

Sustaining Cultural Innovation in Rural Areas

The RuSTIC model as a framework for Intercultural Mediation

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RURACTIVE



Rethinking Culture and Cultural Innovation

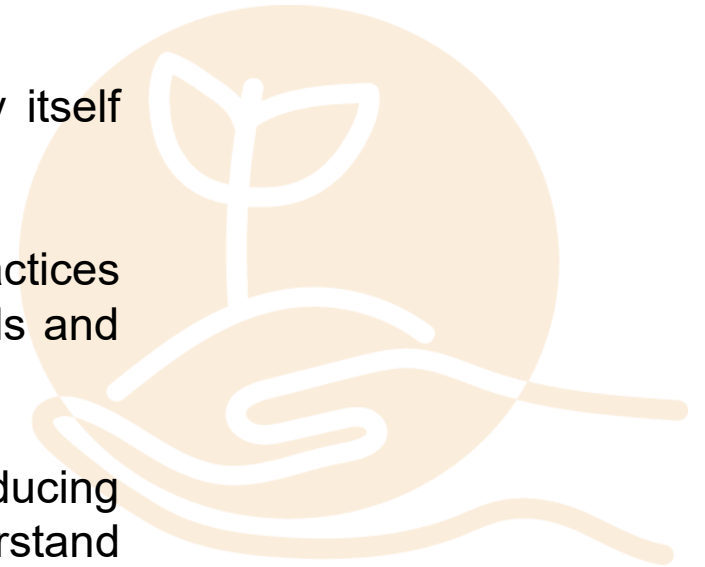


When we speak about [culture](#), we often think of cultural sectors, creative and artistic activities, often linked to tourism and heritage.

But culture can also be understood as closely intertwined with society itself (Pires, 2022).

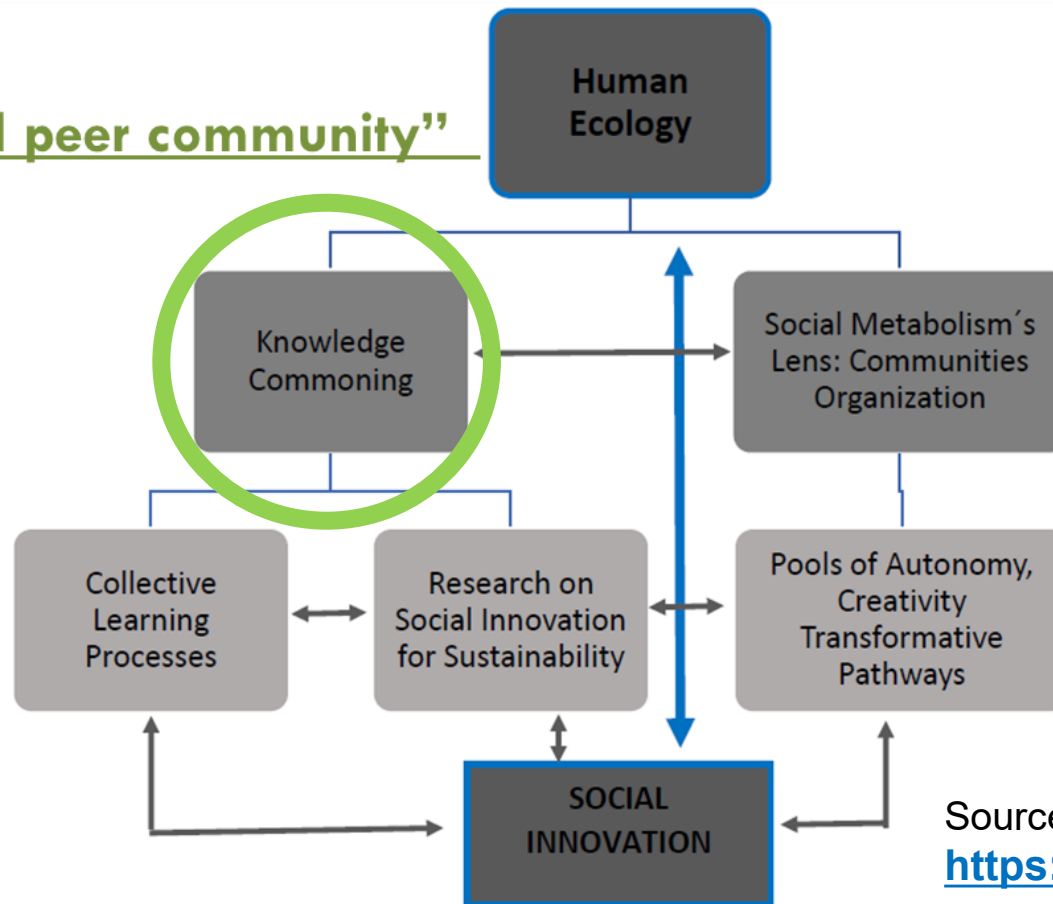
Culture in my thesis: the way meanings, relationships, values, and practices are (re)organised in a territory, among people with different backgrounds and forms of agency, and even in the way they relate to nature.

