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## **Cultural and Creative Tourism in Rural and Remote Areas: European Perspectives**

### **Abstract**

This paper reviews the literature on Cultural and Creative Tourism in Rural and Remote Areas in Europe, analysing major research themes, trends and future research areas. Systematic and narrative reviews were conducted of 316 complete text sources in Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar to provide comprehensive coverage of relevant sources. Additional searches of databases in 12 EU countries identified a further 467 texts in languages other than English, thereby strengthening the European perspective of the study. The data were coded thematically and analysed using ATLAS Ti software. The results show a strong recent growth in research, identifying four key areas of focus: experiencing rurality, staying in rural places, navigating the landscape, and developing tourism. Gastronomy and events were critical aspects of rural experiences, and a strong growth in intangible heritage research was identified. However, other areas lack attention, including geographical variations in rural areas and their effects on tourism experiences, the relationship between urban and rural contexts, and the meanings of remoteness. There is also a lack of research on key transversal themes, such as sustainability and governance. Areas identified as fruitful for future research include place-based analysis of CCT and further investigation into visitor motivations to inform experience development and the creation of new business models for desirable segments.

*Keywords:* cultural tourism, creative tourism, rural areas, remote areas, intangible heritage, gastronomy

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# 1. Introduction

Cultural and creative tourism (CCT) is increasingly utilised as a tool for development and marketing. Interest in CCT has also grown among researchers, with a rapid increase in publications over the past 30 years (Richards, 2025). Much CCT research activity has focused on urban areas, which have concentrations of cultural assets that attract significant visitor flows. Rural and Remote Areas (RRA) are also rich in cultural heritage, but they often struggle with ageing populations, outmigration, and low incomes. Harnessing CCT could support employment and investment in RRA, but the dynamics are under-researched compared with urban cultural tourism.

The European Union has recently noted the need to address this imbalance by conducting both applied and theoretical studies, particularly in relation to sustainable cultural tourism. This is important for RRA in Europe because tourism development is uneven, and many cultural and creative resources, particularly intangible heritage resources, remain underutilised. Developing sustainable CCT experiences and products could therefore help support rural communities economically, while also boosting social cohesion and combating outmigration. These issues are now being addressed in several European projects that analyse the development of CCT in RRA (European Union, 2024a). To establish the state of the art for CCT research related to RRA, it is essential to review the existing research in this area.

Identifying and analysing the current body of knowledge on CCT in RRA can be helpful for researchers and for developing evidence-based policy. RRA face significant challenges due to their peripheral position and/or lack of resources compared to urban areas. These include population decline, a lack of job opportunities, geographical isolation, and inadequate infrastructure, all of which shape the development needs and opportunities for RRA. These challenges also threaten the cultural resources of RRA. Still, CCT is often seen as a potential solution that can strengthen the cultural fabric itself, boost the local community and increase its ability to benefit from tourism.

Developing CCT in RRA is far from simple, however. Cultural heritage in RRA is highly diverse, and one-size-fits-all models of development are therefore inappropriate. Many different business models could be adopted; however, we lack knowledge about which models might be best suited to various rural contexts. There is also a need to understand the dynamics of CCT in RRA better to ensure that it is developed sustainably, with consideration for heritage conservation issues and the capacity of the local environment and communities. CCT is particularly important in European RRA because it can potentially support local culture in communities threatened by globalisation. In recent decades, EU and national tourism policies have increasingly emphasised cultural tourism as a means of strengthening both tangible and intangible heritage.

This paper reviews the literature on CCT in RRA in Europe to analyse key themes and identify future research areas. We also consider whether there is a distinctive European dimension to CCT research in RRA and whether this research differs from cultural tourism research in urban areas. In reviewing these issues, we will consider the theoretical implications that arise from the review.

The following section examines some of the key contextual issues surrounding CCT in RRA, setting the stage for the literature review.

## 1.1. The context of CCT in RRA

### 1.1.1. Cultural tourism

Cultural tourism has long been an essential component of tourism demand. Richards (2018, p. 13) defined cultural tourism as 'a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's basic motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination.'

Estimates indicate that about 40% of international tourism trips are cultural (Bywater, 1993; United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2018; Richards, 2021). However, the UNWTO (2023) sees cultural tourism demand as focused on urban destinations, with rural settings being less popular. The link between CCT and RRA is critical given that 83% of the EU consists of rural areas (European Commission, 2024). However, rural tourism demand appears to be slowing after the pandemic (Eurostat, 2024), underscoring the need to understand the drivers of CCT in RRA. CCT in RRA in Europe is strongly affected by EU policies, including the Rural Development Policy, the Common Agricultural Policy and localised initiatives such as the Leader Programme (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2021), the development of cultural routes (Council of Europe, 2025; Camatti et al., 2022) and national and local policies on tourism and rural development (e.g. Demonja, 2013). Most of these policies promote cultural tourism as a means of boosting local economies.

### *1.1.2. Creative tourism*

Creative tourism is a relatively new tourism niche, which has grown rapidly in recent years (Duxbury & Richards, 2019; Matteucci & Smith, 2024). Creative tourism was initially defined by Richards and Raymond (2000, p. 18) as: "Tourism which offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in courses and learning experiences which are characteristic of the holiday destination where they are undertaken." In rural areas, creative tourism has also been developed as an extension of existing cultural or rural tourism products, for example, by developing creative workshops and taster experiences to involve tourists in local culture (Csapó et al., 2022; Duarte, 2024). Creative tourism policies are typically created at the local or regional level, often within a broader tourism policy framework. To the best of our knowledge, there are no national creative tourism policies in place.

Cultural and creative tourism are often seen as closely related, although there is a clear conceptual distinction between them. Creative tourism requires tourists to be actively engaged in cultural and creative experiences (Richards & Raymond, 2000). Cultural tourism, on the other hand, tends to revolve around relatively passive forms of consumption, such as sightseeing or visiting museums and monuments. Creative tourism has been suggested as a response to the 'serial reproduction of culture' and the rise of 'mass cultural tourism' in many places (Richards, 2021).

### *1.1.3. Rural and remote areas*

In RRA, the development of CCT is closely related to rural tourism in general, which accounts for 37% of tourist nights in the European Union (Šajin & Finer, 2023). Rosalina, Dupre and Wang (2021) link rural tourism to a more general cultural meaning of the countryside, or rural sense of place, which also links nature and culture. In addition to the enjoyment of rural landscapes, Panzer-Krause (2020) sees the consumption of artefacts, cultures and experiences as central to rural tourism, which suggests considerable potential for CCT in rural areas.

Over the years, CCT research attention in RRA has shifted from the nature-based attractions typically associated with rural tourism towards the need to create new economic opportunities through the development of cultural and creative assets (Cloke, 2007). As Zollet and Qu (2024) note, rural areas have developed new strategies to support cultural creative tourism as a source of innovation and new economic opportunities for declining communities. The European Union's (2024b) long-term vision for rural areas also calls for cultural tourism to be utilised in forging stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural regions and communities. The EU is therefore attempting to develop actions that will support rural development by encouraging CCT, including development advice and research programmes (European Union, 2024a).

