amp; coffee</b>
9:30 - 10:00	<p><b>Welcome and opening</b> Room C129</p> <p>Speakers: <b>Rūta Muktupāvela</b> (Advisor on Cultural Policy to the Minister for Culture of Latvia and Professor at the Latvian Academy of Culture), <b>Agnese Davidsonsone</b> (Rector of the Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences), <b>Agnese Lāce</b> (Latvian Minister for Culture of Latvia [<i>video message</i>]), and <b>Nancy Duxbury</b> (Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, Portugal)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Ieva Zemite</b> (Latvian Academy of Culture, Latvia)</p>
10:00 - 10:45	<p><b>Plenary session</b> Room C129</p> <p><b>Unpacking the IN SITU legacy: Research, capacity-building, and policy</b></p> <p>Speakers: <b>Nancy Duxbury</b> (Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, Portugal), <b>Lidia Varbanova</b> (National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts “Kr. Sarafov”, Bulgaria), <b>André Torre</b> (National Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment, France), and <b>Helena Walther</b> (University of Hildesheim, Germany)</p> <p>Moderator: Paola Di Nunzio (Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, Portugal)</p>
10:45 - 11:15	<b>Coffee break</b>
11:15 - 12:00	<p><b>Keynote speech</b> Room C129</p> <p><b>‘All that is old is new again’: Place-Based Innovation and Value Creation in the Age of AI</b></p> <p>Speaker: <b>Susan Luckman</b> (Adelaide University, Australia)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Nancy Duxbury</b> (Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, Portugal)</p>

Time	Session details
12:00 - 13:00	<p><b>Plenary session</b> <i>Room C129</i></p> <p><b><i>The power of connection: Strengthening rural creators through collective action</i></b></p> <p>Speakers: <b>Michaela Charisi</b> (European Network of Cultural Centres, Belgium), <b>Ella Overkleeft</b> (Rural Radicals, The Netherlands), <b>Henk Keizer</b> (AREA Network, Denmark), <b>Marta Lozano Molano</b> (Wazo coop, Spain), and <b>Sabīne Vandāna</b> (Valmiera County Manor Network, Latvia)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Sílvia Silva</b> (Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, Portugal)</p>
13:00 - 14:30	<p><b>Lunch break</b></p>
14:30 - 16:00	<p><b>Concurrent thematic sessions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p><b><i>Session - Policy and planning frameworks for non-urban development</i></b> <i>Room C114</i></p> <p><i>Cultural and creative industries in peripheral policy frameworks: the case of Poland, Jaroslaw Dzialek, Monika Murzyn-Kupisz, and Arkadiusz Kocaj</i> (Institute of Geography and Spatial Management, Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland)</p> <p><i>West Iceland Regional Plan of Action, Sigursteinn Sigurðsson</i> (West Iceland Regional Office, Iceland)</p> <p><i>Culture Forward: Culture as Civic Infrastructure in the Sierra Nevada, Eliza Tudor,</i> (Nevada County Arts Council, USA)</p> <p><i>From Policy to Transforming Communities through longitudinal arts investment, Katie Lowry and Peter Prendergast</i> (The Arts Council of Ireland, and Cork County Council Library and Arts Service, Ireland)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Erna Kaaber</b> (Bifröst University, Iceland)</p> </li> <li> <p><b><i>Session - Inclusion, gender and intersectional agency</i></b> <i>Room C129</i></p> <p><i>A Systematic Literature Review on Cultural Inequalities, Flora Maravalhas, Pedro Borrego, Ana Lúcia Romão, Bernardo Valente, Sandra Firmino, José Soares Neves, and Luís Manuel Baptista</i> (Public Administration at the Institute of Social and Political Sciences, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal)</p> <p><i>Inclusion through Culture: Cultural and Creative Industries in the Borderland Parts of Croatia's Lika Region, Ema Bašić and Jaka Primorac</i> (Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar, Institute for Development and International Relations, Croatia)</p> <p><i>Place-Based Innovation Through Gender Lenses: CCIs as Tools for Post-Disaster Recovery in Norcia, Naomi Camardella and Mara Carando</i> (University for Foreigners of Perugia, Italy)</p> </li> </ul>

Time	Session details
	<p><i>Clapping into Being: Hijra performances and the Creation of Social Space on Non-Urban Bangladesh</i>, <b>Zobaida Nasreen</b> (University of Dhaka, Bangladesh)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Nevena Dobрева</b> (National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts “Kr. Sarafov”, Bulgaria)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Session - Heritage, local knowledge and collaborative stewardship</b> Room C217</li> </ul> <p><i>From Historical Castle to Living Cultural Ecosystem: Artistic Place-based Innovation in a Non-urban European Context</i>, <b>Mahmoud Saleh Mohammadi</b> and <b>Sofie Renap</b> (Spazio Nour, Italy/Belgium)</p> <p><i>Values-based Heritage Re-imagination and Interpretation. The Case of the Beļava Manor House</i>, <b>Ilze Vanaga</b> (NGO "Dēms", Latvia)</p> <p><i>The Manor Network as a Catalyst for Community Collaboration and Sustainable Heritage Management in Valmiera County</i>, <b>Sabīne Vandāna</b> (Valmiermuiža Association of Culture, Latvia)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Ilona Kunda</b> (Latvian Academy of Culture, Latvia)</p>
16:00 - 16:15	<b>Coffee break</b>
16:15 - 17:30	<p><b>Plenary session</b> Room C129</p> <p><b>Culture in action: Practical lessons from non-urban creative practices</b></p> <p>Speakers: <b>Michaela Charisi</b> (European Network of Cultural Centres, Belgium), <b>Mark Justin Rainey</b> (University of Galway, Ireland), <b>Jorge Gallardo</b> (Be.Time, Spain), <b>Milica Milović</b> (Magnet, Serbia), <b>Dorien Jongasma</b> (Imágenes y Palabras, Spain), and <b>Marta Vētra</b> (LAUX, Latvia)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Oleksandra Nenko</b> (University of Turku, Finland)</p>
18:00 – 22:00	<p><b>Evening with dinner and mingling</b> at <a href="#">Valmiera Theatre (Lāčplēša Street 4, Valmiera)</a>.</p> <p><b>Short presentation of Valmiera county &amp; Mayor’s greetings.</b></p>

## Day 2. Tuesday, 12 May 2026

### *From knowledge to action: translating research findings into strategies*

Conference Venue: [Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences \(Cēsu Street 4, Valmiera\)](#)

Time	Session details
9:30 - 11:00	<p><b>Plenary session</b> <i>Room C129</i></p> <p><b><i>Vibrancies at the European peripheries: Cultural sprouts from the IN SITU Labs</i></b></p> <p>Speakers: <b>Erna Kaaber</b> (Bifröst University, Iceland), <b>Mark Rainey</b> (University of Galway, Ireland), <b>Daniela Soares</b> and <b>Isabel Soares de Albergaria</b>, (University of the Azores, Portugal), <b>Oleksandra Nenko</b> and <b>Katriina Siivonen</b> (University of Turku, Finland), <b>Ieva Zemīte</b> (Latvian Academy of Culture, Latvia), and <b>Antonija Letinić</b> (Kultura Nova Foundation, Croatia)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Paola Di Nunzio</b> (Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, Portugal)</p>
11:00 - 11:30	<p><b>Coffee break</b></p>
11:30 - 13:00	<p><b>Concurrent thematic sessions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p><b><i>Session - Interweaving agriculture, culture, and bioregional innovation</i></b> <i>Room C129</i></p> <p><i>Exploring contemporary agricultural art initiatives in Austria, Karin Heinschink and Ingrid Machold</i> (Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics, Rural and Mountain Research – BAB, Austria)</p> <p><i>Agriculture meets River Lore: Agri- and Culture Project at River Uskelanjoki, Finland, Elina Tuomarila</i> (John Nurminen Foundation, Finland)</p> <p><i>The interrelation between built heritage and agriculture for sustainable preservation: the case study of the village of Velika Hoča/Hoçë e Madhe in Kosovo, Sabrina Salis and Ylber Veseli</i> (OSCE, Kosovo)</p> <p><i>Bioregion as an innovative form of public-private cooperation for the preservation of local culture, Dace Kaufmane, Liga Paula, and Amanda Lejniece</i> (University of Life Sciences and Technologies, Latvia)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Katriina Siivonen</b> (University of Turku and Finland Futures Research Centre, Finland)</p> </li> </ul>

Time	Session details
------	-----------------

- **Session - Living Traditions: Craft, music, local knowledge and sustainability**

Room C114

*Revitalisation of Heritage Wool and Wool Crafts to Promote Sustainability in Lapland - Outcomes of Wool Innovation Project*, **Minna Kovero, Elina Luiro, and Tanya Kravtsov** (University of Lapland, Finland)

*Weaving with the Trees - Place-based Explorations into Sustainable Wool Craft Practice*, **Tanya Kravtsov** and **Minna Kovero** (University of Lapland, Finland)

*Making A Scene: Using Gaelic “traditional social knowledge” to grow creative communities for the future*, **Rhona NicDhùghaill** (University of Stirling, Scotland)

Moderator: **Lidia Varbanova** (National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts “Kr. Sarafov”, Bulgaria)

- **Session - Place-based learning and living laboratories**

Room C217

*Inequalities and territorial asymmetries in cultural access and participation in Portugal*, **Bernardo Valente, Pedro Borrego, Ana Lúcia Romão, Flora Maravalhas, Sandra Firmino, Luís Manuel Baptista, and José Soares Neves** (Centre for Public Administration and Public Policies - CAPP, Institute of Social and Political Sciences, Universidade de Lisboa - ISCSP-ULisboa; Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology – Iscte, University Institute of Lisbon - CIES-Iscte, Portugal)

*Territory Schools and Community Activation for the Revitalization of Mountain Cultural Landscapes in Asturias*, **Jean-François Alberghi, Paloma Sánchez-Broch, Pablo López Gómez, and Margarita Fernández Mier** (University of Oviedo, Spain)

*Fostering Innovation and Collaboration through Place-Based Learning at the Turaida Museum Reserve*, **Leonarda Kestere-Klavina** (Turaida Museum Reserve, Latvia)

*Design-Build as Place-Based Innovation: Creating New Experiences through Temporary Interventions in Valmiera*, **Dina Suhanova** (Art Academy of Latvia, Institute of Contemporary Art, Design and Architecture, Latvia)

Moderator: **Andris Klepers** (Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, Latvia)

---

13:00 - 14:00 **Lunch break**

---

Time	Session details
14:00 - 15:30	<p><b>Concurrent thematic sessions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p><b>Session - Culture as core infrastructure: Health, employment, and civic resilience</b> Room C217</p> <p><i>Generational leadership exit as a small cultural &amp; creative ecosystem concern, <b>Ali FitzGibbon</b> (Queen's University Belfast, Ireland)</i></p> <p><i>Addressing Rural Challenges by Connecting the Culture and Health Sectors and Policies: Lessons Learned from Implementing the Arts-on-Prescription Model in Cēsis municipality (Latvia), <b>Inga Surgunte</b> and <b>Baiba Tjarve</b> (Latvian Academy of Culture, Latvia)</i></p> <p><i>Supporting Regenerative Tourism Cultural Entrepreneurs, <b>Milton Almeida</b> (Royal Roads University, and Centre for Social Studies University of Coimbra, Canada/Portugal)</i></p> <p>Moderator: <b>Antonija Letinić</b> (Kultura Nova Foundation, Croatia)</p> </li> <li> <p><b>Session - Sustaining artistic presence and social cohesion</b> Room C114</p> <p><i>Municipal Artist-Employment Projects in Finland: A Decade of Initiatives and Their Impacts, <b>Anne Lehtelä</b> (Independent artist and Specialist in artists' working conditions at the Finnish Arts and Culture Agency, Finland)</i></p> <p><i>Film festivals as places-based innovation practices: evidence from two grassroots initiatives in peripheral Italy, <b>Caterina Francesca Ottobrini</b> and <b>Mariia Samareva</b> (EURICSE, GSSI - Gran Sasso Science Institute, Italy)</i></p> <p><i>Rooted Innovation vs. Transient Placement: A Comparative Study of Cultural Interventions in Non-Urban Croatia, <b>Antonia Kuzmanić</b> and <b>Dunja Bovan</b> (ROOM 100, House Collective, Croatia)</i></p> <p>Moderator: <b>Ieva Zemīte</b> (Latvian Academy of Culture, Latvia)</p> </li> <li> <p><b>Session - Narratives of place: Memory, senses, and intangible heritage</b> Room C129</p> <p><i>Relearning Place(s): Creative and Sustainable Innovation in Non-Urban Territories, <b>António Oliveira</b>, Mekelle University Ethiopian Institute of Technology - EIT-M School of Architecture and Urban Planning, Ethiopia.</i></p> <p><i>KONSERVE: Regenerating non-urban culture through intangible cultural heritage, <b>Zülâl Fazlıoğlu Akın</b> and <b>Alise Katrina Pundure</b> (The Ohio State University, USA)</i></p> </li> </ul>

Time	Session details
	<p><i>Rural dramaturgies: thinking alternative stories of rural place in Haren and the former Limburg mining area</i>, <b>Vivi Focquet</b>, <b>Leontien Allemeersch</b>, and <b>Ewoud Vermote</b> (Kunstenplatform PLAN B, Belgium)</p> <p><i>Reclaiming the Cosmos: Fostering a Connection to the Night Sky in the Scottish Highlands and Islands</i>, <b>Bailee Allen</b> (The Glasgow School of Art, Scotland)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Oleksandra Nenko</b> (University of Turku, Finland)</p>
15:45 - 18:00	<p><b>Study visits</b></p> <p><u>Option 1</u>: Cultural heritage / Valmiera museum</p> <p><u>Option 2</u>: Contemporary art / KURTUVE art space</p> <p><u>Option 3</u>: Creative industries / Future Innovation quarter</p> <p><u>Option 4</u>: Rural culture / Valmiermuiža manor</p>
19:00 - 21:30	<p><b>Concert and dinner</b> at <a href="#">Valmiera Cultural centre, Riga Street 10, Valmiera</a></p>

## Day 3. Wednesday, 13 May 2026

### Looking ahead: defining pathways forward

Conference Venue: [Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences \(Cēsu Street 4, Valmiera\)](#)

Time	Session details
9:30 - 10:30	<p><b>Plenary session</b> <i>Room C129</i></p> <p><b>Capacity building for the future: Tools and strategies for creative innovation in non-urban areas</b></p> <p>Speakers: <b>Nevena Dobрева</b> (National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts “Kr. Sarafov”, Bulgaria), <b>Jude Ortiz</b> (Algoma University, Canada), <b>Antonija Letinić</b> (Kultura Nova Foundation, Croatia), and <b>Ilona Asare</b> (Latvian Academy of Culture, Latvia)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Daniela Soares</b> (University of the Azores, Portugal)</p>
10:30 - 11:00	<p><b>Coffee break</b></p>
11:00 - 12:30	<p><b>Concurrent thematic sessions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p><b>Session - Technology, gaming, placemaking and rural innovation</b> <i>Room C129</i></p> <p><i>Gamified Eco-Trails and Child-led Innovation: The “BÖLEKTAU” Case as a Transferable Model for Non-Urban Cultural and Creative Placemaking</i>, <b>Irina Kharitonova</b> and <b>Alexandra Kharitonova</b> (Public Foundation “Creative &amp; Innovation Institute”, Kazakhstan)</p> <p><i>From Cherry Orchards to Digital Studios: Cross-Sectoral Partnerships Driving Place-Based Innovation in Rural Portugal</i>, <b>Luís Leça</b>, <b>Mariana Salvado</b>, and <b>Matilde Caria</b> (INOVA+, Innovation Services, S.A; Fundão Municipality, Portugal)</p> <p><i>Digital Creativity Against Depopulation: Video Games and Cultural Industries as Drivers of Regional Resilience in Rural Portugal</i>, <b>Mariana Salvado</b>, <b>Luís Leça</b>, and <b>Matilde Caria</b> (Fundão Municipality; INOVA+, Innovation Services, Portugal)</p> <p><i>Digital media and the semiotics of place in the rural creative economy</i>, <b>Simon McKerrell</b> (Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Maria Batle</b> (Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, Portugal)</p> </li> </ul>

Time	Session details
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p><b>Session - Strategic agency: Funding, protecting, and collaborating rural cultural spaces</b> Room C114</p> <p><i>Rural Arts Organizations: Adaptive Hubs of Cross-Sector Collaboration</i>, <b>Sarah Ayers</b> (Flyover Art, USA)</p> <p><i>From Cultural Practice to Community Resilience: A Decade of Place-Based Innovation in Rural Latvia</i>, <b>Zane Matesoviča</b> (British Council Latvia, United Kingdom/Latvia)</p> <p><i>Staying Power: Creating and Protecting Cultural Spaces in Valmiera, Latvia</i>, <b>Matthew Richter</b> (Cultural.Space, Scotland/USA)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Carolina Castaldi</b> (Utrecht University, The Netherlands)</p> </li> <li> <p><b>Session - Social infrastructure and place-based rural strategies</b> Room C217</p> <p><i>The impact of social economy and the Third sector on a cultural base local development in Italian inner areas</i>, <b>Carlo D'Angelo</b> (University of Molise, Italy)</p> <p><i>NGO Islands of Selonia. Smart regional strategy for the Sēlija historical land</i>, <b>Daina Alužāne, Ieva Jātniece, Inga Krekele, Jānis Dzimtais, and Santa Šmite</b> (Association Community Cooperation Network "The Islands of Selonia", Latvia)</p> <p><i>Catholic church as important actor in keeping and cultivating creative place in Latgale (example of Balvi region)</i>, <b>Juris Vuguls, and Erika Vugule</b> (Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies, Faculty of Economics and Social Development, Institute of Humanitarian and Social Sciences, Latvia)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Isabel Soares de Albergaria</b> (University of the Azores, Portugal)</p> </li> </ul>
12:30 - 13:30	<b>Lunch break</b>
13:30 - 14:30	<p><b>Plenary session</b> Room C129</p> <p><b>Where is innovation coming from? Rethinking place-based creativity through a non-urban lens</b></p> <p>Speakers: <b>Tim Wojan</b> (Massive Data Institute, United States of America), <b>Carolina Castaldi</b> (Utrecht University, The Netherlands)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Tongjing Wang</b> (National Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment, France)</p>

Time	Session details
14:30 - 15:30	<p><b>Plenary session</b> <i>Room C129</i></p> <p><b><i>Shaping future policies: EU policy frameworks for non-urban creative ecosystems</i></b></p> <p>Speakers: <b>Ruth Artiles Valero</b> (European Network of Cultural Centres, Belgium), <b>Helena Walther</b> (University of Hildesheim, Germany), <b>Maryline Filippi</b> (National Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment, France)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Erna Kaaber</b> (Bifröst University, Iceland)</p>
15:30 - 16:00	<p><b>Coffee break</b></p>
16:00 - 17:00	<p><b>Plenary session</b> <i>Room C129</i></p> <p><b><i>Closing considerations and future directions</i></b></p> <p>Speakers: <b>Nancy Duxbury</b> (Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, Portugal), <b>Baiba Tjarve</b> (Latvian Academy of Culture, Latvia), <b>Susan Luckman</b> (Adelaide University, Australia)</p> <p>Moderator: <b>Sílvia Silva</b> (Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, Portugal)</p>

