

ANDRES RÕIGAS

Rural marketing:
connections between local government,
communities, and heritage



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LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

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- II Rennu, M., Rõigas, A., Araste, L. (2023). Artisans seeking shelter: Craftspeople moving to the countryside and (new) local communities. *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica*, 66(2), 357–382.
- III Kurisoo, T., Lillak, A., Rõigas, A., Tint, K. (2024). The role of communities in preserving, using and remembering heritage: Archaeological monuments and dark heritage sites in Estonia. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 30(2), 195–209.

The author’s contribution to the articles denoted by: ‘*’ a minor contribution; ‘**’ a moderate contribution; and ‘***’ a major contribution.

	Articles		
	I	II	III
Original idea	***	**	*
Study design	***	**	**
Data processing and analysis	***	**	*
Interpretation of the results	***	**	**
Writing the manuscript	***	**	**

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the central domains in the study of geographical space is the analysis of how people utilize space to meet their needs and desires. Through spatial use, societal changes can be observed, such as technological developments or transformations in administrative structures. Processes such as technological developments and changes in administrative structures shape societal values, which in turn influence how different groups prefer to use and inhabit space. Place-based identity and a sense of belonging have become increasingly important, especially in rural areas where community cohesion supports social and economic vitality. The growing demand for a safe and meaningful living environment has heightened interest in nature conservation, cultural heritage, and the appreciation of personal living space and privacy (Scannell and Gifford, 2017; Bosworth and Bat Finke, 2020; Bugovics, 2025). Normative values such as community cohesion, environmental sustainability, and the preservation of cultural heritage increasingly challenge conventional development models that prioritize economic growth, market efficiency, and centralized planning.

The continued process of urbanization and the decline of rural areas are primarily associated with socio-economic indicators such as the concentration of jobs in urban centres, the disappearance of services from rural regions, and the outmigration of younger generations from rural communities to urban areas. At the same time, opportunities focused on environmental values and cultural heritage—combined with the rapid development of the information society—offer new solutions to the challenges of demographic shrinkage and ageing in rural communities. Guiding rural development is a multifaceted process. On one hand, competitive agriculture requires ongoing modernization and increased production volumes; on the other hand, it is essential to strengthen communities' capacity to participate in shaping and implementing their own regional development goals (Torre and Wallet, 2016). Environmental problems associated with urbanization, such as the declining quality of living environments or the over-consumption of natural resource/s, have prompted the search for alternative, and at times radical, solutions (Anzani, 2020). As a result, expectations about how living spaces should support well-being, social interaction, and environmental sustainability are shifting. Increasing value is placed on the quality of the living environment, community cohesion, and a sense of identity. Development strategies must therefore take into consideration the values and spatial expectations of different social groups in order to create inclusive and flexible solutions.

Li et al. (2019) emphasize that enhancing the adaptive capacity of rural areas and achieving sustainable development requires the diversification of livelihoods, the development of market-oriented institutions, and the strengthening of social capital. Particularly important is the balance between internal community ties (e.g. trust and cooperation among members) and external networks (e.g. relationships with other communities and institutions) as this supports the ability of communities to adapt to change and guide local development. Social capital is not merely the foundation for cooperation but also a strategic resource that

enables communities to articulate locally embedded values, such as cultural traditions, environmental priorities, and social norms, and to develop a distinct identity that is recognizable to external decision-makers and strengthens internal autonomy. This requires the understanding that the use of existing resources should not limit development potential but should instead create conditions for new ideas, collaboration, and expanded participation. Shakya and Vagnarelli (2024) stress that intangible values, such as identity, belonging, and cultural meaning, are crucial for community resilience and sustainability. Identity can be viewed as a value that strengthens social cohesion and responsiveness in changing conditions. From a regional development perspective, it is essential to consider social capital alongside material, cultural, and spiritual resources—a holistic approach that enables communities to develop viable and flexible strategies responsive to both internal and external changes.

Previous societal processes and regional development have largely demonstrated intensive capital accumulation and spatial concentration in urban areas. Competitiveness and economic growth have been strongly influenced by market-based mechanisms and technological innovation, which is reflected in national policy documents and international scientific discourse (European Commission, 2025). In today's society, characterized by diversity, cultural plurality, and dispersed values, there is a growing need for regional policy approaches that support communities' cultural identity, creativity, and social cohesion, enabling regions to shape their development based on local specificities (European Parliament, 2022). Ray (1994; 1998) emphasizes that culture and heritage not only serve as carriers of identity but can also function as key resources for economic development.

Creativity and the concentration of the creative class have traditionally been seen as hallmarks of urban environments, where cultural infrastructure and dense networks support innovation (Pratt, 2011). However, increasing attention is being paid to the potential of rural areas in fostering creativity and sustainable development—both through grassroots community initiatives and national policies. Creativity in rural areas is expressed through the appreciation of cultural heritage, community-based entrepreneurship, and new forms of collaboration, while sustainability entails the preservation of local identity, environmental awareness, and long-term viability (Mu and Aimar, 2022; Shakya and Vagnarelli, 2024).

These processes suggest that in shaping living environments and defining regional development directions, traditional instrumental rationality—focused on goal orientation, efficiency, and practical benefit—is increasingly being complemented by decision-making approaches that prioritize environmental “pleasantness” or aesthetic factors (Osti and Cicero, 2018). Ainsaar and Strenze (2019) emphasize that attitudes supporting innovation, cooperation, and community cohesion significantly influence regional development, highlighting the growing importance of value-based choices.

In recent years, rural development has acquired a new meaning shaped by both technological and societal changes. Emerging opportunities highlight values such as cultural heritage, local identity, and so-called “rural amenities”. On one hand,

these trends are supported by the development of information technology, which enables flexible work and living arrangements and reduces spatial constraints. On the other hand, broader societal shifts—such as the appreciation of sustainable development principles, changing consumption habits, the growing role of education, and the rise of identity-based choices in the context of globalization— influence the attractiveness of rural areas. Increasingly, people seek safe, aesthetically pleasing, and meaningful living environments.

In this transformed context, the following question arises: how can rural areas be viewed not merely as geographical units but as places rich in cultural, social, and environmental values with the potential to support community-driven development? Shifting societal values, such as increased appreciation for sustainability, local identity, and cultural heritage, provide a basis for viewing rural areas as strategic resources. These areas, together with their cultural assets, can be actively utilized by communities, planners, and policymakers through purposeful and context-sensitive marketing activities to support inclusive and place-based development. A marketing perspective enables the interpretation of rural potential not only in economic terms but also in social and cultural dimensions.

This dissertation consists of seven chapters divided into theoretical and empirical parts. The theoretical section explores the development potential of rural areas in the context of marketing, focusing on changing values and their impact on regional development. The empirical section analyses the activities of local governments, traditional communities, and intentionally formed community initiatives, highlighting their role in rural marketing and the implementation of development goals. This doctoral dissertation has three main objectives:

1. To analyse how place marketing activities have initiated and supported community-based in-migration to rural areas in Estonia, with a particular focus on the roles and strategies of local governments and communities (articles I and II).
2. To examine how the treatment of cultural heritage as a resource influences the development of community-based in-migration and tourism, including the interpretation and use of heritage in marketing practices (articles I, II, and III).
3. To assess the impacts of community-based in-migration on local development and community functioning, especially in terms of social innovation, entrepreneurship, public service sustainability, and internal community dynamics (articles I and II).

The empirical part of the dissertation is divided into two main research directions: (1) the formation of intentional communities that value heritage (articles I and II); and (2) the appreciation of heritage in traditional communities (Article III). Intentional communities are understood as social groups that deliberately form around shared values, goals, or lifestyles. The article-based analysis explores the possibilities of marketing processes involving communities and local governments, focusing on the emergence of heritage-valuing communities and the role of marketing activities in their formation and consolidation.

Based on Article I, the impact of traditional marketing activities implemented by local governments on regional development is assessed, including the promotion of in-migration—that is, internal migration within the country (see Meijering et al., 2007a). Articles II and III provide an overview of cooperation opportunities between communities and local governments in the context of heritage-based marketing, highlighting various strategies through which value-based communities can form and evolve.

The empirical analysis addresses group-based in-migration to rural areas as a mechanism for the emergence of intentional communities (articles I and II). Community activities describe the preservation of values derived from heritage and the environment, and their role in shaping community identity. In the context of intentional communities, the motivations for location choice, prior marketing activities, and further steps in community consolidation are analysed. The impact of in-migration at the local level is examined from both municipal and community perspectives.

Article I highlights the potential of place marketing activities by local governments to influence in-migration patterns in rural areas. The analysis addresses concepts related to place marketing that may be particularly effective in promoting group-based in-migration. In the rural context, there is an opportunity to link target group motivations, location choice factors, and marketing agent activities with the development potential of the place, emphasizing the role of marketing as a strategic development driver.

The discussion and concluding sections identify the comparative factors shared across the articles that characterize the specificity and impact of rural marketing activities. Additionally, supplementary empirical information is used in the discussion that could not be included in the articles due to space limitations but is important for the deeper interpretation and generalization of the research findings.

The empirical part of the dissertation is based on case studies primarily conducted in Southeast Estonia (articles I and II). The choice of region is justified by several factors:

- Southeast Estonia was home to most of Estonia's intentional communities during the study period.
- These communities are characteristically stable and persistent.
- Local governments and communities in Southeast Estonia have engaged in moderate place marketing, allowing for the analysis of its impact on community development.

Studying rural areas in Southeast Estonia provides an opportunity to assess why intentional communities tend to form in locations considered peripheral. From a place marketing perspective, the reasons and goals for forming intentional communities are not necessarily direct influencing factors, but articles I and II evaluate the reasons for their persistence and sustainability.

The impact of traditional community marketing initiatives in the context of heritage sites can be assessed based on Article III. From a local perspective,

marketing supports the preservation of heritage alongside the development of local entrepreneurship and networks. It also allows for the assessment of the impact of local government contributions on community development. All chapters of the empirical section are linked to marketing target groups and analysing which target groups have yielded the most expected results from the perspectives of both community and local government.

The shared elements across the articles highlight the comparative factors characterizing rural marketing activities, addressing both community and local government perspectives (Table 1). Particular attention is paid to group-based in-migration, which is discussed in articles I and II as a key social process that fosters the formation of intentional communities. Such migration acts as a mechanism through which value-based, goal-oriented, and location-driven communities emerge—a process closely tied to the marketing characteristics of the place and the rise of a local identity.

Table 1. Comparison of the focus and outcomes of articles I–III

Publication	Research Focus	Main Themes	Effectiveness and Impact
Article I	Local government place marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional marketing activities • Impact of place marketing on in-migration • Role of marketing agents • Location selection motivations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local government actions influence regional attractiveness • Moderate impact on the emergence of intentional communities • Partnership between local governments and communities
Article II	Formation of intentional communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group-based in-migration • Heritage-based marketing • Reasons for location selection • Community strengthening activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergence of intentional communities linked to marketing and location selection • Southeast Estonia as the main region • Expansion of the heritage concept in marketing • Spread of sustainable development ideas
Article III	Heritage marketing in community contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valorisation of heritage sites • Cooperation between communities and local governments • Development of entrepreneurship and networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing supports community development • Local government contribution visible through cooperation • Heritage as a development resource

As a shared theme across the articles, marketing is viewed as a tool for community formation and development, linking place selection with visitation and in-migration. At all levels, the need for collaboration and the existence of effective cooperation between communities and local governments can be identified and described.

2. RESEARCH MOTIVATION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This dissertation investigates how rural communities contribute to regional development by applying heritage-based cultural and environmentally conscious marketing practices. The research focus is twofold: first, it analyses how such marketing practices support the formation of intentional communities and attract new residents to rural areas; and second, it evaluates how rural communities engage in valuing and managing heritage in the context of rural tourism.

The research is grounded in several theoretical and policy frameworks related to the revitalization of rural areas, emphasizing the need to move beyond narrowly sectoral models of rural development. The OECD report *The New Rural Paradigm* (2006) and the European Commission's *Cork 2.0 Declaration* (2016) highlight that traditional agriculture-centred approaches are no longer sufficient to address contemporary social, economic, and environmental challenges in rural contexts. In addition, the *Barca Report* (An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy, 2009) argues for a place-based development strategy that prioritizes territorial diversity, integrated governance, and context-sensitive policy design, particularly in rural and less-developed regions. These reports collectively advocate for integrated, place-based, and multi-directional development models that promote innovation, community participation, and sustainable resource use in rural areas.

Li et al. (2019) examined why some rural areas experience decline while others thrive. They found that successful rural development depends on the balance between internal social cohesion and external connectivity. This dynamic enhances community resilience and adaptability, enabling better responses to economic and social changes.

Hoffmann et al. (2023) introduced the interdisciplinary concept of *rurbanity*, which describes the blending of rural and urban elements and the increasingly blurred boundaries between their spatial and social structures. Their framework identifies four key dimensions relevant to rural transformation: resources and place-basedness, flows and connectivity, institutions and behaviour, and lifestyles and livelihoods. This perspective offers useful insights into how rural areas respond to urbanization pressures while maintaining distinct identities and offering alternative modes of living.

Marketing based on rural imagery to attract new residents has been studied in various European contexts. Burkhart-Kriesel et al. (2014) emphasize that the visual and narrative communication that shapes community image directly influences decisions to relocate to rural areas. Such communication creates emotional connections with potential migrants, shaping their expectations and perceptions of quality of life. Similar targeted marketing strategies have been explored in the Nordic countries. For example, Niedomysl (2004) analysed regional campaigns in Sweden aimed at increasing rural attractiveness, while Eimermann (2015) examined lifestyle migration as a multi-layered process where migrants

seek not only consumption values but also production opportunities, contributing to rural diversification and development.

Carson and Carson (2018) highlighted the role of internal social networks and social capital in encouraging return migration and shaping regional attractiveness. Strong local ties and collaborative networks support the integration of new residents and foster innovation and community resilience.