This marks a potential turning point, where research attention is shifting towards the potential of RRA as a new frontier in CCT development. This also creates a need for new conceptual frameworks that can account for the differences in resources and attitudes between urban and rural environments. To address this issue, this paper analyses the literature on CCT in RRA, aiming to identify important research themes and gaps in the existing literature. It provides an overview of the state of the art in CCT research in RRA, providing a basis for future research and informing the development of research agendas and policymaking. The aims of the paper are therefore to examine the European literature to:

- Identify major research themes in the CCT literature relating to RRA
- Analyse developing trends and patterns in CCT research in RRA
- Identify underexplored areas in the literature to inform future research

This review examines the academic literature on the subject. It adds new dimensions to the analysis by considering literature in languages other than English and analysing geographical variations in research effort and focus. To this end, we have employed a structured review and a narrative review to provide a more comprehensive picture of CCT in RRA in Europe.

## 2. Literature review methodology

The overall search strategy aimed to encompass as much relevant literature as possible, providing a comprehensive European overview. We undertook a systematic literature review of CCT in RRA in international databases. The authors also conducted a review of sources in various languages to enrich the predominantly English-language sources contained in databases such as WOS and Scopus. A summary of these sources was then produced in English. The results of the systematic review in English and the reviews in different languages were then combined to create an overall picture of previous work on CCT in RRA in Europe.

The literature review was developed in accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) principles (Moher et al., 2015). The PRISMA method provides a means of ensuring a rigorous, transparent and replicable analysis of the literature. The research team followed the appropriate steps outlined in the PRISMA guidelines, as described below.

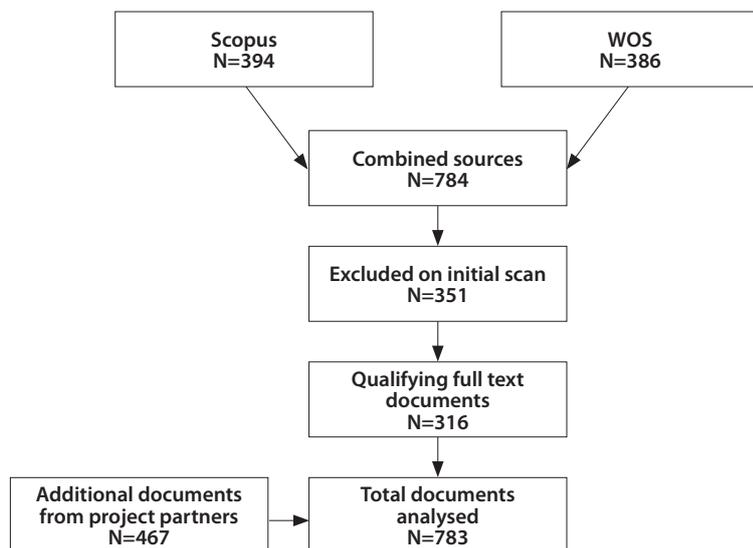
The main literature search was conducted in April 2024 in the Web of Science (WOS) and SCOPUS databases. The inclusion criteria for the search were as follows: 1) research must be conducted in Europe; 2) the research should be conducted in a rural/remote area, and 3) conducted between 1989 (the first identified study of rural cultural tourism) and April 2024. Review articles, conference papers and sources not dealing with cultural and/or creative tourism in rural and/or remote areas were excluded.

The sources available in SCOPUS and WOS are predominantly English language sources, so additional searches were made in Google Scholar, ResearchGate and national databases, including those in Belgium (FRIS - Flanders Research Information Space), Croatia (primarily CroRis and Hrčak), Estonia (ETIS, the Estonian Research Information System), the Netherlands (Nederlandse Onderzoek Databank - NOD), Spain (Dailnet) and Portugal (SciELO).

The search terms were "remote region" or "remote area" or "rural area" or "rural region" and "cultural tourism" or "creative tourism". These were translated into the relevant language by the researchers. An initial scan was conducted of the abstracts and keywords to identify publications that did not meet the inclusion criteria (covering CCT in RRA in Europe). Checks were also made for the exclusion criteria (covering urban areas or large cities, being outside Europe, or primarily dealing with agritourism and other areas not directly linked with culture). These checks were conducted independently by members of the research team due to the project's multilingual nature.

From the qualifying sources, a total of 316 English full-text documents were recovered. The full text was reviewed to identify the main themes covered. An additional 467 sources were identified in languages other than English, resulting in a total of 783 analysed documents (Figure 1). Texts in languages other than English were examined by team members proficient in those languages, who then shared English language summaries with the team.

**Figure 1**  
*Literature search strategy and sources*

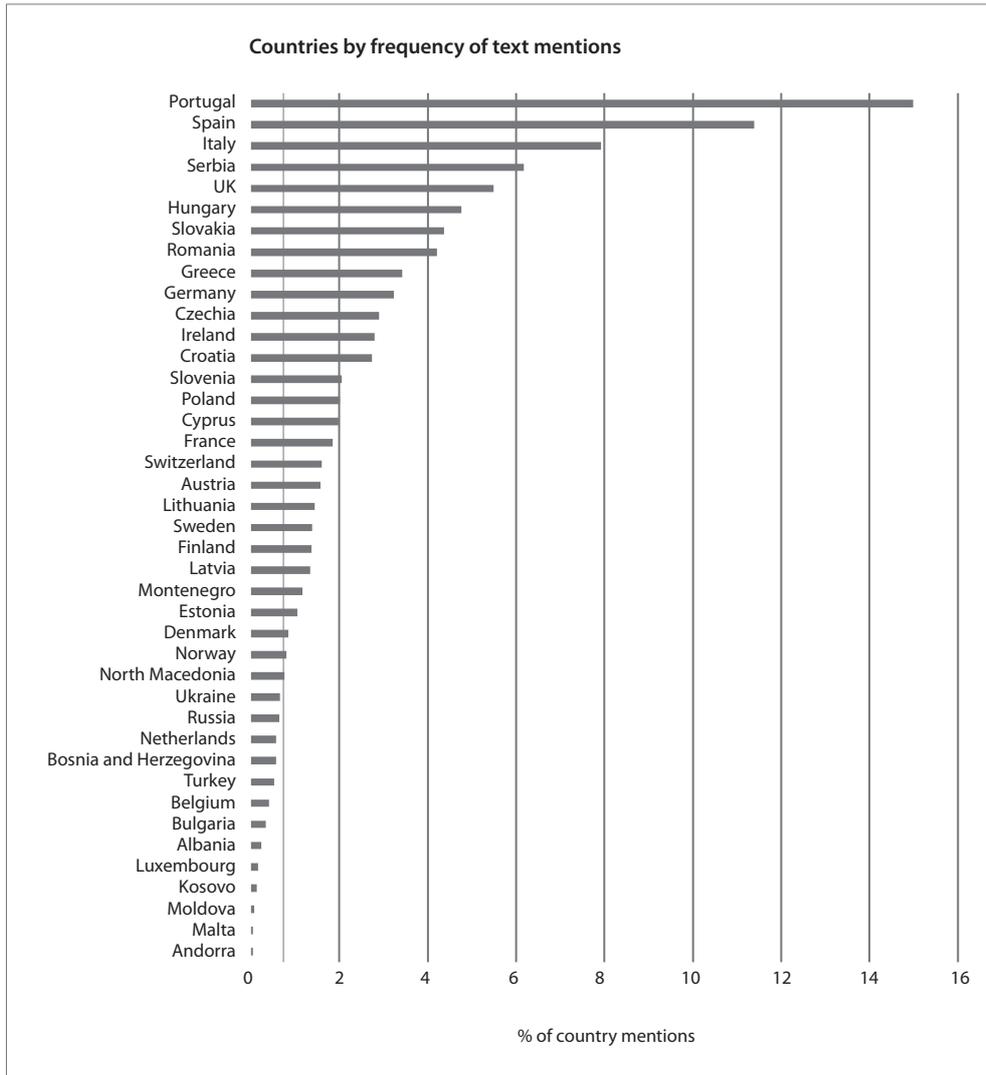


To identify more detailed trends in the literature, a narrative analysis of the complete text sources was conducted (Hennessy et al., 2019). ATLAS.Ti was used for the study, and thematic coding was performed. The codes were developed and reviewed by research team members. The first stage of the coding was exploratory, with researchers assigning codes to main data segments deemed relevant to the research questions. A subsequent refinement phase helped to identify specific themes or patterns in the data, using the search and coding functions in ATLAS.Ti. Finally, the major themes were examined to identify emerging patterns. For example, 'gastronomy' was recognised as a standard code in the data, which, upon closer examination, was found to be strongly related to food events and local ingredients, with the link between food and locality, or 'terroir', being particularly important in recent studies (e.g., Fusté-Forné, 2019).