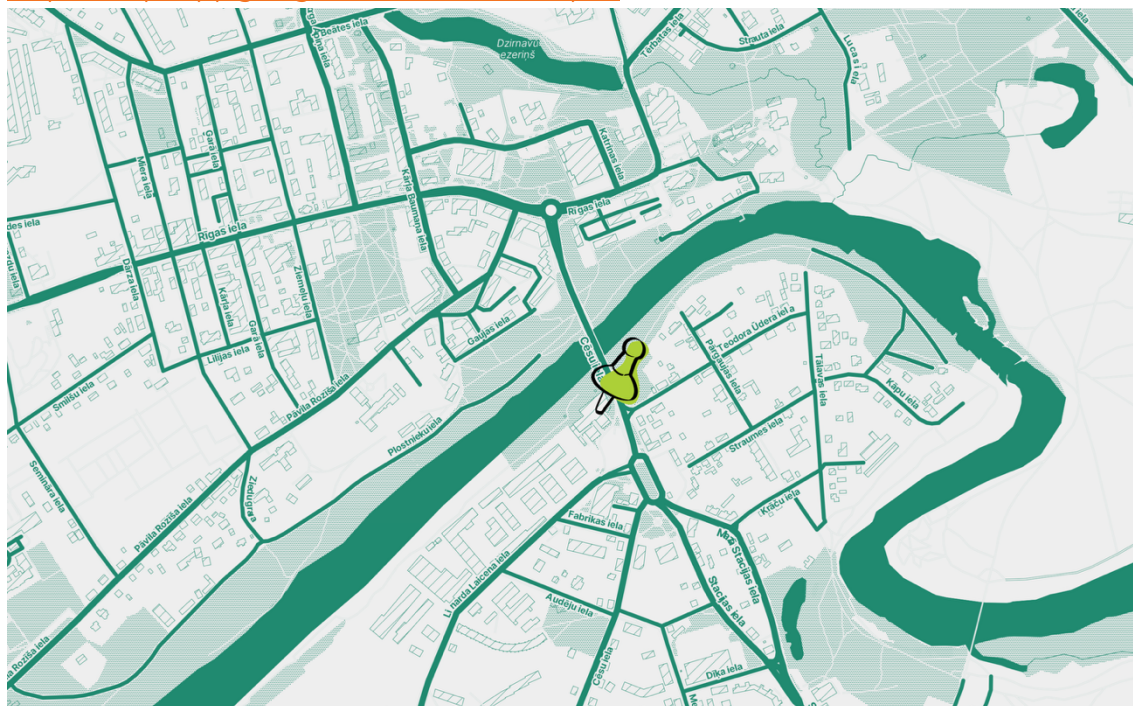
# Conference practical information

## Venues and maps

### Conference venue

Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences / Vidzemes Augstskola (Cēsu iela 4, Valmiera)

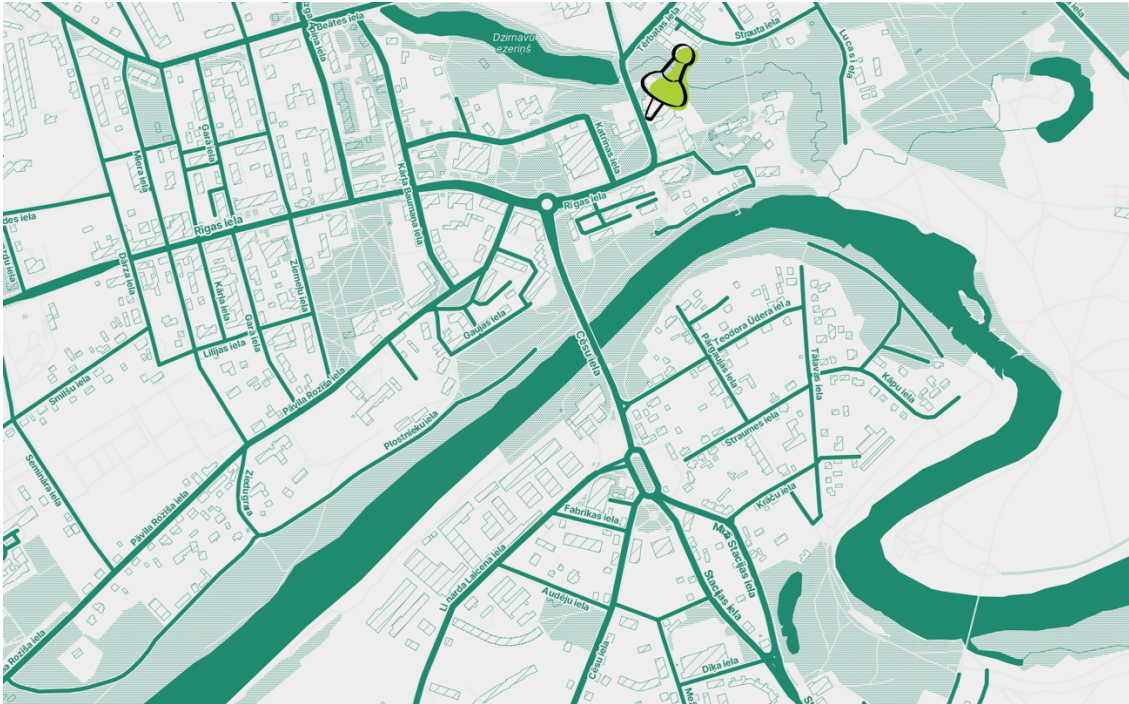
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/KbGXXdHUFnTf33pY8>



## Valmiera Theatre

(Lāčplēša Street 4, Valmiera)

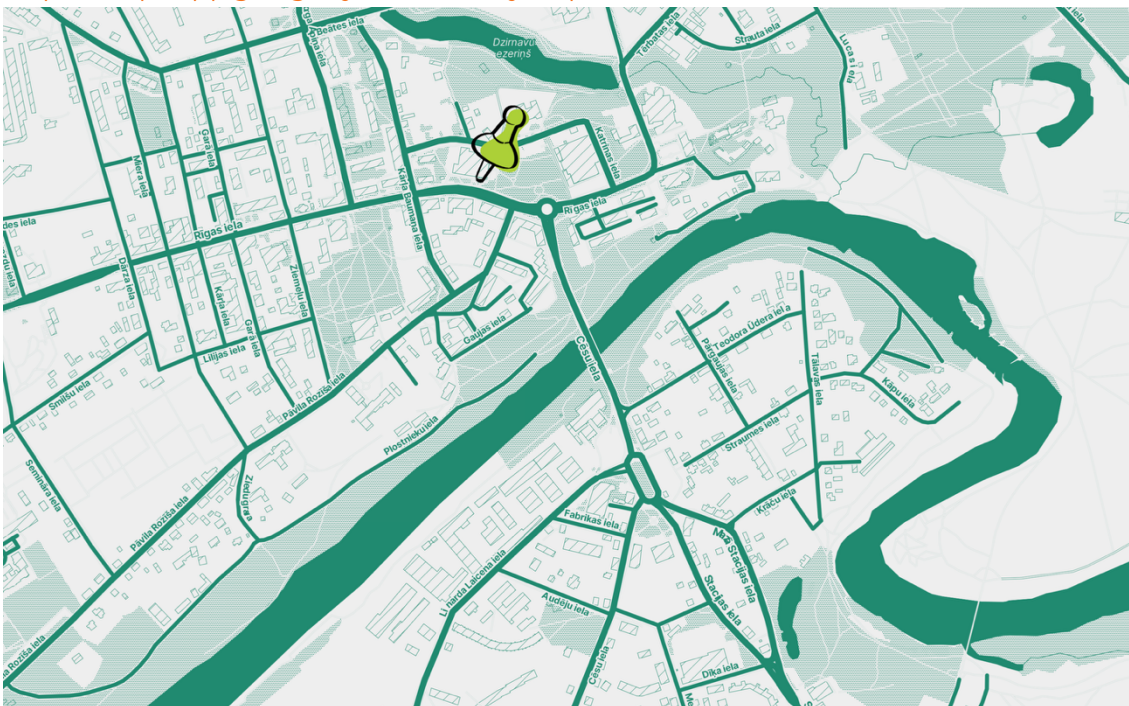
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/wYr6ky7dceU51JzW7>



## Valmiera Cultural Centre

(Rīgas iela 10, Valmiera)

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/CyJmxZXNMkyZoq7Z9>



## Study visits

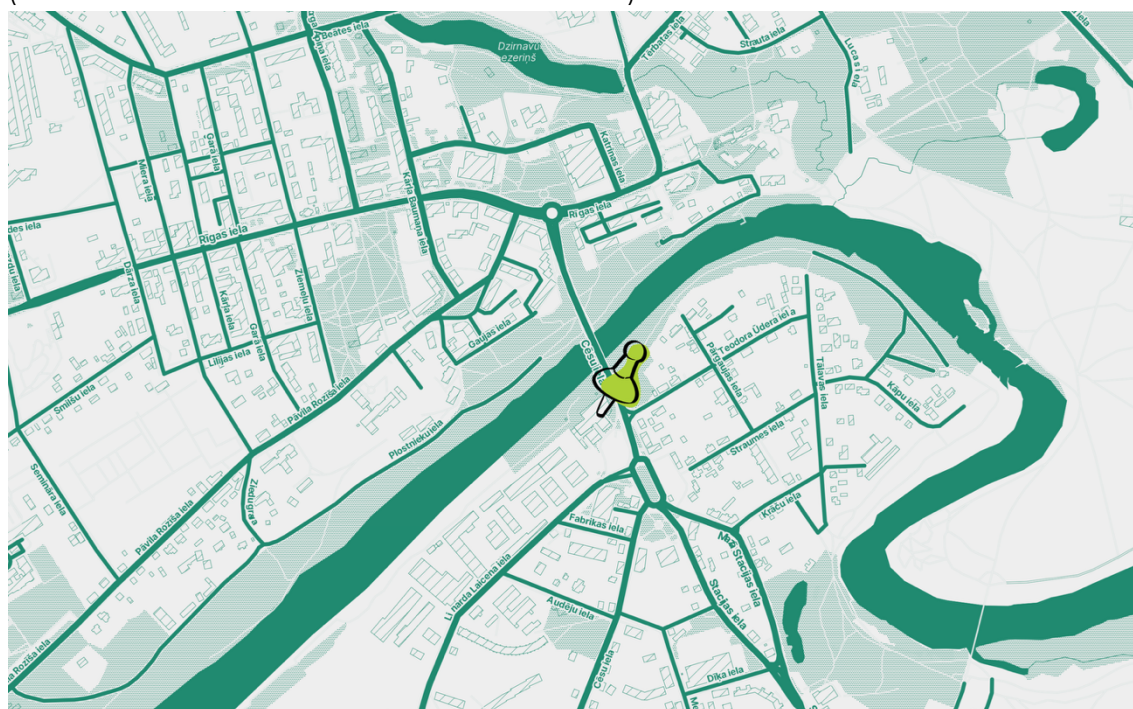
### Creative industries – Visit to future Valmiera Innovation Quarter

Valmiera Innovation Agency, DARE makerspace, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences and Valmiera Integrated Library.

Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences / Vidzemes Augstskola (Cēsu iela 4, Valmiera)

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/KbGXXdHUFnTf33pY8>

(At the same location as the conference venue).



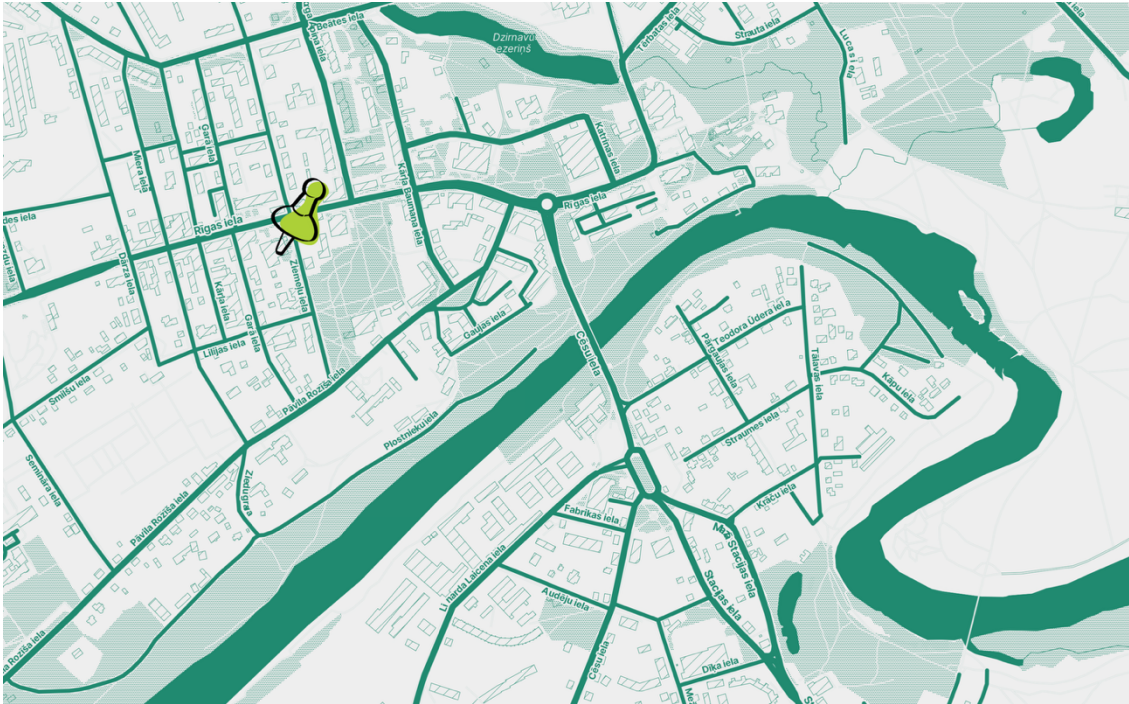
Valmiera's creative industries are embedded in a compact applied innovation ecosystem linking entrepreneurship, education, prototyping and open access learning. The Valmiera Innovation Agency coordinates regional innovation and skills development, while DARE makerspace provides hands-on facilities for prototyping and co-creation. This ecosystem is strengthened by Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences through open innovation and collaboration with industry, and by the Valmiera Integrated Library, which acts as civic infrastructure for digital access, learning and experimentation. Together, these institutions show how creative industries collaborate in a non-urban setting.

## Contemporary art – Visit to the contemporary art space KURTUVE

(Rīgas iela 25a, Valmiera)

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/nwoTUTtzoFNysfeP6>

800 m from the conference venue (approx. 12 min walk).



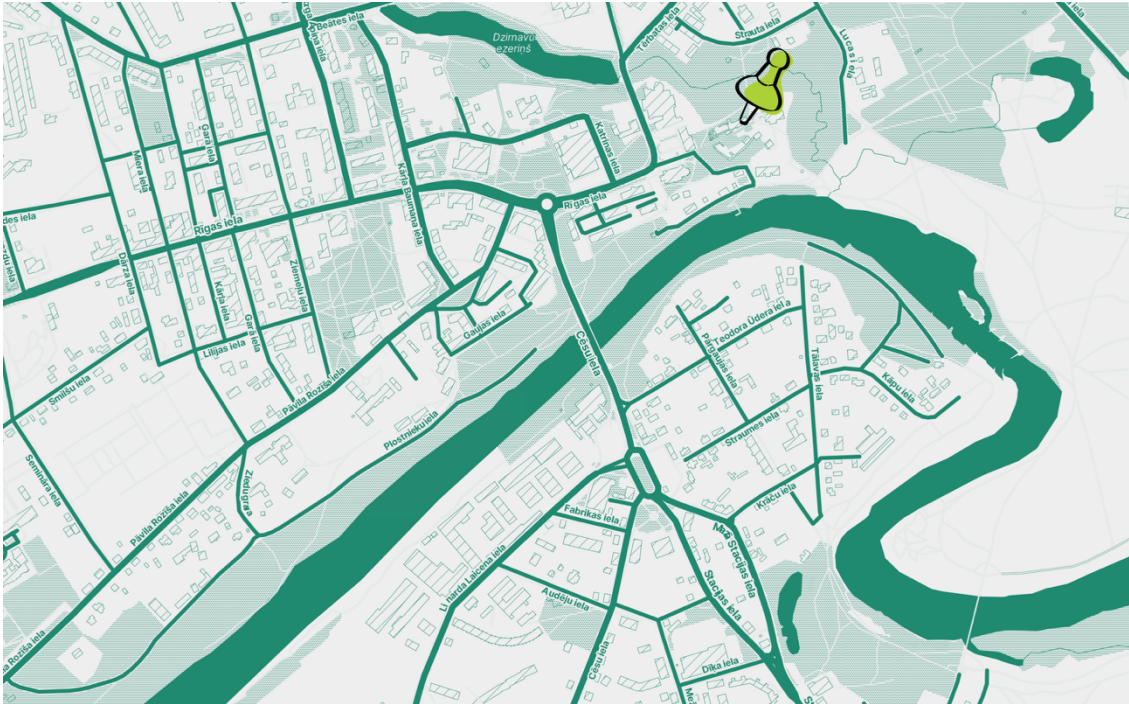
Valmiera's contemporary art scene extends beyond institutional stages, showing how non-urban communities can develop ambitious cultural infrastructure and experimental formats. Valmiera Theatre and the Valmiera Theatre Summer Festival play a central role in shaping contemporary performing arts with strong national visibility and local engagement. Alongside this, the city invests in participatory, design-led public space initiatives such as large scale exhibitions in the public space or interactive installation-playground for children «Playground Stage», which reframes play as cultural expression and invites families into shared storytelling. Together with initiatives such as the contemporary art space KURTUVE, these efforts reflect a coherent cultural development rooted in the legacy of the European Capital of Culture bid.

## Cultural heritage and innovation – Visit to Valmiera museum

(Bruņinieku iela 3, Valmiera)

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/L33b9bX5knGQEMUp6>

1.2 km from the conference venue (approx. 16 min walk).

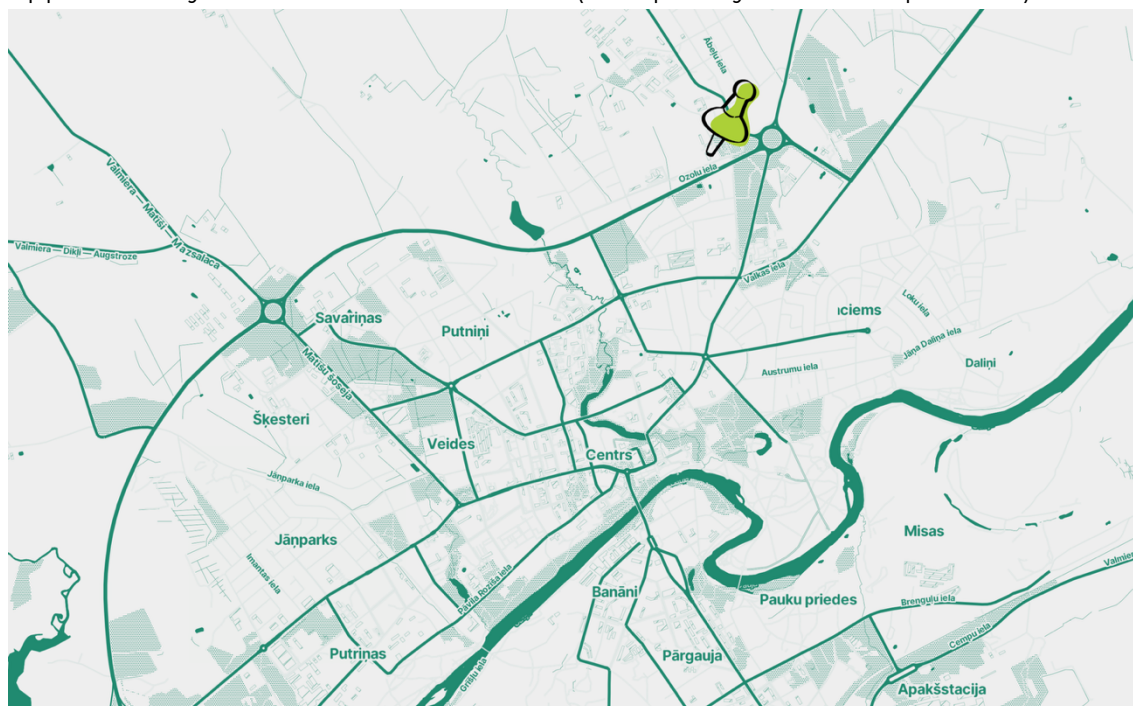


Valmiera Museum is a strong example of how cultural heritage can be positioned as a living resource for place-based innovation, not only preserved as a collection. Through contemporary interpretation, community storytelling and education-focused formats, the museum connects medieval and industrial layers of the city with present-day questions of identity, resilience and regional development. Approach that heritage functions as a shared platform for learning, civic participation and cultural tourism, showing how local history can be translated into meaningful experiences and future-oriented narratives.

