**International conference on innovative approaches of cultural and creative actors for the sustainability of communities outside urban centers, September 25th to 27th in Šibenik**

**Horizons of Sustainability: The Power of Creative Innovation for Transformation of Rural and Non-Urban Futures**

The conference takes a broad and forward-looking perspective, envisioning a future that unlocks the potential for positive, lasting changes in less urbanised areas through creative and cultural initiatives. In a world recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and facing severe crises, ranging from climate change and wars to energy challenges, migration, and inflation, the need for significant positive transformations has reached an unprecedented urgency.

The conference focuses on rural and non-urban communities that are especially vulnerable in times of crisis due to limited resources and often facing depopulation challenges. Recent policy trends reflect a growing focus on the well-being and sustainability of extra-metropolitan communities in non-urban and rural territories. These communities exhibit a creative capacity for responses to contemporary challenges. Many scholars have highlighted the role of cultural actors across Europe, illustrating how they focus on place-based innovations, injecting a fresh energy and novel insights for the sustainability of their communities.

Sustainability needs creative, place-based innovation. In today’s complex global landscape, sustainability has matured into an all-encompassing paradigm spanning climate, energy, finance, food, health, education, heritage, culture, and numerous other domains. Achieving a lasting and balanced utilisation of resources is integral to sustainability, which demands economic, technological, soft, and social innovations to propose creative solutions tailored to local communities’ specific characteristics and needs.

The conference explores the potential, synergies, and challenges involved in reshaping social, economic, environmental, and cultural sustainability with attention to showcasing and analysing place-based innovation and creativity as forces in this transformative process. In non-urban and rural settings, these place-based innovations are particularly significant. They can effectively address local challenges and remarkably enhance the quality of life, vitality, and the overall sustainability of communities and territories.

A particular thematic focus of the conference will be care and children and youth’s creative engagement within these communities, recognising them as pivotal components of sustainable and resilient rural and non-urban societies.

One of the crucial aspects of placed-based innovation of cultural and creative actors is defining their commitment to care – for children, the elderly, common goods, resource sharing, and so forth. Care is gaining prominence in sustainability discussions, with some theorists and advocates proposing it as an organising principle for society and the economy. Over the past decade, care has also become more relevant in political discourse, shifting from traditional family relations to a broader perspective focusing on reshaping and revitalising communities. Culture, as a space for dialogue, plays a central role in supporting the transition to a “society of care.” It has the power to identify various strategies and tactics to engage citizens, contribute to the democratisation of societies, and raise awareness about urgent issues and the need to create equitable and sustainable societies. For culture to fulfil this role, it must be accessible financially, geographically, and socially and serve as a space for dialogue and participation based on principles of cultural democracy, ensuring that every voice is heard and engaged.

A shared concern that resonates in various rural and non-urban territories across Europe is the depopulation of these areas, which stands out as a critical threat to their sustainable future. In this scenario, the pivotal role of children and youth in cultural life and their contribution to creative innovations emerges as one of the most significant issues. This international conference is held in Šibenik – dubbed the “City of Children” for its longstanding Festival of Children dating back to the 1960s – and aims to shed light on children’s creative and engaging role in innovation for transforming rural and non-urban futures. This emphasis arises from the imperative to rejuvenate ageing communities in these territories and the sincere intent to actively involve new generations in discussions and actions shaping our collective future. In this regard, culture poses itself as the most persuasive strategy and means to encourage their engagement.

From all these points of view, the conference strives to open discussion on place-based innovation of culture and creativity and its transformative potential in preserving intrinsic values and contributing to the well-being of communities and societies. This approach evokes the need to encourage transformative cultural policy and a holistic approach to all public policies which regards culture as a connective tissue for social processes – an experimental, innovative, and creative realm for sustainable solutions in the public interest of local communities in rural and non-urban landscapes.

The **“Horizons of Sustainability: The Power of Creative Innovation for Transformation of Rural and Non-Urban Futures”** Conference, held in Šibenik, Croatia, from 25 to 27 September 2024, is organised within the project IN SITU – Place-based Innovation of Cultural and Creative Industries in Non-urban Areas. This event is co-organised by the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra and the local partner Kultura Nova Foundation from Zagreb in cooperation with the partners of the IN SITU project. It is supported by the European Union’s Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme (Grant Agreement no. 101061747) and the Central European Initiative