### 3. Results of the structured literature review

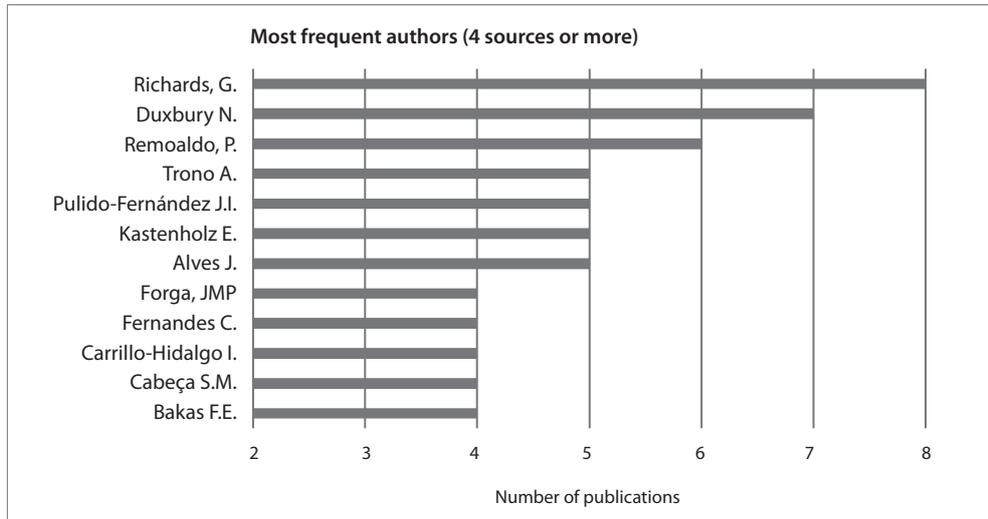
The literature review revealed uneven geographic coverage, with a preponderance of sources from southern Europe, particularly Portugal, Spain and Italy (Figure 2). Recent Portuguese output comes mainly from the CREATOUR Project on creative tourism. In Spain and Italy, a substantial amount of publication activity was associated with gastronomic tourism in rural areas. Several Central and Eastern European countries are also well-represented, including Serbia, Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania. This highlights the ongoing significance of rural tourism in these economies. There are also language effects, with France and Germany being relatively underrepresented in predominantly English-language databases such as WOS and SCOPUS (Richards et al., 2022).

**Figure 2**  
*Frequency of country mentions in complete text sources in English*



The distribution of countries also reflects the prominent authors in the field. The most productive authors are in southern Europe, particularly in Portugal (Duxbury, Remoaldo, Kastenholz, Alves), Italy (Trono) and Spain (Pulido-Fernández). Greg Richards, based in northern Europe, has written extensively on European cultural and creative tourism. This pattern of authorship reflects the growing importance of EU projects, many of which are led by institutions from southern Europe.

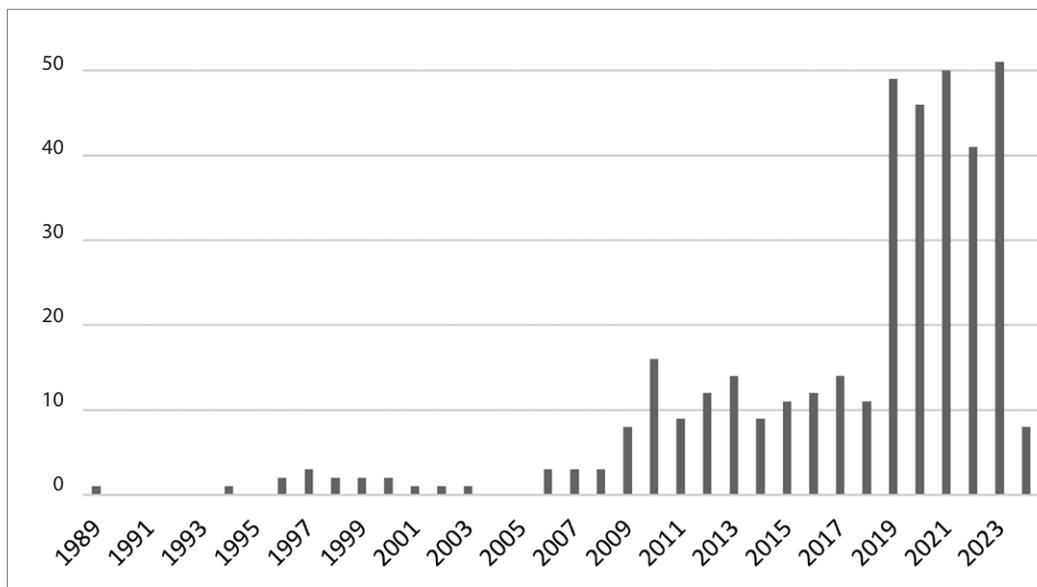
**Figure 3**  
**Most frequently cited authors**



We found a significant increase in publications from 2019 onwards. This finding also aligns with the results of other reviews, which indicate a substantial rise in cultural tourism publications in recent years (Richards, 2025).

The growth of the literature can be divided into three main phases. The period from 1996 to 2003 marks the initial recognition of cultural tourism as a distinct market, with a handful of pioneering studies. This was followed by an increase in the publication volume of CCT from 2009 to 2018, and subsequently, the current high level of CCT publications, with 17,300 being produced in 2023. Cultural tourism publications also increased from 1% of all tourism publications in Google Scholar in 2018 to 6% in 2023, indicating a growing attention to this field. Creative tourism publications also grew, from 4% of all cultural tourism publications in 2016 to 16% in 2021 (Richards, 2025).

**Figure 4**  
**Publication date of sources in WOS**



A frequency count of keywords reveals that 'heritage' is the most used term. Attractions such as route(s) and festivals/events are also relatively well covered, emphasising their importance in CCT in RRA. Wine and olive oil, as specific food resources, are also common, mainly thanks to Spanish sources. This also highlights the critical role of gastronomy and food in cultural and particularly creative tourism experiences (Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2024). There has been substantial growth in studies of intangible heritage in RRA, with a 266% increase between 2015 and 2023, as indicated by Google Scholar. This probably reflects the growing use of intangible heritage resources to attract visitors.

**Table 1**  
*Frequency of terms from the WOS and Scopus full text sources*

Rank	Term	Number of occurrences
1	Heritage	3,056
2	Route(s)	1,547
3	Sustainability/sustainable	1,206
4	Festival/event	1,117
5	Wine	1,002
6	Museum(s)	826
7	Nature	733
8	Landscape	654
9	Food	650
10	Olives	620
11	Music	371
12	Traditions	296

This analysis identified several key themes, as described in the following section.