From this perspective, [cultural innovation](#) is not only about producing innovative cultural initiatives, but about transforming how people understand themselves, relate, and act, including how they relate to and perceive nature.



Intercultural Mediation

“extended peer community”



Connecting and integrating:

perspectives, experiences, values, and meanings;
different types and sources of knowledge; several actors.

Enabling the emergence of:

new shared meanings;
Co-creation of innovative practices.

“New forms of social and collective production of knowledge” (Bruckmeier, 2016)

Source: Own elaboration

<https://doi.org/10.54499/2021.06974.BD>

RURACTIVE and Insights from my doctoral research

“Most local social innovations are precarious. Like butterflies, they are pretty, but they lead a short life.” (Brandsen et al., 2016: 307)



It remains rare to find **explicit references to social innovation in concrete policy instruments** or to see its effective integration into European rural development programs (Slee et al., 2022).



What about the challenges collaboratively diagnosed in different rural innovation hubs (Dynamos) within RURACTIVE communities?

Ageing and outmigration, loss of cultural knowledge and traditions, limited participation in cultural life, weak visibility of rural cultural assets, governance and coordination gaps.

Two questions guide my presentation



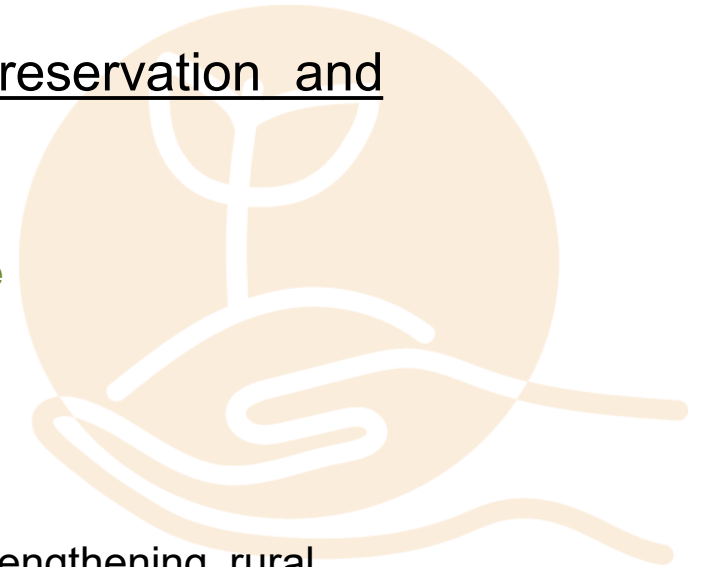
Q1: What mechanisms could support sustainable cultural and creative opportunities linked to social innovation and local development?

Q2: What forms of EU support could strengthen the preservation and transmission of local cultural knowledge?

I will share some results of my work, the *RuSTIC model*, and integrate it with the perspective of intercultural mediation for collective learning (policy learning and social-political capacity to innovate) from mediation to translation: from dialogue to collective action.