## Culture in rural territories – Visit to Valmiermuiža

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/4YE9GVCKeuRUzNBz9>

Approximately 5 km from Valmiera centre (transport by bus will be provided).



Valmiermuiža – historical manor site – is a strong example of how culture in rural territories can become an engine for renewal by linking heritage, local production and contemporary cultural programming. Rather than treating rural heritage as a backdrop, Valmiermuiža functions as an active cultural landscape where craft, events, entrepreneurship and community encounters reinforce one another. This approach shows how rural places can sustain identity while creating new values and reasons to gather, visit and stay, making culture a practical tool for resilience, belonging and long-term regional attractiveness.

## Transportation

### Travelling to Valmiera

Valmiera, a charming town in northern Latvia, is located approximately 120 km from Riga International Airport (RIX). There are several convenient ways to travel from the airport to Valmiera.

#### **Getting from Riga Airport (RIX) to Riga Central Bus Station**

Take bus No. 22 from the airport (stop located ~300m from Arrivals Hall E and C) to Autoosta (Central Bus Station).

- Duration: ~27 min
- Ticket: €1.81 (from driver, card only) or €1.50 (from ticket machine or Narvesen at the airport)
- Schedule: Every 10–20 minutes from 05:25 to 00:40

More information: <https://saraksti.lv/#bus/22/a-b/7749c/en>

#### **By car**

- Driving time: ~1h 45min
- Route: E77 → E264
- Distance: ~117 km
- Car rental: Available directly at Riga Airport on the 1st floor of the terminal, in Arrivals Hall E. Major providers include AVIS, Budget, EasyCars, Enterprise, SIXT and others.

Info & booking: <https://www.riga-airport.com/en/car-rental>

#### **By bus**

- Duration: ~2h 5min
- Departure: Riga Central Bus Station (Rīgas SAO)
- Arrival: Valmiera Bus Station
- Frequency: Every 30 minutes
- Tickets: ~€5–€8
- Schedule: Every 1 to 1.5 hours

Info & booking: <https://www.1188.lv/en/transport/buses/rigas-sao/valmieras-ao/105317/105331>

#### **By train**

- Duration: ~1h 50min
- Operator: Vivi
- Departure: Riga Central Station
- Arrival: Valmiera Train Station
- Tickets: ~€5–€8
- Schedule: Approximately five times per day

Info & booking: <https://www.vivi.lv/en/routes/list>

### Public Transport in Valmiera

City buses connect various neighborhoods with the city center. Main transit stops in the center: “Centrs” (K. Baumaņa Street) and “Kino” (Rīgas Street).

Explore Valmiera’s public transport routes, bus stops, and key city locations using this [interactive map](#) (Latvian only).

## **Bolt Services in Valmiera**

Valmiera offers several Bolt mobility solutions for convenient travel around the city:

- Ride-hailing for quick and easy city travel
- Electric scooters available in various locations
- Bolt Drive car-sharing service

You can access all services through the Bolt app, available on Google Play and App Store.

More info: <https://bolt.eu/sw-tz/cities/valmiera/>

## Staying in Valmiera for longer?

### Nature, landmarks and events

#### Zilaiskalns and Zilaiskalns Cultural history and visitor center

Zilaiskalns is an excellent escape from the city rush into the peaceful nature. There is a 38,5 meters high viewing tower at the peak of the hill. At the foot of the hill is [the Zilaiskalns cultural history and visitor center](#), where you can get to know the history of the village. Working hours: Tue - Wed 9.00-17.30, Thu – Fri 11.00-19.00, Sat 11.00-17.00.

Address: Parka street 2, Zilaiskalns; [visitzilaiskalns.lv](http://visitzilaiskalns.lv)

#### Valmiera St. Simon's church

The Valmiera St. Simon's Church is one of the most important monuments of medieval architecture in Latvia, with valuable art monuments – medieval tombstones, an altarpiece by the painter Karl Christian Fogel – Fogelstein, the chancel made in 1739, the organ of the famous European artist Friedrich Ladegast and others. During the working hours of the church, visitors can climb the church tower. Working hours: Tue - Fri 11.00-18.00, Sat 11.00-17.00, Sun 10.00-14.00.

Address: Bruņinieku street 2, Valmiera; [simanadraudze.lv](http://simanadraudze.lv)

#### Strenči Psychoneurological hospital park and audioguide

The complex is a unique cultural and historical site with a rare architectural ensemble. The hospital forms a historical building complex and park that reflects the development of medicine, architecture and community in the region. A walk in the Hospital Park can be combined with exploring the place through 10 audio guide stories about the architecture of the hospital buildings, the history of the place, the landscape, artistic expressions, and the development and importance of mental health care today. Available 24/7

Address: Valka street 11, Strenči, [strencupns.lv](http://strencupns.lv)

#### Gauja River Rafters Festival | May 15-16 | Strenči

“The river does not ask for a path—it is the path.” This spirit flows through the 2026 Gauja River Rafters Festival, a two-day celebration of nature and tradition. On May 15, enjoy choir sing-alongs, a rock concert, fire and drum performances, and evening moments on the water. On May 16, experience a crafts market, creative workshops, the ceremonial welcome of the raft, a festive procession, folk dance performances, a concert by Intars Busulis, and an open-air dance party. The festival also hosts International Timber Rafters Days, the International Timber Rafting Camp, and the General Assembly of the International Association of Timber Rafting.

### Handmade, local and craft products

- Vaidava Ceramics - Latvian design ceramics [Google Maps](#) | [Instagram](#)
- Liepkalni - bakery [Google Maps](#) | [Instagram](#)
- Kēkss - bakery [Google Maps](#) | [Instagram](#)
- Zaiga - souvenir art shop [Google Maps](#)
- Valmiermuiža Brewery - local products [Google Maps](#) | [Instagram](#)
- [“Origin - Valmiera region”](#)

### More information

[visit.valmiera.lv](http://visit.valmiera.lv)

# Abstracts and bios from concurrent sessions

## Policy and planning frameworks for non-urban development

**Jaroslaw Dzialek, Monika Murzyn-Kupisz, and Arkadiusz Kocaj**

*Institute of Geography and Spatial Management, Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland.*

### **Cultural and creative industries in peripheral policy frameworks: the case of Poland**

Recent studies on cultural and creative industries (CCIs) in rural, low-density, remote and/or left-behind areas – often conceptualised as 'peripheral' (Churski et al., 2024) – have highlighted the persistent urban bias within this field of research (Duxbury, 2021; Power, Collins, 2021; Mathisen et al., 2024; Silva et al., 2024). This bias shapes how peripheral creative entrepreneurs and their outputs are perceived and influences CCI-oriented policies targeting peripheral regions, which often replicate toolkits developed for metropolitan contexts without adequate adaptation.

In Poland, the idea of CCIs as drivers of development was largely transferred in the 2010s and framed as an instrument for urban regeneration (Stryjakiewicz et al., 2014). Subsequently, a national strategy recognised CCIs as significant not only for economic development but also for social cohesion, and regional policymakers incorporated them as key economic activities within their development strategies. However, little is known about the extent to which national and regional cultural and development policies incorporate the perspectives of peripheral areas, or how far these policy frameworks translate into local policy-making practices. Addressing these two gaps constitutes the main aim of this paper.

Our analysis is based on a thematic review of national and regional development strategies, as well as local strategic documents from administrative units located in peripheral areas of Poland. We focus on units identified through statistical data as exhibiting a relatively significant presence of creative firms and creative occupations. The study seeks to assess how CCIs are conceptualised in local strategic documents, which creative activities are framed as local development assets, and what specific place-based policy instruments are proposed to strengthen them in order to stimulate local social, cultural and economic development. We also examine the extent to which local strategies emphasise endogenous potential for CCI development, alongside efforts to create conditions for attracting creative talent from outside.

### **Biographical note**

**Jarosław Dzialek** is an Associate Professor at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Management, Jagiellonian University (Kraków, Poland). His research focuses on the patterns and dynamics of historical and contemporary artistic practices, including the emergence, development and decline of art cities, artistic and creative quarters, and art gallery clusters, as well as intra- and inter-urban artistic mobilities. His current research interests are shifting towards artistic practices and creative work in remote, low-density and left-behind regions. He also collaborates with other researchers on topics such as the role of cultural institutions and heritage sites in local development, and the geography of fashion.

**Monika Murzyn-Kupisz** holds a PhD in economic sciences from Krakow University of Economics and an M.A. in European Leisure Studies (a joint diploma from Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Tilburg University, Universidad de Deusto in Bilbao, and Loughborough University). She is a professor at

the Institute of Geography and Spatial Management at Jagiellonian University in Krakow and a member of ACEI, RSA, and ICOMOS Poland. Her multidisciplinary research, within the broad fields of cultural economics and socio-economic geography, focuses on cultural heritage, museums, creative activities, and artists, with an emphasis on Central and Eastern Europe.

**Arkadiusz Kocaj** is an assistant professor at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Management, Faculty of Geography and Geology, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. His research focuses on the geography of industry, particularly the distribution and development of craft-based and traditional industries, with a focus on wood and furniture, as well as textiles and clothing. He is also a member of research teams studying other manufacturing sectors, including the automotive, aerospace, and home appliance industries, as well as regional transport networks.

**Sigursteinn Sigurðsson**

*West Iceland Regional Office, Iceland.*

**West Iceland Regional Plan of Action**

The West Iceland Regional Plan of Action (WIRPA) is a long-term regional development framework, managed by West Iceland Regional Office (SSV), that seeks to strengthen economy, innovation, culture and wellbeing across West Iceland Region. It emerged from a 2015 agreement between national ministries and SSV, integrating earlier regional and cultural strategies into a unified plan for sustainable development in rural areas.

The Plan sets out a shared future vision for the region, defined via broad public consultation. In the original process more than a hundred local residents helped shape its ambitions, and in subsequent updates a variety of community voices — including youth, immigrants, returnees and municipal representatives continued to contribute. Through this participatory process, Vesturland's inhabitants themselves decide the direction of their region.

As WIRPA is financed partly by the Iceland ministry of culture, there is a strong emphasis on arts and culture in the programme, and at its tenth anniversary WIRPA has made a significant impact on culture development within the region. Within the programme a special focus projects are organised the WIRPA focus group and executed by SSV. These projects vary from being policy making to a specific target projects, but all that benefit the region and its nine municipalities. These projects are for example West Iceland Cultural Policy, collaboration of museums and exhibitions, Children's Culture Festival, Youth Creative Industries etc.

Under WIRPA is West Iceland Development Fund that is specifically aimed to support the grassroots and as of today has supported hundreds of cultural projects within the region, such as films, concerts, art festival, heritage projects and more.

**Biographical note**

**Sigursteinn Sigurðsson** (b. 1982) is director of culture and welfare at the West Iceland Regional Office, and lives and work in the town of Borgarnes. Sigursteinn is educated as an architect at the Iceland University of the Arts and Glasgow School of Art. Before joining the SSV team, Sigursteinn organised various cultural events in Borgarnes and the region, such as Plan-B International Art Festival in Borgarnes and network of creative people in West Iceland. Sigursteinn has practiced architecture since his graduation in 2011 but joined the SSV team as director of culture and welfare late 2019 and has since then directed various cultural projects such as the Region's Culture Policy, Children's Culture Festival, Collaboration of exhibitions and museums and more. Sigursteinn is a chairperson of Iceland Craft Association and was until recently in the Eyrarrósín Awards committee – an award presented to outstanding cultural project in rural Iceland.

**Eliza Tudor**

*Nevada County Arts Council.*

**Culture Forward: Culture as Civic Infrastructure in the Sierra Nevada**

Culture Forward is a countywide arts and culture action plan developed for Nevada County, California, in the Sierra Nevada mountain range—a predominantly rural region characterized by small cities, unincorporated communities, long travel distances, and limited public cultural infrastructure. While cultural planning and intersectoral cultural policy have become more common in metropolitan settings, they remain comparatively rare in rural regions, where jurisdictional fragmentation, uneven capacity, and sector silos often constrain coordinated action. Culture Forward was conceived explicitly to respond to these conditions. Rather than positioning arts and culture as a discrete sector, Culture Forward operates as a form of civic infrastructure: a shared framework through which cultural practice intersects with economic development, workforce pathways, tourism, education, land stewardship, and local governance. The plan aligns county and municipal priorities with the lived realities of rural creative labor, volunteer-driven cultural organizations, and geographically dispersed communities, treating culture not as an amenity but as a connective system supporting community wellbeing and resilience. The planning process combined qualitative and quantitative research—including cultural asset mapping, deep listening across geographically dispersed communities, economic impact analysis, and sustained engagement with partners across government, business, education, tourism, and community-based organizations. Cross-sector participation was deliberately cultivated and has proven essential to the plan’s credibility, durability, and early implementation momentum. In a rural context where arts advocacy alone rarely secures long-term investment, Culture Forward demonstrates the value of framing culture as shared work—and shared responsibility—across public, civic, and private systems. This presentation will outline the structure, governance model, and implementation strategy of Culture Forward, with attention to lessons relevant to non-urban regions: how cultural planning can function across multiple jurisdictions; how trust-based, place-responsive engagement strengthens participation; and how cultural policy can be translated into actionable strategies that support resilience, belonging, and long-term sustainability. The project offers a transferable model for embedding.

**Biographical note**

**Eliza Tudor** is an interdisciplinary arts leader and cultural policy practitioner with more than three decades of experience working across arts and social practice in the UK, Australia, and the United States. She is Executive Director of Nevada County Arts Council in rural Northern California, where she leads countywide cultural planning, policy-aligned initiatives, and cross-sector partnerships in a predominantly mountainous and non-urban region of the Sierra Nevada. Tudor is the lead architect of Culture Forward, Nevada County’s first multi-year arts and culture action plan, which positions culture as civic infrastructure and aligns creative practice with priorities in economic development, workforce pathways, education, tourism, public health, and community wellbeing. Her work is rooted in the realities of rural cultural ecosystems—geographically dispersed communities, volunteer-led organizations, limited public infrastructure, and the need for sustained collaboration across jurisdictions and sectors.

**Katie Lowry<sup>1</sup>, and Peter Prendergast<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>The Arts Council of Ireland, Ireland; <sup>2</sup>Cork County Council Library and Arts Service, Ireland.

## **From Policy to Transforming Communities through longitudinal arts investment**

The Arts Council is the national government agency for funding, developing and promoting the arts in Ireland. Our role is to advocate, advise, invest and work in partnership with others, to cultivate a vibrant arts environment at the heart of Irish society. Taking a policy-approach to the Arts, we will be presenting a case study “From Policy to Action” through our overarching Creative Places Programme, focusing on The West Cork Islands as an example of non-urban rural investment in people and place. The Creative Places programme aims to invest in places around Ireland which have not yet benefited from sustained public arts investment and drives policy. The percentage of the population living in rural areas of Ireland in 2024 was 35.7%. Creative Places is informed by the objectives of the National Planning Framework, Project Ireland 2040: a fair society, a collaborative society, more sustainable choices and options, and a creative, innovative, and culturally attuned society. It also supports the strengthening of rural economies and communities, in line with the Action Plan for Rural Development. Additionally, Creative Places derives from the Arts Council’s core policy documents: Making Great Art Work 2016–2025 – the overarching ten-year strategy that guides investment and strategic objectives; Place, Space & People (2020) – a specific spatial policy focused on equitable access to the arts and community-led practice; and The Arts Council’s Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy – which aims to ensure that everyone in Ireland has equal access to engage with and participate in the arts, regardless of their background.

We are leading out on and investing in communities that have not previously benefited from sustained arts investment. Supported by artists and led by locals, Creative Places celebrates people-powered arts. Established in 2019, Creative Places/Cumas Ceantar is a long-term programme of sustained longitudinal arts investment that takes a socially engaged approach underpinned by Community Development.

### **Biographical note**

**Katie Lowry** is currently the Head of Local and Place Partnership - The Arts Council of Ireland. She has over 20 years of experience working in the arts in Ireland. She worked for the Irish Film Board and then as an arts consultant before joining the International Department of the Arts Council in 2008 and the Creative Europe Desk.

**Peter Prendergast** is an Arts Manager and Creative Producer currently delivering the Creative Places programme across the seven inhabited West Cork Islands. He graduated with an M.Phil. in Art History from Trinity College Dublin. His career spans grassroots, commercial, and institutional arts organisations in Ireland. He brings a deep commitment to fostering creative communities and supporting sustainable artistic practice in rural and urban contexts.

## Inclusion, gender and intersectional agency

**Flora Maravalhas, Pedro Borrego, Ana Lúcia Romão, Bernardo Valente, Sandra Firmino, José Soares Neves, and Luís Manuel Baptista**

*Public Administration at the Institute of Social and Political Sciences, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal.*

### **A Systematic Literature Review on Cultural Inequalities**

Cultural inequalities are shaped by interacting social, institutional, and territorial conditions. Cultural capital clarifies why access depends not only on cultural provision but also on socially legitimised dispositions and competences, sustaining distinction and social reproduction. Intersectional research further shows how social class, education, age, gender, nationality, and disability combine with territorial dynamics to structure unequal participation and consumption in non-urban and rural areas.

Developed within the project *Invisible Lines: An Analysis of Inequalities in Access to Culture in Portugal*, this paper presents a systematic literature review (SLR) that synthesises empirical and theoretical contributions, maps prevailing analytical approaches, and identifies gaps and inconsistencies. The review protocol followed PRISMA-P 2015 guidelines. A Scopus search retrieved peer-reviewed studies on access to culture, cultural participation, and cultural consumption, with attention to social and territorial disparities. After seven successive screening stages, the initial set was reduced to a corpus of 140 full articles.

The corpus was analysed using a conceptual model, a brief bibliometric analysis, topic modelling, and multivariate descriptive methods. Results organise the literature into six complementary mechanisms structuring cultural inequalities: structural and contextual barriers to access; territorial political economy and centre–periphery inequalities in cultural provision; socially stratified participation profiles; institutional and organisational barriers; urban cultural restructuring linked to creative economy and tourism strategies; and socio-spatial stratification, including neighbourhood effects and unequal cultural returns. Across topics, territorial inequality appears as under-supply, concentration of infrastructure and funding, and uneven institutional capacity, with digital divides operating as a cross-cutting constraint. Research gaps concentrate on the evaluation of policy interventions and on explanations that connect social stratification, organisational practices, and territorial governance. By consolidating and systematising this evidence, the paper supports a sector-informed research agenda and contributes to planning and policy frameworks for more equitable and sustainable cultural ecosystems beyond metropolitan centres.

### **Biographical note**

**Flora Maravalhas** is a PhD candidate in Public Administration at the Institute of Social and Political Sciences, Universidade de Lisboa (ISCSP-ULisboa), and a research fellow at the Centre for Public Administration and Public Policies (CAPP) and the Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology (CIES-Iscte), Iscte – University Institute of Lisbon. Her research addresses policy design and cultural policy. She helped design the Social Impact Commitment of Cultural Organisations within Portugal's National Plan for the Arts.

**Pedro Borrego** is an Assistant Professor at ISCSP-ULisboa and an integrated researcher at CAPP. He holds a PhD in Pharmacy and has consultancy experience, including culture-related projects:

Eurostat's Measuring the Cultural and Creative Sectors in the EU (2020–2022) and Barómetro da Cultura (2019–2023).

**Ana Lúcia Romão** is an Associate Professor at ISCSP-ULisboa and an integrated researcher at CAPP. She holds a PhD in Economics and her research focuses on accountability, good governance and public management control.

**Bernardo Valente** is a PhD candidate in Political Science at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and holds an MSc in Political Science from the University of Copenhagen. He is a research fellow at the Centre for Public Administration and Public Policies (CAPP), Institute of Social and Political Sciences, Universidade de Lisboa (ISCSP-ULisboa), and has worked on public policy, European policy and innovation policy projects.