## 4. Themes emerging from the literature

Four major themes emerged from the analysis of full texts: experiencing rurality, staying in rural places, moving through the landscape and developing tourism. These relate to aspects of mobility to and within RRA – movements through rural and remote areas, dwelling in and experiencing rural areas, and the effects of these mobilities on rural and remote communities, as well as policies and politics.

### 4.1. Experiencing rurality: authenticity and nostalgia

The most extensive research area in CCT in RRA pertains to the experience of living in rural areas. Rodrigues et al. (2024) argue that people are attracted to a 'new rurality', to escape urban bustle, seek authenticity and develop new creative communities with access to technology to support experimentation. This also reflects the recent growth of a 'rural creative class' (Herslund, 2012), underlining that tourism involves not only the consumption of rural, but also the productive roles of rural 'Newcomers' (Zollet & Qu, 2024).

Saxena (2016) argues that rural creatives are helping to transform rural areas into consumption spaces for leisure and tourism, stimulating new economic activities, including the creative industries. From a more critical stance, Verdini (2020) views digital connectivity as stimulating development in some remote Italian villages; however, issues of accessibility and connectivity mean that such initiatives cannot be easily scaled up. Larsen and Graezer Bideau (2024) also argue that initiatives such as the UNESCO Creative Cities Network support 'officialised' creative spaces, standardising and commodifying practices of creativity, smoothing over contradictions, alternative views and contestation. Gómez-Vega et al. (2024) found that creative spaces and talent contribute to rural tourism development, but do not necessarily lead to increased innovation.

The new rurality is supported by events that create differentiated representations of history and place, as seen in the cases of 'medieval fairs' and gastronomic festivals (Paniagua, 2016). These new meanings of ruralness can generate conflict, as the arrival of outsiders strengthens new interpretations of rurality. Querol Vicente et al. (2020) view the new rurality as a transition from the 19th-century perspective of the rural as a museum to contemporary presentations of the rural as a living space. This also highlights an essential difference between traditional modes of cultural tourism, which rely on a passive rural gaze, and the new modes of creative tourism that involve more active engagement with the destination's living culture.

Experiences have become central to shaping the new rurality through the addition of physical attractions and interpretive elements to the physical landscape. Mossböck et al. (2020) compared the regions of Carinthia and Styria in Austria, where the former has actively developed experiences. Carinthia enjoyed a greater volume of tourism flows based on experience innovation, whereas Styria remained a more traditional rural region. Kavoura and Bitsani (2013) also found that Carinthia has emphasised sensory elements, inviting visitors to "see, smell, hear, feel, taste", and "let nature cast its spell on you". Štátná and Vaishar (2023) found similar differences in two regions of South Moravia, indicating that the presence of cultural resources (or comparative advantage) is less significant than how they are utilised (competitive advantage) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2014).

Gastronomy has also been a significant growth area in the literature. Richards (2015) argues that the consumption of gastronomy by tourists has shifted from a focus on food service to attracting 'foodies' to eat specific foods, and more recently, to the development of entire 'foodscapes' providing an integrated range of gastronomic experiences, including events (Radoynova, 2022). The latest *Report on Italian Gastronomy* (Garibaldi, 2024) shows a 49% rise in gastronomy tourism since 2016, mainly because of the growing range of gastronomic experiences in rural areas. A close relationship between creative tourism and gastronomy has been noted in recent studies (Kuhn et al., 2024). Baby et al. (2024) even suggest that creative tourism can be an umbrella term for agrifood travel experiences. Gyimóthy (2017) analyses the innovative dimension of 'New Nordic Cuisine', which emphasises the seasonality and local sourcing of ingredients. Food also features strongly in research from Bulgaria and Hungary (Terziyska, Ivanova & Ivanov, 2024; Raffay, 2024)

Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miró (2020) examined innovative wine-based experiences in rural Catalonia, highlighting the importance of interpretation in adding value to the basic gastronomic product. Martínez-Falcó, Marco-Lajara, Zaragoza-Sáez and Sánchez-García (2024) also found that tourism activities in Spanish wineries, including guided tours and wine tastings, diversify sources of income and increase sustainability. In the Moravia region of the Czech Republic, Štátná et al. (2020) suggest that cultural tourism can help mitigate seasonality. However, Niavis et al. (2020) also report that bureaucracy and incomplete information hinder innovation in wine tourism in Greece.

Luković et al. (2024) found that local gastronomy is promoted in Serbia to enhance well-being, with visitors encouraged to purchase local products and reduce food miles. At the same time, they argue, globalisation can damage traditional agriculture and standardise food offerings, reducing authenticity. In Portugal, Teixeira and Ribeiro (2013) also found some commercialisation of local food, such as 'Gourmet style' pickled partridge.

Olive oil is increasingly being used to develop special interest tourism (Pulido-Fernández et al., 2019). López-Guzmán et al. (2016) found that over 70% of tourists would consider visiting an oil mill, an interpretation centre, or a museum. Čehić et al. (2020) relate olive oil tourism in Croatia to the Mediterranean diet. Other agricultural resources exploited for tourism include lavender (Ramírez-García et al., 2023), mushrooms (Latorre et al., 2021; Fusté-Forné, 2019) and whiskey (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2016).

Remoteness is a potentially attractive experience in peripheral areas. The OECD (2023) argues remoteness can provide a basis for developing CCT in places such as the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands. In the

Arctic regions of Norway, Sweden and Finland, the indigenous Sámi provide a unique cultural attraction. Björn and Lüthje (2025) analyse the practices developed by the Sámi to sensitise tourists to their culture, which challenge the Western dichotomy between nature and culture.

Leban et al. (2024) see remoteness as a basis for 'mindful luxury' in the Faroe Islands, which have combined exclusivity with a commitment to conservation. They argue that 'mindful tourists' can adapt to their surroundings and are more likely to appreciate the value of sustainable practices. In contrast, Cheer et al. (2022) argue that remote areas are facing increasing pressure from the placemaking practices of outsiders. In Greenland, de Gallier (2024) suggests that increased accessibility draws the community into the global economy, leading to rapidly growing socio-ecological challenges. There are also cultural challenges posed by Danish colonialism (Ren et al., 2020), which requires a degree of cultural sensitivity to handle (Marques & Engberg, 2022). Cooper (2020) also found that tourists in Greenland increasingly expect access to everyday life, which may increase the vulnerability of local culture.

## 4.2. Staying in rural and remote places

The presence of different forms of accommodation is central to cultural tourism in rural areas, as many of these accommodation facilities directly relate to cultural heritage.

Heritage accommodation models have a long history in southern Europe. For example, the Spanish Paradores chain was founded in 1928, helping to maintain cultural heritage in depopulated areas (López, 2022). Silva and Prista (2016) argue that Portuguese Pousadas and other forms of rural accommodation provide links to agricultural landscapes and architecture reflecting a rural idyll. Heritage accommodation can be extended from individual historic buildings to entire settlements, as seen in the Historic Villages of Portugal (Silva, 2012) and 'cultural tourism villages' in Croatia (Petrić et al., 2025).

Different models of farm accommodation have been analyzed. In France, Dubois, Cawley & Schmitz (2017) found that some farm visitors prefer to stay in rural landscapes, while others use them as a base for exploring tourist sites and nearby cities. In Austria, Katelieva and Muhar (2022) examined farm holidays, specifically *Urlaub am Bauernhof* (Holiday on the Farm), which offers 113,800 bed spaces and supports 23,000 jobs. They identified several creative tourism activities, including poppy cultivation, winemaking, resin extraction and medicinal herbs.