In addition to previous research, this dissertation is informed by the author's personal experience in rural marketing, gained through national initiatives (e.g. *Maale Elama*) and local development projects (see Niitra, 2013). These experiences, combined with the analysed sources, confirm that targeted communication strategies and the precise engagement of target groups can significantly enhance rural attractiveness and support population recovery. Communities play a central role in guiding regional development, especially in mobilizing internal resources such as cultural values, social capital, and local entrepreneurship. Local-level activities go beyond marketing aimed at in-migration and entail highlighting regional values and positioning the living environment as an attractive alternative to urban lifestyles.

Such community initiatives can be seen as a counterbalance to the historically dominant productivist paradigm of rural development, which treated rural areas primarily as monofunctional agricultural production units (Holmes, 2010). The intensification of agriculture has led to significant environmental and social changes, increasing the need to diversify rural economies and resource use. Song et al. (2022) point out that alongside intensive agricultural development, interest in alternative economic practices such as agritourism and place-based entrepreneurship has grown. These practices create more flexible and diverse economic structures, enhancing the capacity of rural areas to cope with external changes, including climate change, market fluctuations, and demographic shifts.

The multifunctional development model thus supports rural adaptability and long-term sustainability, strengthening social, economic, and environmental resilience. This trend is also supported by the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), particularly through its second pillar—rural development—during the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 programming periods. These programmes focus on diversification, social inclusion, and the valorisation of natural and cultural heritage (European Commission, n.d.; EU CAP Network, 2023). Through CAP, local initiatives are funded that utilize local resources, including natural and cultural assets, to strengthen community identity and economic vitality.

Cultural and natural resources hold deep meaning for communities, shaping identity and belonging primarily at the local level. This place-based meaning-making provides a foundation for meaningful community participation in shaping regional development strategies. Through this, communities can highlight their unique cultural, social, or natural resources and apply them to support economic development, preserve identity, and strengthen social cohesion (Shakya and Vagnarelli, 2024; Mouraz et al., 2024). In this context, community marketing acquires strategic significance: it is not merely a communication tool but a purposeful development instrument used by communities or their initiators to mobilize

local resources, create an attractive image, and strengthen their role in shaping regional identity and appeal.

A second key rationale for this research lies in the unique and rapid societal transformations that have taken place in Estonia, setting it apart from the development trajectories of many Western European countries. According to Raagmaa (1996), the first major shift occurred after World War II, when Estonian society simultaneously transitioned from an agricultural to an industrial society and underwent a complete institutional restructuring due to the loss of national sovereignty. The central mechanism of this transition was the collectivized farming system, which reshaped the social, economic, and spatial structure of rural areas. During the Soviet period, rural society was extensively reorganized: traditional farm-based production was replaced by centralized and industrially organized agriculture, closely linked to urbanization and labour relocation.

The second wave of rapid change began in 1991 with the restoration of independence, which brought a transition to a market economy and opened Estonian society to the West (Lauristin and Vihalemm, 1997). Since World War II, Estonia has undergone continuous urbanization, shaped by specific historical and institutional conditions. Radical transition processes and technological developments have contributed to the demographic decline of peripheral regions and the deepening of socio-economic challenges (Fina et al., 2021).

As a result of outmigration, by the turn of the century, a significant number of dwellings in peripheral areas were left vacant. Their low market value and dispersed settlement patterns created opportunities for new target groups to move in (Karsten, 2020). In several regions, traditional communities or local leaders responded to rural decline by seeking solutions through targeted marketing activities. Depopulated villages within cultural landscapes have offered opportunities for shifts in migration patterns, including group-based in-migration and the emergence of so-called intentional communities in sparsely populated contexts.

This rationale can be further refined to clearly justify the research need, emphasizing that although community activity was visible, there was a lack of systematic scientific treatment. The revised version below preserves the original idea while more clearly articulating the research gap and explaining why this rationale is important.

Accordingly, a third key rationale for this research is the emergence of bottom-up community initiatives that value cultural heritage. In Estonia, heritage has traditionally been treated as a domain of national responsibility, coordinated by the National Heritage Board, while the role of local communities has remained modest. Bardone et al. (2020) point out that community-led heritage initiatives have been addressed only to a limited extent, and communities are often excluded from institutional heritage processes. At the same time, growing interest and activity related to heritage are evident among communities across Estonia, ranging from the maintenance of heritage sites to the interpretation of meanings and the shaping of local identity.

This contradiction—the visible presence of community activity and the lack of scientific treatment—became one of the central inspirations for this doctoral

research. The aim is to highlight the potential of bottom-up approaches in heritage practices and to analyse how communities create, interpret, and utilize heritage. Although heritage sites managed by national authorities are often included in local development strategies, community-led initiatives have become more frequent in recent years, driven by local needs and values. Heritage is increasingly seen as a means to strengthen regional identity and support local development. In many parts of Estonia, heritage maintenance and management have evolved into collaborative forms of community engagement, involving a broad base of local residents and promoting both social cohesion and economic vitality.

Based on the understanding that cultural heritage can be a key resource for regional development, it is important to examine how communities themselves contribute to shaping regional attractiveness. In the context of in-migration and rural tourism, previous studies have paid relatively little attention to the opportunities offered by communities, the expectations of target groups, and the process of defining these groups within a broader strategic framework. These aspects may prove decisive when the goal is sustainable and community-centred development.

Several authors have noted that place marketing aimed at sparsely populated or declining areas is often not sufficiently effective. For example, Niedomysl (2004), in a study focusing on the late 20th century, found that marketing campaigns in rural Sweden did not significantly increase in-migration, as they failed to adequately consider the actual preferences of target groups. This finding has been confirmed and further developed by Eimermann et al. (2017), who analysed the relationship between place marketing and consumer-based mobility patterns in northern Sweden. They showed that rural marketing strategies emphasizing quality of life and community may appeal to certain groups, such as members of the creative class or seekers of alternative lifestyles, but the impact of such strategies often remains limited, as they may not provide sufficient support for long-term settlement and economic sustainability.

Similar critical observations have been made in the context of rural tourism. Neumeier and Pollermann (2014) emphasize that although tourism is often highlighted in local development strategies as a driver of regional growth, its actual economic impact may be insufficient—especially in areas lacking distinctive tourist attractions. In such contexts, tourism often remains a marginal activity, unable to provide a stable income or counteract demographic decline. Tirado Ballesteros and Hernández Hernández (2021) add that rural tourism development is constrained not only by weak demand but also by supply-side management challenges. Their study in Castilla-La Mancha shows that inadequate cooperation among local stakeholders, limited marketing competence, and poor integration of local resources into tourism strategies hinder efforts to increase visibility and shape attractiveness. The authors stress that effective rural tourism development requires a strategic approach that combines community participation, professional management, and targeted marketing. The absence of these components limits tourism's potential to support local development.

In place marketing studies, the importance of target group selection is often underestimated, although it is crucial for successful rural marketing (Galiano Coronil, 2022). Many existing approaches focus on generalized urban populations or international audiences, overlooking the need to differentiate specific target groups and tailor marketing messages accordingly (Rauhut Kompaniets and Rauhut, 2016). This limits the effectiveness of strategies, as they fail to account for the diversity of target groups and their varying motivations for re-locating or visiting.

The treatment of community-based initiatives in place marketing and regional development studies has been variable. Cvijanović et al. (2025) describe community-led tourism models that are linked to economic sustainability and heritage preservation, highlighting the role of local residents in shaping regional identity. In such models, communities are presented not merely as marketing targets but as active participants, indicating an alternative approach to regional development strategies.

Community-based initiatives in regional marketing and precise target group definition may represent strategic approaches to mitigating rural demographic decline, shaping regional reputation, and developing the local entrepreneurial environment. These directions support regional development from both a value creation perspective (e.g. activating cultural heritage, mobilizing community resources) and a consumption perspective (e.g. consumption of regional image by new residents or visitors), thereby contributing to the continuity of local life and the preservation of social cohesion.

In response to identified knowledge gaps, this study focuses on two main analytical directions. First, it evaluates the marketing measures implemented by local governments and traditional communities aimed at target-group-based in-migration. Second, it investigates bottom-up community activities and their potential in heritage preservation and marketing. Based on a broader interpretation of cultural heritage as a dynamic and community-mediated resource, the study analyses the roles of local governments, traditional communities, and intentional communities in shaping and implementing local development.

This doctoral dissertation contributes, first, to the academic discourse on the formation and functioning of intentional communities. Focusing on the Estonian context, it clarifies the conceptual elements of rural marketing in relation to target-group-based in-migration, enabling a better understanding of community-based migration processes and their social and economic impacts.

Second, the dissertation contributes to the study of internal community networking, focusing on heritage preservation and marketing in rural areas in Estonia. From the perspective of intentional communities, it examines the dissemination of sustainable development ideas and their role in shaping community identity and regional attractiveness. The research focuses particularly on peripheral rural areas where parts of the material and intangible cultural heritage have been preserved and where heritage-based marketing activities may acquire special significance.

Based on the above foundations, the central aim of this dissertation is to answer the following research questions. To support the analytical focus and structure of the dissertation, the main objectives are presented at the end of Chapter 1.

- In what ways have place marketing activities initiated and supported community-based in-migration to rural areas in Estonia? (articles I, II)
- How does the treatment of cultural heritage as a resource influence the development of community-based in-migration and tourism? (articles I, II, III)
- What are the impacts of community-based in-migration on local development and the functioning of intentional communities? (articles I, II)

To answer these research questions, the dissertation draws on empirical data collected in Estonia between 2018 and 2024 based on interviews with local government leaders, regional stakeholders, members of intentional communities, and rural in-migrants. For the demographic and social characterization of the regions, the articles use data from the Estonian population censuses (2011 and 2021) and the Estonian Population Register (2023).

2.1. Definitions used in the study

This doctoral dissertation consists of three peer-reviewed articles (referred to as Article I, II, and III), which are included as integral parts of the thesis. For the sake of conceptual clarity, the key terms used in the study are defined below. It is important to note that the concept of “community” is dynamic and continuously evolving. In the context of this dissertation, the concept of community is distinguished as **traditional and intentional communities** based on the focus areas of the research.

The general definition of community is based on the notion of a **geographical community**, understood as a spatially bounded group of people. In this study, it primarily refers to a village or neighbourhood, where **social cohesion** and shared values—or the process of their formation—play a central role (based on Cobigo et al., 2016).

A **traditional community** is a social entity that has developed historically and territorially, where members are connected by shared values, lifestyles, cultural practices, and often kinship ties. These communities are closely linked to local identity and cultural continuity (based on Rosenvald et al., 2021).

An **intentional community**, by contrast, is a deliberately formed group of individuals united by shared goals, values, and ways of living. Members voluntarily choose to live or act together, often as an alternative to mainstream societal structures (Firth, 2018). These communities are typically geographically situated in specific locations, where physical proximity supports shared practices, collective decision-making, and place-based identity. Their spatial embeddedness is

often essential to their functioning, as it enables everyday interaction, resource sharing, and the cultivation of a distinct community ethos.

Social innovation refers to new ideas, practices, services, or forms of cooperation that address societal needs and improve quality of life, while simultaneously strengthening community cohesion and social capital. Social innovation is not limited to technological or economic advancements but focuses on empowering social relationships, institutions, and communities. It is often a bottom-up process, driven by local needs and resources, with the aim of creating sustainable and inclusive solutions (Do Adro and Fernandes, 2020).

Sustainable development is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This concept emphasizes a balance between economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity, providing a framework for integrating environmental policies and development strategies (Emas, 2015).

Group-based in-migration refers to lifestyle-driven relocation, where individuals with similar values and interests move together to a rural area with the aim of forming an intentional community (based on Meijering et al., 2007a).

In-migration denotes the movement of people into a specific geographical area, such as migration from urban to rural areas or from one rural region to another (based on Stockdale, 2016).

Dark heritage refers to sites and practices associated with death, suffering, or violent historical events, which societies engage with for remembrance, education, or tourism purposes (Stone, 2006). In the context of this dissertation, an example of dark heritage is the Forest Brother bunkers, which embody both resistance and historical trauma.

Lifestyle entrepreneurship refers to a form of entrepreneurship where the primary goal is not economic profit maximization, but rather the creation of a business that aligns with the entrepreneur's personal values, interests, and desired way of life. Such entrepreneurs often prioritize work-life balance, geographic flexibility, or creative self-expression over growth or scalability (based on Jones et al, 2020).

A significant portion of the analysis focuses on intentional communities, which have primarily emerged based on existing dispersed settlement patterns. These communities do not necessarily conform to the classical Western European concept of eco-villages (cf. Nogueira et al., 2024), but rather consist of self-defined groups that operate through partial openness and integration, with a focus on sustainable development, heritage preservation, and self-realization.

The second group under study consists of traditional rural communities, viewed from two perspectives. First, communities whose activities are directed towards the preservation and presentation of local heritage. Second, communities that use local strengths (including heritage) to maintain community vitality and engage in marketing. In both types of communities, local governments play a role in implementing marketing activities and managing heritage.

This study expands the understanding of rural marketing by highlighting the roles and responsibilities of communities and local governments in shaping regional image. Although the success of in-migration marketing may sometimes be coincidental or driven by the initiative of local leaders, it nonetheless allows for the targeting of intentional communities as a potential audience. The analysis focuses on community-based approaches, where marketing measures incorporate environmental and cultural heritage. The study evaluates how communities and local governments strengthen communities through targeted marketing activities.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The meanings of rural areas are neither fixed nor unambiguous; rather, they emerge through ongoing processes of construction, reconstruction, and contestation, shaped by the identities, experiences, and relationships of various social actors with specific places (Woods, 2010a; Galani-Moutafi, 2013). These actors may include local residents, newcomers, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and community activists, whose actions and interpretations influence the discursive field of the rural. In recent decades, technological advancements, changes in land use, and the expansion of the information society have contributed to a narrowing of quality-of-life disparities between rural and urban areas, particularly where such changes have been effectively adopted. The shrinking of time-space distances and the spread of urban-lifestyle elements have improved living conditions while also posing a risk to the distinctiveness of rural life (Albrecht, 2022; Hoffmann et al., 2023). The integration of urban features, such as remote work and housing renovation, has enabled the blending of urban and rural living conditions (Song et al., 2022). Improved access to public services and infrastructure has made many rural areas more accessible, fostering in-migration, entrepreneurship, and tourism. However, the realization of these opportunities depends on place-specific factors, including geographic location and the receptiveness of traditional communities to change.