**Sandra Firmino** is an Associate Professor at ISCSP-ULisboa and an integrated researcher at CAPP. She holds a PhD in Administrative Sciences from the University of Minho, has led two funded projects, and researches network governance and the formation, implementation and evaluation of public policies.

**José Soares Neves** is an Associate Professor in the Department of History at the School of Sociology and Public Policy of Iscte, an integrated researcher and subdirector at CIES-Iscte, and director of the Portuguese Observatory of Cultural Activities.

**Luís Manuel Baptista** is an Invited Assistant Professor at ISCSP-ULisboa and a Geographic Information Systems administrator at the Sintra City Council. He holds a PhD in Geography and has experience in geospatial projects.

**Emma Bašić** and **Jaka Primorac**

*Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar, Institute for Development and International Relations, Croatia.*

### **Inclusion through Culture: Cultural and Creative Industries in the Borderland Parts of Croatia's Lika Region**

Cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are receiving increasing attention in current discussions on rural development as potential drivers of sustainable development (SD) practices. Although typically associated with urban environments, the past decade has witnessed growing interest in their role in revitalising peripheral and sparsely populated areas.

Research data bridging quantitative indicators (data on cultural infrastructure, employment in CCIs, public needs and institutional frameworks) and qualitative data (21 semi-structured interviews with cultural and creative practitioners from the region and 6 semi-structured interviews with experts from and outside of the region), from Croatia's rural region of Lika, indicate similar trends. Results obtained through reflexive thematic analysis in the MAXQDA software show that CCIs contribute to SD across four dimensions: economic (cultural tourism, employment, local production), ecological (use of natural materials and promotion of environmental values), social (inclusive and solidarity-based practices), and cultural (heritage preservation and reinterpretation).

In specific contexts, such as borderland areas of Lika, along the Croatian - Bosnian border, characterised by migration flows and multicultural communities, inclusion emerges as particularly important. Here, cultural and creative actors (especially women's associations) actively foster coexistence and intercultural dialogue through creative and participatory practices. However, analysis shows that in Lika's strategic documents, CCIs are often addressed only declaratively, lacking concrete implementation measures and institutional support.

This paper is derived from the PhD dissertation "Modernisation and Sustainable Development in Rural Areas: Cultural and Creative Industries in Croatia's Rural Region of Lika", which highlights the need for territorially sensitive policies, stronger integration of culture into development strategies, and enhanced local capacities to enable CCIs to develop sustainably and support the region's sustainable development.

#### **Biographical note**

**Emma Bašić** is a research assistant at the Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar (Regional Centre in Gospić) and a PhD candidate in Sociology of Regional and Local Development at the University of Zadar (Croatia) and the University of Teramo (Italy). She holds a Master's degree in German language and Sociology from the University of Zadar. Her research is situated within cultural and rural sociology, with a particular focus on cultural and creative industries and sustainability.

**Jaka Primorac** works as a Scientific Advisor at the Department for Culture and Communication at the Institute for Development and International Relations (IRMO), in Zagreb, Croatia. In 2010, she received PhD in sociology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. Her research interests intersect the fields of the sociology of culture and media and the sociology of work, with a strong focus on qualitative methods. Dr Primorac worked on a number of international and domestic projects funded by the European Commission Horizon Programme, COST, Croatian Science Foundation etc.

**Naomi Camardella** and **Mara Carando**  
*University for Foreigners of Perugia, Italy.*

### **Place-Based Innovation Through Gender Lenses: CCIs as Tools for Post-Disaster Recovery in Norcia**

The seismic sequence of 2016 that struck central Italy intensified long-standing demographic fragility, making Norcia—a small town in the Umbrian Valnerina—an important site for studying how gender, care responsibilities and territorial rootedness shape decisions to stay or leave. Although women and men experience mobility, care and reconstruction in different ways, these differences remain largely absent from Italian post-disaster policies.

Part of broader research that aims to understand "who stays and who leaves" after the earthquake through a gender lens, this paper interprets settlement and migration choices not only as indicators of vulnerability but as key moments for imagining place-based innovation rooted in cultural and creative resources. It shifts the perspective from portraying Norcia only as a fragile inland area to seeing it as a laboratory of place-based innovation. Here, gender roles can enable or constrain the development of cultural and creative industries (CCIs). Aiming to outline policy guidelines that use CCIs to expand decent work opportunities for women, strengthen local attachment and reduce depopulation.

The theoretical background of the analysis draws on feminist disaster studies, research on disaster-induced migration and work on CCIs literature and their role to foster social innovation, gender equality and economic development. By critically examining existing reconstruction and civil protection policies, it outlines directions for more gender-aware planning and policy frameworks that leverage CCIs in inner areas.

Preliminary findings show that gendered care roles encourage young women's out-migration toward urban centres, while men remain tied to land, craftwork and local networks. These dynamics are invisible in gender-neutral reconstruction policies. The paper argues that CCIs, grounded in local cultural heritage, can offer viable pathways to support women's economic autonomy, counter female out-migration in non-urban contexts and integrate gender perspectives into inland reconstruction and development mechanisms.

#### **Biographical note**

**Naomi Camardella** is a PhD student in Liberal Arts and Sciences in Sustainability at the University for Foreigners of Perugia. Her research focuses on analyzing the impact of natural disasters on women and their role in reconstruction processes, with particular reference to the case of Norcia. She is an activist for LGBTQIA+ rights, with constant attention to gender policies in the academic world.

**Mara Carando** is a PhD student in Diplomacy and International Cooperation at the University for Foreigners of Perugia. Her research examines how culture can act as a driver of sustainable local development, at the intersection of economic, political and social perspectives. In this framework, she investigates new strategies for promoting the nation through cultural resources and identity narratives.

**Zobaida Nasreen**

*University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.*

### **Clapping into Being: Hijra performances and the Creation of Social Space on Non-Urban Bangladesh**

This study explores the cultural practices of hijra communities in non-urban regions of Bangladesh, focusing on the embodied performance of clapping (tāli) and the ways these practices cultivate social, cultural, and symbolic space. While hijra identities have historically been framed through urban visibility and metropolitan performance circuits, their presence in rural and peri-rural landscapes remains understudied.

Drawing on ethnographic insights, the research examines how the distinctive hijra clap functions as both a communicative tool and a performative assertion of identity, signaling authority, solidarity, and social negotiation within village contexts. In non-urban communities—where social norms can be more rigid and visibility more contested—hijra individuals use clapping, kinship-based support networks, and everyday interactions to negotiate belonging, claim recognition, and carve out micro-spaces of autonomy. This process of cultivating space is not merely physical but relational, shaped by exchanges with local residents, religious norms, economic survival practices, and longstanding perceptions of gender variance.

Ultimately, the study highlights how hijra communities in rural Bangladesh create culturally meaningful spaces through embodied performance and social navigation, challenging dominant narratives that situate gender-diverse life solely within urban margins.

#### **Biographical note**

**Zobaida Nasreen** is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Dhaka and was a prestigious Fulbright Scholar (2018-2019). She received her PhD in social anthropology from Durham University, UK. After doing her MSS in anthropology from Jahangirnagar University, she completed her MA in development studies from Hiroshima University, Japan. She has authored 14 books and coedited *Political Violence in South Asia* (2018, Routledge) with Professor Ali Riaz and Fahmida Zaman. She has published in various local and international journals. Her areas of interest include anthropology of violence, forced displacement, sexuality and masculinity, social memory, social movements, and indigeneity and identity politics.

## Heritage, local knowledge and collaborative stewardship

**Mahmoud Saleh Mohammadi** and **Sofie Renap**

*Spazio Nour, Italy, Belgium.*

### **From Historical Castle to Living Cultural Ecosystem: Artistic Place-based Innovation in a Non-urban European Context**

Recent debates within cultural policy and artistic research increasingly attend to non-urban territories as sites of cultural production marked by distinct temporalities, social formations, and modes of knowledge. In parallel, art history has traced a long trajectory of participatory and socially engaged practices that reposition art as a shared, situated process structured through encounter and use rather than through autonomous form (Lacy, 1995; Kester, 2011; Bishop, 2012). This paper brings these two lines of inquiry together through an ongoing project initiated by Spazio Nour in a seventeenth-century castle in Wechelderzande, Belgium, situated within a landscape shaped by woodland, light, and a tradition of artistic retreat. The project approaches the castle as a spatial and social structure shaped through practice. Through site-specific interventions, collective artistic processes, and sustained engagement with local actors, heritage emerges as a form of cultural infrastructure produced through use, negotiation, and collective memory (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2013). The methodological orientation draws on legacies of participatory art, social sculpture, and post-studio practices, where authorship circulates among artists, participants, spaces, and materials. Artistic practice unfolds through proximity, material presence, and shared experience, in sustained relation to the rhythms of the surrounding landscape.

Positioned within this art-historical constellation, the work of Spazio Nour aligns with traditions that approach space as a relational field (Lefebvre, 1991) and participation as a condition of cultural production. The rural setting of the castle, historically connected to Impressionist painters who sought light, slowness, and immersion in nature, lends particular intensity to these dynamics. Landscape, memory, labour, silence, and social life intersect with contemporary artistic processes, shaping a working climate oriented toward attention, duration, and collective presence. Such configurations resonate with place-based innovation as a relational process rooted in local specificity and long-term engagement (Bell & Jayne, 2010; Duxbury et al., 2015).

#### **Biographical note**

**Mahmoud Saleh Mohammadi** is an artist, curator, and the founder and Art Director of Spazio Nour, an artistic and cultural platform dedicated to participatory, site-specific, and socially engaged artistic practice. Born in Tehran in 1979, he studied painting at the Art University of Tehran and at the Brera Academy of Fine Arts in Milan. In 2023, he finished his research project at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. His practice spans painting, socially-engaged art, installation, performance, and spatial intervention, and has been presented internationally. His work focuses on cultural exchange, spatial experience, and collective artistic processes, with a strong emphasis on place-based creation in both urban and non-urban contexts.

**Sofie Renap** is an art historian, researcher, and curator. She graduated in Art History from KU Leuven and continued her studies in contemporary art and philosophy at the University of Hildesheim, Germany. She works as a freelance researcher, writer, and assistant for international artists and cultural projects, and regularly contributes to art publications. Within Spazio Nour, she focuses on research, curatorial development, and project coordination.

**Ilze Vanaga**

NGO “Dēms”, Latvia.

**Values-based Heritage Re-imagination and Interpretation. The Case of the Beļava Manor House**

The Beļava Manor House (Gulbene County, Latvia) is a Baroque-style cultural monument of national importance built in the mid-18th century, which encloses 11 art monuments of national importance. The master's thesis “Cultural Significance in the Management Planning of Built heritage. The Case of the Manor Houses of the Gulbene County” (Ilze Vanaga, 2024) has highlighted the lack of management planning for this site, although the study reveals that it is attributed with strong social, historical, economic, aesthetic, and ecological values. Taking into account the principles of values-based management planning and the importance of the site in Latvia's built heritage, in 2025 several volunteers initiated projects to activate the heritage community of Beļava Manor, promote its visibility and build a bridge between the municipality (the site owner) and other stakeholders. The core of the activities was aimed at involving the local community and wider audience in shaping the future of the abandoned site. There were organised seminars to raise awareness on the historical importance of the place, as well as cultural events to regain the people-site connection. “Development Workshop of the Beļava Manor” brought together different stakeholders, played out the “hell” and the “paradise” future scenarios of the site, as well as gathered opinions of the potential functionality of the manor. Throughout 2025, participants of the activities had an opportunity to shape the development of the manor's visual identity by voting for their preferred solution. As a result of the initiatives, in 2025 a values-based interpretation plan and visual identity of the site was developed (available at [www.belavasmuiza.lv](http://www.belavasmuiza.lv)). Activities provided local and national-scale political discussions for preservation and management of the place. There were organised a meeting with county deputies calling for purposeful actions at the site. It was strengthened by one meeting with the Heritage Board members who appealed to review municipality's priorities in the field of cultural heritage finding opportunities for the development of Beļava Manor. Thus, the values-based and structured heritage activism allowed to reimagine and advance the future of the manor.

**Biographical note**

**Ilze Vanaga** is a life-long learning and heritage project coordinator and heritage practitioner. Since 2014, Ilze has gained experience in various local government institutions and NGOs in Gulbene County, managing regional, national and international projects in such programs as Erasmus+, Interreg, Latvian Culture Capital Foundation, LEADER and others. Since 2024, she has led several initiatives aimed at activating the local and wider heritage community of the abandoned Beļava Manor House (Gulbene County, Latvia), identifying its potential functions, developing a values-based interpretation plan and building a bridge between the Municipality and other stakeholders.

**Sabīne Vandāna**

*Valmiermuiža Association of Culture, Latvia.*

**The Manor Network as a Catalyst for Community Collaboration and Sustainable Heritage Management in Valmiera County**

In the rural landscape of Valmiera County, where over 80 historic manor heritage sites have been identified, the challenge of sustainability often lies not in the lack of heritage assets, but in the isolation of their managers.

This project analyses the "Valmiera County Manor Network" (established in 2024–2025) as a vital community collaboration tool designed to bridge the gap between static preservation and active, sustainable development.

Drawing on recent participant analysis, past events and networking, the study demonstrates that the network functions primarily as a platform for experience sharing and knowledge transfer. While manor owners and managers face significant challenges regarding internal capacity and financial resources, survey results reveal a high intrinsic motivation to collaborate and a readiness to share specific expertise, such as restoration skills and project writing. But do these results also manifest themselves in reality?

The project argues that the network strengthens the local cultural heritage community by transforming individual enthusiasts and owners into a cohesive "community of practice". This collaborative approach addresses the urgent need for capacity building through peer-to-peer learning and joint tourism initiatives, thereby enhancing the resilience of these historic sites. After all, the Valmiera County Manor Network serves as a model for how non-urban regions can mobilise social capital to ensure the long-term sustainability of their historic environments.

**Biographical note**

**Sabīne Vandāna** has been managing the Valmiermuiža Association of Culture since 2016, creating cultural offerings in Valmiermuiža and developing it as a high-quality cultural destination while respecting the historical landscape. She creates projects and events related to cultural heritage, music, theatre, contemporary art, as well as community involvement, cooperation, and civic participation. Sabīne is currently actively developing an initiative of Valmiera County Manor Network. She is also studying for a Master's degree in social sciences in tourism and leisure organisation, Tourism Competitiveness Management, at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences.

## Interweaving agriculture, culture, and bioregional innovation

**Karin Heinschink** and **Ingrid Machold**

*Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics, Rural and Mountain Research (BAB), Austria.*

### Exploring contemporary agricultural art initiatives in Austria

Austria's rural areas accommodate approx. 43 % of inhabitants on 75% of the federal territory (BML, 2022: 17, 2019 statistics). These areas are heterogenous and face challenges such as outmigration of youths, an aging population, a decline in local economic activity or difficulties in maintaining the cultural landscape (Groier et al., 2022). Activities for strengthening rural economies and societies can be implemented by public, private and civil actors, including art initiatives. This contribution examines how contemporary agricultural art initiatives seek to foster a good quality of life and sustainability in rural areas. In an exploratory study, we analyse data from interviews with 15 artists and regional stakeholders from 5 Austrian case studies (Groier et al., 2022). Results show that contemporary agricultural art initiatives serve as local suppliers of food, culture (through arts, farming, landscape maintenance) and social interaction in rural areas. Furthermore, they actively engage in the public discourse of key sustainability topics for society and humankind (e.g. biodiversity loss, climate change, resources, societal challenges). By means of appealing to different senses and working with the recipients' perception, emotions and participation, they seek to raise awareness, stimulate discussions or start processes. This is in contrast, or complementary to research and policy who often deal with these topics using top-down approaches and abstract or technical language. Overall, contemporary agricultural art initiatives may contribute to a sustainable regional and societal development through place-based and/or socially inclusive approaches.

### Biographical note

**Karin Heinschink** studied international business at the Vienna University of Economics and Business, AT as well as agricultural economics at University College Dublin, IE. She has worked as a research fellow at the Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics, Rural and Mountain research (BAB) since 2019 and its predecessor institution Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics (AWI) from 2013 to 2018. Her research interests include interdisciplinary and cross-topic studies on agriculture, the food system, rural areas and nature conservation and mixed-methods research combining quantitative and qualitative approaches.

**Ingrid Machold** studied sociology and theory of drama at the University of Vienna. She has worked as a research fellow at the at the Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics, Rural and Mountain Research (BAB) since 2019 and its predecessor institution Federal Institute for Less-Favoured and Mountainous Area (BABF) from 2000 to 2018. She has acted as the Deputy head of department Mountain Areas research and regional development at BAB since 2019. Her main research priorities are rural sociology, rural and regional development and regional governance with a focus on socio-economic and policy related issues and living conditions in rural and mountain regions: This involves a particular focus on demographic change, the provision of public services, arts and culture in rural development as well as research on transition processes to sustainable and resilient rural and mountain regions. She has participated in several projects funded by the European Commission as well as national projects on the social dynamics of rural development.

**Elina Tuomarila**

*John Nurminen Foundation, Finland.*

**Agriculture meets River Lore: Agri- and Culture Project at River Uskelanjoki, Finland**

The John Nurminen Foundation`s ongoing project (2025-2027) in Southwest Finland combines both agricultural and cultural perspectives. The project stems from long-term fieldwork and findings that reveal great separation between local experience, memory-based knowledge and the systemic, top-to-bottom approach in the rural river landscapes when it comes to environmental water management or land management. In close cooperation with agricultural operators and residents, we aim to reduce nutrient runoff into the Archipelago Sea, contributing to Finland's goal of removing the catchment area from HELCOM's hot spot list. In these rural watersheds, food production, intergenerational knowledge and sense of place are intertwined with daily life. The project's strong cultural focus sheds light on local cultural and environmental knowledge, engaging local people and collect their memories and experiences living by and with the river. Together with agricultural actions, the project works with the cultural heritage of Uskelanjoki, land, water and people from source to sea, to gaze not just to the past but to create future stories of the Uskelanjoki river and people living with the river landscape. The artists working in the project have photographed and interviewed local people, from farmers to children and adults, all of whom have a very concrete relationship with their living environment. Lifestories of the people, land, Uskelanjoki river and grazing animals are brought together into an inclusive and communal photography exhibition in the summer season 2027. The location and presentation of the exhibition will be unusual and surprising. As this is a fixed-term project, the challenge is the legacy: how do we maintain the trust of those who have worked with us? How do we leave a lasting mark on cooperation and keep inspiring people? How do we continue creating understanding between diverse disciplines and stakeholders, including landowners and officials? This presentation discusses the methods used, provide insights into initial findings, and reflect on participation, trust, culture and sustainable development.

**Biographical note**

**Elina Tuomarila** is Cultural Producer in the John Nurminen Foundation since 2020.

**Sabrina Salis** and **Ylber Veseli**

*OSCE, Kosovo.*

### **The interrelation between built heritage and agriculture for sustainable preservation: the case study of the village of Velika Hoča/Hoçë e Madhe in Kosovo**

This paper explores the interrelation between built heritage and agriculture and its relevance for sustainable preservation using the village of Velika Hoča/Hoçë e Madhe in Kosovo as a case study.

The village of Velika Hoča/Hoçë e Madhe in Kosovo overlooks a vast landscape of wine fields, and it is well known for its unique vernacular and religious architecture. Furthermore, the village is a significant heritage site for the local Kosovo Serb community: it is the only entire village inhabited by the Kosovo Serb community that is also recognised as a heritage site. Thanks to its cultural significance, the village is classified as a Special Protective Zone by the cultural heritage legislation and enjoys enhanced protective status. While the village's religious and vernacular cultural heritage is widely recognized, the surrounding landscape drew less attention from scholars and policy makers. Nevertheless, the surrounding wine fields have been providing with a much-needed source of economic sustainability and cultural identity for the local Serb community. During the Middle Ages, local wine cellars belonging to Serbian Orthodox monasteries produced and exported wine and brandy internationally. The local economy was based on growing grapes, horticulture and wine production. Historically, the village's landscape and built heritage have been closely interlinked and influenced each other's structurally and culturally, resulting in a unique harmony between heritage and environment.