In Scandinavia, second homes provide an essential element of RRA accommodation supply (Rye & Gunnerud Berg, 2011). Sievänen, Pouta, and Neuvonen (2007) argue that second homes provide a connection to rural life, offering activities such as hunting, fishing, and enjoying local cuisine. Almost half (45%) of the Finnish population has regular access to a recreational home. Studies of rural second homes have also been conducted in parts of Slovenia (Vranješ, 2017), Croatia (Opačić & Koderman, 2024), and the Czech Republic (Horáková, 2010).

Rural accommodation can also be found in *Albergo Diffuso* (AD), which combines the Italian words "diffuso" (meaning scattered) and "albergo" (meaning hotel), indicating the presence of hotel services in a scattered pattern of facilities. According to Bakan, Tubić, and Jaković (2021), AD first appeared in the late 1970s as a means of reconstructing earthquake-stricken settlements and halting emigration. The model took off in 1995 with the opening of the first AD hotel in Sardinia (Morena et al., 2017). Gilli and Ferrari (2016) view AD as an innovative model of network hospitality, enabling residents to become storytellers and creative tourism facilitators.

Droli (2019) argues that AD increases cultural tourism sustainability by enhancing resources, including built heritage, landscape, eno-gastronomy, and craft. The place-based AD concept combines a love for a location and its natural, historical, and cultural aspects. Demonja and Gredičak (2015) and Bakan et al. (2021) analyse the role of ADs in Croatia, where established rules govern their development.

The dwelling aspect of rural tourism mobilities is essential because it sustains tangible heritage through re-use and conserves related intangible heritage. The intangible elements of heritage accommodation are increasingly being utilised as a means of connecting with visitors, lending meaning to heritage, and providing more engaging experiences.

### 4.3. Moving to and through RRA

Mobility is a necessity for most RRA visitors, and for some, movement is central to the experience of these places. This is most evident when tourists follow itineraries or routes that highlight landscapes and culture. Many studies of rural cultural tourism, therefore, focus on routes, particularly from a supply perspective (e.g. Rudan et al., 2024). They have been used as a political and marketing tool, linking resources to increase attractiveness. Inspiration has come from the successful Camino de Santiago and other pilgrimage routes. However, as Hortelano Mínguez and Beck (2023) outline, 'visionary' views of the development potential of cultural routes are often countered by 'sceptics' who doubt their effectiveness.

Pedrosa et al. (2022) reviewed studies of cultural routes, showing many deal with food and drink, particularly wine and olive oil. Partalidou and Tilkeridou (2023) analysed the route created by the Greek Union of Winemakers of the Macedonian Vineyards, and Moropoulou et al. (2021) considered the role of cultural routes in Aitolokarnania, in Western Greece. These studies indicated that a lack of investment, inadequate human capital, a lack of strategic vision, and seasonality hindered route development.

Many transnational cultural routes are related to international cooperation projects, such as the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe programme (Council of Europe, 2025). Pederosa et al. (2022) argue that tourism routes have expanded from linking single points to encompass networks of stakeholders working together to achieve common goals.

Few studies provide empirical evidence of the effects of cultural routes on tourism (Calderón Puerta et al., 2018). However, Rodríguez-Vázquez et al. (2024) analysed tourism flows along the Camino de Santiago in Spain and found that cultural tourism is more critical in inland areas. However, the Camino itself does not generate increased demand for cultural tourism. López-Guzmán et al. (2009) analysed a wine route close to major beach tourism destinations in Andalusia. Although a potentially interesting add-on for international beach tourists, most visitors come from the local region (27.5%) or elsewhere in Spain (45%). The main obstacles to the development of cultural tourism are a lack of coordination and planning.

The cultural theming of routes was examined by Santamarina and Vizcaíno (2021) along the Valencia Iberian Route in Spain, which aims to diversify the tourism offer. Some inland towns have benefited strongly from cultural, rural, sports or wine tourism related to the route. They highlight the importance of wine tourism routes, supported by the 'heritagization' of wine culture. Also in Spain, Otero et al. (2023) analysed the role of the Camí de Ronda pathway in protecting the cultural landscape.

Trono and Castronuovo (2021) analyse partnerships in the Southern Via Francigena route in Italy, where strong synergies between public bodies, cultural associations and residents promote sustainable mobility and increase awareness of local culture. The "Footsteps of St. Paul" route in rural Greece is popular with foreign pilgrims taking cruises and coach tours (Lampada et al., 2019) and is featured in regional development plans. Municipal authorities are optimistic about opportunities for alternative forms of tourism along the route.

Cultural routes feature non-motorised forms of mobility, including cycling, walking and running. Somoza Medina, Lois González, and Somoza Medina (2023) see walking as a 'cultural act', becoming more popular as health concerns rise. In Ribeira Sacra, Spain, researchers found that walking trails support sustainability and promote tourism. Running has also become a more frequent practice among visitors to rural areas (Larsen

& Bærenholdt, 2019). Many rural destinations organise competitive and fun runs, which Kolar (2019) argues provide opportunities for sport tourists to have cultural experiences, often accompanied by families or friends who visit local cultural attractions (Perrin-Malterre, 2018). Lukoseviciute et al. (2024) also found that eco-cultural trails can enable visitors to engage with nature and culture in a sustainable manner. In Iceland, Lund and Jóhannesson (2017) suggest that the complex mobilities associated with rural places create paths and trails that connect places, people, nature, and culture.

#### 4.4. Developing tourism in RRA

The development of tourism in RRA involves political, social and economic processes, generating issues of power and tensions within host communities. In studies of CCT development in RRA, issues of governance, sustainability and community involvement arise.

##### 4.4.1. Governance

Much attention has been paid to the role of local tourism organisations and public administrations in governance. Pilving et al. (2022) analysed the role of regional tourism networks in rural-urban tourism collaboration in Estonia. They argue that rural entrepreneurs are disadvantaged compared to their urban counterparts, lacking the critical mass needed to function effectively. External support, such as through the EU LEADER programme, is essential. Still, Pilving et al. (2022) conclude that dominant enterprises tend to shape local tourism policy and act as 'switchers' between urban and rural networks.

Malisiova and Kostopoulou (2023) found that cultural associations stimulated creative tourism in the Komotini Municipality, Greece, through activities such as performing arts, crafts, design, gastronomy, language, and spirituality. Personal contacts between cultural association members and tourists help to promote these activities. Moric (2013) also sees potential in intangible cultural heritage in Montenegro, thanks to its dynamic character, which enables locals to become intermediaries in cultural exchange and communication.

However, facilitating collaboration can be challenging, as Melón et al. (2021) note at an ecomuseum in La Aldea, Spain, and Schuhbauer and Hausmann (2022) observe in the Zugspitze region of Germany. Important decisions made at the political level limit the involvement of local cultural tourism stakeholders in the implementation process. In the craft sector, Jones, Van Assche, and Parkins (2021) argue that networks can support producers in strategic planning and decision-making. Pilving et al. (2022) also note that entrepreneurial networks are supported by trust, friendship, resource and information sharing, which can often be a challenge in remote locations, as observed by Leick et al. (2023) in Norway's Lofoten Islands.

##### 4.4.2. Community involvement

Local attitudes and levels of involvement are key in development. Differences between local stakeholder groups can be substantial, as reported by Tavares Moutela et al. (2020) in the Schist Villages Network of Portugal. They found that residents and economic operators advocated for the better use of local resources. In contrast, tourists were generally satisfied with their heritage experience but unaware of their own environmental impacts. Rural communities are usually optimistic about tourism development (Liasidou et al., 2021; Moric et al., 2021), although local tourism participation often prioritises economic aspects over cultural ones.