Understanding place-specific development conditions and consciously combining them can influence the transformation of rural areas into attractive living and business environments for various social groups, including in-migrants. In recent decades, rural development has been increasingly shaped by market-driven logic and intensified and technologically advanced agricultural production. This has created a situation where, due to the decline in traditional employment, rural areas face ageing populations and depopulation (Bock, 2016). These processes have forced traditional communities to seek new solutions for survival. Despite efforts to modernize services and social infrastructure, these developments have not been sufficient to effectively halt the decline. Brown and Argent (2016) point out that the problem lies not only in population loss but also in its broader impact on the social and economic functioning of rural areas. Such cumulative decline can threaten the sustainability, functionality, and even regional identity of communities (Drudy, 1989; Emery and Flora, 2006).

In assessing the need for change in rural areas, Lowe et al. (1995) argue that rural life, as a clearly defined social and geographical space, requires new forms of differentiation that reflect the diversity of contemporary development processes. If rural development is understood as a multi-level process (van der Ploeg et al., 2017), one possible direction is the implementation of opportunities focused on internal community resources and bottom-up development (Gkartzios and Lowe, 2019). By incorporating social innovation, such measures primarily affect areas with favourable development conditions. The task of social innovation is to create, renew, and transform intra-community relationships and develop new

forms of cooperation to achieve goals (Castro-Arce and Vanclay, 2020). Bottom-up initiatives offer potential for smart specialization or community strengthening in rural areas. The community level places the focus on the strengths of specific places and the adaptation of values in response to societal changes. In the rural context, values often differ from urban norms and expectations.

Societal and technological developments have brought the principles of sustainable development and urban amenities into rural areas, while simultaneously shaping perceptions of rural values and quality of life—elements that are difficult to replicate in urban environments (OECD, 1999; Castro-Arce and Vanclay, 2020). The application of these values as opportunities creates advantages for rural areas, offering attractive conditions for both local residents and in-migrants. Although the perspectives and skills brought by in-migrants may require time to integrate, they can also serve as inputs for community success and development.

Better results in planning and implementing rural development have been achieved through the decentralization of regional policy decisions (Bartolini et al., 2016). In this process, increasing potential is seen in community-centred development models (OECD, 2016; Li et al., 2019). Narrowing the scope of rural development opportunities to the context of this dissertation, two main goal-oriented directions can be distinguished from a community perspective. As a shared element, both directions allow for the creation of local development scenarios that ensure community survival, growth, and sustainable functioning:

- The first direction includes **traditional or intentional communities**, where clearly defined common goals have emerged to preserve the home area and community, and active efforts are made to achieve these goals. To support this goal, communities offer existing resources—such as buildings, landscapes, and local networks—to newcomers as foundations for settlement and engagement. This facilitates spatial reproduction, often motivated by idealistic aspirations such as sustainability, heritage preservation, or alternative lifestyles (Halfacree, 1997). In the context of cultural heritage, these communities are distinguished by a cultural or identity-based orientation, expressed, for example, in the desire to preserve heritage, settlement patterns, and landscapes. Spatial reproduction and the arrival of new residents influence the formulation of new goals.
- The second direction includes **traditional communities** that contribute to the preservation and presentation of regional cultural values. Marketing activities are directed towards the valorisation of cultural heritage and the environment, linked to tourism and the development of related services (Bachleitner and Zins, 1999). In this context, activities with value beyond local consumption needs, such as handicrafts (Prince, 2017), food production, and small-scale agriculture (Sidali et al., 2015), have greater potential. Marketing opportunities also extend to transportation, guiding services, experience-based tourism, and creative entrepreneurship, where technological solutions enable event organization and participatory experiences (Roberts and Townsend, 2016). When such models are implemented, entrepreneurs not only create value for

themselves but also involve other local stakeholders (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018). In the context of community-based heritage tourism targeting niche markets, Parlato et al. (2022) have identified the potential to disperse visits outside the peak tourism season.

Although some in-migrants position themselves in opposition to urban lifestyles, these processes are part of the globalization of rural areas, where locality plays a place-specific role. From a place-specific perspective, internal community networks and cooperative relationships are decisive, and internally, they may align with community traditions. Supportive and openness-oriented environments provide input for self-realization. Herslund (2012) argues that the rural environment can be an inspiring entrepreneurial setting, especially for those seeking alternatives to urban life. A favourable foundation for entrepreneurship is created by trust-based relationships, which, according to Murdoch (2000), form more easily in rural areas. Entrepreneurship studies show that community participation enables access to local resources and supports initiatives aimed at regional benefit (McKeever et al., 2014; McKeever et al., 2015).

The strengthening of regional vitality is closely linked to the dissemination and adoption of social innovations, supported by active local participation and the cultivation of mutual trust (Dax and Fischer, 2017). Community-based networks play a key role in fostering cooperation, often emerging from a shared need for resilience and continuity in the face of external pressures (Pfaffl, 2024). Such cooperation may also take the form of resistance, for instance, in efforts to preserve public services or defend traditional ways of life (Paniagua, 2017). These initiatives, while potentially leading to tensions between local governments and interest groups (Simard, 2018), often serve as catalysts for community persistence and renewal. In the context of rural marketing, Giles et al. (2013) emphasize that collaboration between local governments, communities, and target groups is essential. Through reciprocal partnerships, clearer expectations and shared goals can be established, enabling the implementation of more effective and context-sensitive development measures.

3.1. Value-based development opportunities

The decline and ageing of rural populations, along with efforts to reverse these processes, have become key areas of research for scholars and points of concern for policymakers in recent decades. Although the causes and consequences of these changes have been extensively analysed (see Dax and Fischer, 2018; Li et al., 2019), there are no universally effective solutions that would allow these processes to be halted or reversed. Rural development opportunities are often addressed through classical regional policy approaches that focus on economic growth and employment (Higgins, 2017) or on shaping the living environment to preserve settlement patterns (Hudson, 2007). However, Vik et al. (2025) argue that economic revitalization and the preservation of rural settlements are not

necessarily compatible, making it difficult to place them on a single development scale.

Success in development may depend on emphasizing community-based approaches, incorporating new activities and markets (Li et al., 2019), implementing strategies based on rural amenities (Elbersen and van Dam, 2000; Ulrich-Schad, 2018), or promoting entrepreneurship through smart specialization (Naldi et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic, which had a profound impact on societies, revealed counter-urbanization processes during times of crisis (Tammaru et al., 2023), which, together with technological advancements, rapidly expanded the possibilities for remote work in rural areas (Davies, 2021). Such developments are not necessarily the result of logical progression but rather reactions to external influences, which in turn confirm the roles of chance and unexpected factors in rural development. Similarly, the randomness of events or sudden opportunities may affect individual places or communities.

At the same time, a plurality of ideas and theoretical approaches prevails in different contexts. The lack of universally effective solutions is primarily linked to the diversity of spaces and places. The reasons for these differences may include the specific nature of historical changes, the forms of internal community cooperation, and the lack of resources or the inability to recognize and utilize local strengths and opportunities. These factors are often associated with low levels of innovation or the one-sided application of innovative solutions (see Sørensen, 2018; Gamito et al., 2021). Community development is also influenced by external factors, such as inadequate support measures or the difficulty of adapting them to specific local conditions. Emphasizing the importance of innovative solutions, Gamito et al. (2021) highlight the potential to improve quality of life through the diversification of services and livelihoods. Supporting community development is a key part of improving the living environment, as it fosters learning and cooperation skills that shape participants' attitudes and understandings. Internal changes and clarity of needs within traditional communities form the basis for the development of clear goals and the selection of appropriate solutions. One way to guide development is to invest in changing societal value orientations (Saint Onge et al., 2007; Escribano et al., 2020). In the Estonian context, it can be argued that values are shaped through long-term socialization but may change due to societal upheavals or new development directions (Ain Saar and Strenze, 2019). Historically, urbanization and changes in urban environments have been seen as drivers of values and knowledge, either as areas requiring improvement (Amin, 2006) or as sources of alternatives (Shucksmith, 2018). Value changes originating in urbanized societies may pose challenges and offer new opportunities for rural areas.

Traditionally, rural marketing has been associated with tourism, which is seen as a source of entrepreneurship and, less frequently, as a means of developing community services (Bachleitner and Zins, 1999; Cunha et al., 2020; Shakya and Vagnarelli, 2024). Stabilizing or reversing community decline through the addition of new residents is usually a long-term process that requires clear and targeted marketing messages, possibly accompanied by changes in the image of the

place. However, phenomena based on regional cultural heritage or national distinctiveness, such as uniqueness or recognizability, are difficult to measure. Therefore, place marketing requires expert and place-specific approaches that include clear messages for target groups.

Based on these factors, community-based marketing and strategic communication by communities or local governments emerge as key elements. The messages conveyed in place branding must consider different target groups, community types, their goals, and regional competitive advantages (see Aasetre et al., 2020). In the context of both in-migration and visitation, these factors, together with changing value orientations, can create a synergistic effect in two ways. First, successful marketing combined with the integration of in-migrants shapes the reputation of the place and community. This leads to sustained interest from new residents or visitors. Second, the arrival of new residents may halt population decline or even initiate growth. Similarly, increased visitation creates opportunities for new lifestyle-based businesses. The impact at the local level is broader; it encompasses the need to maintain services and has the potential to improve regional reputation (see Figure 1). It is worth noting that the spread of success stories and role models can have a synergistic effect, encouraging other communities to reassess their resources and set new goals. However, simply copying successful examples rarely leads to effective outcomes.

According to Stam (2015), regional policy should not be limited to maximizing business indicators such as growth or employment figures. Instead, it should aim to create a supportive institutional and socio-economic environment—one that fosters access to resources, encourages innovation, and enables productive entrepreneurship to emerge and flourish. The management and promotion of local heritage increases visitor numbers. Often, this involves niche tourism, which may nonetheless be sufficiently viable to support the emergence of new lifestyle enterprises—small-scale businesses that align with the personal values and preferred ways of living of their founders, often rooted in creativity, sustainability, or place-based identity. Contributions from local governments or entrepreneurs, including investments, can play a significant role in creating such opportunities. Broad-based cooperation and systematic approaches are part of the entrepreneurial ecosystem policy (Miles and Morrison, 2020). This policy does not focus on individuals or single entrepreneurs but emphasizes mutual dependence and marketing and development opportunities based on cooperation, as is typical in community-centred approaches. The spread of lifestyle entrepreneurship is part of the diversification of activities and livelihoods, aligning with new paradigms of rural life. The emergence of new businesses is generally considered a success story, which increases the importance of the local level. Nevertheless, regional policy continues to be shaped by pragmatic factors, such as the availability of jobs and infrastructure (Addie et al., 2020), along with an emphasis on increasing competitiveness.

In the context of rural tourism and in-migration, development planning cannot rely solely on competitiveness and growth. In fact, when launching new initiatives, this may even conflict with the implementation of rural development stra-

tegies based on decentralization, participatory governance, and community-based development (see Speer, 2012; Li et al., 2019). Rural marketing requires differentiation, which may involve highlighting competitive advantages, but such efforts often do not yield immediate success. To achieve balance, it is not advisable to focus solely on maximizing business indicators or continuously increasing competitiveness. Instead, measures should be designed to support the living environment as a holistic ecosystem. These approaches require, in addition to cooperation with the public sector, the provision of community services (Hulme and Edwards, 1997; Bennett and Iossa, 2010) and delegation through partnerships (Smoke, 2015). Together, these activities create conditions for improved service quality and the emergence of new networks, businesses, and further place marketing initiatives.

According to Bergh (2004) and Dax and Fischer (2017), active and engaged communities are a prerequisite for decentralization and a key to its success. In the Estonian context, mobilizing internal community resources and identity-driven development can support sustainable development goals, for example, through the restoration of buildings and landscapes, which enhances regional reputation and may contribute to the shaping of national identity. Visibly practised craft skills and the valorisation of vernacular built heritage are, in such cases, part of broader cultural heritage marketing (Rõigas and Rennu, 2018) and may also serve as a foundation for the emergence of intentional communities. These developments are often linked to spatial transformation, where previously underutilized or marginalized geographic spaces are turned into attractive and multifunctional living environments (Colomb, 2012; Di Prete, 2020). Such transformation goes beyond physical redesign, involving the reinterpretation of meanings and values and laying the groundwork for new development trajectories and community-based initiatives.

3.2. Rural areas as a resource

Changes in society, rural development, and individual lifestyles have created new societal needs and consumption patterns, thereby diversifying local economies. In response to these new demands, traditional rural resources are being redefined or their areas of application expanded. Place-specific resources, such as landscapes, local food, and interpersonal connections, are gaining new value, creating opportunities for regional development.

Rural life is no longer equated solely with agriculture as the dominant activity. Instead, it is viewed as a more diverse and dynamic space where production, consumption, and living environments intersect (Boyle and Halfacree, 1998). This has led to the emergence of a post-productivist perspective on rural areas, which sees a transition from spaces of production to spaces of consumption (Ilbery and Bowler, 1998; Halfacree, 2006; Halfacree, 2007). This shift allows rural and urban spatial, social, and environmental phenomena to be increasingly interpreted through their similarities (Hoffmann et al., 2023). The post-productivist approach

not only implies economic diversification but also includes environmentally conscious agriculture and the valorisation of non-agricultural uses of rural space. Production landscapes are increasingly seen as spaces for consumption and recreation (Mather et al., 2006), where emphasis is placed on rural amenities, ecosystem services, and the preservation of cultural landscapes (McCarthy, 2005).

As part of this framework, the concept of the rural idyll has emerged, referring to an idealized, often literature-inspired image of rural life as peaceful, nature-oriented, and meaningful (Halfacree and Rivera, 2012). In the Estonian context, rural areas are portrayed as tranquil, nature-connected, and traditional places that contrast with urbanization and modernization. This idyllic image is particularly strong in national romantic discourse and cultural memory (Palang, 2024) and may therefore be a significant element in the formation of the “rural idyll”.