This paper argues that recognising the interrelation between built heritage and agriculture is crucial for the sustainable preservation of the village. Furthermore, it maintains that cross-sectoral collaboration and partnership between actors responsible for the conservation of built heritage, and environment-based tourism sector, is a crucial component of future sustainable preservation policies and measures.

This paper is based on archival research, interviews with local actors, and extensive field work conducted by the authors over the past 5 years.

#### **Biographical note**

**Sabrina Salis** is a cultural heritage expert who spearheaded preservation efforts in Italy, China, Jordan, Iran and Kosovo for the past 12 years. She is specialised in heritage preservation and management and currently serves at the OSCE Mission in Kosovo as Chief of Section in the Property, Cultural Heritage and Interfaith Dialogue Section. Before joining the OSCE, she worked for 5 years at UNESCO in Jordan and Iran, leading programs and projects on the preservation of cultural heritage, illicit trafficking, documentary heritage and intangible heritage. At UNESCO she advised the government on the implementation of the UNESCO's 2003 and 1970 Conventions, offering technical expertise and policy advice.

**Ylber Veseli** has been working at the OSCE Mission in Kosovo for the past 20 years, where he has provided technical and legal advice to the government on the implementation of policies and programs in the field of cultural heritage. He has recently supported the drafting of the management plan of the Old Bazaar of Pejë that is currently undergoing approval process, and co-authored OSCE Mission in Kosovo reports on protection of immovable cultural heritage.

**Dace Kaufmane, Liga Paula, and Amanda Lejniece**

*University of Life Sciences and Technologies, Latvia.*

## **Bioregion as an innovative form of public-private cooperation for the preservation of local culture**

To ensure the sustainability and viability of rural areas, a tailored and a place-based approach to rural communities is needed. In Europe, since the end of the 20th century, the idea of a bioregion developed and transformed into an innovative interdisciplinary concept for sustainable territorial development. Bioregionalism emphasizes a sense of community and shared culture that stems from the local geography and ecological features of the bioregion, which ultimately bind society. In Europe, such initiatives are included also in the goals of the Green Deal. The creation of a bioregion requires diverse forms of cooperation between a number of stakeholders such as state institutions, municipalities, the business sector, research and educational institutions, as well as local communities. This is also confirmed by the process of forming the first bioregion in Latvia. Cultural aspects are important for bioregional identity; this connection can be expressed in local art, folklore, festivals and community events that celebrate the unique qualities of the region. Culture preservation practices that embody community development are diverse and adapted to the specific needs and characteristics of the bioregion. In order to develop better cooperation between stakeholders, it should be based on local knowledge, local resources and community involvement. During the qualitative research, LBTU researchers have identified the main functions of private and public sector cooperation for the development of bioregions in Latvia. The study revealed that in Northern Kurzeme and Latgale, potential bioregions are perceived as an innovative solution that encompasses the cultural dimension. In searching for the most successful strategies that would unite communities in the preservation of cultural heritage, it was concluded that effective communication and educational campaigns would significantly increase public awareness and involvement.

### **Biographical note**

**Dace Kaufmane** is an assistant professor and leading researcher at the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies; teaches subject courses on management, tourism, and regional development. She has more than 20 years long research experience in a number of national research projects, is author and co-author of more than 100 scientific publications on private-public cooperation in tourism, culinary heritage in gastronomic tourism, local food systems, bioregional development perspectives and other management-related issues. The results of the research have been published in the proceedings of the international scientific conferences and international scientific journals.

**Liga Paula** is a professor and leading researcher at the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies; teaches subject courses on community development, organizational behaviour, human development, research organization, and regional development. She has more than 20 years long research experience in a number of national and international research projects, is author and co-author of more than 120 scientific publications on rural development and community studies, local food systems, organizational issues, teacher quality of work life. The results of the research have been published in the proceedings of the international scientific conferences, monographs, and international scientific journals.

**Amanda Lejniece** is a bachelor's student of the study programme "Sociology of Organizations and Public Administration" at LBTU. Her research interests are related to social problems, regional

development and sustainability in the context of nature and agriculture. In cooperation with LBTU researchers, she has been involved in the research project “Bio-regions as an integrated strategy for sustainable development of rural areas in Latvia”. Amanda is a K. Ulmanis scholarship holder, she has presented at international scientific conferences, has participated in two Erasmus+ BIP exchange programs.

## *Living Traditions: Craft, music, local knowledge and sustainability*

**Minna Kovero, Elina Luiro, and Tanya Kravtsov**

*University of Lapland, Finland.*

### **Revitalisation of Heritage Wool and Wool Crafts to Promote Sustainability in Lapland - Outcomes of Wool Innovation Project**

VillalInno, the Wool Innovation project, focused on place-based craft and local wool, created art-based product and service innovations in Lapland, Finland. Operating in Northern Finland, within remote areas and living cultural landscapes, the project responded to ecological, economic, social and cultural sustainability challenges. It positioned local wool materials and traditional knowledge as strategic resources for contemporary product and service development. By embedding environmental responsibility into creative processes, VillalInno reframed craft not only as cultural expression, but also as a tool for regional resilience.

*WoolInno: Revitalisation of the Wool Craft Tradition* project (2023-2026), implemented by the Faculty of Art and Design of the University of Lapland and co-funded by the European Union, created wool-based innovations for small and medium-sized enterprises in Lapland in the context of crafts and cultural tourism by sharing and renewing the cultural heritage of crafts. At the core of the project was heritage sheep breeds, like Finnsheep and Kainuu Grey, and their locally produced wool. The project enhanced the cooperation between craftspeople, sheep farmers and the tourism sector in Lapland. Designers, artisans and artist-researchers collaborated to explore ways to promote local wool by innovating and branding wool products and services to give value to local wool.

Through co-creative workshops, experimental prototyping and piloting, the project enabled knowledge transfer between people. Emphasis was placed on narrative-driven product identities that communicate material origin and ethical production. By linking revitalisation of heritage wool and crafts with contemporary design strategies, VillalInno demonstrated how place-based crafts can contribute to sustainable transitions in northern regions. The project brings forth a model for revitalisation of wool crafts to strengthen local economies, reinforce cultural continuity, and support long-term material and social sustainability in the Arctic context. Outcomes of WoolInno project provide transferable insights for other peripheral regions seeking sustainable heritage-based innovations in creative industries.

#### **Biographical note**

**Minna Kovero** (1980) is a Karelian-hearted researcher-artist from Rovaniemi and a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Art and Design at the University of Lapland. Her interests in art and research are related to Finno-Ugric traditions, traditional ecological knowledge, cultural sustainability, revitalisation of crafts and ornaments, and the deeper meanings of adornments. In her creations she uses textile materials, wood, beeswax colours, scents, small shiny things and found objects from nature. She works in the VillalInno project (2023–2026) that focuses on revitalising the wool craft traditions.

**Elina Luiro** (1981) is an artist-designer and university teacher at the University of Lapland, holding Master's degrees in Industrial Design and Art Education. Her artistic practice centres on Arctic biodiversity, ecological sustainability, and multisensory material exploration, particularly through wool. She works with embroidery, wet and needle felting, and integrates natural materials with contemporary craft approaches. In the VillalInno project (2023–2026), she contributes as an expert

by combining traditional wool crafts with digital fabrication, including revitalising historical tools – such as heddles and lucet implements – through laser cutting and 3D printing.

**Tanya Kravtsov** (1985) is an artist-researcher and a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Art and Design at the University of Lapland. Originally from south-western Siberia, she has made her home in Rovaniemi since 2016. Her artistic and research interests include art-based research methods, traditional and contemporary craft, connectedness with nature, and traditional ecological knowledge. She works with various media, including painting and slow crafts such as embroidery, pottery, and band weaving. She is a designer in the VillalInno project (2023-2026) that focuses on revitalising the wool craft traditions.

**Tanya Kravtsov** and **Minna Kovero**  
*University of Lapland, Finland.*

### **Weaving with the Trees - Place-based Explorations into Sustainable Wool Craft Practice**

This paper explores how cultural and creative practices can act as transformative forces for building equitable and sustainable communities. Grounded in a place-based perspective, it focuses on the northern landscapes where humans, materials, and non-human beings coexist in ongoing multispecies relations. By approaching the forest as both collaborator and site of learning, we examine weaving-in-the-woods practices that activate sensory engagement, ecological awareness, and embodied knowledge rooted in local environments. These outdoor weaving encounters—using simple heddles, natural fibres, and improvised looms—foreground the interconnectedness between people and the living world, revealing how creative acts can mediate new forms of attention, reciprocity, and responsibility.

At the same time, the project explores innovation through wool materials and traditions. Wool, as a locally available and culturally embedded fibre, becomes a conduit through which heritage, craft knowledge, and contemporary experimentation intertwine. Through craft workshops, place explorations, and co-creating, we explore how wool-based creativity can support the revitalisation of northern craft traditions while opening pathways for sustainable futures. This includes developing experimental weaving methods, integrating natural materials gathered from the forest, and reimagining heddle-based weaving as an accessible, inclusive practice that invites diverse participants into a shared space of learning. The connection between human and non-human collaborators is at the centre of this inquiry, and the research highlights their potential to catalyse social, ecological, and cultural transformation. The project argues that cultural and creative activities, especially those deeply rooted in place and guided by multispecies awareness, can strengthen social cohesion, foster equality, and support environmentally grounded innovation.

The study is conducted through an art-based action research approach and proposes that creative place-based practices offer vital tools for nurturing sustainable and resilient communities in the North and beyond.

#### **Biographical note**

**Tanya Kravtsov** (1985) is an artist-researcher and a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Art and Design at the University of Lapland. Originally from south-western Siberia, she has made her home in Rovaniemi since 2016. Her artistic and research interests include art-based research methods, traditional and contemporary craft, connectedness with nature, and traditional ecological knowledge. She works with various media, including painting and slow crafts such as embroidery, pottery, and band weaving. She is a designer in the VillalInno project (2023-2026) that focuses on revitalising the wool craft traditions.

**Minna Kovero** (1980) is a Karelian-hearted researcher-artist from Rovaniemi and a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Art and Design at the University of Lapland. Her interests in art and research are related to Finno-Ugric traditions, traditional ecological knowledge, cultural sustainability, revitalisation of crafts and ornaments, and the deeper meanings of adornments. In her creations she uses textile materials, wood, beeswax colours, scents, small shiny things and found objects from nature. She works in the VillalInno project (2023-2026) that focuses on revitalising the wool craft traditions.

**Rhona NicDhùghaill**

*University of Stirling, Scotland.*

### **Making A Scene: Using Gaelic “traditional social knowledge” to grow creative communities for the future**

Like many peripheral areas, in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland many young people are forced to leave to pursue education and employment opportunities, while a growing housing crisis makes it increasingly difficult to return. At the same time, communities are experiencing increased in-migration, most often from England, which has implications for the endangered Gaelic language and fragile indigenous culture of the region. Can the wisdom contained in traditional Gaelic practices and concepts be reinterpreted to grow an inclusive and sustainable arts "scene" for the future, honouring our heritage while moving with the times?

My paper will discuss two examples from my own community arts practice in my home region on the west coast of Scotland.

*Let's Make A Scene*, a collectively run open mic night in Oban, is a contemporary incarnation of the traditional taigh cèilidh (visiting house), based on the Gaelic principles of radical inclusivity, community care, and the normalisation of creativity. It provides a meeting place, a welcome for new faces, and a way to build social networks, as well as practical opportunities to perform original music, song and spoken word in a nurturing space, leading to larger gig opportunities which help sustain the local arts scene.

Feàrna is a collaboration with fellow community arts practitioner Alice Stillman on the Isle of Mull, which has built a toolkit of Gaelic concepts, insights and practices, supporting more inclusive ways of working in the region which hold space for Gaelic culture while also welcoming those from elsewhere. I am a Gaelic speaker from the region while Alice is a newer resident originally from England; together we provide workshops to creative practitioners, for example through the Scottish Artists Union Learning Programme.

This paper will draw on social arts practice scholarship, as well as theory from the wider social sciences.

### **Biographical note**

**Rhona NicDhùghaill** is a Gaelic speaker from Oban on the west coast of Scotland. She makes collaborative, community-based, multi-artform projects, often exploring Gaelic culture and identity in a post-vernacular context. She has worked in various community and arts development roles over the past 20 years in Glasgow and in the Highlands and Islands, including as a curator, producer, and refugee support worker. In 2022 she completed an MA in Art and Social Practice with UHI and is currently working on a PhD with the Centre for the Sciences of Place and Memory with the University of Stirling in Scotland.

## *Place-based learning and living laboratories*

**Bernardo Valente, Pedro Borrego, Ana Lúcia Romão, Flora Maravalhas, Sandra Firmino, Luís Manuel Baptista, and José Soares Neves**

*Centre for Public Administration and Public Policies (CAPP), Institute of Social and Political Sciences, Universidade de Lisboa (ISCSP-ULisboa); Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology, Iscte – University Institute of Lisbon (CIES-Iscte), Portugal.*

### **Inequalities and territorial asymmetries in cultural access and participation in Portugal**

Access to culture is recognised as a right and as a dimension of social cohesion and sustainable development in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the UNESCO Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. In Portugal, the national constitution assigns to the State the responsibility for promoting the democratisation of culture and guaranteeing access to cultural activities. However, despite recent advances in the cultural infrastructure of the territory, structural inequalities in cultural access and participation persist, linked to the historical concentration of resources in metropolitan areas, the fragility of cultural infrastructures in low-density territories and the limited adaptation of public policies to local dynamics. These asymmetries lead to low cultural participation among large segments of the population, undermining social, territorial, and democratic cohesion.

The article is one of the outputs of the research project Invisible Lines: An analysis of inequalities in access to culture in Portugal and focuses on identifying socio-economic, demographic and institutional factors that help explain regional asymmetries in cultural access. It examines two non-urban territories with distinct dynamics: Norte Transmontano, a northern inland region marked by geographical isolation and an ageing population; and Alentejo/Algarve, a southern region exposed to economic seasonality and labour precariousness. The research design combines document analysis, the collection and harmonisation of statistical data from official and non-official sources, and semi-structured interviews with cultural stakeholders and local governance actors. The empirical evidence on cultural inequalities in Portugal, supported by georeferenced data, illustrates territorial patterns of exclusion and inclusive practices, including initiatives implemented by public authorities to enhance cultural democratisation. By integrating quantitative and qualitative insights into a coherent analytical and policy-oriented framework, the study shows that territorial inequalities in access to culture stem from persistent structural factors that require more flexible, locally adapted public policies supported by empirical evidence.

### **Biographical note**

**Bernardo Valente** is a PhD candidate in Political Science at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and holds an MSc in Political Science from the University of Copenhagen. He is a research fellow at the Centre for Public Administration and Public Policies (CAPP), Institute of Social and Political Sciences, Universidade de Lisboa (ISCSP-ULisboa), and has worked on public policy, European policy and innovation policy projects.

**Pedro Borrego** is an Assistant Professor at ISCSP-ULisboa and an integrated researcher at CAPP. He holds a PhD in Pharmacy and has consultancy experience, including culture-related projects such as Eurostat's Measuring the Cultural and Creative Sectors in the EU (2020–2022) and Barómetro da Cultura (2019–2023).

**Ana Lúcia Romão** is an Associate Professor at ISCSP-ULisboa and an integrated researcher at CAPP. She holds a PhD in Economics and her research focuses on accountability, good governance and public management control.

**Flora Maravalhas** is a PhD candidate in Public Administration at ISCSP-ULisboa and a research fellow at CAPP and the Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology, Iscte – University Institute of Lisbon (CIES-Iscte). Her research addresses policy design and cultural policy.

**Sandra Firmino** is an Associate Professor at ISCSP-ULisboa and an integrated researcher at CAPP. She holds a PhD in Administrative Sciences from the University of Minho, has led two funded projects, and researches network governance and the formation, implementation and evaluation of public policies.

**Luís Manuel Baptista** is an Invited Assistant Professor at ISCSP-ULisboa and a Geographic Information Systems administrator at the Sintra City Council. He holds a PhD in Geography and has experience in geospatial projects.

**José Soares Neves** is an Associate Professor in the Department of History at the School of Sociology and Public Policy of Iscte, an integrated researcher and subdirector at CIES-Iscte, and director of the Portuguese Observatory of Cultural Activities.

**Jean-François Alberghi, Paloma Sánchez-Broch, Pablo López Gómez, and Margarita Fernández Mier**

*University of Oviedo, Spain.*

### **Territory Schools and Community Activation for the Revitalization of Mountain Cultural Landscapes in Asturias**

The rural areas of Asturias, located in the north of the Iberian Peninsula, are undergoing profound transformations driven by depopulation, demographic ageing, and the lack of generational replacement. Those processes undermine the sustainability of their social, economic, and community cohesion. The decline in population not only affects productive activity but also weakens mutual support networks, the transmission of cultural practices and the continuity of historically constructed territorial identities.

In this context, the Social LANDScapes research group at the University of Oviedo has been participating since 2024 in the Interreg Sudoe Cultur-Monts project. The aim of this project is to revalue the mountain cultural landscapes of southwestern Europe (particularly in Spain, France, and Portugal) and to promote their potential as a driver of sustainable territorial development. The project is structured around the activation of local stakeholders, community participation and the transfer of knowledge generated through interdisciplinary research.

One of the main lines of work developed by the research group in Asturias is the creation of territory-based schools. Those educational initiatives (developed both in formal and non-formal contexts) integrate the rural environment into the learning process and transform the landscape and community practices into pedagogical resources. These Territory Schools mobilise a wide range of actors (local residents, associations, businesses, artisans, livestock farmers, cultural organizations, local administrations...) and foster collaboration between academic and local knowledge. Through active and collaborative methodologies, we create spaces for intergenerational exchanges, recover traditional knowledge and facilitate a bidirectional transfer of knowledge between the territory and academia.

In this presentation, we will outline our main lines of action. Preliminary results show that the Territory Schools operate as a key methodological tool within Cultur-Monts, activating local stakeholders, energising communities and training new generations capable of understanding, caring for and revitalising mountain cultural landscapes.

#### **Biographical note**

**Jean-François Alberghi** is a sociologist and European project expert specialising in rural development, cultural heritage and community-based innovation. He is a member of the Social LANDScapes research group at the University of Oviedo, where he contributes to interdisciplinary research and territorial activation processes focused on mountain cultural landscapes. With over 15 years of experience in European programmes (Interreg, Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, Creative Europe), his work centres on knowledge transfer, stakeholder engagement and participatory methodologies linking academia, local communities and policy frameworks.

**Paloma Sánchez-Broch** has developed her professional career in the fields of heritage research and interpretation, cultural mediation and management, and secondary education teaching. She is a member of the LLABOR-SocialLANDScapes research group and is currently carrying out her

doctoral research in the Department of History at the University of Oviedo as a predoctoral researcher working in the areas of heritage education and scientific knowledge transfer.

**Pablo López Gómez.** PhD in Archaeology. Specialist in medieval rural history, ethnography, landscape archaeology and public archaeology. His main line of research focuses on commons and mountain landscapes. He has extensive experience as an archaeological technician, having co-directed the excavations of the LLABOR-LANDS group from 2016 to 2025, and has been the director of the Commons Archaeology Project in the Cantabrian Mountains since 2020.

**Margarita Fernández Mier** is a Professor of Medieval History at the University of Oviedo, with more than 35 years of teaching and research experience. A specialist in the Early Middle Ages from an interdisciplinary perspective, she has led national and international research projects and is the author of more than 140 scientific publications. She has also directed several knowledge-transfer and citizen-science initiatives, designing activities that enable society to participate in knowledge-generation processes, with a particular focus on the rural world that forms the core of her historical research.