In the Andalusian village of Benalauría, locals have attempted bottom-up approaches to maintaining balance through strategic withdrawal from tourism (Ruiz-Ballesteros & Gonzalez-Portillo, 2024). When Benalauría effectively became a 'village-hotel', some residents decided to avoid tourism to increase their quality of life through degrowth. However, the freedom of local actors to influence development is often hindered by conflicting business and personal interests, as well as conflicts between heritage preservation and business development, as Dinis et al. (2019) found in Central Portugal. In the Polish village of Choczewo, Strzelecka

et al. (2017) also found significant social distance between residents and local authorities. While residents' decisions were influenced by emotional bonds with places and nature, administrative decisions were based on 'objective' national criteria.

In the Czech village of Lipno, Dutch second-homeowners inject money into the local economy, helping to combat population decline (Horáková, 2010). But they interact little with residents, undermining social networks, increasing food prices and rents, and affecting community services. Horáková (2010) argues that much research fails to separate the effects of tourism from other change processes, suggesting that newcomers can become 'conspicuous scapegoats' for social and economic problems. Kastenholz et al. (2013) found more extroverted visitors in Portuguese villages who sought more intense interaction with residents, participating in trail walking and tasting local food in a search for more 'authentic' experiences. They buy more local products, are more immersed in local culture, and are more satisfied.

#### 4.4.3. Sustainability

The development of CCT should be sustainable, providing benefits for all stakeholders, and supporting the effective management of both tangible and intangible heritage (OECD, 2024). However, there has been relatively little research on sustainable cultural tourism in rural areas. Turnock (2002) describes Maramures in Romania as a rich cultural landscape with considerable potential for cultural tourism. But providers competed in providing accommodation, undermining economic sustainability. Yubero Bernabé and García Hernández (2016) examine tourism in Sierra de Albarracín in Spain, where heritage renovation has been supported by government and EU programmes. Although tourism has grown, seasonality remains high, limiting economic sustainability. Ottaviani et al. (2024) present evidence from the TExTOUR EU project indicating economic sustainability can be achieved through inclusive participation-led methods. The project developed heritage-related routes, traditional culinary schools, creative workshops for immigrants, artistic events and artistic residencies. In Croatia, Afrić Rakitovac and Urošević (2023) argue for the strategic development of participatory models of sustainable tourism and heritage management.

Peñalosa and Castaldi (2024) examined environmental sustainability in peripheral regions, which often lag in innovation performance. They find a link between CCIs and green growth but note the low participation of Eastern European areas in EU environmental programmes. The need for switchers to link local and wider interests is a common theme. Gica et al. (2021) examine the development of cultural tourism in the village of Viscri, Romania, which they attribute to a 'cosmopolitan leader' who employed an integrative approach, including training in traditional crafts.

Some more accessible rural areas now suffer from similar challenges of overcrowding as their urban counterparts. For example, Panzer-Krause (2020) identified 'overtourism' at the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland. Cruise ship and coach trip tourists see this as a 'must-see' sight, whereas individual visitors are more interested in the geology and more aware of sustainability issues. In Italy, Cerisola and Panzera (2024) argue that the view of cultural and heritage tourism as sustainable depends on the number of tourists remaining low.

Digital technologies are underrepresented in the literature on RRA. Only three papers specifically mentioned the digital transformation. However, several others were dealing with the 'digital pivot' during the pandemic, the growth of digital communications and the design of digital applications. For example, Berjozkina and Kuruvilla (2023) analyse the "Virtual Latvia" platform, which makes cultural heritage in rural areas more accessible to tourists. Many studies also consider the effect of COVID-19 in stimulating a 'digital pivot' in CCT, particularly for museums. However, Varotsis (2022) notes that digitalisation remains under-researched in RRA. Zainal Abidin et al. (2023) suggest attention should also be paid to older tourists, who may need more support in using digital tools.

#### 4.4.4. Placemaking

To date, relatively little attention has been paid to placemaking in RRA. However, Gyimóthy (2018) considered the use of Swiss rural locations as a backdrop for Bollywood films. Richards (2020) reviewed the links between creative tourism and placemaking, including rural examples. In Greenland, Cooper (2020) analysed the role of a local cultural centre in giving meaning to place for locals and tourists. Fusté-Forné (2019) analyses mycotourism (mushroom-based tourism) through a placemaking perspective.

Intangible heritage can be leveraged in placemaking to imbue local assets with meaning (Richards, 2020). As Vranješ (2017) describes in Slovenia, new rural regimes are emerging as rural space is decoupled from agriculture, and tourism is used to support the economy and create new frames of meaning. Rytönen (2014) examines the tourism-driven New Culinary Country in Northern Sweden, a programme designed to 'speed up the emergence of the new rurality.' (p. 2). Changing consumer behaviour and the emergence of Localised Agri-Food Systems create a new focus on cultural and place-based resources. Often, these resources are capitalised by newcomers from urban areas, who have a more cosmopolitan view of culture and creativity and a focus on quality of life. This may provide opportunities for RRA to overcome the relative lack of creative resources (Zollet & Qu, 2024) and improve the quality of life.

Place-based collaboration arguably enables rural communities to support their cultural heritage resources more effectively by giving them a voice and visibility (Garau, 2017). Because rural culture is based on embedded knowledge, the development of CCT tends to rely on less formal, 'stickier,' and localised knowledge (Duxbury, 2021). Physical co-presence of visitors and locals is essential for knowledge transfer, increasing creativity and satisfaction (Björn & Miettinen, 2024), but this is a human resources challenge. Rural creativity often relies on 'lifestyle entrepreneurs', as noted by Ferreira Carvalho et al. (2024) in Portugal and Carson et al. (2018) in northern Sweden.

Creative clusters can create a critical mass of knowledge and other resources, as well as networks, which can link actors dispersed across a wide geographical area. Clustering approaches are reflected in research on artist colonies and creative hubs (Wojan et al., 2007; Brouder, 2012), as well as in creative tourism clusters (Scalabrini & Alves, 2022). Cerquetti (2020) analysed the impact of museum networks in the Marche Region of Italy, where a lack of funding and staff has driven a search for greater effectiveness.

Although networks have been seen as a tool for uniting disparate geographic locations, network building is still hampered by national borders. On the Croatian borders with Hungary and Slovenia, Čelan (2021) identified challenges, including the low permeability of the border, language barriers, and a concentration of border crossing areas. Lempek et al. (2022) and Marton et al. (2021) also argue that the cultural tourism potential is limited by poor marketing and management, as well as a lack of accommodation. Horjan (2011) examined the role of traditional crafts as an attraction for cultural tourism on the border between Croatia and Slovenia, where there is little linkage between 'rural tourism' and craftspeople or well-known traditional sites.