Waltert and Schläpfer (2010) have introduced the concepts of environmental and landscape amenities, emphasizing their role in shaping quality of life and influencing regional development patterns. Natural and aesthetic values increase the attractiveness of a region, but their impact often depends on social factors as well. Rural development is not based solely on physical or environmental resources but also on social capital and community networks (Lee et al., 2005). According to Palang et al. (2017), the connection between landscapes and heritage has shaped people’s identity and sense of belonging, which can be considered an important source of inspiration and well-being. Therefore, it is essential to understand how environmental and social resources together create the conditions for sustainable development and in-migration.

New mobility patterns and a growing consumer desire for authentic experiences have expanded the ways in which local resources can be utilized in rural areas. This has created new marketing opportunities, including local food production (Sidali et al., 2015), small-scale manufacturing and lifestyle entrepreneurship (Sørensen, 2018), as well as tourism based on landscapes and heritage (Lane and Kastenholz, 2015). In addition to tourism-related rural marketing, increasing attention has been directed towards encouraging in-migration, with the aim of strengthening communities and making more effective use of local resources (McManus and Connell, 2014; Eimermann, 2015). The effectiveness of rural marketing initiatives led by traditional communities or municipalities can be seen as an indicator of the relevance and functionality of local development strategies. In some cases, in-migration-oriented marketing is integrated into broader tourism development efforts, where local values are promoted alongside favourable living conditions and lower costs of living (see Vuin et al., 2016).

The effectiveness of regional marketing and the implementation of community-driven development trajectories are neither temporally nor spatially uniform processes. Opportunities for local development depend on the demographic composition of the population and the decisions and actions of various societal actors, such as local residents, municipalities, entrepreneurs, and civil society organizations (Van der Ploeg et al., 2017). Development is also shaped by the region’s history, available resources, and previous economic activities. From an economic perspective, there is a certain tension between technologically driven

agricultural consolidation and large-scale production, on the one hand, and the growing demand for new experiences and products, on the other, which creates opportunities for the emergence of local brands and the formation of collaborative networks.

In light of new rural paradigms, rural development cannot be addressed solely through traditional top-down regional policy measures (Murdoch, 2000; Dower, 2013; OECD, 2006; 2016). The diversity of opportunities and needs requires a place-specific approach, in which development efforts include an innovation component. Although Bock (2016) argues that social innovation often develops outside formal policy frameworks, the involvement of external funding may lead to contradictions. Developers often operate within predefined frameworks, adapting them to local conditions, but this does not always ensure the achievement of regional development goals.

From a local perspective, key prerequisites for rural development include public goods, such as natural assets and landscapes, as well as resources, such as traditional architecture, real estate, interpersonal relationships, and intra-community cooperation. These values are applied across multiple dimensions: through the preservation of cultural heritage, which supports identity and environmental protection; through the creation of employment and the promotion of local entrepreneurship; and through the strengthening of social cohesion and overall quality of life (Gamito et al., 2021). Such applications contribute to community resilience, economic progress, and regional reputation. It is also important to link rural development to broader, including global, objectives such as biodiversity and ecosystem preservation (Conticelli et al., 2019). Therefore, values associated with the rural idyll, such as a peaceful environment, nature, and cultural traditions, are increasingly recognized as potential marketing assets. These assets serve as foundations for regional development strategies and community-based initiatives (see Eimermann, 2015).

3.3. Heritage in the context of place marketing

Heritage is often regarded as a meaningful resource for communities; it is closely tied to identity, a sense of belonging, and cultural continuity. In addition to its cultural value, heritage is increasingly seen as having economic potential, especially in rural contexts (Bardone et al., 2020). The use of heritage in rural place marketing is important for recognizing, preserving, and maintaining traditional landscapes, yet it has remained underutilized in marketing practices (Knapik and Król, 2023). According to Tuan's (1977) distinction between space and place, space becomes place when it is endowed with meaning and social connections are formed. In the absence of such meanings, communities may fail to recognize heritage or may consider it insignificant. In heritage-based place marketing, places acquire meaning through architecture, landscapes, and associated local lore, history, and cultural background (Conticelli et al., 2019). Heritage thus becomes a meaningful resource when it is connected to people's experiences,

values, and identities. Emphasizing the importance of national architecture, Mouraz et al. (2024) argue that it forms a vital part of rural built heritage, being inseparable from territory, community, and local resources.

Heritage, both as a landscape element and as oral tradition, plays a crucial role in the valorisation of meaningful places. Purposeful place marketing aimed at specific target groups enhances the value of heritage through visitation and serves as a supporting factor in initiating in-migration or the formation of intentional communities. While heritage is often clearly defined and legally regulated in the context of tourism sites, activities aimed at in-migration frequently require thinking beyond conventional frameworks. Elements considered as heritage—whether tangible or intangible—may hold significance even if they have not been recognized by traditional communities (Knapik and Król, 2023).

In the valorisation of place-based heritage, place attachment—the emotional bond between individuals and places—becomes essential (Scannell and Gifford, 2017). Place attachment can be a decisive factor in the persistence of traditional communities and also serve as an argument for promoting in-migration. In this context, group-based in-migration, the emergence of intentional communities, and their expansion may be influenced by shared interests and values.

Several studies (Niedomysl, 2005; Stockdale, 2014; Eimermann, 2015) have shown that prior contact with a destination can influence migration decisions. Donaire et al. (2025) describe how tourism-related experiences may be part of a longer decision-making process, often preceded by a second home or summer residence phase. However, the connection between heritage tourism and in-migration is generally weak (Vuin et al., 2016), and migration is more often driven by factors such as low property prices and accessibility (Gkartzios, 2013; Karsten, 2020). Nevertheless, heritage-related aspects are important for perceiving the authenticity of rural areas and experiencing rural lifestyles, which may become decisive elements in place marketing related to migration (King et al., 2021).

In addition to the classical distinction between cultural and natural heritage (Bridgewater, 2017), the interpretation of heritage explains how nature and culture are interconnected. In the local context, this highlights the relationship between heritage landscapes and historical buildings, supporting Kenter's (2016) argument that part of heritage exists continuously in the surrounding physical environment. Material heritage and the living environment are often considered mutually dependent and coexisting (Josefsson and Aronsson, 2016; Garcia, 2020). The meaning of heritage may differ at the local or personal level from official definitions. UNESCO (2009) notes that the values of cultural heritage may be aesthetic, social, and community-based, without distinguishing rural areas from urban environments.

In the case of intangible heritage, local customs, stories, and place-based traditions are valued for supporting the collective identity of a place (Lewicka, 2008). This distinguishes rural heritage from urban environments, where built and institutionalized heritage tends to dominate. In urban contexts, heritage has increasingly expanded to neighbourhood- or community-based initiatives

(UNESCO, 2009). In rural areas, the meaning of heritage is typically not based on institutional frameworks but rather on community understanding or agreements about the uniqueness of a place and ownership relations. Heritage management occurs through place-centred interpretation, extending to built and natural environments, social relationships, and people.

Place attachment and local lore broaden the understanding of heritage through personal experience, being connected to the cultural significance of specific places, objects, or landscapes (Dragan et al., 2024). In this way, heritage may also encompass subjective phenomena that hold meaning for the evaluator. In a community context, shared understanding of heritage is part of identity (Lewicka, 2008). Through a sense of belonging, heritage management and ownership become part of the lifestyle and a symbol of social status. Both lifestyle and status can, in turn, be important arguments in heritage-based place marketing. In the context of intentional communities, the preservation of heritage is supported by the application of sustainable development principles in building renovation and landscape maintenance. These approaches preserve landscapes, settlement patterns, and traditional architecture, bringing heritage into the everyday awareness of community members.

3.4. Impact and significance of rural marketing

The term *rural marketing* encompasses three distinct domains. The first and most common interpretation focuses on rural tourism, which is often contrasted with mass tourism and associated with niche marketing (Roberts and Hall, 2004). The second domain involves the marketing of rural areas as living environments, with the aim of attracting new residents (Rauhut Kompaniets and Rauhut, 2016). The third domain concerns the movement of goods between urban and rural areas, which is primarily studied in the context of developing countries (Parida and Sahney, 2018) or in relation to local food systems (Printezis and Grebitus, 2018). All three domains intersect with place branding, which is defined as a strategic approach aimed at shaping the image and reputation of a region or its associated products by emphasizing its uniqueness and distinctiveness (Logar, 2025).

This dissertation addresses place marketing from two heritage-based perspectives: (1) the management of heritage sites in conjunction with marketing; and (2) heritage-based marketing aimed at group-based in-migration and the formation of intentional communities. Both approaches are linked to niche marketing, which Roberts and Hall (2004) distinguish from market segmentation by emphasizing bottom-up approaches that respond to individual needs. In a community context, this means understanding the specific needs of target groups and responding to them. According to Escribano et al. (2020), in addition to supply, demand-shaping is a critical factor, referring to the development of consumer awareness and the ability to recognize the unique characteristics of a product or place. This approach enables the marketing of heritage-related places and spaces

alongside the possibility of a rural lifestyle. These opportunities are presented as alternatives, using place-based values as specific competitive advantages.

The treatment of vacant housing resulting from population decline as a resource is one way traditional communities can attract new residents. Rosenqvist (2020) argues that material objects, such as buildings, serve as raw material for creating new meanings of rural life. In this way, rural development and modernization are linked to ongoing changes derived from the reinterpretation of classical development paradigms. Buildings, landscapes, and functioning communities form an alternative living environment to urban space (Paniagua, 2023). If land is seen as a production resource, then landscape is inherently a common good (Kaur et al., 2004).

In addition to material heritage, skills and intangible heritage hold marketing value in the context of intentional communities. In terms of skills, community activities include building renovation, the dissemination of sustainable development ideas, and the revival of traditional techniques. These activities can be considered forms of innovation, measurable through the contribution of intentional communities to heritage preservation or the continuity of traditions and skills (cf. Bock, 2016). Communities dedicated to sustainable development and local heritage often disseminate ideas externally through internal role models, master artisans, and training programmes. Importantly, the involvement and education of local masters also contributes to employment, where region-specific skills are emphasized as competitive advantages.

Paniagua (2023) notes that the restoration or preservation of heritage architecture is part of the process of community renewal and the creation of place attachment. In a community context, place attachment can be understood as collective responsibility for the managed space (Aitken and Campelo, 2011) and as having a positive impact on architectural heritage. Caring for and taking responsibility for heritage fosters a sense of belonging and connection to place. This is supported by Parlato et al. (2022), who confirm that physical space, together with traditional settlement patterns and buildings, supports the preservation of local lore and identity. In this framework, rural areas are seen as a resource base, whose values are renewable and, in terms of landscapes and intangible heritage, inexhaustible (Scazzosi, 2018). These places, together with intentional communities, are viewed as having a teaching and tradition-transmitting role, with influence extending beyond their immediate location.

In the cases examined in this dissertation, the functioning community is central, with the goal of achieving sustainability through renewal or regeneration. In traditional communities, the driving force may be self-preservation or resistance to external change (cf. Paniagua, 2017). Scazzosi (2018) identifies a perceived contradiction between preservation and development, emphasizing the need for change that respects heritage while enabling progress. In both cases, a shared internal understanding of goals and actions is necessary. In terms of the nature of change, it may be important to define preferred target groups. In the context of regional heritage management and tourism, a similar internal alignment of community perspectives is required (Brooks et al., 2023). Local governments have

the opportunity to support marketing activities by reinforcing messages and coordinating cooperation with communities.

The goal of traditional communities in marketing is to reach those target groups who are seeking opportunities for living and self-realization in rural areas. Similarly, heritage-based destination marketing targets groups seeking new experiences. Target groups value places where messages are clear and aligned with their interests (Burkhart-Kriesel et al., 2014; Rodrigues et al., 2021). In terms of shared interests, Giles et al. (2013) argue that in heritage-based marketing, community messages must align with the identity of the place. At the same time, it is evident that rural areas are not equal in terms of their development potential. Better opportunities exist in places with a distinctive cultural background and the associated recognition and reputation. According to Grootens (2019), factors such as media and government actions may also play a role in shaping community visibility and reputation.

Community persistence and the success of in-migration are the result of a combination of marketing activities and the provision of various opportunities. Depending on the target group, heritage and the use of local development opportunities play a significant role. In this context (see Escribano et al., 2020; Parlato et al., 2022), sustainable development is a key criterion for understanding target groups in both heritage preservation and community sustainability (see Figure 1).

Rural marketing is a multifaceted and context-sensitive process that differs significantly from urban or national place marketing. Strategies aimed at in-migration cannot usually be successfully transferred from models designed for urban environments, and such approaches tend to fail in rural areas (Rauhut Kompaniets and Rauhut, 2016). Urban marketing traditionally emphasizes modernity and global activity. In contrast, rural marketing highlights traditions, local products, and natural beauty (Jafarli and Canavari, 2025). Marketing practices, target groups, and community activities create different but comparable case studies. Moreover, marketing activities and the resulting in-migration or visitation growth influence the destination itself.

National institutions have initiated and launched various marketing practices. These measures are usually at least partially linked to national programmes, but their implementation is generally the responsibility of local governments or communities (Aasetre et al., 2020). Greater attention has been paid to small towns and villages in Spain and Italy that offer real estate at symbolic prices (Di Figlia, 2016; Cristini et al., 2022). These measures primarily target young families and entrepreneurs. From the “Smart Villages” concept in Spain, applications have emerged in the Castilla y León region that combine digital infrastructure development with living environment marketing to make rural areas more attractive to young professionals (Khairullina et al., 2025). Similarly, community-based approaches have been successfully used in Germany and Ireland, where local residents and local governments jointly create new living conditions and social networks that support in-migrants (Noack and Federwisch, 2020).

The simplest way to measure the economic impact of marketing activities is through indicators such as increased tax revenue or the emergence of new busi-

nesses and jobs. However, community-level impact is often broader and multi-layered (Van der Ploeg et al., 2017). It may be expressed in the preservation of landscapes and architectural heritage, the spread of sustainable development principles, the diversification of small-scale production, entrepreneurial cooperation, and the development of region-specific products. At the community level, the inclusion of diverse perspectives can shape new forms of social cohesion. In the Estonian context, skilful marketing—despite potential conflicts—may prove decisive for community persistence and heritage preservation. Giles et al. (2013) emphasize that place marketing messages should reflect the experiences and perceptions of previous newcomers, making them part of the region’s identity. Thus, the best marketers of a region are often the new residents or the intentional communities themselves (Jafarli and Canavari, 2025). Returning to the Estonian context, it is important to note that the values and goals of intentional communities are generally broad and flexible and do not impose ideological barriers to expansion (cf. Farias, 2017).