**Leonarda Kestere-Klavina**

*Turaida Museum Reserve, Latvia.*

**Fostering Innovation and Collaboration through Place-Based Learning at the Turaida Museum Reserve**

In non-urban areas, cultural heritage institutions can serve as in situ learning environments where cultural, creative, scientific, and ecological skills are developed directly within their historical, social, and environmental context. This case study presents the Turaida Museum Reserve in Turaida, Sigulda Municipality, as a model of place-based innovation that cultivates creativity, cross-sectoral collaboration, and community engagement, directly responding to the conference theme of leveraging culture for non-urban development.

The Young Archaeologists' School, implemented in partnership with the Sigulda Youth Initiative Centre "Mērķis," engages lower and upper secondary school students in hands-on, experiential learning that integrates heritage, education, creative practice, and biodiversity observation. Participants explore archaeological methods, museum research, experimental archaeology, and fieldwork, culminating in European Archaeology Days and supervised excavations. By interacting directly with heritage sites, landscapes, and natural habitats, students develop transferable skills in critical observation, cultural interpretation, creative problem-solving, civic engagement, and environmental stewardship.

Place-based innovation is further reinforced through digital and participatory initiatives. The platform [atklajturaidu.lv](http://atklajturaidu.lv) guides learners through the museum's collections, historical sites, and ecological landscapes, combining exploration with creative and problem-solving tasks. Competitions such as "Engaging in Turaida – Designing a Turaida Souvenir" introduce participants to product design, prototyping, and entrepreneurship inspired by local heritage and natural resources. Storytelling tools, including the historical character Dāvids, enhance narrative-building and interpretation, while civic participation projects allow students to map cultural and ecological values and practice ethical decision-making in situ.

This integrated model demonstrates how rural cultural institutions can act as hubs of creativity and innovation, linking heritage, education, biodiversity learning, and local economies. By fostering hands-on, place-based learning, the Turaida Museum Reserve cultivates skills, agency, and local identity, supporting sustainable heritage and creative development in non-urban communities.

**Biographical note**

**Leonarda Kestere-Klavina** has extensive experience in arts and cultural management, having contributed to numerous projects with broad public engagement. Her work includes Latvia's presentation in Weimar as European Capital of Culture (1999), the Latvian Culture Season in France, Étonnante Lettonie (2005), and the French Culture Season in Latvia, Un Printemps Français (2007). She has produced large-scale concerts and ceremonies, such as the Inauguration of the President of Latvia, which included a live broadcast with HMQ Elizabeth II and thousands of Latvian children. Leonarda has collaborated with leading Latvian cultural institutions, producing contemporary opera, ballet, and musical performances including The Birds' Opera, Alice, Jakob Lenz, and Thumbelina. She has also worked in sponsorship, charity projects, and international arts consultancy with MRS Grupa. From 2014 to 2020, she led the International Program of the Latvian State Centenary celebrations at the Ministry of Culture, and from 2022 to 2024, she was Head of Development and International Cooperation at the National Museum of Literature and Music in

Riga, organising international conferences, exhibitions, and community initiatives. Since September 2025, Leonarda serves as Head of Communication and Development at the Turaida Museum Reserve, a protected cultural site encompassing the Turaida Medieval Castle, a wooden church, manor buildings, and the Dainu Hill Sculpture Park. She holds a Master's degree in Arts Management from the City University of London and completed a Doctoral Study in Arts and Cultural Studies in 2017. Since 1998, she has taught cultural management at the Latvian Academy of Culture, with research interests in the relationships between institutional leaders and communities.

**Dina Suhanova**

*Art Academy of Latvia, Institute of Contemporary Art, Design and Architecture, Latvia.*

**Design-Build as Place-Based Innovation: Creating New Experiences through Temporary Interventions in Valmiera**

The proposed presentation will analyse temporary spatial interventions as a critical form of site-specific innovation, demonstrating how their inherent speed, low commitment and economical budget allow non-urban communities to rapidly test and co-create new social, cultural and spatial experiences. In non-urban contexts, where large-scale development can be resource-intensive and slow, it can be argued that such agile, temporary architecture offers a unique mechanism for bypassing traditional hurdles to trigger immediate spatial transformation.

The presentation will analyse and focus on the "Festival'and" International Summer School in Valmiera, Latvia, as a case study. Since its inception in 2018 organised by RISEBA Architecture school, now implemented by the Art Academy of Latvia, this initiative has functioned as a living laboratory and summer practice for students, effectively bridging the gap between the creative and cultural sectors, local governance, academia, and business stakeholders. The presentation will showcase six distinct cases of spatial interventions realized through this programme, ranging from the revitalisation of neglected squares to the adaptation of public spaces during the pandemic.

The methodology is rooted in "design-build" pedagogy – a practice-based approach where diverse actors, including architects, practitioners, students, and community members, collaborate in non-hierarchical settings. By prioritising the use of locally produced timber, these projects not only foster regional material sustainability but also facilitate a "learning-by-doing" process. Beyond their educational dimension, these interventions act as "urban prototypes." They generate short-term, socially inclusive environments that engage local communities, providing municipalities with tangible feedback for long-term planning. Ultimately, the paper will illustrate how the creative sector can serve as a transformative power in Valmiera or other towns aiming to show that hands-on, experimental approaches are not merely installations, but strategic tools for forging more equitable and sustainable communities, empowering non-urban actors to envision and actively construct their future spatial reality.

**Biographical note**

**Dina Suhanova** is a researcher and project manager at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Design and Architecture (LMDA), Art Academy of Latvia. Trained as an architect and theorist of visual arts and culture, she shifted from architectural practice to focus on contemporary architectural culture, research and education. She has edited numerous academic publications and contributes regularly to local and international journals as well as presents in various conferences. From 2012 to 2019, she worked as tutor and BA Architecture programme director at RISEBA University of Applied Sciences. Since 2018, she has curated and directed the international summer school "Festival'and" in Valmiera, fostering experimental approaches to learning and practice for architecture and design students. In 2025 Dina prepared and published book-catalogue with selected innovative architecture, design and art practices from Latvia and the Baltic countries – "(Re)Connected to Nature. Nature-Driven Creative Practices in Design, Architecture, and Art. Vol 1".

## *Culture as core infrastructure: Health, employment, and civic resilience*

**Ali FitzGibbon**

*Queen's University Belfast, Ireland.*

### **Generational leadership exit as a small cultural & creative ecosystem concern**

Leadership has been presented as a solution to sustainability concerns of cultural and creative ecosystems of all sizes (Parkinson & Buttrick, 2017; Price, 2016, 2017) as these systems rely on individual and interpersonal mobilisation. In smaller peripheralised communities (such as in Ireland and Northern Ireland), such individuals hold greater significance while the lines between individual, company and sector vision and responsibilities are blurred (FitzGibbon, 2019; FitzGibbon & Hazlett, 2025; Opara et al., 2019; Paris & Leroy, 2014). This research blends the exploration of cultural leadership succession (Church, 2014; Henderson Hall, 2003) and the study of such 'cultural and creative ecosystems' (Collins & Murtagh, 2024; De Bernard et al., 2022; Mahon et al., 2018), examining the under-explored significance of leadership exit to peripheralised, small and isolated cultural communities. It reasons that (a) one cannot look at succession concerns in organisations without attention to the wider ecosystem loss; and (b) a generational surge into leadership (through policy initiatives) must eventually lead to a mass exit, with attendant problems of sustainability and intergenerational knowledge transfer more significant to smaller ecosystems than large urban ones. The work uses interview data, collaborative rapid response research and ethnographic observation in three case studies: the community arts movement in Northern Ireland in the 70s-80s in response to mass civil conflict; the regional independent theatre movement in Ireland in the 70s-80s following new state education policies and Ireland's entry to the European Economic Community (EEC); a hypothesised case that since 2020 the COVID19 crisis has/is prompting a mass exit of cultural sector leadership. The findings demonstrate that 'natural' succession and restorative order are myths – small systems are destabilised by the loss of big people in them. As the global pace of change and thus succession accelerates, greater attention is needed to its outworkings in peripheralised cultural communities.

### **Biographical note**

**Ali FitzGibbon** is a Senior Lecturer in Creative & Cultural Industries Management in the School of Arts, English & Languages at Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland. She researches decision-making, ethics, leadership and labour in contemporary cultural production and ecosystems, particularly freelancers, performing arts and festivals. She was a Co-Investigator on Future Screens NI, one of six UK Creative Industries Research Clusters (2021 – 2024) and Co-Investigator on Freelancers in the Dark, a rapid response research project on the effect of COVID19 on theatre freelancers across the four nations of the UK (2020 – 2023). She is an editor of the Irish Journal of Arts Management & Cultural Policy and Co-Director of the Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland, in which role she co-edited the first ever collection on Irish and Northern Irish cultural policy, *Cultural Policy: Perspectives on the Island of Ireland* (Routledge, 2025). She was, for over 25 years, an international programmer, producer and consultant with a particular focus on youth arts and performance for young audiences and large-scale collaborative youth and outdoor projects, working as lead producer for Replay Theatre Company (1997 – 2004), leading the Belfast Children's Festival and Young at Art (2003 – 2016) and creating the original early years participatory dance event, Baby Rave. In 2016, she was a co-founder of Fighting Words NI, a creative writing charity and has worked for over 20 years as an advisor for independent cultural organisations, local authorities, public bodies and government departments.

**Inga Surgunte, and Baiba Tjarve**

*Latvian Academy of Culture, Latvia.*

### **Addressing Rural Challenges by Connecting the Culture and Health Sectors and Policies: Lessons Learned from Implementing the Arts-on-Prescription Model in Cēsis municipality (Latvia)**

Data show that several population groups in rural areas are on the margins of cultural and welfare policies. The cultural sector fails to engage with them as consumers or participants, and welfare services lack the means to help re-socialise them or address their issues. These at-risk groups include the long-term unemployed, people with addictions, early retirees, young people with suicidal thoughts, burnt-out medical and social workers, and lonely seniors, to name a few. These groups were addressed by the 'Arts on Prescription' project<sup>1</sup>, which was implemented for the first time in Latvia in the Cēsis County (population 41,324 in 2025; the county includes several towns and rural areas and is located 90 km from the capital, Riga) between 2023 and 2025. Cultural and health institutions involved people experiencing mental health issues in social and non-therapeutic arts activities to enhance their mental well-being. Taking this project as a case study, the authors of the study explore the experiences, challenges, and policy implications for culture and welfare and health policymakers and practitioners of working collaboratively. This example demonstrates a bottom-up approach to policymaking, as it started as a project initiative and evolved into a regular municipal-level incentive. Furthermore, the project implementers initiated a national-level policy debate on collaborations between the cultural and health sectors. On the one hand, it reveals the step-by-step implementation strategies of a new policy instrument and demonstrates the difficulties involved in developing intersectoral collaborations between policymakers.

#### **Biographical note**

**Inga Surgunte** is research assistant at the Latvian Academy of Culture and is involved in several international projects addressing the cultural sector's impact on sustainable development, including health and well-being. She co-authored the guide "Talking Points: Arts and Health in Communities", a joint publication of the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture and the Northern Dimension Partnership on Health and Social Wellbeing. Inga led the Museums on Prescription programme in Cēsis Municipality, part of the Interreg project Arts on Prescription in the Baltic Sea Region (2023-2025). Inga has also contributed to the European Commission preparatory action "CultureForHealth", which played a key role in the inclusion of "culture and health" priority in the current EU Work Plan for Culture.

**Baiba Tjarve** is a lead researcher at the Latvian Academy of Culture. Her research interests are mainly related to various issues of cultural governance and cultural policy. Baiba has participated in numerous applied research projects in the cultural sector, gaining significant experience in cultural consumption, various aspects of cultural governance and audience research; author of Latvian profile for the online database of "Compendium of cultural policies and trends". She researches social and economic impact of culture within the national research project "Cultural and creative ecosystem of Latvia as a resource of resilience and sustainability" (2023-2026), as well as takes part in two Horizon Europe funded projects "Tracks4Crafts: Transforming crafts knowledge for a sustainable, inclusive and economically viable heritage in Europe" (2023-2027) and "IN SITU: Place-based innovation of cultural and creative industries in non-urban areas" (2022-2026). In 2024, as scientific editor (together with Ilona Kunda and Ieva Zemīte), she prepared the collective monograph "Creative Cities: Processes and People".

**Milton Almeida**

Royal Roads University, Centre for Social Studies University of Coimbra, Canada/Portugal.

**Supporting Regenerative Tourism Cultural Entrepreneurs**

Regenerative tourism holds the promise of healing and improving the current state of our world by reconciling and reconnecting people with their natural and social environments and thereby rejuvenating their communities. Acts of reconciliation and connection are achieved by directing efforts toward restoring, improving, and enhancing the natural and cultural environments of local communities.

Entrepreneurs wishing to implement cultural regenerative tourism activities, activities that empower communities and create authentic cultural exchange that goes beyond preserving local culture, face unique challenges that include a lack of practical guides on how to develop and implement them, as well as the necessary supports and frameworks to support their successful implementation.

This conference presentation seeks to gather information and harness the wisdom of conference attendees by exploring regenerative tourism themes such as restoration and healing, community empowerment, and cultural vitality to refine a proposed research project that asks: *What supports are required for the successful implementation of regenerative tourism cultural activities?* The presenter will provide context and facilitate a group discussion. Preliminary methods being considered include case study analysis and semi-structured interviews. The intended outcome of this research is a robust framework for regenerative tourism entrepreneurs.

This research project will focus on regenerative cultural tourism products in island communities across the Azorean archipelago. Island communities face unique tourism problems that range from extreme resource strain to cultural erosion. The project will focus on projects developed with the assistance of IN SITU, but may be broadened to include other regenerative tourism cultural activities.

Rejuvenating local cultures is a dynamic process that involves actively supporting, reviving, and reintroducing regionally specific knowledge, skills, and practices. Thus, uncovering the necessary support to facilitate this dynamic process is key to the successful implementation of these activities.

**Biographical note**

**Milton Almeida's** tourism experience took him across Canada and into Europe where he held senior positions with Hilton International and Sheraton as well as independent hotels. During his extensive leadership and management experience, Milton led many highly effective teams ranging from 10 to 250 people. Milton's business experience is complemented by a Master of Arts in Leadership and Training and a Doctor of Social Sciences. His doctoral work explored the role of leadership in creating more sustainable and innovative organizations. His research interests include leader and leadership development, regenerative tourism, change management, and strategic planning.

## *Sustaining artistic presence and social cohesion*

**Anne Lehtelä**

*Independent artist and Specialist in artists' working conditions at the Finnish Arts and Culture Agency, Finland.*

### **Municipal Artist-Employment Projects in Finland: A Decade of Initiatives and Their Impacts**

This presentation provides an overview of municipal artist-employment projects implemented in Finland over the past decade. In these initiatives, municipalities employ professional artists from various disciplines on fixed-term contracts. The projects vary in their funding structures, institutional arrangements, and objectives, which range from fostering resident participation and strengthening local vitality to promoting cultural well-being, supporting early-career artists, and reinforcing local identity. While some initiatives have evolved into permanent municipal practices, others remain time-limited pilot projects. The projects are situated within a broader context in which public funding for the arts in Finland has become increasingly constrained, and paid employment opportunities for artists remain limited. This challenge is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where professional artists often face restricted income sources, limited audiences, and fewer institutional infrastructures. Municipally funded artist-employment initiatives play a significant role in enhancing cultural provision and employment opportunities outside urban centers. To illustrate the practices funded in rural areas and their innovative and sustainable dimensions, the presentation draws on several examples from different regions of Finland: Petäjävesi, a rural municipality in Central Finland, where two professional artists were employed under the title of village artists; the long-standing Summer Musicians project in Kuhmo, a remote town near the Finnish–Russian border, which employs young musicians each summer to deliver concerts and music interventions across the region; and Lapua and neighbouring rural municipalities, where several small municipalities have collaborated to employ summer artists for community-based artistic work, including workshops, public events, and participatory practices involving local residents. Taken together, these examples demonstrate that municipally funded artist-employment projects in rural Finland can generate enduring impacts beyond the duration of individual contracts. They contribute to community cohesion, increase access to cultural activities, support artists' livelihoods, and, in some cases, establish practices that continue as part of municipal operations. The initiatives have significance not only for artists' working conditions but also for broader discussions on cultural sustainability, rural development, and the role of the arts in strengthening local resilience.

#### **Biographical note**

**Anne Lehtelä** (MA & MAdminSc) works at the Finnish Arts and Culture Agency as an expert on the working and income conditions of artists.

**Caterina Francesca Ottobri** and **Mariia Samareva**

*EURICSE, GSSI - Gran Sasso Science Institute, Italy.*

### **Film festivals as places-based innovation practices: evidence from two grassroots initiatives in peripheral Italy**

This research investigates how bottom-up cultural practices in non-urban and peripheral areas in Italy generate place-based innovation and respond to conditions of precarity, marginality and limited cultural infrastructure. A cultural commons perspective is applied to examine two grassroots film festivals - Lago Film Festival (Veneto) and L'Aquila Film Festival (Abruzzo) - conceptualising them as evolving processes of collective creation, participatory governance and spatial activation.

The study focuses on socio-territorial margins that provide alternative platforms where mainstream markets and public institutions are insufficient to support creative production, meet artists' needs or respond to cultural demand. Lago Film Festival, located in the rural area of Revine Lago, performs as an independent and peripheral initiative, employing collective cultural infrastructures through flexible programming and experimentation, such as involving local artists and filmmakers. L'Aquila Film Festival operates in the historic centre of L'Aquila, still recovering after the 2009 earthquake, repurposing vacant or underused spaces to support community reconnection and cultural revival through collaboration with local residents and organisations. Across both cases, openness, low formalisation, participatory governance and community involvement propose alternative responses to conventional practices, documenting bottom-up organisational structures.

Empirical evidence from interviews and participatory observation shows how these practices transform marginalised territories into active cultural commons, addressing socio-cultural exclusion through community-led cultural experimentation and artistic innovation, while the adaptive (re)use of peripheral or abandoned spaces allows them to meet local needs and counteract marginalisation. The analysis also highlights the tensions of informality, including precarity, limited institutional support, and the need to negotiate with local authorities, stressing the importance for ongoing

collective support to sustain these cultural initiatives.

The findings suggest that despite many constraints the informal, community-driven nature of the festivals becomes a resource in peripheral contexts, enabling forms of local participation and resilience and enhancing the cultural ecosystems in non-urban and peripheral areas.

#### **Biographical note**

**Caterina Francesca Ottobri** is a junior researcher at EURICSE. She graduated in Economics and Management of Cultural Heritage and Entertainment from the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan (Italy), where she also obtained a Master degree in Arts Management and a PhD in Management and Innovation. She collaborated with the Foundation Eni Enrico Mattei (FEEM) in Milan and she worked as research fellow at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, focusing on the analysis of the impact and social innovation of independent cultural and creative spaces on the local territory.

**Mariia Samareva** is a PhD Candidate in Regional Science and Economic Geography at the Gran Sasso Science Institute, Italy. She holds an MA in International Cooperation on Human Rights and

Intercultural Heritage from the University of Bologna and a BA in International Relations from St. Petersburg State University. Prior to starting her PhD, Mariia worked at Brussels-based non-profit organisation Culture and Media Agency Europe (CUMEDIAE), where she contributed to international collaboration projects in the cultural sector. Her current research examines the role of cultural and creative ecosystems in local development, as well as the emergence of alternative and solidarity-based economic models in culture.

**Antonia Kuzmanić, and Dunja Bovan**

*ROOM 100, House Collective, Croatia.*

### **Rooted Innovation vs. Transient Placement: A Comparative Study of Cultural Interventions in Non-Urban Croatia**

This contribution examines two interconnected place-based cultural initiatives, "Circus on the Periphery" and "Contemporary in Zagorje," to analyse their role as innovative practices of Cultural and Creative Industries in remote, non-urban communities and as expressions of a foundational cultural attachment and care for place. Both projects deliberately operate in communities overlooked by dominant streams of contemporary culture and art presentation, and in dislocated, unexpected, and excluded locations where contemporary circus and outdoor arts performances are not even expected.