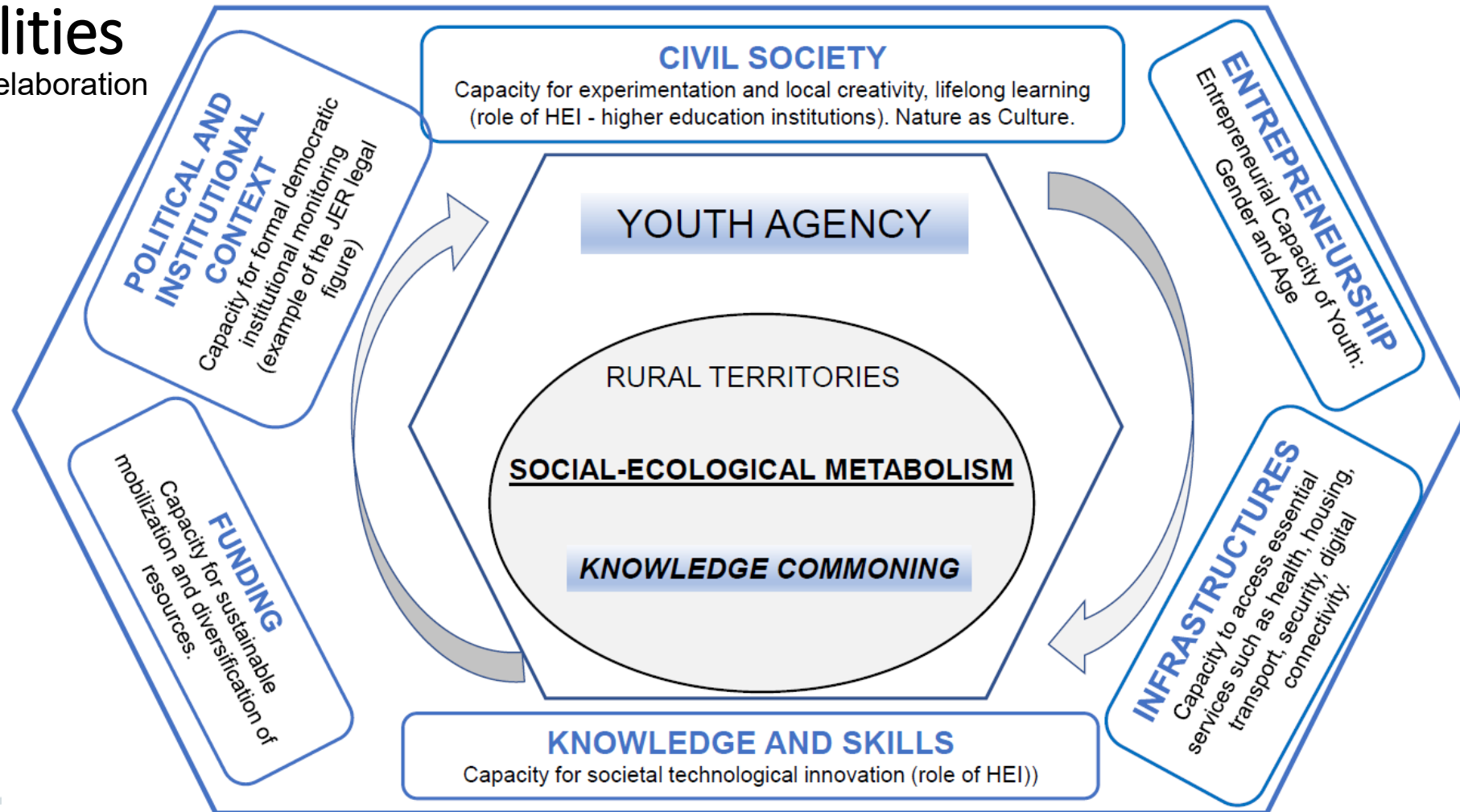
“(...) Evidence from RURACTIVE suggests that strengthening rural cultural ecosystems requires moving beyond heritage preservation toward integrated cultural innovation strategies. (...)”



The *RuSTIC* Model: Rural Social-Ecological Transformative Innovation

Capabilities

Source: Own elaboration

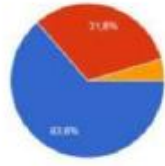


The *RuSTIC* model helps us understand rural social innovation as a system of interdependent capacities. What matters is not each dimension alone, but how they interconnect. **It can support more integrated cultural innovation strategies.** Culture shapes the relationships between these dimensions, enabling or limiting innovation. In this sense, *RuSTIC* contributes to sustaining cultural innovation in rural areas, including through rural-urban partnerships.