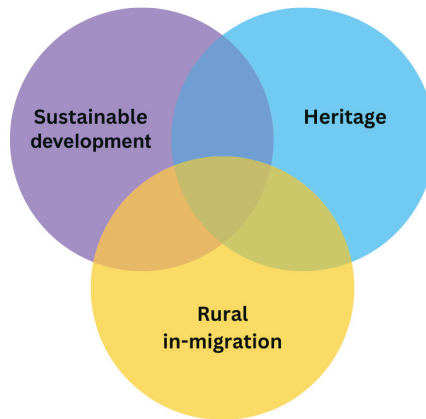


Figure 1. Impact of in-migration on heritage preservation (author’s illustration)

As experiences and knowledge evolve, rural marketing undergoes constant transformation and may, over time, reshape the meaning of indigenous cultures. In a globalizing society, adaptation to change is a means of survival for rural areas. By adapting the concept of *rurbanity* proposed by Hoffmann et al. (2023), a convergence of urban and rural influences can be observed within the context of urban adaptation. These processes give rise to new spatial, social, and environmental phenomena that share many similarities regardless of local context. In essence, in-migration to rural areas is a change-oriented process. Despite efforts towards sustainable development and the conscious lifestyle choices of target groups, heritage-related challenges in the local context act as catalysts for transformation and offer new opportunities.

3.5. Community and subcultures

Intentional communities are closely-knit, small-scale groups of people who are spatially situated and formed around shared secular or religious values. Some authors (e.g. Claeys, 2011) view them as a persistent phenomenon accompanying societal development, while Metcalf (2012) links their emergence to 17th–18th century separatist movements or migration to the New World.

Contemporary rural intentional communities are often associated with the ecovillage movement, which began in the 1960s as a response to environmental concerns (Litfin, 2014). Increasingly, such communities implement principles of environmental stewardship and sustainable development, expanding the concept of community and linking it to ethical categories (Van Schyndel Kasper, 2008; Temesgen, 2020). These ethical categories refer to value-based principles such as ecological responsibility, social justice, community participation, and inter-generational equity. These principles emphasize equality within the community, shaping its operational norms and identity. They are not merely ideals but are expressed in everyday practices and decision-making processes, forming an integral part of the community's lifestyle and goals.

Intentional communities are often described as alternative spaces, understood as places where social, ethical, and countercultural practices are tested (Pepper, 2005; Fois, 2019). These spaces aim to create decentralized and autonomous ways of living that offer alternatives to mainstream economic and cultural norms. Pickerill et al. (2024) highlight that such spaces focus primarily on meeting the basic needs of community members and improving quality of life.

Social justice is one of the core values pursued both within intentional communities and in society at large. Intentional communities are often viewed as experimental spaces where alternative social arrangements and responses to societal challenges, such as achieving net-zero emissions, are tested on a smaller scale (Pepper, 2005; Casey et al., 2020; Copeland et al., 2023). Within these communities, principles of social justice may be reinterpreted and adapted to reflect local values, needs, and collaborative practices. On the one hand, such communities can offer models and inspiration for broader societal transformation (Wright, 2020; Meijering et al., 2007b). On the other hand, critics (e.g. Farkas, 2017; Progovac et al., 2020) have pointed to their potential isolation and idealism, which may lead to alienation within the wider society. Nevertheless, intentional communities located in rural areas can serve as carriers of ecological worldviews, contributing to the dissemination of sustainable development ideas through example and cooperation. Their impact largely depends on how successfully they establish connections and communicate their messages to the broader public.

Meijering et al. (2007a) found that intentional communities have managed to establish themselves to some extent in rural areas. Growing interest in sustainable lifestyles and organic farming indicates the spread of these ideas. Temesgen (2020) and Nogueira et al. (2024) confirm that in environmental matters, communities offer solutions or serve as examples that reach society at large. In addition to communities, the role of the individual is important in the context of rural

lifestyles. Meijering et al. (2007a) argue that moving to the countryside and adopting a sustainable lifestyle can lead to the same goals pursued by ecovillages. Embracing rural lifestyles may contribute to the dissemination of green ideas, aligning the goals of intentional community members with those of individuals.

The spread of these ideas and activities requires the formation of group identity. In intentional communities, this occurs through the purposeful application of members' experiences, knowledge, and creativity (Miller, 2016). Environmental identity is also important, relating to the suitability of place, available choices, and selected activities (Swim et al., 2014). The formation of group identity during community development is a dynamic and evolving process shaped by social interaction. However, it can be argued that the goals and core identity traits of groups moving to rural areas are often pre-established. Place-specific identity searches and anchoring are more part of a refining process.

In postmodern society, new collective forms have emerged, such as neo-tribes and subcultures, whose membership is based on lifestyle choices rather than class affiliation (Maffesoli, 2016). These groups are often temporary and have fluid boundaries (Bennett, 1999; Smith, 2002), offering alternatives to traditional community belonging. Group affiliation is no longer a fixed aspect of individual identity but part of a flexible and situational identity. Subcultural groups may not be permanent, and their characteristics, size, visibility, and lifespan depend entirely on their specific forms of interaction and the context in which they exist.

Debates about the nature and boundaries of community highlight its close connection to place and space (Barrett, 2015) or to collective and social identity (Phillips, 2002; Ham and Woolcock, 2022). The temporary and context-dependent nature of such groups allows their activities to be interpreted within the framework of poststructuralist geography, which emphasizes the continuous formation of identity, culture, and space. From a geographical perspective, space is not static but is constantly changing and being reinterpreted.

In the activities of groups moving from urban to rural areas, it is important to recognize that rural areas themselves are also dynamic (Rosenqvist, 2020; Phillips, 2002). This leads to the transfer of urban lifestyle elements to the countryside and the spread of rural values and practices in cities. Urban dwellers who adopt rural lifestyles may be referred to as lifestyle-oriented semi-urbanites, for whom neighbourhood and community ties are important (Kährrik et al., 2016). Sweetman (1999) emphasizes that lifestyle searches and migration decisions are often linked to the need for identity renewal. Woods (2010b) and Gkartzios et al. (2017) describe these processes as the hybridization of urban and rural space, expressed in the ruralization of urban life and the urbanization of rural life. These changes have introduced concepts such as the rural idyll (Shucksmith, 2018), pastoralism (Santoro, 2024), and rural amenities (Waltert and Schläpfer, 2010) into the discourse on rural modernization and postmodern values.

The modernization of rural areas and the emergence of new communities suggest processes of adaptation and value integration rather than continuous cultural or spatial transformation. While some scholars argue that the fragmentation of hsubcultures may lead to the formation of new cultural expressions (Ulusoy and

Firat, 2011), such developments may not manifest as clear divisions in rural contexts. Instead, differentiation may occur through the spatial expansion of communities. Groups that have relocated to or formed in rural areas can be viewed as subcultures that, through countercultural practices, distinguish themselves from urban environments while sometimes remaining connected to urban production and consumption networks (Halfacree, 2006). These groups are often temporary and context-dependent, with their characteristics, visibility, and longevity shaped by specific forms of interaction and shared values.

The movement towards green worldviews and sustainable development is more clearly distinguishable in the context of ecovillages, where aspirations for separation and alternative lifestyles are expressed through the activities of intentional communities (Sager, 2018). These communities function as subcultures, aiming to create environmentally sustainable and socially just ways of living and offering alternatives to mainstream society.

3.6. Target group choices

The effectiveness of the resources invested in place marketing is most easily measured by changes in the number of residents in or visitors to a rural area. In the context of rural marketing, the key to attracting new residents is the correct identification of the target group. From the perspective of traditional community-led place marketing, clarity in defining the target group and a shared understanding thereof is essential. The small population size of rural areas may highlight the difficulty in identifying a clear target group, as Brencis and Ikkala (2013) argue that population size plays an important role in shaping a place's brand and recognition. Peripheral locations are often too small or obscure for the desired target groups to be aware of them. One way to reach target groups may be through the activities of traditional community members who invite like-minded individuals, although this may conflict with the community's actual capacity to do so. Communities oriented towards marketing are usually small and consist of individuals whose contact with their ideal target group is rather limited. More favourable conditions exist in places where the desired target group has already arrived and can act as place marketing agents (Giles et al., 2013).

There are target groups with prior connections to the place, which gives certain advantages in favour of that location. In rural place marketing, such target groups include second-home owners (Kauppila, 2010; Hiltunen and Rehunen, 2014) or returning older generations seeking better living environments (Jauhiainen, 2009). The contribution of older generations is also seen as part of social innovation in rural areas and as potential for traditional communities to prepare favourable conditions (Noack and Federwisch, 2020). Norris and Winston (2010) identified commonalities between these two groups, viewing second homes as retirement residences for their owners. Slightly different are middle-class returnees, who relocate due to the development of remote work opportunities or entrepreneurial pursuits (see Müller and Korsgaard, 2018).

Just as rural visitors can be segmented, types of rural migration and target groups can also be categorized based on various parameters (see Rauhut Kompaniets and Rauhut, 2016). In general, Schmied (2005) classified urban-to-rural migration into five categories:

- Middle-class quality-of-life migration
- Migration of the economically disadvantaged
- Life-cycle migration (e.g. retirement return)
- Work-related migration
- Countercultural migration

The last category includes representatives of various subcultures, and migration may be group-based. These individuals typically seek to live in cleaner or more rural environments, valuing personal space and heritage-based values and sometimes having a connection to the destination. In the Estonian context, migration related to property ownership and management can be specifically identified, which partially resembles the use of second homes. Additionally, escape to the countryside can be distinguished from migration driven by low-cost housing among the economically disadvantaged (see Rõigas and Rennu, 2018).

In the context of group-based migration, middle-class quality-of-life migration and the formation of new communities share several common features. Both target groups are generally well-educated and entrepreneurial. They have clear goals and expectations regarding the chosen location. This phenomenon can be generalized as lifestyle migration, where aesthetic qualities and quality of life take precedence over economic factors (Knowles and Harper, 2009) and migration carries subjective meaning (McGarrigle, 2022). A key difference between these target groups is age. Community-based models typically apply to younger generations, although they may also include middle-class individuals with advancing careers. More often, they are people at the beginning of their work and family life, who belong to a group with shared interests for various reasons. Middle-class quality-of-life migration is often driven by the search for a better living environment, which does not necessarily have a group-based character. However, this does not exclude connections to established places or communities.

In addition to target groups of new residents, it is important to consider target groups in rural tourism marketing. In defining tourism target groups, it has been found that visitor motivations often fall into two categories: push and pull factors. Push factors refer to internal motivations (e.g. the need to relax, seek silence, or have meaningful experiences), while pull factors refer to destination attributes that satisfy those motivations (Pesonen et al., 2011). By segmenting target groups based on lifestyle and values, it is possible to distinguish visitors who value environmental consciousness, locality, and community, seek authentic experiences, and are willing to contribute to the local economy (Rickly et al., 2023). Defining such segments allows for more targeted marketing activities and strengthens the image of the region as a consciously chosen destination.

4. METHODS USED

Quantitative methods have played a central role in the study of demographic processes in rural areas, particularly in analysing interregional differences. These methods enable the processing of large datasets and the identification of spatial patterns and trends (Cloke et al., 2006). At the same time, interdisciplinary rural research has increasingly recognized the value of qualitative and mixed methods, which offer deeper insights into residents' behavioural motivations, social meanings, and community contexts. As Strijker et al. (2020) emphasize, qualitative and quantitative approaches are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary, allowing for the examination of both social and spatial transformations in rural settings.

In recent years, there has been a growing need to integrate diverse methodological and theoretical approaches to better understand the specific social and cultural dimensions of rural areas (Milbourne, 2007; Strijker et al., 2020). This becomes particularly challenging in remote and isolated regions, where limitations in data systems, seasonal fluctuations, and lifestyle diversification may hinder the acquisition of reliable and comprehensive insights. In such contexts, Taylor et al. (2016) argue that research methods should be flexible, combined, and adapted to the particularities of the local context to ensure analytical depth and relevance.

The articles forming the basis of this doctoral dissertation focus on the challenges related to community-based heritage preservation and rural place marketing. Since the cases under investigation concern specific communities and organizations, qualitative methods have been applied to enable an in-depth understanding of the studied contexts, meanings, and experiences. Case studies can be either qualitative or quantitative, depending on the research question and data available (Hyett et al., 2014). In this work, the emphasis is on a qualitative approach, which does not aim for statistical generalization to society at large, as community-based case studies and macro-level analyses are grounded in different epistemological frameworks—that is, different understandings of how knowledge is constructed and validated.

While qualitative research does not confirm regularities in the same way as quantitative analysis, it allows for the identification of recurring patterns, meaningful connections, and contextual mechanisms that explain the internal logic of the phenomenon under study (Bouncken et al., 2021). This approach supports theoretical generalization, where findings contribute to the development of the concepts and understandings applicable in similar contexts, rather than statistical extrapolation beyond the studied cases.

The cases examined in articles I and II constitute a complete sample, as all known subjects meeting specific research criteria were analysed (e.g. community-based in-migration, craft-related activities, lifestyle-driven relocation to rural areas). This selection enables a detailed description of the phenomenon and highlights characteristics specific to this group. Although the results cannot be

statistically generalized to the entire society, the use of a complete sample allows for substantive conclusions about the group within a defined temporal and contextual framework (see Hyett et al., 2014).

The sites studied in Article III were selected based on several pre-identified features, including management practices, geographical location, environmental context, and living memories and community meanings associated with Forest Brother bunkers. The selection does not aim for representativeness but focuses on the significance and contextuality of the phenomenon. This enables an analysis of how place-based heritage relates to community identity formation, participatory governance, and cultural marketing, supporting the understanding of heritage as a resource rather than a burden.