In 2020, the contemporary circus collective ROOM 100 initiated the project "Circus on the Periphery," a strategic intervention aimed at the Dalmatian region of Croatia. Contemporary circus artists performed at mountain peaks, secluded islands off-season, and villages in the Dalmatian hinterland. In 2021, this model of place-based intervention migrated north, as ROOM 100, in collaboration with the House Collective, adapted the project into the Zagorje region, testing the translatability of its approach to decentralisation across diverse non-urban landscapes in Croatia. While extending "Circus on the Periphery" from Dalmatia to the Zagorje region revealed a critical distinction between project models. In Dalmatia, a lack of embedded local partners risked reducing the intervention to a transient "snap action," highlighting the limits of artistic placement without sustained community engagement. Conversely, in Zagorje, collaboration with the House of Klajn, showed that innovative mapping and placement are intrinsically linked to an ethics of care for community sustainability. Their work prioritises accessibility and audience development not as abstract goals but as acts of cultural inclusion, strengthening local attachment by integrating cutting-edge artistic practices into the lived environment.

Ultimately, the presentation argues that such CCI practices demonstrate that artistic innovation in non-urban areas is most resilient and impactful when it is rooted in and actively nourishes a deep-seated commitment to place and its people.

#### **Biographical note**

**Antonia Kuzmanić** is co-leader of the ROOM 100 collective from Split, Croatia. As a young artist, she was awarded as circusnext laureate in 2010. In 2015, she switched her focus from performing to designing and implementing projects to develop the sector in her country. Currently, she is the director and producer of the Peculiar Families Festival, Fragments of the Circus, and several other development programmes. ROOM 100 is part of the circusnext platform (Antonia serves as both a laureate jury member and a steering committee member), the Circostrada Network (Antonia has been part of the steering committee from 2018 until 2025), projects funded by Creative Europe, and collaborative projects between organisations from Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia. Since 2024, she has been active again as a performer. She is based in Barcelona.

**Dunja Bovan** is co-leader of the House Collective from Klanjec, Croatia, where she works as the head of the artistic and independent cultural centre House of Klajn. She studied film, theatre, and TV production at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Zagreb, completing her studies in 2017. She gained further education in the field of cultural production by completing the Festival Production Management Training school organised by The Festival Academy/European Festival Association.

During and after her university education, she worked in the organisational teams of film and music festivals (Zagreb Film Festival, ZagrebDox, Motovun Film Festival, Amateur Film Review, Animafest Zagreb, Mediterranean Film Festival Split, Four River Film Festival, Outlook and Dimensions). From 2016 to 2020, she worked as the executive producer of the ZagrebDox International Film Festival, and from 2015 to 2019, she worked as the coordinator of the Zagreb Film Festival. As an external collaborator, she participated in the organisation of the Holland Festival theatre festival in Amsterdam. Since 2020, she has lived and worked in Klanjec.

## *Narratives of place: Memory, senses, and intangible heritage*

**António Oliveira**

Mekelle University Ethiopian Institute of Technology - EiT-M School of Architecture and Urban Planning, Ethiopia.

### **Relearning Place(s): Creative and Sustainable Innovation in Non-Urban Territories**

This paper proposes a phenomenological re-reading of cultural, spatial and temporal dynamics in non-urban territories as a basis for creative, place-based innovation. Drawing from the PhD research *Relearning Architecture – Sense, Time, Place and Technology* (Oliveira, 2018), the text argues that rural and peripheral landscapes contain latent cultural and existential potentials capable of generating poetic innovation—provided that design and cultural policy move beyond technocratic models and re-centre the human body, memory, temporality and local knowledge. Through theoretical grounding in Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Deleuze and Norberg-Schulz, and through the comparison of three non-urban case studies - Quinta da Malagueira (Portugal), Quinta Monroy (Chile), and Chã das Caldeiras (Cape Verde) - the paper demonstrates how creative place-making emerges from a reciprocal, situated dialogue between communities, bodies, landscapes and technologies. These models offer an alternative methodological framework for contemporary non-urban innovation: one that recognises place as a dynamic becoming, shaped through sensory engagement, participatory processes and temporal continuity. The paper concludes by proposing a “Relearning Framework” for territorial innovation based on four interdependent principles—Sense, Time, Place and Technology—aiming to support new ecologies of creativity in peripheral communities. Non-urban and rural communities across Europe face urgent challenges: depopulation, loss of cultural identity, erosion of local economies, and the homogenising pressure of globalised spatial models. At the same time, these places hold immense potential for cultural innovation rooted in their landscapes, memories, and modes of dwelling. The main premise of this paper is that innovation in non-urban territories cannot be imported, nor can it be produced by replicating urban-centric development models. Instead, innovation must be cultivated from within, arising from embodied experience, cultural specificity, and the temporal depth of life in place.

### **Biographical note**

**António Oliveira** is an architect, researcher, and visiting Professor at the School of Architecture and Urban Planning of the Ethiopian Institute of Technology (EiT-M), Mekelle University. His work focuses on the relationship between architecture, body and territory, with particular interest in how non-urban communities develop spatial innovation through cultural practices, collective agency, and situated technologies. He has collaborated in international research and design-based initiatives across Europe and Africa, and has presented and published on themes such as phenomenology in architecture, participatory housing processes, and territorial culture. His current research explores how non-urban communities generate architectural intelligence through embodied practices, temporal continuity, and material improvisation.

**Zülâl Fazlıoğlu Akin** and **Alise Katrina Pundure**

*The Ohio State University, USA.*

### **KONSERVE: Regenerating non-urban culture through intangible cultural heritage**

This paper examines a cultural project, KONSERVE: Intercity Artist-in-Residence Programme Network. Initiated in 2020/2022, KONSERVE developed a model for "rendering the intangible cultural heritage with inclusion of local rural communities through participative, artistic, and creative methods" (KonsERVE, 2025) and increasing cultural participation in non-urban areas. While the first iteration of the project hosted 13 artists in five villages, the second iteration hosted eight artists in two villages as part of the Ortaklaşa in 2024, an EU-funded program designed and implemented by the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV). The governance of the project is participatory and inclusive, comprised of a multitude of actors from various independent organizations, the local community, and the municipalities, to create sustainable cultural policies.

We evaluate this program by tracing its design and implementation phases. While we analyse the conceptual and analytical framework for the design phase, the implementation phase analysis focuses on the three instruments deployed by the project, namely artist residencies, capacity building trainings, and exhibitions. We conduct document analysis, interviews, and surveys with various actors who contribute to and participate in this program, including cultural workers, artists, and local participants. We construe this project as an attempt to construct infrastructure capacities to help build regenerative cultural policies as "an approach that supports cultural practices of production and consumption which restore and enhance not only cultural ecosystems and communities but also their natural, social, economic and political contexts" (Dâmaso and Rex, 2025, p. 409). In this context, intangible cultural heritage is regenerated through a participatory and inclusive cultural policy design to construct a sustainable and equitable cultural landscape in non-urban areas. KONSERVE's creative approach to locally embedded knowledge, heritage, and local sustainability through public-civic partnerships is a good example of establishing community infrastructures in an equitable way.

#### **Biographical note**

**Zülâl Fazlıoğlu Akin** earned her PhD in Arts Administration, Education and Policy at the Ohio State University. Her research centers on cultural policy, international cultural relations, and cultural diplomacy with a specific focus on Turkey, Europe, and the Middle East. Her public scholarship focuses on inclusive arts education policy. She works with arts and cultural organizations in Turkey and Europe as a researcher, consultant, and cultural expert. She regularly teaches courses on international cultural relations, public policy for the arts, and contemporary issues in creative industries.

**Alise Katrina Pundure** is a PhD student in the Arts Administration, Education and Policy program at the Ohio State University. Originally from Riga, Latvia, she holds an MA in Arts Administration from Teachers College, Columbia University, and a BS in Entertainment and Arts Management from Drexel University. Her research interests include international cultural policy, the role of the diaspora in cultural policy and diplomacy, and how digital technologies are shaping cultural institutions. Alise has gained professional experience through roles at Harvard University, Teachers College, Columbia University, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia.

**Vivi Focquet, Leontien Allemeersch, and Ewoud Vermote**

*Kunstenplatform PLAN B, Belgium.*

### **Rural dramaturgies: thinking alternative stories of rural place in Haren and the former Limburg mining area**

This article reflects on an artistic research project on village dramaturgy conducted in two Belgian contexts undergoing profound transformation: Haren, a former village annexed by the city of Brussels, and the former Limburg mining area in Flanders. Between 2024 and 2025, members of Kunstenplatform PLAN B, together with artists Aulona Fetahaj and Martha Balthazar, worked as “village dramaturgs” to investigate how rural traces, memories, and forms of resistance persist within processes of metropolitization and post-industrial transition.

Methodologically, the research combined qualitative fieldwork and artistic experimentation. It included in-depth interviews with inhabitants, activists, and experts; guided walks and site visits; archival research; and the development of participatory artistic formats such as collective listening exercises, soundwalks, mappings, and a collective memory calendar. These methods were not merely documentary but dramaturgical: they were designed to make relationships, tensions, and latent narratives perceptible and discussable within each place.

The article presents two main case studies. First, we discuss Haren as a site of resistance. How did histories of protest against metropolitization grow within the community, and what traces did they leave behind? What is the role of the village dramaturg in supporting and facilitating these dynamics? In the former Limburg mining area, we engage with questions of cultural memory, critically examining heritage policies by proposing a bottom-up, future-oriented “people’s history” materialized through a participatory calendar of commemorative days.

By articulating village dramaturgy as a situated and relational artistic practice, this contribution argues that locally embedded artistic research can both reveal rural undercurrents and actively shape alternative rural futures. The article concludes by outlining village dramaturgy as a transferable methodological framework for artists and researchers working in contested rural and peri-urban contexts.

#### **Biographical note**

**Vivi Focquet** studied Theatre Studies at Ghent University. Since then, he has worked as an organizer, performer, and writer. He is currently a member of Kunstenplatform PLAN B, researching and making possible artistic creation and presentation in rural contexts. He collaborates closely with performer and maker Sophia Rodriguez. Together with longtime collaborator Marie Umuhoza, he produced the concert performance *Holy* (2026) by Martha Canga Antonio and is building a new night club in Brussels.

**Leontien Allemeersch** is a cultural worker, networker and photographer operating across disciplines and contexts. She develops relational, transdisciplinary and site-specific practices rooted in rural and peripheral environments. Her work connects artistic processes with communities, places and public space. Moving between coordination, curation and creation, she builds platforms and collaborations that bridge art, policy and society. She is co-founder of

Kunstenplatform PLAN B and works as artistic coordinator at de Koer. Her practice unfolds collectively, always in relation to context, people and place.

**Ewoud Vermote** studied Social Sciences at Ghent University and film at LUCA School of Arts. In the past, he was active in the Seasonal Neighbours collective. He currently teaches at Sint-Lukas Kunsthumaniora and is part of the PLAN B arts platform.

**Bailee Allen**

*The Glasgow School of Art, Scotland.*

**Reclaiming the Cosmos: Fostering a Connection to the Night Sky in the Scottish Highlands and Islands**

This research was developed in partnership with the Glasgow School of Art Rural Lab and is situated in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. Using participatory design, it investigates community-led star map making as a regional storytelling tool to connect rural Scottish communities to the night sky, or 'cosmos'. For millennia, civilisations have used asterisms, or 'star stories', to form locally specific cosmologies shaped by land, culture, and more-than-human relations. In an era of artificial light, digital saturation, and ecological fragmentation, this project examines how rural communities might reclaim locally rooted relationships with dark skies to promote cultural, ecological, and psychological well-being.

Fieldwork was conducted on the Isle of Canna (National Trust for Scotland), a rural community in the Scottish Inner Hebridean Islands. Residents and visitors were invited to create personal star stories by connecting real patterns of stars to their lived experiences on Canna, local heritage, flora and fauna observed on the island, and folklore. Over 30 community-generated star stories were collected.

These stories were translated into an interactive web-based and VR-enabled star map, alongside an immersive mobile planetarium experience designed to support place-based knowledge exchange, ecological attentiveness, and night-sky connectedness as a form of rural wellbeing practice. An open toolkit is being developed through the Glasgow School of Art Rural Lab to enable other regions to generate their own hyperlocal star maps, adapting the framework to their own ecologies, histories, and connections to local place.

Positioned at the intersection of rural innovation, participatory creative practice, and environmental engagement, this project demonstrates how increased connection to the night sky can function as shared, hyperlocal cultural infrastructure to strengthen community belonging and increase human and more-than-human wellbeing in non-urban contexts.

**Biographical note**

**Bailee Allen** is a multidisciplinary design researcher and interaction designer whose work explores place-based creativity, environmental connection, and more-than-human wellbeing. Raised under the dark skies of the Mojave Desert, her practice is deeply informed by night-sky connection. She recently completed an MDES in Design Innovation and Interaction Design at the Glasgow School of Art Highlands and Islands campus, where her dissertation focused on dark sky advocacy and community wellness. Her work bridges digital and material practices to support hyperlocal cultural resilience and mutual flourishing.

## Technology, gaming, placemaking and rural innovation

**Irina Kharitonova** and **Alexandra Kharitonova**

*Public Foundation “Creative & Innovation Institute”, Kazakhstan.*

### **Gamified Eco-Trails and Child-led Innovation: The “BÖLEKTAU” Case as a Transferable Model for Non-Urban Cultural and Creative Placemaking**

On September 5, 2025, the first gamified eco-trail in Kazakhstan, “BÖLEKTAU,” was inaugurated in Burabay National Park. The 382-meter eco-trail represents a place-based cultural and creative placemaking model for non-urban protected areas, integrating environmental education, digital storytelling, and sustainable tourism. Along the route, visitors encounter interpretive panels on local flora, fauna, and legends of Mount Bolektau, as well as quest-based tasks and QR codes providing access to a multilingual audio guide (Kazakh, Russian, and English). The physical infrastructure incorporates Italian-made photocatalytic coatings that contribute to air purification, embedding environmental innovation into cultural infrastructure. A key feature of the project is its child-led and CCI-driven approach. Gamification is implemented through the Telegram bot EcoPlaton, which transforms the eco-trail into an interactive narrative experience based on digital storytelling, creative problem-solving, and micro-learning tasks. This approach positions children and youth not merely as audiences, but as co-creators within cultural and creative ecosystems. Environmental fairy tales translate the SDGs into an accessible narrative format for children and families, addressing themes such as biodiversity protection, environmental responsibility, education, and sustainable lifestyles. The project illustrates how cultural and creative industries can function as connective tissue between nature conservation, local identity, education, digital culture, innovation, and AI-enabled tools, while remaining low-cost, scalable, and adaptable to diverse territorial narratives. From a cultural policy and practice perspective, the project offers several transferable lessons, including: the use of gamification, digital narratives, and AI tools as mechanisms for inclusive access to natural and cultural heritage; the value of child- and youth-led innovation in creative placemaking processes; cross-sector governance models linking civil society, business, public authorities, and creative practitioners; the integration of sustainability principles, gender equality, and environmental responsibility into cultural infrastructure in non-urban areas; and the active engagement of visitors in developing a culture of care and respectful interaction with natural sites.

#### **Biographical note**

**Irina Kharitonova** is the founder and director of the Public Foundation “Center for Sustainable Development of Central Asia – Creative&Innovation Institute” (Kazakhstan). She is an expert in sustainable development, ESG, and creative industries. Irina is the author and curator of the PLATON 5D educational platform and a winner of international programs and competitions (UNESCO, Samsung Solve for Tomorrow, Monaco Ocean Protection Challenge). With over 15 years of experience, she has led social, environmental, and cultural projects at both regional and international levels, including the development of Kazakhstan’s first gamified eco-trails. Irina actively fosters international cooperation, speaks at conferences and forums, and educates children, youth, and professionals in the field of sustainability.

**Alexandra Kharitonova** is an environmental scientist specializing in biodiversity conservation, climate risks, water resource management, and environmental impact assessment. She is a researcher and author of scientific publications, and has participated in international research programs (DAAD, KUSTEP, GCRF). Alexandra has practical experience in environmental consulting,



citizen science, and eco-education. She collaborates with universities, research institutions, and civil society organizations.

**Luís Leça<sup>1</sup>, Mariana Salvado<sup>2</sup>, and Matilde Caria<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>INOVA+, Innovation Services, S.A, Portugal; <sup>2</sup>Fundão Municipality, Portugal.

## **From Cherry Orchards to Digital Studios: Cross-Sectoral Partnerships Driving Place-Based Innovation in Rural Portugal**

This presentation examines the Fundão video game cluster case study from the GAME-ER Horizon Europe project [101132585], showcasing how cross-sectoral collaboration transformed a rural Portuguese municipality facing depopulation into an emerging innovation hub. Drawing on primary data collection, including semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, and participatory mapping exercises, we present insights into the mechanisms through which partnerships between traditional and digital sectors created mutual value and territorial resilience.

Fundão's Innovation Strategy, launched in 2012, deliberately positioned the municipality as an interface connecting traditional sectors— particularly agriculture and textiles—with emerging digital industries. The Living Lab Cova da Beira model facilitated unprecedented collaboration among diverse actors: the University of Beira Interior, local game studios, agricultural producers, technology companies, and civic associations.

Rather than replacing existing economic activities, the strategy created synergies. For instance, AgroTech 4.0 initiatives apply digital technologies and innovation to agricultural modernisation, while game development companies benefit from different gamification initiatives in the municipality and partnerships with the university's computer science programmes and access to applied research opportunities in sectors like health, agriculture, and heritage.

Key success factors included the municipality's active mediating role, development of shared infrastructure (coworking spaces and incubators),

and collective actions such as joint international showcasing at industry events, mentoring networks, and talent retention programmes. Cross- sectoral partnerships extended beyond economic collaboration to encompass social integration measures—bilingual education, cultural exchange events, and family support services—that welcomed international talent while maintaining connections to local heritage and traditional knowledge.

The Fundão case challenges assumptions about rural-urban dichotomies in creative industries and demonstrates that peripheral regions can cultivate dynamic ecosystems through intentional boundary-spanning partnerships. This presentation will discuss both successes and ongoing challenges, offering practical insights for regions, policymakers and practitioners seeking to foster place-based innovation through multi-sectoral collaboration in non-urban contexts.

### **Biographical note**

**Luís Leça** is an International Project Manager and Consultant at INOVA+, specializing in proposal writing and project management within the European Union's Horizon Europe programme. With a diverse background in International Trade, Entrepreneurship, and Financial Management, his expertise focuses on entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial orientation, cultural and creative industries, and internationalisation strategies for SMEs. With extensive experience in Horizon Europe projects, Luís has contributed to various initiatives. He is currently the Coordinator of the GAME-ER Project and part of the research team, focusing on the dynamics of regional clusters in the video game industry across Europe.

**Mariana Salvado** is a project manager and EU policy advisor at the Municipality of Fundão, specialising in the design, funding, and implementation of European projects that drive territorial innovation. With more than seven years of experience, she has led cross-sector partnerships, secured EU funding, and delivered initiatives focused on sustainability, digital transformation, and community empowerment. Mariana bridges strategic planning and execution, ensuring that policy frameworks translate into measurable local impact. She contributed to award-winning applications and played a key role in Fundão's UN Voluntary Local Review. Her work explores how rural regions leverage European instruments to scale innovation and foster resilient ecosystems.

**Matilde Caria Secca** is a European Projects Consultant at INOVA+, working on EU's Horizon Europe programme, in initiatives across CCIs, biodiversity, civic participation, and related fields. She holds a bachelor's in International Relations and a master's in Communication Sciences, where she specialised in how arts and culture can meaningfully communicate climate change and inspire societal action. Her experience spans advocacy and communications roles in Porto and Brussels, including at the European Parliament.

**Mariana Salvado**<sup>1</sup>, **Luís Leça**<sup>2</sup>, and **Matilde Caria**<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Fundão Municipality, Portugal; <sup>2</sup>INOVA+, Innovation Services, S.A, Portugal.