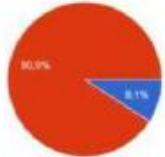
N = 22 (Vilares de Vila Rica – grupo internacional)

Please indicate your age group
22 respostas



● 18 a 25 years
● 26 a 30 years
● 31 a 35 years
● 36 a 40 years
● Over 40 years

Do you have confidence in your local government?
22 respostas



● Yes
● No



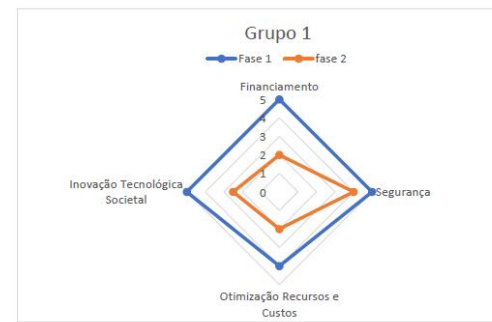
The game is a space for **inclusive participation**, mainly to vulnerable groups, and **mutual recognition**, **allowing intangible resources often invisible by public policies to become visible**, such as informal networks of solidarity, collective memories, local heritage, and situated traditional knowledge.

allowing local communities to **assess, integrate, test, and refine their perspectives on local capacities for social innovation through interactive engagement and collective learning.**

CONTRIBUTIONS AND FUTURE PATHS

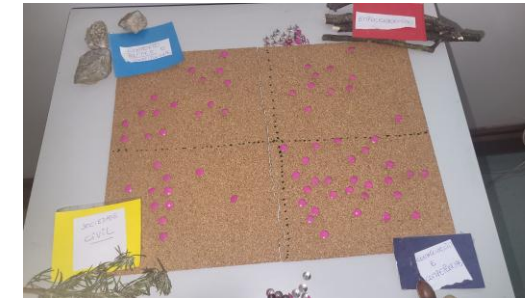


The Game of Left-behind Territories encourages **the negotiation of priorities** and situated learning, while the *RuSTIC* Exploratory Scale structures **collective deliberation**, allowing **perceptions to be translated into shared and comparable social and ecological indicators**. The scale does not measure opinions, but levels of shared understanding.



$$\text{RuSTIC INDEX} = \sum_{i=1}^6 f d^i \cdot v d^i$$

$f d^i$ = relative frequency/dimension
 $v d^i$ = assigned Likert scale value/dimension



Capacity building, participatory measurement and intercultural mediation

Co-construction and dynamic repository of social-ecological qualitative and quantitative indicators

Collective social-ecological learning

Experimentation and territorialization of public policies (place-based)

New Forms of Governance

Future Paths

Expansion of Testing and Validation

Strengthening Capacity Building for Sustainability

Experimenting with local systems as hubs of Transformative Governance (ecosystemic approach)

Digital Evolution of the Proposal:
RuSTIC Platform

Q1: What mechanisms could support sustainable cultural and creative opportunities linked to social innovation and local development?

Move from individual projects to ecosystemic approaches, promoting collective learning, creativity, and experimentation (Intercultural mediation).

Explore and assess territorial capacities with qualitative and quantitative indicators, experimenting with innovative and **participatory tools: linking community assessments to official statistical data, subjective local perspectives with objective metrics.**

Sustainability depends on the recognition/understanding and monitoring of local capacities. We propose an **agile and evolutionary solution that promotes experimentation, dialogue, and negotiation in an evolving and adaptive practice.**

Q2: What forms of **EU support** could strengthen the preservation and transmission of local cultural knowledge?



Recognise knowledge as a living social-ecological process (“ecology of practices” Isabelle Stengers, 2005)

Create and support collaborative spaces for intergenerational, interinstitutional, and intercultural exchanges. [Localizing policies implies **reconfiguring scales of power and practices**, not just transferring competences.](#) (Swyngedouw, 2010)

Promote *knowledge commoning* (an emergent concept in my thesis): exploring the Game of Left-behind territories in formal and informal contexts.

There is a difference between policies designed for the territory and policies produced in the territory, through co-production between local and institutional actors, experts, and non-experts.