4.1. Data collection

The empirical part of this doctoral dissertation is based on combined qualitative data collection methods, which enabled the exploration of the interrelations between community-based in-migration, place-based heritage, and cultural marketing on multiple levels. The research questions emerged through an interdisciplinary approach that integrated perspectives from spatial planning, cultural heritage, and community-based development (Figure 2). The refinement of the questions considered previous academic literature, analysis of development documents, and preliminary fieldwork results.

To address the research questions, a combination of qualitative research methods was applied, including a content analysis of local government development documents, individual expert interviews with municipal leaders, and focus group sessions within communities. Articles I and III relied on the strategic documents of local governments, statistical data sources, and publications from Statistics Estonia (e.g. Servinski and Leesment, 2018), which enabled the characterization of regional changes in a broader context beyond the studied communities. The research methods were carried out as follows:

- Document Content Analysis – In articles I and III, a qualitative content analysis of strategic development documents from local governments was conducted. The analysis focused on substantive meanings rather than quantitative indicators. The aim was to identify local government approaches to community-based in-migration and place marketing and to understand the institutional context. The analysis revealed place marketing visions, supporting activities, and the relationship between planned measures and described actions. Progress reports also disclosed the reasons for and outcomes of implementing measures, allowing the assessment of strategic priorities directed towards in-migration or community support.
- Expert Interviews – Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with municipal leaders (Article I), focusing on their experiences and assessments of activities related to community-based in-migration and heritage. The

questions were open-ended, with follow-up questions asked when necessary. To clarify certain facts, follow-up interviews were conducted by phone (articles II and III). The interview protocol was developed based on input from focus groups.

- Focus Group Sessions – Conducted during the preparation of articles I, II, and III in six communities. Each focus group included four to eight community members. Discussions focused on four thematic blocks: motives for community-based in-migration (articles I and II), the role of place marketing in community formation, community contribution to regional development, and suggestions for improving place marketing (Article III). Sessions were held on-site in the communities, which encouraged active participation and ensured group representativeness.

The focus group methodology accounted for potential limitations such as participant dominance, topic deviation, and the unpredictable flow of discussion. As noted by Sim and Waterfield (2019), a structured approach, where a moderator guides the discussion within a defined topic, may still evolve spontaneously depending on participant dynamics. This introduces randomness, which complicates the replication of the study and requires the moderator to skilfully maintain balance so that all participants can express their views. To mitigate such risks and refine the information, two additional interviews were conducted with other community members in Article II.

In Article I, the empirical material consists of strategic development documents from local governments, semi-structured expert interviews with municipal leaders, and focus groups conducted in six intentional communities. These materials were collected between 2021 and 2023. The documents were analysed using qualitative content analysis to identify approaches to community-based in-migration and place marketing, with particular attention paid to visions, activities, and the rationale for implementing measures, reflecting the institutional context. The interviews with municipal leaders focused on their experiences with and assessments of activities related to community-based in-migration and heritage. Input from the focus groups, conducted separately in the preparatory phase of the study, was used to inform the development of the interview protocol. Background data were gathered from publications by Statistics Estonia and regional datasets (e.g. Servinski and Leesment, 2018), which enabled the characterization of the studied regions in a broader demographic and socio-economic context.

In Article II, data collection was based on multi-year ethnographic fieldwork, which included participant observation, in-depth interviews, and informal conversations with craftspeople and community members in seven intentional communities, five of which are examined in depth in Article II. Fieldwork was conducted between 2018 and 2021 and involved visiting communities that had formed either spontaneously or through deliberate initiatives. Data collection included interviews, observation of everyday life, and participation in community activities, enabling an understanding of community formation, internal relation-

ships, value structures, and collaboration practices. Special attention was paid to the transmission of craft skills, the development of cooperation networks, and the ecological and economic self-sufficiency of communities. Additionally, the spatial location, fields of activity, relationships with local residents and municipalities, and the communities' self-perception and identity formation were documented. This approach enabled the study of community functioning from both cultural and socio-economic sustainability perspectives.

In Article III, focus group sessions were conducted in four communities, with a total of 12 discussions involving 25 participants. The discussions focused on the role of place marketing in community formation, community contribution to regional development, uses of heritage sites, and suggestions for improving place marketing. Focus groups were conducted on-site, which encouraged active participation and ensured group representativeness. Follow-up interviews were also conducted with community members to clarify the topics raised in the focus groups and to deepen the understanding of community meaning-making processes. Article III also relied on document analysis, which addressed the strategic directions of local governments, place marketing practices, and the role of heritage sites in shaping local identity.

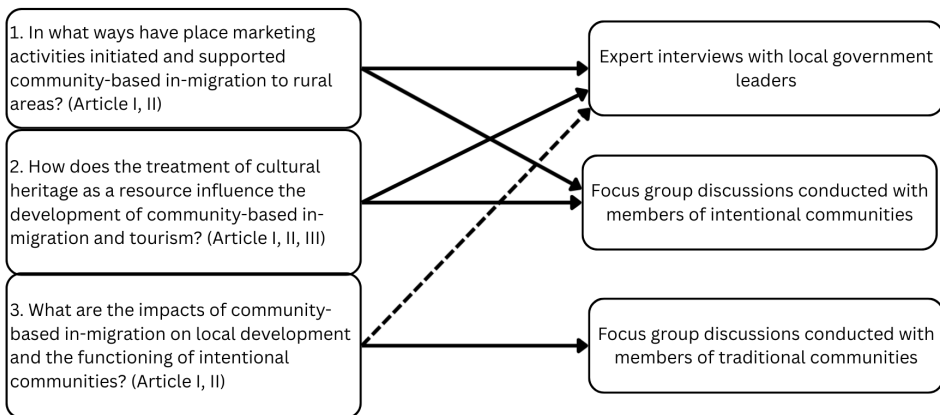


Figure 2. Connections between data collection methods and research questions

All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. For analysis, informative text segments were identified based on the research questions and organized according to predefined thematic categories (Krueger and Casey, 2009). Categories were formatted as responses in tabular form. Analytical memos were then compiled for each participant group (municipal leaders and communities), which served as the basis for the comparison, interpretation, and synthesis of results. Categories were derived through a combination of theory-driven and data-driven approaches, considering both the research questions and the patterns emerging from the dataset. The theoretical framework was based on community-based development and cultural heritage perspectives. Thematic categories represented central topics and meaning structures related to the

research questions, through which the data were structured and interpreted. Examples include motives for community formation, forms of collaboration, the role of municipalities, uses of heritage sites, identity formation, and sustainability strategies.

4.2. Ethical aspects of the research

Community-based qualitative research raises several ethical considerations, particularly regarding the protection of participant anonymity in the context of a small society. In articles I and II, the number of respondents was limited, and due to their distinctive characteristics, individuals could potentially be identified even when anonymized. In Article III, the place-specific nature of the data further complicated the application of anonymity protocols. Small societies are characterized by dense social networks, trust-based relationships, and a strong emphasis on privacy—factors that are especially relevant when studying intentional communities. At the same time, these communities are often willing to publicly share their goals and messages. Therefore, anonymity cannot always be guaranteed at the group level, and researchers must assess the need for anonymity on an individual basis, considering participants' preferences and the sensitivity of the context.

The ethical considerations of this study primarily concerned the use and publication of data collected through expert interviews and focus groups. As the research focused on individuals and communities, it was essential to ensure that the entire research process—from design to dissemination—was ethically sound and responsibly implemented. In this case, approval from an ethics committee was not required, as the study did not involve vulnerable populations or sensitive personal data, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

In Article I, ethical concerns emerged in two dimensions related to expert interviews: first, regarding the interviewees' official positions and the potential institutional implications of their views; and second, concerning the content of the interviews, which addressed political and strategic decisions related to community-based in-migration and heritage. In both cases, participants were given the opportunity to define the scope of their participation and the level of disclosure.

The research area was linked to specific municipalities, raising the question of whether a municipal leader could be considered an expert in the context of rural in-migration and place marketing. In some municipalities, it was known that the leader was directly responsible for marketing activities, but this could not be confirmed in all cases. Therefore, where possible, officials responsible for the relevant field were also invited to participate. It became evident that in smaller municipalities, leaders often fulfil multiple roles, including active involvement in marketing efforts. This multiplicity of roles did not create methodological conflict but rather enabled the collection of richer data on local development practices.

The results of the expert interviews verified and complemented the information obtained from focus groups, confirming that several municipal leaders were actively collaborating with communities. However, there was no indication that they were involved as stakeholders beyond their official roles. Thus, the data collected can be considered reliable and relevant, without being influenced by participant bias.

Ethical aspects of focus group interviews were particularly related to group dynamics and the distribution of roles among participants. Given that the dissertation focused on community research, the focus group method was deemed the most appropriate for answering the research questions. From an ethical perspective, potential risks such as dominance or biased discussion were considered. In several intentional communities, no clear leader was identified, and no dominant behaviour was observed during discussions. In two cases, follow-up interviews were conducted with community members who had not participated in the focus groups—not due to bias, but to clarify information deemed important for the study.

The methodological framework of this research was based on a combined qualitative approach, in which different types of data—documents, expert interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic fieldwork—were analysed in parallel and triangulated. In Article I, strategic development documents were linked with expert interviews; in Article II, ethnographic fieldwork was combined with focus groups and follow-up interviews; and in Article III, focus group results were integrated with document analysis. This approach enabled the confirmation and interpretation of patterns from multiple perspectives, enhancing the reliability and depth of the analysis.

Ensuring participant confidentiality proved challenging in the context of small, place-specific communities. During coordination with community representatives, it became clear that several communities wished to be identified by name in the study, viewing it as an opportunity to present their activities and goals. The names of focus group participants were not disclosed, except for a few cases in Article II where individual agreements were reached. These agreements were related to specific topics concerning community-based entrepreneurship and the role of craftspeople. As their work is closely tied to personal recognition and public image, the decision to waive anonymity was considered justified. These agreements were not formalized in writing, but the communities are referred to by their location names in the dissertation (see Table 2).

In Article III, communities associated with specific heritage sites were examined. The data were presented in coded form by focus group, preserving participant privacy while allowing for an analysis of community meaning-making and heritage practices at the site level.

4.3. Sampling procedure

Information regarding the existence, number, and locations of intentional communities operating in rural areas of Estonia (articles I and II) was generally known to the authors based on previous research (Rõigas and Rennu, 2018; Rõigas et al., 2024). The aim of the sampling process was to include all known intentional communities located in Estonia's rural regions. Based on earlier data, it can be argued that such communities tend to cluster in municipalities that have participated in local or national initiatives promoting rural areas.

The definition of intentional communities used in articles I and II was based on criteria aligned with previous scholarly literature (Sanguinetti, 2012; Lopez and Weaver, 2019). The communities included in the sample were required to meet the following criteria:

- Location in a rural area
- A collective purpose and voluntary membership
- A clearly distinguishable founding impetus (e.g. simultaneous in-migration or shared value system)
- A sense of community or perceived distinctiveness
- Spatial compactness (within the scope of one to three villages)
- Member ownership of housing or participation in a co-housing model

Additionally, Article I emphasized that the community should be associated with a non-profit organization or other legal structure, indicating a level of organization and the potential for partnerships with local government.

Although the list of communities was known at the outset of the study, focus group participants were asked to name similar communities to refine and supplement the sample. This process cannot be classified as a traditional snowball sampling method, as the general population list was already available (Lagerspetz, 2021). During the additional data collection, it became evident that communities communicate with one another and possess information about other similar groups. This enabled the researchers to observe changes in the number of communities over the course of the study. The authors had prior contact with members of some known communities, which provided a basis for assuming that refusals to participate in interviews would be unlikely (cf. Zacharya et al., 2022). A comprehensive list of the communities is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Communities that form the basis of articles I and II

Official community name(s) EE	Official community name EN	Abbreviated name in the study	Motivation (Kanter 1972)			Ecological
			Religious	Political	Economical	
Parmu Ökoküla	Parmu Eco-village	Parmu	0	0	XX	XXX
Karula kogukond	Karula community	Karula	0	0	XX	XXX
Sänna Kultuuri-mõis	Sänna Culture Manor	Sänna	(XX)	0	X	XX
Mauri Põliskodude Küla	Mauri Ancestral Homes	Mauri	(X)?	0	XX	XXX
Mooste kogukond	Mooste community	Mooste	0	0	XXX	X
Nedsaja küla	Nedsaja village	Nedsaja	0	0	XX	XX
<i>Mõisamaa, Väike Jalajalg*</i>	<i>Small Footstep</i>	Mõisamaa	0	0	X	XXX

XXX – fully meets this characteristic, XX – partially meets this characteristic, X – slightly meets the given characteristic, 0 – does not meet this characteristic. *Mõisamaa – Article II.

In Article I, six face-to-face expert interviews were conducted with municipal leaders. Article II focused on the views and goals of the communities, with municipal leaders playing a clarifying role. The interviews addressed topics such as heritage preservation, entrepreneurship, and marketing from a case-based perspective and uncovered new aspects of cooperation between communities and local governments. In Table 2, the community “Mõisamaa, Väike Jalajalg” is presented in italics to indicate that it was included exclusively in Article II and not in Article I. This typographic distinction clarifies the scope of community involvement across the articles.

Additionally, six focus group discussions (Article I), seven focus groups and two supplementary interviews (Article II), and 12 focus groups with 25 participants (Article III) were conducted. The focus groups were held on-site in the communities to facilitate participation and ensure representativeness. Being on-site also allowed for a visual overview of the community’s spatial organization and landscape context.

A methodological difference emerged in the composition of focus groups in articles I and II versus Article III. In Article III, a diverse approach was used to form focus groups: contacts were established through local activists, libraries, social media, and visitor centres. Participants were selected based on their interest in and connection to the heritage being studied. The study was based on the assumption that understanding the current state and potential of community-managed heritage requires the involvement of individuals with interest in and ties to the sites.

In contrast, articles I and II used existing contacts and involved community leaders or board members of non-profit organizations (village associations). In

some cases, it became evident that the community lacked a clearly defined leader, indicating collective responsibility and a horizontal leadership structure.