## **Digital Creativity Against Depopulation: Video Games and Cultural Industries as Drivers of Regional Resilience in Rural Portugal**

This presentation examines how Fundão, a rural Portuguese municipality facing demographic decline and economic marginalisation, strategically deployed cultural and creative industries (CCIs) – specifically video game development – to build regional resilience and counter "left-behindness". Drawing on the GAME-ER Horizon Europe project [101132585], we analyse how CCIs can serve as powerful tools for territorial rebalancing when integrated with intentional place-based innovation strategies.

Fundão's case challenges prevailing assumptions that CCIs require urban density to thrive. Confronting population loss, ageing demographics, and youth out-migration, the municipality positioned video games and digital innovation as drivers capable of attracting talent, creating quality employment, and generating positive migration flows. Between 2012 and 2024, this strategy reversed decades of decline, attracting over 1,000 qualified professionals from 78 nationalities and establishing a functioning innovation ecosystem.

The strategic approach integrated CCIs with traditional economic sectors, catalysing broader territorial transformation and fostering social proximity within the local community. Game technologies found applications in agriculture modernisation, education innovation, and heritage valorisation, creating cross-sectoral synergies that strengthened overall regional resilience, and even led to the creation of Gaming Lab Fundão, a space equipped to support videogame development projects in the region.

Critical success factors included proactive municipal leadership as innovation ecosystem orchestrator, substantial investment in cultural infrastructure and creative education (programming from age 6, bilingual schooling, music and digital arts programs), and comprehensive social support systems ensuring talent retention.

Fundão's experience offers replicable insights for policymakers addressing territorial inequalities across Europe. It demonstrates that CCIs, when strategically deployed with institutional commitment and place-based approaches, can mitigate socioeconomic disparities and build resilient regions capable of competing for global creative talent.

### **Biographical note**

**Mariana Salvado** is a project manager and EU policy advisor at the Municipality of Fundão, specialising in the design, funding, and implementation of European projects that drive territorial innovation. With more than seven years of experience, she has led cross-sector partnerships, secured EU funding, and delivered initiatives focused on sustainability, digital transformation, and community empowerment. Mariana bridges strategic planning and execution, ensuring that policy frameworks translate into measurable local impact. She contributed to award-winning applications and played a key role in Fundão's UN Voluntary Local Review. Her work explores how rural regions leverage European instruments to scale innovation and foster resilient ecosystems.

**Luís Leça** is an International Project Manager and Consultant at INOVA+, specializing in proposal writing and project management within the European Union's Horizon Europe programme. With a diverse background in International Trade, Entrepreneurship, and Financial Management, his

expertise focuses on entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial orientation, cultural and creative industries, and internationalisation strategies for SMEs. With extensive experience in Horizon Europe projects, Luís has contributed to various initiatives. He is currently the Coordinator of the GAME-ER Project and part of the research team, focusing on the dynamics of regional clusters in the video game industry across Europe.

**Matilde Caria Secca** is a European Projects Consultant at INOVA+, working on EU's Horizon Europe programme, in initiatives across CCIs, biodiversity, civic participation, and related fields. She holds a bachelor's in International Relations and a master's in Communication Sciences, where she specialised in how arts and culture can meaningfully communicate climate change and inspire societal action. Her experience spans advocacy and communications roles in Porto and Brussels, including at the European Parliament.

**Simon McKerrell**

*Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland.*

### **Digital media and the semiotics of place in the rural creative economy**

Place-based approaches to advertising musical gigs, events, festivals, musical instruments and recordings have been key to rural artists' online presence for many years. However, the pandemic accelerated the trend for more active forms of place-based digitalization such as born-digital gigs in rural venues, live online tuition, music and virtual tourism, alongside forms of audio, visual and participatory content on websites and social media. This paper examines how rural place is used in the online activities of individual artists and bands to understand the affordances of digital media in the rural creative economy.

The paper sets out a new conceptual framework for the digital analysis of place that uses social semiotic and multimodal theory to understand the relationship between individual artists, bands and businesses towards a taxonomy of digital place. Case studies examine how the specific dimensions of place such as landscape, language, heritage, sound and local narratives are mobilised in digital media and sound to construct different forms of cultural and social capital that support sustainability in the rural creative economy.

### **Biographical note**

**Simon McKerrell** is a Professor of Media and Music and Head of Media and Journalism at Glasgow Caledonian University. His research focuses upon music and policy, particularly understanding the agency and mediatization of music, and the people who make, consume, distribute promote and share music. His current research focuses upon equity and sustainability for musical freelancers and micro-enterprises in the rural creative economy. He has published in two main areas: cultural policy relating to music in Scotland, and; the social semiotics and discourse of text, image and sound in media (e.g. YouTube, sectarianism, etc.). His books include *Focus: Scottish Traditional Music* (Routledge), and the Co-Editor of both *Music as Multimodal Discourse: Media, Power and Protest* (Bloomsbury) and *Understanding Scotland Musically: Folk, Tradition, Modernity* (Routledge).

## *Strategic agency: Funding, protecting, and collaborating rural cultural spaces*

**Sarah Ayers**

*Flyover Art, USA.*

### **Rural Arts Organisations: Adaptive Hubs of Cross-Sector Collaboration**

Rural arts organisations in the United States historically receive approximately 2% of federal arts and philanthropic funding. Rural arts organisations have developed alternative operational strategies out of necessity—strategies that may serve as blueprints in a time when nonprofits, community centers, and institutions face increasing uncertainty. My research proposes a shift: from viewing rural arts organisations as peripheral cultural institutions to recognising them as central to conversations about sustainability, innovation, equity, and cross-sector collaboration.

### **Biographical note**

Before joining Signal-Return as Executive Director, **Sarah Ayers** worked in Public Programming at the Detroit Institute of Arts, was Director of Zabriskie Gallery in New York City and worked as a Curatorial Fellow at Bard Graduate Center. Ayers holds a Master's Degree in Art History and Visual Culture (MA) and her Bachelor's in the Business of Art & Design (BSc). She is currently a Doctoral Candidate at Transart Institute/Liverpool John Moores University exploring Rural Community-Led Art Organizations: Knowledge Sharing, Curatorial Practice, and the Art of Participation. A Comparative Analysis through a United States-based Lens.

**Zane Matesoviča**

*British Council Latvia, UK/Latvia.*

**From Cultural Practice to Community Resilience: A Decade of Place-Based Innovation in Rural Latvia**

This presentation shares practical insights from the British Council's People-to-People (P2P) programme in Latvia – a ten-year initiative implemented in rural municipalities and non-urban communities, with a particular focus on the Latgale region. The programme offers a rare long-term case of how culture-driven, locally rooted interventions can strengthen social cohesion, build trust, and support resilience in territories facing depopulation, economic challenges, and low levels of civic participation.

Through a combination of community arts activities, youth-led projects, training for local leaders, and support for emerging civic hubs, the P2P programme helped develop new forms of cooperation, strengthened local identity narratives, and created sustainable spaces for dialogue and participation. Over time, the network expanded to 11 community centres, each adapting the P2P approach to its own cultural traditions, needs, and social dynamics.

Rather than presenting a theoretical study, this project presentation focuses on how the programme worked in practice: what models of collaboration proved effective, how trust was built between institutions and communities, which challenges emerged, and what conditions enabled sustainable impact. The Latvian experience illustrates that cultural innovation in rural areas does not require major infrastructure or large budgets, but rather long-term presence, local ownership, and meaningful partnerships.

The presentation concludes with transferable lessons for policymakers and cultural organisations seeking to design similar place-based cultural programmes in non-urban territories across Europe.

**Biographical note**

**Zane Matesoviča** is the Country Director of the British Council in Latvia, where she has led major cultural and social cohesion initiatives for nearly a decade. She specialises in place-based community development, cultural diplomacy, and arts-based approaches to strengthening resilience in non-urban regions. Zane has extensive experience working with municipalities, NGOs, community leaders and policymakers, particularly through the British Council's long-term People-to-People (P2P) programme in Latvia. She is also a visiting lecturer at the Latvian Academy of Culture, teaching cultural policy and creative industries. Her work focuses on the intersection of culture, community empowerment, and democratic participation.

**Matthew Richter**

*Cultural.Space, Scotland/USA.*

### **Staying Power: Creating and Protecting Cultural Spaces in Valmiera, Latvia**

What opportunities exist for creative and cultural spaces (museums, theaters, bookshops, nightclubs, artists' studios, etc.) in a shrinking, constricting market? How do we then protect those same cultural spaces, that cultural life, in a growing market? How can government and CCIs collaborate on the protection of these vital spaces, and what structures have been created and used in other markets? How does the cultural space policy work currently being explored internationally in dozens of urban centres export to our rural areas? What lessons can be learned from the experiences of cities like Seattle (population 4 million), or San Francisco (pop. 4.6 million), that are applicable to Dundee, Scotland (pop. 140,000), or Valmiera, Latvia (pop. 22,000)? In short, how do we ensure rural creative and cultural communities have agency over the future of their creative and cultural spaces?

In my experience many of the issues facing cultural spaces in rural and urban markets are more similar than different. The far more interesting metric for the cultural space work I've encountered is growth rate. Historic growth rate seems to have far more to do with the availability of opportunities for creative and cultural space than does population size. Valmiera has experienced a negative growth rate for over 30 consecutive years, its current population down a staggering 38% from its 1990 level. That population loss has been levelling in recent years, and seems poised to turn around. This presentation will use Valmiera as a case study, based on conversations (to be conducted once a presentation is approved) with local policy-makers, artists, real estate professionals, and CCI professionals. The presentation will draw lines between projects like the Cultural Space Agency in Seattle; CAST in San Francisco, and the Creative Land Trust in London, and opportunities to apply these policy models in Valmiera.

### **Biographical note**

**Matthew Richter** has spent the past 35 years creating cultural spaces, from pop-up storefront galleries to permanent cultural centres in mammoth urban warehouses and train stations. His work has consistently placed him at the intersection of art, government, and real estate, and he has gained a unique perspective from that vantage point. Art in America has referred to him as "an arts visionary" for his work advancing the presence of the arts in the urban fabric. In 2020 he became the founding director of the Seattle-based Cultural Space Agency, a mission-driven cultural real estate development authority. Matthew was the founding director of both the Consolidated Works contemporary arts center and the Rm 608 gallery for visual and performing arts. He spent two years building the Storefronts Seattle program, which for many years was the largest arts pop-up program in the US, working in both urban and rural markets. He joined the Seattle Office of Arts & Culture in 2013 as the Cultural Space Liaison, the first position of its kind in the country, leading a body of work around the creation, activation, and preservation of cultural spaces. He has served as the Performance Editor of *The Stranger*, and is a nationally published feature writer. He is an accomplished furniture designer and builder, and has lectured internationally on the state of the arts. He is a recipient of the Safeco Insurance RUDY Award for nonprofit director of the year, has been made an honorary member of the American Institute of Architects, received an Award of Merit from the American Planning Association, and is the only two-time recipient of the Seattle Mayor's Arts Award. He currently works independently as a cultural space planning strategist, based in Edinburgh, Scotland.

## *Social infrastructure and place-based rural strategies*

**Carlo D'Angelo**

*University of Molise, Italy.*

### **The impact of social economy and the Third sector on a cultural base local development in Italian inner areas**

This research investigates the transformative potential of social economy actors in fostering cultural-based local development within non-urban communities, specifically focusing on Italy's inner areas. While these territories represent 60% of the national landmass and host 39% of Italian museums (rising to 56% in the Abruzzo region), they suffer from significant "accessibility poverty," with over 30% of cultural sites open only upon request.

To address the conference theme of advancing policy frameworks and innovative partnerships, this study employs a qualitative research design based on a comparative analysis of selected case studies. Specifically, it examines how Pro Loco, a typical Italian association, and community cooperatives act as intermediate bodies that bridge the gap between local authorities and citizens. The research methodology focuses on evaluating two specific regulatory instruments of shared administration: public-civic partnerships and co-management agreements.

By analysing successful practices in the Abruzzo region, the research illustrates how these social economy actors cultivate creative, place-based solutions that go beyond traditional management. The study demonstrates that these collaborations do not only guarantee the right to culture but also trigger socio-economic revitalization by strengthening local identity and collective agency. The findings aim to contribute to the conference discussion by providing a scalable model of innovative public-civic governance for fragile, non-urban territories across Europe.

### **Biographical note**

**Carlo D'Angelo** is a PhD Student at the University of Molise, with a project research about the right of culture in inner and fragile areas. He is R&D manager at UNPLI Abruzzo ([www.unpli.info](http://www.unpli.info)), a network of 280 association involved in cultural, touristic and social dynamics. He is member of the scientific committee of Scuola dei piccoli Comuni ([www.scuolapiccolicomuni.it](http://www.scuolapiccolicomuni.it)).

**Daina Alužāne, Ieva Jātniece, Inga Krekele, Jānis Dzimtais, and Santa Šmite**  
*Association Community Cooperation Network “The Islands of Selonia”, Latvia.*

### **NGO Islands of Selonia. Smart regional strategy for the Sēlija historical land**

The Islands of Selonia have developed a smart region strategy for the Selonia Historical Land. This is the first development strategy developed for a Latvian historical land and the first regional-scale strategy initiated, developed, and promoted by civil society organizations through a series of public focus groups and discussions. The Selonia Historical Land does not have any state or local government structures that would (otherwise) undertake to direct the purposeful, unified, and sustainable development of this territory. The strategy shows the needs of land development, where culture plays a significant role, and sets out a series of smart approaches to follow. These include a recognition that place identity is economically valuable; an awareness that strong horizontal cooperation can compensate for even very significant shortcomings; a strategy to follow new EU initiatives, understand them, and harmonize their application with local traditions and specifics; and the utilisation of the special values of the territory, defined as “Golden Cards,” to enhance the impact of each initiative and to compensate for shortcomings. Local residents have demonstrated the ability to see Selonia as a single territory, a single cultural space. With very limited financial resources, NGOs and communities have achieved noticeable positive changes. Selonia is no longer a “gray spot” in Latvian tourism, media environment, or culture. On the contrary, Selonia is now a good example of social innovations, community culture, identity builders, challenge overcomers, and horizontal cooperation. In the field of culture, in 2023 funding was obtained from the historical lands culture program (Selonia’s culture program), which is directly targeted and used for Selonia as a unified territory. An Action Plan for 2025-2030 has been developed to implement the Smart Region Strategy, providing for specific activities, the resources necessary for them, and setting out a division of responsibilities among civil society and public institutions.

#### **Biographical note**

**Daina Alužāne** is chairwoman of the board of the Association Community Cooperation Network “The Islands of Selonia”, project writer and manager, lecturer, computer graphic designer, copywriter.

**Ieva Jātniece** is author of the idea of “Sēlijas salu”, lecturer, strategic planner, project writer and manager, copywriter.

**Inga Krekele** is board member of the Association Community Cooperation Network “The Islands of Selonia”, author of the idea of “Sēlijas salu”, Sēlijas Austrumu envoy, diplomat, lecturer.

**Jānis Dzimtais** is public relations specialist, web designer, copywriter, tourism specialist, discussion moderator, lecturer, guide, project writer.

**Santa Šmite** is board member of the Association Community Cooperation Network “The Islands of Selonia”, project writer and manager, event organizer, lecturer.

**Juris Vuguls**, and **Erika Vugule**

Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies, Faculty of Economics and Social Development, Institute of Humanitarian and Social Sciences, Latvia.

### **Catholic church as important actor in keeping and cultivating creative place in Latgale (example of Balvi region)**

This study begins with the problem of the “drainage” of the interests and values of the Latvian state as residents of non-urban regions depart from rural areas, leading to the closure of schools and post offices, and reduced staff in cultural centers. A cultural vacuum has formed in these areas, which, under the influence of various factors, is being saved, preserved and restarted through a certain renaissance of the role of the Catholic Church. This study seeks confirmation of the hypothesis that the Catholic Church is returning to the cultural space of the non-urban territories of Latgale not only with its religious, but also cultural mission, affirming love for its neighbor, or in the sense of the philosophy of dialogue – evaluating self-valuable centers of existence – not according to economic or consumerist, but according to dialogical principles. Using methods of philosophical reflection, discourse analysis, qualitative content analysis, analysis of historical sources, as well as interviews, we aim to define the “new wave” of Catholic Church priests and describe the situation in several non-urban territories of Balvi municipality, with attention to the preservation of cultural life and significant traditions, care and networking of cultural functions with other organizations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Catholic priests who lead the Catholic parishes of the Balvi region. Similar interviews were conducted with five leaders of cultural life of the region, i.e., the head of the Viļaka Museum; the head of the Balvi region culture and tourism department; the artistic director of the Balvi culture and recreation center; the head of the Baltinava Museum; and the head of the Viļaka Culture House. The municipalities of Balvi, Viļaka, Bērzpils, Baltinava and Rugāji are also involved in the research. In this research, parishes are also legitimately considered communities, and we also plan to involve these five communities through a survey and, possibly, separate interviews.

#### **Biographical note**

**Juris Vuguls**, born on December 2, 1968. In 2012, he obtained a Doctor of Philosophy degree for his doctoral thesis “Ideas of Orthodoxy and Hesychasm in Latvia, 1834–1936.” He is currently working as an assistant professor at Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies and has also lectured at the Baltic Russian Institute, the University of Latvia and the Institute of Women's Law. On a daily basis, he works mainly with Latvian and foreign student streams of the Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies, Organization and Public Administration program, lectures in Latvian and English also to ERASMUS program students. His main scientific interests are history of ideas, philosophy of religion, ethics, ecosophy and critical thinking. From September 1, 2025, chairman of the Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies Ethics Commission.

**Ērika Vugule**, born March 15, 1969, in Balvi, is a Latvian educator and researcher. She obtained a bachelor's degree in Educational Sciences from the University of Latvia in 1998, followed by an Mg. paed. degree in 2000, while also beginning her teaching practice in Teacher Professional Programs. She later earned a master's degree in History and, in 2011, defended her doctoral thesis on teachers' professional organizations in Latvia (1918–1940), obtaining a doctorate in the History of Pedagogy. Since 2020, she has worked as a teacher of Cultural Foundations and History in Jelgava schools and is currently a lecturer in Business Communication and Rhetoric at the Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies. Her research interests focus on history, education, culture, and posthumanism in the context of 21st-century anthropocentrism.

## Survival kit

### Useful phone numbers

- Emergency (General): 112
- Police: 110
- Ambulance: 113
- Gas Emergency: 114

### Taxi services

- Bolt: The most popular ride-hailing app in Latvia (<https://bolt.eu/sw-tz/cities/valmiera/>)
- Valmieras Taksi: +371 25242535 (<https://www.valmierastaxi.lv/>)
- You can also use the Mobilly app for regional bus tickets and parking (<https://www.mobilly.lv/en/>)

### Language

The official language is Latvian.

In Valmiera and other cities, communication in English is generally possible, especially in hotels, restaurants, and conference venues.

### Local time

Latvia is in the Eastern European Summer Time (EEST) zone in May.

- Offset: UTC/GMT + 3 hours

### Electricity

The electric voltage in Latvia is 230V/50 Hz. Standard European 2-pin plugs (Type C and F) are used.

### Banks and currency

The currency used in Latvia is Euro (€).

Most international credit/debit cards are accepted.

Banks are typically open Monday–Friday (approx. 9:00–17:00).

ATMs are widely available.

### Valmiera tourist information

Tourist Information Centre: Rīgas iela 10, Valmiera (<https://visit.valmiera.lv/en/>)

### Recommendations

Suggested restaurants and cafes:

- Restaurant "Akustika" (Lāčplēša iela 2, Valmiera)
- Restaurant "Rātes Vārti" (Lāčplēša iela 1, Valmiera)
- "Vīna studija" Wine Bar (Rīgas iela 1, Valmiera)
- Cafe Ahh-meat (Rīgas iela 37, Valmiera)
- Valmiermuiža Brewery & Shop (Dzirnavu iela 2, Valmiermuiža)

More at: <https://visit.valmiera.lv/en/catering/>