Links between tourism, culture and creativity are essential for rural areas (OECD 2009, 2014). Culture and creativity provide content for tourism experiences, while tourism supports local cultural and creative industries. Rodrigues et al. (2024) and Palenčíková and Csapó (2021) emphasise the role of creative tourism in rural regeneration, which can preserve and enhance both tangible and intangible heritage. Waniek et al. (2023) examine storytelling in cross-border collaboration between Slovenia and Croatia. The "Living Magic – Stories from Pohorje and Istria" project utilises intangible cultural heritage to engage visitors, linking cultures across borders (Korez-Vide, 2017). Ivančič Kutin & Kropelj Telban (2021) analyse the development of storytelling routes in Slovenia, and Ivančič Kutin (2017) analyses the links between storytelling and events. In Bulgaria, myths and legends are utilised in creative storytelling, helping to conserve biocultural heritage (Damyanova,

2018) and bringing entire cultural landscapes to life (Ganeva-Raycheva, 2021). Garrison and Wallace (2025) analyse the effects of storytelling or 'story-weaving' in developing cultural tourism in Scotland. Salis (2023) emphasises CCI links in the arts field in Italy, and McKerrell and Hornabrook (2022) highlight music tourism in rural Scotland. Horjan (2011), Arcos-Pumarola et al. (2023), and Lőrincz et al. (2023) underline the role of crafts in CCT. Marasco et al. (2024) have identified the emergence of a "CCIs-tourism nexus" in the Abruzzo region of Italy, including "Fashion/design" and "Sustainable mobility and tourism" as strategic themes.

## 5. Discussion

This literature review shows significant growth in CCT research in RRA. Recent EU projects have stimulated an increase in CCT research, with the focus shifting from tangible to intangible heritage resources, reflecting the need for alternatives to tangible heritage for CCT in RRA. The growth of studies on cultural routes, events, and festivals also signals efforts to engage visitors in intangible cultural heritage.

We identified four major research themes in the literature: experiencing, staying in, moving to and around and developing RRA. In relation to experiencing RRA, culture and creativity are increasingly employed to valorise place assets, create distinction and attract visitors. Often lacking large-scale tangible heritage resources, rural areas have been increasingly emphasising creativity and intangible culture. This is evident in increased research on regional and local gastronomy and creative tourism (Richards, 2025), which tends to be particularly strong in Europe (Remoaldo et al., 2022).

Staying in RRA is often linked to heritage, because many accommodation facilities incorporate heritage elements. Providing tourist accommodation helps conserve tangible heritage but requires significant resources. Many heritage buildings can be adapted for tourism (such as castles, manor houses, and gîtes), but their contribution to the cultural tourism experience remains under-researched.

The theme of movement is linked to culture and sustainability. Cultural routes link cultural resources and encourage tourists to visit new areas. Increasingly, routes are laid out for walking or cycling, enabling tourists to leave their cars at home. One big issue for cultural routes, however, is the extent to which visitors follow the path itself, as opposed to visiting individual attractions along the route.

The effects of tourism development on local people, culture and identity have been extensively researched in RRA. The commodification of rural culture through tourism poses a significant challenge, particularly when the desired image is closely tied to traditional ways of life. This creates tensions between the traditional culture interpreted for tourists and the contemporary lives of rural residents. Relying on tradition can obscure contemporary culture and trap locals in an inauthentic version of the past. The sparse supply of tangible heritage in RRA means they have fewer CCT development opportunities, which Blapp and Mitas (2019) link to the concept of 'serial reproduction' of rural creative tourism.

How does research on CCT in RRA differ from urban cultural tourism research? In cities, 'mass cultural tourism' focuses attention on physical overcrowding and touristification (Cocola-Gant, 2023). In RRA, problems of 'overtourism' occur at a few 'honeypot' sites, but there are still significant effects of tourism on rural life. These include the displacement of locals by visitors purchasing second homes, as well as the loss of local amenities and traditions. Using tourism as an economic prop for local communities is more problematic than in cities, because human resources to interpret the 'local' for visitors are scarce. Florida's (2017) idea that creatives are attracted by other creatives and the creative 'buzz' of city centres is also less applicable in rural areas. Research is emerging on rural creative hotspots (Richards et al., 2024), but rural creatives are often drawn to tranquillity rather than creative buzz. Having relocated to rural areas, creatives usually seek out one another for mutual support and ideas, but this has little impact on their location choices (Leick et al., 2023).

Our review reveals many challenges facing the development of CCT in RRA. In particular, the shift towards intangible culture in tourism experiences places pressure on already stretched human resources. Having people who can link visitors to local culture is essential for visitor satisfaction and place attachment (Kastenholz et al., 2020). Although rural areas often benefit from lifestyle migration, labour shortages persist, making tourism operations difficult (Atkočiūnienė & Vazonienė, 2019). Efforts to attract 'digital nomads' to rural areas (Buława et al., 2024) can attract younger workers, but they often have little connection to the local culture. Addressing these problems requires new governance structures to create collaboration within the tourism sector and cross-sectoral alliances with the cultural and creative industries (Stoffelen et al., 2017).

However, opportunities can also be identified. Diversifying tourism experiences can attract new markets and help to combat seasonality, particularly with a shift from cultural towards creative tourism (Richards, 2020). Changing the form of tourism can help to generate more value from the same number of visitors. Clustering and networking can also support a critical mass of services, catering for local needs. Many clustering initiatives have been researched in RRA, including *albergo diffuso* (Droli, 2019), creative hubs (Hill, Manning, & Frost, 2021), artists' residencies (Almeida et al., 2025), and 'creative outposts' (Brouder, 2019). CCT networks have received less attention; however, cultural routes can serve as practical networking tools (Richards, 2011). The movement of visitors to new areas also provides a flow of resources and new ideas to support and enliven rural communities.

Such developments raise issues of inequality in the distribution of tourism costs and benefits. The OECD (2024) argues that tourism employs youth, women, and migrants, thereby helping to build social capital, create jobs, and integrate rural businesses into global value chains. The report also highlights the potential for tourism to develop shared interests in heritage among residents and visitors, and to spread tourism to new areas. Achieving this means creating liveable places which can attract and retain workers and entrepreneurs. This implies ensuring equitable access to job opportunities, public services, infrastructure, and affordable housing, which requires coordination across different levels of government and often cross-border collaboration. However, cross-border cooperation in CCT is hampered by economic, social and cultural barriers.

Countries and macro-regions differ in terms of the quantity and focus of CCT research. The coverage of publications is closely related to geography, with a preponderance of gastronomy and wine studies in southern Europe. This points to a certain spatial reductionism, as indicated in the critique of macro-regional policy by Bialasiewicz, Giaccaria, Jones and Minca (2013). In studies of cultural and creative resources, there is a tendency to relate rural environments to traditional culture and nostalgia. This link is weaker in Northern Europe, where experience-led tourism and cultural policies have promoted competitive rather than comparative advantage. However, differences in regional resources still strongly influence the distribution of CCT business models. This is also reflected in the suggested heritage focus for different macro-regions by the Council of Europe (2020), which includes maritime heritage in the Baltic and food heritage in the Alpine region. There are some exceptions, such as the development of creative, storytelling-based products in Croatia and Slovenia.

It is essential to highlight success stories in the development of CCT in RRA. Our review identified some successful innovations in local accommodation, including the schist villages of Portugal, which are linked to creative tourism development (Tavares Moutela et al., 2020) and physical renovation. The *Albergo Diffuso* model is another innovation now spreading from Italy to other countries (Droli, 2019; Bakan et al., 2021). There have also been successful gastronomic innovations, including culinary boutique tourism in the Slovenian Mediterranean hinterland (Topole & Pipan, 2020), wine tourism in Spain and other southern European countries (Crespi-Vallbona & Mascarilla-Miró, 2020), and as creative tourism (Baby, Barbieri & Knollenberg, 2024). There are essential links between gastronomy, agritourism and creative tourism, which have been developed through platforms such as BeCountry in Italy and *Urlaub am Bauernhof* (Holiday on the Farm) in Austria (Katelieva & Muhar, 2022). Creative tourism has also been linked to events and creative

workshops in Barcelos, Portugal (Ferreira, Sousa & Gonçalves, 2019). Literary tourism has also been successfully developed in many RRA, and successful rural 'booktowns' include Uruña, Spain (Grande, Curiel & De La Hoz, 2019) and Óbidos in Portugal (Marques, 2019). There are numerous cultural and pilgrimage routes, many of which were stimulated by the success story of the Camino de Santiago. For example, in Italy, Trono and Castronuovo (2021) analyse two 'emblematic cases' of cultural route innovation along the Via Francigena. These successful initiatives are usually based on collaboration, underlining the importance of networks in developing 'collaborative advantage' (Richards & Duif, 2019).