For articles I and II, data collection involved direct contact with municipal leaders, requesting the inclusion of the officials responsible for development or community work where possible. Interviews with municipal leaders focused on interpreting the meaning of cultural heritage, challenges in rural place marketing, previous experiences, potential success factors, and marketing potential. The information gathered clarified the role and potential of local place marketing in shaping community migration motivation, attracting new residents, and ensuring their permanence.

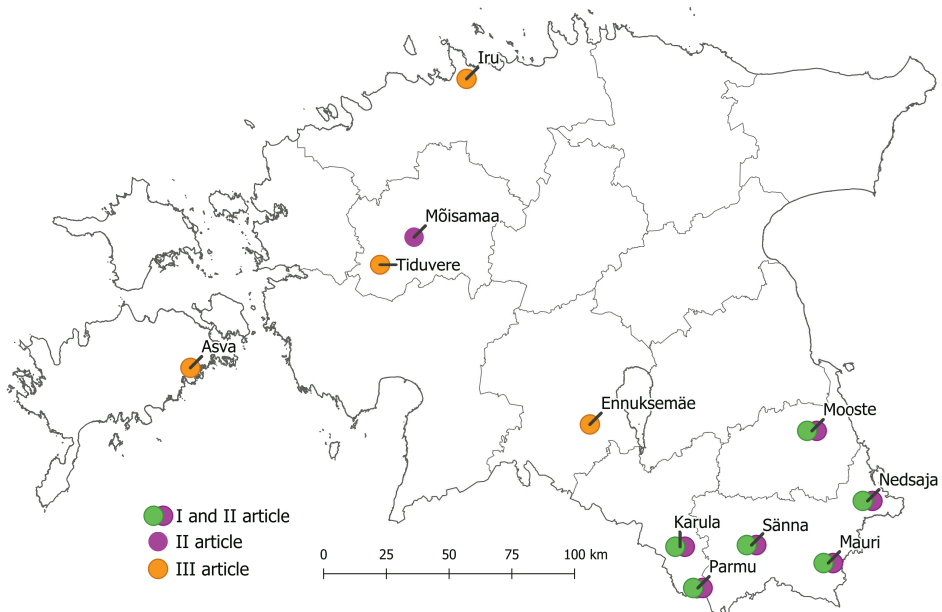


Figure 3. Study area. Articles I and II indicate the locations of intentional communities, while Article III shows the locations of traditional communities

As part of the preparation of Article I, six focus group discussions were conducted within intentional communities. Article II analysed the results of seven focus group interviews, supplemented by two follow-up interviews aimed at clarifying the data and resolving emerging contradictions. In the development of Article III, 12 focus groups of varying sizes were involved, comprising a total of 25 participants (Figure 3).

A key advantage of focus group discussions compared to individual interviews lies in the co-construction of knowledge through interaction among community members (Lichtman, 2014). In articles I and II, each focus group consisted of four to eight community members. In the case of Article III, scheduling all participants within a unified timeframe proved challenging, resulting in a greater number of focus groups with fewer participants in each. Additionally, individual interviews were conducted online to address specific key issues.

5. RESULTS

This chapter provides a concise overview of the research questions addressed in articles I, II, and III. Given that group-based in-migration marketing and the activities of intentional communities are mutually reinforcing areas of enquiry, the results of articles I and II are presented jointly. The contribution of traditional communities to the maintenance and interpretation of dark heritage sites is summarised separately (Article III).

5.1. Rural marketing (articles I-II)

Articles I and II examine community-based migration to rural areas in Estonia and the role of local governments in place marketing. The studies focus primarily on the region of Southeast Estonia, where several intentional communities have emerged. The main motivators for migration include access to suitable real estate, low population density, the availability of local services, and the cultural distinctiveness of the area. Remote work opportunities and interest in heritage culture are also considered important.

Communities often form based on friendships or shared interests, with members united by a desire to live an ecological and self-sufficient lifestyle. In many cases, community members have prior connections that facilitate the decision to migrate. Heritage-based values and identity play a significant role in the formation and sustainability of communities.

The role of local governments in community-based migration has been rather passive. Marketing activities have focused on highlighting existing strengths, but lack a systematic and target-group-oriented approach. Some exceptions, such as Mooste and Säanna, demonstrate that local governments can be active partners by providing infrastructure and support for community development. However, the flow of information between communities and local governments is often uneven, especially regarding the real estate market.

Local activists have been key in the formation of communities and the dissemination of information. Their activities often precede the strategic steps taken by local governments. Activists have acted as spokespersons for the community, establishing partnerships and supporting sustainability.

Community-based migration has a multi-level impact on local development. Intentional communities contribute to entrepreneurship, cultural life, and education. They have maintained public services, revitalized social life, and created jobs for both themselves and local residents. Their role in preserving cultural heritage—both tangible and intangible—is particularly significant. Communities have restored historic buildings, revived the use of dialects, and revitalized traditions.

From the perspective of local governments, communities have alleviated the shortage of specialists and increased demand for public services. However, it has

become evident that community-based migration requires more preparation and resources than individual migration. Place marketing is seen as having potential, but the definition of target groups and strategic approaches needs further development. Preferred target groups are young, educated families, but development documents often do not distinguish between community-based and individual migration.

In summary, the studies show that community-based migration can be an effective way to revitalize rural areas, provided that suitable conditions are created. Successful cooperation requires better coordination, more informed marketing, and strong partnerships between local communities and local governments.

5.2. Heritage site management (Article III)

The management and use of heritage sites examined in this study show that responsibility for their preservation is shared among various stakeholders. This responsibility often depends on who has taken the initiative or to whom it has been historically or administratively assigned. For example, the Ennuksemäe bunker is managed by the local government, while Tiduvere relies on volunteers. Asva hillfort is privately owned and linked to an active community, whereas Iru hillfort is in more passive use. Local communities play a crucial role in maintaining and promoting these sites, especially in locations distant from urban centres.

The use of heritage sites is closely tied to their contemporary functionality. The Asva community is connected to the Viking Village theme park, offering educational programmes and local services. Forest Brother bunkers carry a deep historical message and are associated with commemorative events. Reconstructed bunkers allow visitors to form a personal connection with the site and its history. Communities value conscious tourists but fear the negative impacts of overtourism. Virtual reality and digital solutions present heritage more effectively.

The significance of heritage sites for communities is rooted in emotional attachment and identity. Hillforts and bunkers have different historical contexts, but both strengthen the community's connection to history. The Asva community values archaeological discoveries that confirm the site's historical importance. The Iru community's interest is based on personal memory, although its activity is lower. The study shows that heritage management is most effective when it involves collaboration among interest groups, creating emotional and personal bonds with the site.

The heritage of the Forest Brothers remains a sensitive topic, and its treatment depends on trust and the community's willingness to engage. Different perspectives show that dark heritage sites are interpreted in various ways. Community members often have personal stories that shape the meaning of the place. The appreciation of heritage occurs through both personal connection and general interest. Communities define what is important to them, which actively preserves and utilizes heritage.

Community involvement in heritage preservation creates synergy for regional development. Bottom-up initiatives, such as those in Ennuksmäe and Asva, demonstrate that community spirit motivates local residents. Near larger centres, community activity tends to be lower, which may require top-down management models. Emotional attachment creates a sense of partial ownership, which motivates action to preserve the site.

The study shows that even without formal inclusion, dedicated heritage communities exist that view historical sites as valuable resources. These communities embody the ideals of the Faro Convention (Council of Europe, 2005), granting communities a greater role in the preservation and use of heritage. Heritage is seen not as a burden but as an opportunity to strengthen regional identity and cultural continuity.

6. DISCUSSION

The discussion chapter is structured into eight thematic sections. While the peer-reviewed articles forming the empirical basis of this dissertation address the core research questions, their scope is necessarily limited by publication constraints. Therefore, this dissertation provides a more comprehensive elaboration of selected empirical aspects, including general clarifications and thematic expansions referenced by article number. The specific community-based cases discussed in articles I and II are presented using the place names listed in Table 2 to ensure clarity and consistency. For Article III, such harmonization of place names is not required due to the nature of the data and the broader thematic focus.

6.1. Intentional and traditional communities in the Estonian context

In the case of traditional rural communities, it is assumed that people living in the area share common interests and values, which fosters a sense of unity and enables identification for both local residents and newcomers. Such a sense of community emerges through the interaction of identities, where newcomers and locals co-create a shared space of meaning (Anderson, 2010). In contrast, intentional communities are formed deliberately as individuals gather in a specific location based on shared ideals or worldviews, which often diverge from mainstream societal norms (Meijering et al., 2007a; Miller, 2010; Sherry, 2019). These communities are characterized by a sense of belonging and collective action towards common goals as well as a desire for spatial separation from mainstream society (Sager, 2018; Lopez and Weaver, 2019).

Kanter (1972) identified religious, political, and economic motives, along with the need for self-fulfilment, as drivers behind the formation of intentional communities. However, distinguishing contemporary communities based on these motives proves challenging, as such a framework does not encompass the full diversity of community types (see Table 2). The communities discussed in Article II exhibit moderate tendencies towards differentiation and challenge urban norms and consumer culture. In the contemporary context, the focus of self-fulfilment and critique is largely tied to environmental concerns arising from globalization. The goals of these communities are linked to sustainable development and environmental protection (see Meijering et al., 2007a; Sherry, 2019; Temesgen, 2020). Assessing the diversity of goals, Nogueira et al. (2024) emphasize that, in general, these communities seek to diverge from mainstream worldviews, with environmental issues often receiving distinct emphasis. According to Lopez and Weaver (2019), intentional communities are created as a collective response to societal challenges. Barrett (2015) argues that the roots of these challenges lie in modern societal structures, which have accelerated inequality and exclusion at the expense of collective interest and solidarity. He stresses that these processes are not irreversible and that communities can offer

constructive alternatives. Such perspectives reflect a moderate opposition to urban norms, such as wasteful consumption, individualism, stressful lifestyles, or heteronormative stereotypes (see Wallmeier, 2017).

In Estonia, intentional communities emphasize participation in rural life as a means of achieving their goals (Article II). Group-based migration to the countryside, accompanied by community formation, is part of a broader pursuit of self-fulfilment. Instead of global perspectives, the conceptualization of community is often based on the need for territorial, social, and emotional cohesion (cf. Annist, 2011). This partially aligns with the arguments of Roberts and Townsend (2016) and Paniagua (2017), who support group-based rural in-migration as a strategy to withstand rapid societal changes. The aspirations of these communities suggest that they function, to some extent, as “spaces of innovation” (cf. Lopez and Weaver, 2019), where alternative rural lifestyles are practised to varying degrees. Despite some clearly distinct principles, part of their innovative activity involves offering environmentally conscious or sustainability-oriented choices. New behavioural and operational models adapted to the rural context make rural areas more suitable living environments for members of intentional communities. According to these communities, rural migration itself is an alternative to previous ways of life. It is seen as a form of social innovation that influences traditional communities and opens possibilities for partnership with local governments (articles I and II).

The collective shift towards more environmentally friendly behavioural norms explains why, in the Estonian context, intentional communities have often been equated with eco-communities (Trapido, 2022). They have been described as “lifestyle laboratories whose main goal is to create functioning models for a better society” (Allaste, 2011, p. 20). According to Temesgen (2020), the aspirations of intentional communities can be understood as a way of meeting social needs while maintaining some previous connections and networks (Article II).

The development of new public service models in cooperation with local governments serves as a practical example of implementing innovation in rural areas. Kangro and Lepik (2025) emphasize that municipalities must understand their role in managing community-based resources, as community-driven innovation enables sustainable solutions to rural challenges. The impact of intentional community activities is also evident at the level of traditional communities and municipalities, where a shared space emerges. Different stakeholders have the opportunity to contribute to the development of a specific place, which in turn supports broader societal renewal.

From a community perspective, such factors highlight participants’ strong attachment to a specific location, expressed through similarities and a sense of belonging. This complements Barrett’s (2015) discussion of solidarity and interpersonal trust, where the long-term decision to establish an intentional community affects both its members and the surrounding region.

The formation of subcultures and living environments has predominantly been studied in urban contexts. However, several studies have shown that the potential for creativity and knowledge-based entrepreneurship also manifests in smaller

centres and rural areas, where communities address local problems and create new forms of cooperation (McGranahan et al., 2011; Eglīte, 2022). According to Article II, creativity-based activities in rural communities differ from the classical concept of the creative class, which emphasizes economic growth and cultural diversity in urban settings. In rural areas, creative activities are often linked to sustainable solutions and the use of local resources.

Based on articles I and II, regional quality of life is not the primary motive for group-based in-migration. Although the attractiveness of the living environment may be one factor, the findings suggest that employment opportunities and community ties play a more significant role in migration decisions. Local networks and rural amenities may encourage in-migration and the emergence of new enterprises, while their absence may lead to out-migration (see Herslund, 2019). In the case of Estonian intentional communities, research does not confirm a temporary nature (Article II). Relocation decisions have been deliberate and tied to material responsibility. Material responsibility through property ownership creates a strong connection to place, where the meaning of living space and housing culture becomes part of identity (Ojamäe, 2011). This, combined with internal cohesion and responsibility within the community, suggests permanence rather than temporariness.

Although Article II highlights the closure of the Mõisamaa community in 2022, most of the studied cases point to the persistence of communities. Rõigas and Rennu's (2018) study also reveals that failed target group selection in rural marketing may lead to negative consequences, including damage to the reputation of traditional communities. The attacks described in Article III on the Ennukse-mäe Forest Brothers' bunker (Haav, 2016) may hypothetically indicate internal community conflict, raising questions about the meaning and use of heritage.

Several factors support the sustainability of intentional communities, including a conscious lifestyle choice aligned with community values and needs, and the stability of internal cooperation networks. These networks foster social cohesion and mutual support, helping communities adapt to external changes and maintain their functionality. From the perspective of local governments and traditional communities, accurate target group identification is a key factor influencing the long-term viability of community-based initiatives.

Herslund (2019) points out that middle-aged families adapt best to rural areas, as their daily dependence on local public services is reduced. This means that their lifestyle allows for greater flexibility, and they do not consider service availability as a decisive factor in choosing a place of residence. From a marketing perspective, municipalities emphasized public services, especially the education network, as one of the most important factors supporting in-migration (Article I). Based on articles I and II, the target group consists mainly of younger families who, while acknowledging the importance of services, do not consider them decisive in location choice. The significance of public services may vary depending on the target group and the type of services. When considered part of "rural amenities," their role may be more supportive than decisive. Although the availability of public services and the capacity of municipalities to provide them

may influence migration decisions, this study does not allow for a clear evaluation of the impact of local services on community-based migration.