Preserving knowledge is not only about documenting it, but **about keeping it alive through integrative practices and experimentation**. “Knowledge in vivo” through [Youth-led transformative governance initiatives](#). Support exploratory measurement and monitoring, promoting the social-ecological transformation of desirable conditions in rural areas
[RURACTIVE communities and cross-cutting priorities: biodiversity, climate change, social justice, and inclusion.](#)



The Game of Left-behind Territories: let's play and create?

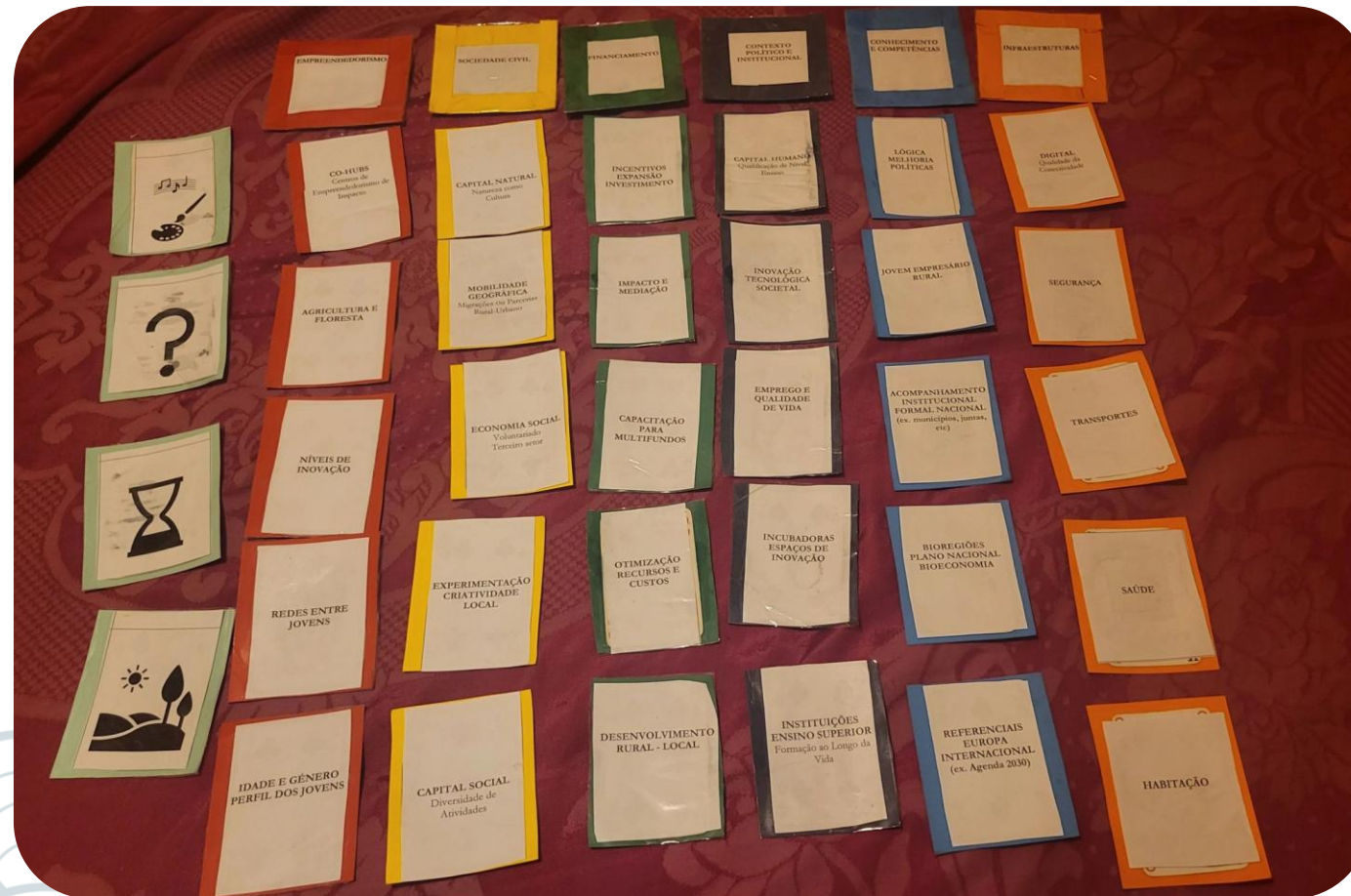
Thank you very much!

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Source: Own elaboration