## 6. Future research directions

There has been relatively little research on place-based development approaches. Place-based approaches also require appropriate governance models, which is also a weakness in the current research on CCT in RRA. In a European context, it is significant that cross-border collaboration emerges as a research blind spot, and there have been few attempts to study the potential attractiveness of (former) borders as cultural sights.

Most research focuses on individual products in RRA and the utilisation of tangible resources for cultural tourism. Although studies of intangible heritage resources are increasing, further research is needed on effective strategies to harness these resources, such as storytelling and interpretation. Creative tourism in RRA is also under-researched compared to the previous focus on cultural tourism, particularly related to tangible heritage resources. Despite their potential (OECD, 2023), remote areas tend to receive little attention, with a few notable exceptions, such as cultural tourism among the Sámi (Adie & Saarinen, 2024) and recent media coverage of Greenland and the Faroe Islands (e.g., Hayward & Berthelsen, 2024). However, growing user pressure on cities makes it likely that remoteness will become a sought-after luxury good (Leban et al., 2024).

Previous research has established a few connections between CCT and policy frameworks. Future research could examine the effects of EU policy, most notably the place-based approach to policy in the EU macro-regions (Trono, 2022). Despite recent EU-funded projects, a distinctly European perspective on CCT is still lacking. Much recent research on RRA and CCT has come from Asia (Palermo et al., 2023), where concepts of cultural and creative tourism are often combined.

Digitalisation is an increasingly important aspect of rural tourism, particularly in terms of place curation and experience design (Richards, 2024). But the growth of platforms offering cultural and creative tourism has not been widely studied. Relatively little research is related to (new) media, such as film or TV-induced tourism (Joliveau, 2009; Stasiak, 2022), or the impact of social media. Can the emergence of new platforms featuring creative tourism help to attract tourists to new areas, or do platforms also concentrate tourism activity, as in cities? (van der Zee et al., 2020).

Sustainability is a growing challenge for CCT in RRA; however, the approach to sustainability is often implicit, assuming that small-scale tourism is inherently sustainable. This is another area in which the relative lack of empirical evidence to support such claims is problematic (Hortelano Mínguez & Beck, 2023), suggesting the need to examine sustainable and innovative pathways for rural tourism development. In terms of sustainability, relatively little is known about the travel and accommodation choice process for cultural tourists. Research could examine how tourists could be 'nudged' into making more sustainable choices, and which types of cultural and creative tourists are most susceptible to sustainability messaging. More attention could also be given to the potentially positive contributions of tourists through regenerative creative tourism, as Zollet and Qu (2024) suggest. Small-scale regenerative and creative tourism can create revitalisation opportunities for residents, supporting local communities and enhancing the attractiveness of the place. More information on tourist motivations could help tailor experience development and new business models to desirable segments, including visitors who also make a co-creative contribution to rural areas, such as volunteers, or

counter-seasonal tourist groups, as Björn and Miettinen (2024) show in Lapland and Fusté-Forné (2019) illustrates with mushroom tourism in Spain.

There is also a lack of research on peri-urban fringes that often receive significant numbers of urban visitors. Such areas have usually been seen as relatively uninteresting and lacking in cultural and creative resources (Jansen Verbeke, 2009). As cities attempt to spread tourists away from overcrowded city centres, the urban fringe could be an essential location for 'overspill tourism'. However, this form of tourism is often driven by opposing forces (the need to escape the crowds), making it more challenging to develop positive marketing propositions.

A more holistic view could also link the context of RRA and the policy frameworks with the impacts of tourist activity on culture and creativity. The interaction between tourists and residents is often also overlooked or reduced to narrow roles, such as 'host' and 'guest'. There is a growing realisation that tourists travel for more than activities or attractions – they also travel to experience places. But what attracts tourists to a place, and what roles do 'locals' play in this? Future research could take a more reflective approach to the relationships between place attractiveness, place attachment and tourism development.

## 7. Conclusions

Our review indicates a strong recent growth in research on CCT in RRA, particularly since 2019, during which we have identified several key research themes. Firstly, there is a considerable amount of research on experiences and the development of cultural and creative experiences in RRA. Rural areas are being remade as consumption arenas, emphasising authenticity and nostalgia. Gastronomy, events, and festivals play a central role in shaping such experiences, while remote areas are becoming increasingly exclusive destinations for 'luxury' experiences. Secondly, research has focused on rural accommodation and innovations such as *albergo diffuso*, placing more emphasis on accommodation networks. Thirdly, the movement of tourists to and through rural areas is being highlighted, particularly in terms of cultural routes. Finally, there is increased attention to development issues in RRA, as well as reactions to the growth of tourism. However, there are still relatively few studies that delve deeply into governance and/or sustainability issues. The current study suggests research on the role of place in tourism development, particularly from a placemaking or placeshaping perspective, could generate new insights.

In terms of research trends and patterns, we see significant growth in research on intangible heritage. This responds to the growing number of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage listings and reflects a shift in cultural tourism away from built heritage towards everyday culture. Contemporary rural lifestyles, therefore, become important as a source of intangible heritage experiences for tourists. However, the idea that 'local' lifestyles provide the basis for rural culture is being challenged by population changes. Rural areas are diversifying, with an increasing number of lifestyle entrepreneurs, retirees, and digital nomads becoming 'locals'. Rural communities could potentially enlist tourists and other mobile groups as co-creators of culture. A shift in RRA from supplying culture for tourist consumption towards creative and production-based models is essential. The rural CCT economy could shift from exporting cultural products (with low value-added) to distributing knowledge, know-how, and emotions (with high-value content and added value). Consequently, as Panzera (2022) suggests, it is crucial to enhance the "absorptive capacity" of the territory and individuals to leverage external knowledge and expand their CCT potential.

Thirdly, the current study identifies several critical gaps in the literature, which can serve as pointers for future research. As suggested in the previous section, these include the need for more studies on strategies for intangible heritage utilisation, including storytelling, stronger links between CCT and policy frameworks, consideration of the impacts of digitalisation, more detailed analysis of sustainable and regenerative approaches to development and the relationship between urban and rural areas, particularly in the peri-urban fringe.

This review makes several significant contributions to the literature. It reviews literature in languages other than English, an omission in much previous work (Richards et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2025). It also provides a place-based perspective on CCT, which can link theoretical perspectives on place attractiveness for tourists with place attachment of local populations as a basis for co-creation. It also highlights many research gaps and avenues for future research, for example, in terms of place-based CCT, the attractiveness of (former) European border areas and governance systems in CCT.

As always, this review has limitations. The literature search across different languages raises potential issues with interpreting terms. Although translation of sources into English reduced these, there remains the possibility of misinterpretation. Although we have attempted to produce a comprehensive picture of the CCT literature in Europe, variations in geographic coverage still exist. In particular, French and German literature is lacking in international databases and cannot be covered in the current study.

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