Estonian intentional communities cannot be equated with classical eco-community models as their modes of operation and relationships with surrounding communities differ significantly. While eco-communities are often characterized by closed structures, inward orientation, and clearly defined communal rules, Estonian intentional communities are generally open and integrated with traditional communities (articles I and II). Community members live dispersedly, own property, and cooperate daily through work, social activities, or shared buildings. Unlike classical models, Estonian communities often lack formal communal rules and daily collective activities. The common denominator is rather a shared identity and goals (cf. Brown, 2002), not a collective decision-making process (cf. Miller, 1999). This flexible and context-sensitive approach suggests that Estonian intentional communities emerge through lifestyle- and value-based choices, rather than as strictly defined models of alternative living.

In the Estonian context, it is not possible to construct a universal model of intentional communities, as their number is small and their development history relatively short. Although certain common features can be identified, the current empirical material does not allow for generalizations applicable to the entire phenomenon. Despite societal openness, no communities have emerged in Estonia that clearly oppose mainstream society in their daily practices. This may be due to a lower perception of societal problems or the resolution of such issues through activities associated with a rural lifestyle.

Additionally, a national cultural attitude, such as the desire to live “at a distance from the neighbour’s chimney smoke”, may reduce the willingness to share everyday physical space, which is often common in Western eco-communities. Such space-sharing may include communal housing, shared kitchens, co-working spaces, or collective households, which require close social interaction and agreed-upon rules. In Estonian communities, living arrangements are mostly dispersed, with individual property ownership, and cooperation tends to occur voluntarily and flexibly rather than through daily shared living spaces. As Shucksmith (2018) notes, the “rural idyll” is often associated with the normative expectations and cultural imaginaries of a good life in the countryside. In Estonian communities, the imagined “good rural life” may not imply intensive communality but rather individual peace, privacy, and closeness to nature. Therefore, the shared spaces and collective living arrangements typical of Western eco-communities may not be part of the local cultural imaginary, which in turn influences the structure and forms of cooperation within communities.

Community location choices are generally not the result of strategic marketing but rather emerge from coincidental factors, such as the availability and suitability of real estate and existing contacts within traditional communities. Although several communities described instances of “jumping headfirst into the unknown”, group leaders typically possessed prior information about the traditional community and had established contact with local residents. In some cases, communities initially approached local governments to find suitable properties

(Article II). Municipalities (Article I) confirmed such information-seeking efforts and the sharing of the necessary contacts. However, several community members noted that not all municipalities respond or possess the relevant information.

The departure from urban life among Estonian intentional communities tends to be moderate and not defined by strict lifestyle rules. Many members maintain ongoing connections with cities through work, education, or access to services. Tartu and other county centres serve as important support hubs. The use of the term “intentional community” is justified by the self-identification of the communities involved in the study, which emphasizes comparative elements rooted in environmental awareness or sustainable development (cf. Nogueira et al., 2024). The desire to be autonomous and self-sufficient is more of an ideal than an everyday practice. Community activities focus primarily on preserving a rural way of life, adapting identity, and often reviving traditions (Article II). Therefore, the terms “intentional” and “new” community should be used with caution. It is also difficult to define the size of a community or the number of core members. The figures presented in the articles reflect the communities’ own assessments. Community size is constantly changing and, in many cases, expanding into neighbouring villages.

6.2. Connections between marketing, heritage, and entrepreneurship

The development of the entrepreneurial environment and the highlighting of competitive advantages can motivate in-migration (Bosworth and Atterton, 2012; Müller and Korsgaard, 2018). The diversification of place-based activities is part of social innovation, for which both local governments and communities share responsibility. Articles I and II examine the place marketing activities of local governments and traditional communities alongside entrepreneurial initiatives by in-migrants. Article III highlights the emergence of heritage-based lifestyle entrepreneurship in the context of regional tourism and place marketing.

Elmes and Mitchell (2020) have shown that there is a correlation between the educational level of in-migrants and their entrepreneurial activity. According to Article I, the formation of intentional communities is based on well-educated friendship groups united by shared values and a sense of belonging. Article II adds a dimension of needs-based cooperation, where entrepreneurship is linked to local crafts, traditional skills, and the revival of cultural identity. The use of local heritage in entrepreneurship is particularly evident in male-dominated craft activities such as woodworking and construction (Article II). These activities create connections with the cultural heritage of traditional communities. From a sustainability perspective, the activities of communities are associated with the creation of demand, which is often the basis for creative economy practices.

Local heritage-based economic networks operate in symbiosis with culture and identity. According to Article III, heritage-based entrepreneurship brings jobs and investments to the region, creates business opportunities, and strengthens the

area's image. Here, two types of investment can be distinguished: local government investments that create conditions for community entrepreneurship (e.g. the Ennuksemäe bunker), and private initiatives that use heritage as a competitive advantage (e.g. the Viking Village near Asva hillfort).

In articles I and II, intentional communities expressed the goal of achieving broad autonomy. More specifically, they aim to be self-sufficient and at least partially independent from consumer society (cf. Meijering et al., 2007a; Metcalf, 2012). According to Article II, this primarily involves internal food production and consumption. Community-based or heritage-based entrepreneurship is a means of achieving self-sufficiency or autonomy, often targeting a broader market. This differs from the claims of Herslund (2012) and Farkas (2017), who argue that rural or intentional community entrepreneurship mainly focuses on meeting local needs.

More locally oriented activities include heritage construction and renovation, which, according to Article II, have a market largely concentrated in Southeast Estonia. This can be linked to regional specialization in renovating buildings with similar architectural features. The growing appreciation of farmhouse architecture and the spread of country home culture in Southeast Estonia were mentioned as factors expanding the market. Communities cited their knowledge of authenticity and sustainable construction methods as competitive advantages.

Entrepreneurship within communities may not show rapid growth or create many jobs in a short time. However, Müller and Korsgaard (2018) have shown that such businesses can form a significant and resilient economic base in peripheral areas. In many communities, these forms of entrepreneurship were initially lifestyle-based, motivated by the desire to preserve the community and the home region. Importantly, many community leaders had prior entrepreneurial experience, which they adapted to rural conditions. In this way, success and business growth were achieved while maintaining a lifestyle based on environmental friendliness and sustainability.

In the context of rural entrepreneurship, Cunha et al. (2020) concluded that the development of lifestyle entrepreneurship supports the sustainability of both the community and the location. Local networks contribute to community well-being through cooperation, marketing, and heritage preservation. This, in turn, increases the region's visibility and creates opportunities for broader place marketing. Growing interest in authenticity (Rickly et al., 2023) creates new opportunities for communities that use heritage as a marketing tool.

6.3. Heritage and communities as rural marketing arguments

In the studies underlying this dissertation, cultural heritage appears as a marketing element in two distinct approaches. Although the research objectives of Article II and Article III differ, the presence of local tangible and intangible cultural heritage serves as a shared marketing argument. In terms of influencing marketing,

Article II highlights elements such as preserved settlement patterns, farmhouse architecture, landscapes, dialects, and traditions. Article III focuses more on object-based activities related to the preservation and presentation of heritage.

Cultural heritage is often seen as a bearer of regional identity and a source of social capital (Knapik and Król, 2023). According to Harrison et al. (2008), heritage continues to be associated with values and assets inherited from ancestors, but its meaning is no longer limited to the past; it increasingly includes opportunities for present development and future shaping. In postmodern interpretations, heritage is not only about protecting monuments, restoration, and presentation, but its meaning is expanded according to context and community needs. Heritage is increasingly understood by local residents as part of their cultural background, which can be updated and adapted to local development goals.

Such goals may include economic benefits through tourism, educational impact, opportunities for self-development, community participation, demonstration of heritage, preservation, research, and interpretation (Fredheim, 2019). In this framework, heritage functions as a resource through which conditions for regional development can be shaped. By leveraging heritage, interest can be generated to increase visitation or offer an attractive living environment that encourages new residents to settle. If activities aimed at increasing regional visibility are successful, the sustainable use and expanded interpretation of heritage can foster the formation of new networks and connections, the emergence of entrepreneurship and cooperation opportunities, and a broader understanding of local heritage (Figure 4).

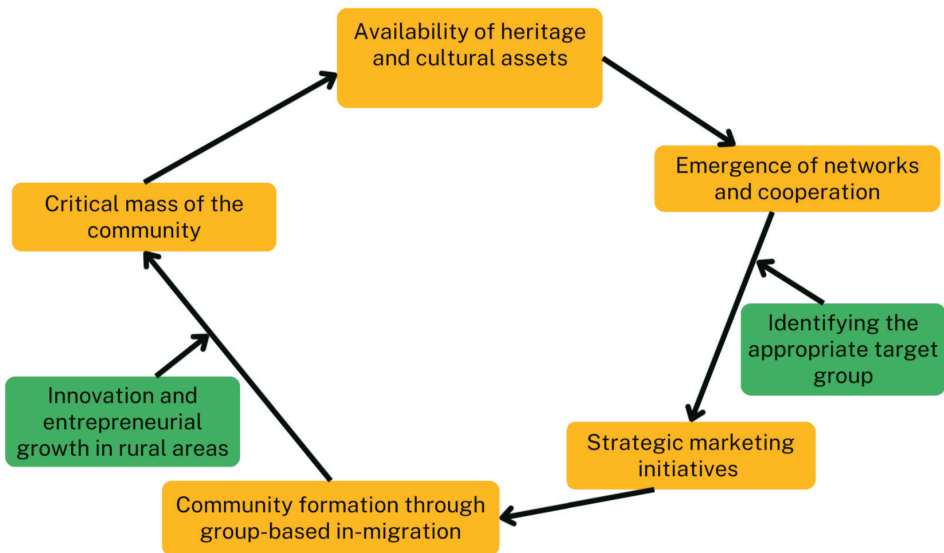


Figure 4. A development model based on rural heritage. Adapted by the author from Drudy (1989). Opportunities are highlighted in green

The use of physical space and experience creates meanings and values that shape identity (Adams, 2011), promote place attachment (Mottiar, 2016), and activate traditional communities. Community initiatives are often based on strong place attachment (Wallace and Beel, 2021), which arises from a sense of responsibility towards a changing environment and mediates people's responses to socio-ecological changes (Masterson et al., 2017). In the community context, such development strengthens the sense of belonging, which, in marketing, highlights regional strengths and competitive advantages. In the examples presented in this dissertation, heritage functions as a resource that supports in-migration (Article II) and the preservation of local heritage (Article III), provided that the community has a clear understanding of the values offered and the target groups.

Huggins and Thompson (2015) note that culture and heritage are often excluded from development planning, separating them from the active economic space. Hribar et al. (2015) argue that heritage protection and development are not opposing but mutually reinforcing processes. Article II discusses the recognition of material heritage as a resource in the formation of intentional communities, which is also confirmed by Article I. The nature of migration is not decisive in this context, but group-based migration may influence material heritage more quickly and often within a short time frame. Importantly, this has a positive impact on the region's reputation, resulting from simultaneous in-migration and the revitalization of the area, especially through visual transformation.

In postmodern interpretations, communities increasingly play a central role in local development. Cultural heritage becomes a motivator for strengthening communities and a trigger for action. Additionally, deepening the meaning of landscapes along with architectural heritage creates opportunities for the spread of sustainable development ideas (de Luca et al., 2021). The opportunity for sustainable solutions in preserving and restoring heritage is often one of the motivating factors—alongside property availability—for the formation and location choice of intentional communities. According to Article II, these factors are interdependent in the decision-making process.

From the perspective of heritage marketing, articles II and III suggest that heritage, landscapes, and the natural environment can be treated as public goods that support community sustainability and the achievement of development goals (cf. EU CAP Network, 2023). In addition to the above, intangible cultural heritage is seen as a place-specific public good (Shakya and Vagnarelli, 2024), which can be used in regional marketing. Thus, heritage is viewed as an element within local community networks, serving as a key factor in both in-migration and the sustainability of traditional communities.

Several intentional communities (Article II) noted that valuing heritage and internal cooperation based thereon can serve as a growth opportunity for existing or emerging intentional communities. Similarly, it was confirmed that activities related to heritage management expand internal cooperation networks within communities through the inclusion of new stakeholders (Article III).

A notable difference in marketing behaviour between articles II and III is the use of digital solutions. The importance of such technologies in the protection

and preservation of cultural heritage has been emphasized by several scholars (Adane et al., 2019; Gervasi et al., 2022). In the context of intangible cultural heritage, technological tools preserve and revitalise history and memory (Viejo-Rose, 2015; McDowell, 2016). Investments in technology have enabled the use of e-guides (Bieszk-Stolorz et al., 2021) and other digital solutions that enhance the visibility and accessibility of heritage sites and cultural monuments (Guidi and Frischer, 2020).

In Article II, the importance of direct place experience in the decision-making process was highlighted in the context of group-based in-migration. Tourism or visiting a location was seen as a potential precursor to migration decisions (cf. Vuin et al., 2016). Since the heritage value of a place or environment is often defined from a local perspective, background information was sometimes obtained through traditional information channels such as the internet and literary sources, in addition to on-site visits. Nevertheless, decisions regarding place selection were primarily based on locally acquired information (Article II).

Digital solutions support heritage-based place marketing by increasing accessibility and enabling visitors to act independently, without relying on local services. In the regions discussed in Article III, digital tools (including digital guides) have already been implemented, although communities were unable to clearly assess their impact. On the one hand, the simplicity of technological solutions may lead to a detachment from the heritage-engaged community and reduce the visitor's direct engagement with the destination. On the other hand, these tools can bring places of interest closer to a wider audience, supporting both independent visitation and the highlighting of the site's uniqueness.

6.4. Impact of heritage on local development and marketing

When heritage is viewed as a carrier of identity or a marketing resource, it often comes with the expectation that new residents will contribute to preserving its uniqueness—whether related to the place, community, or cultural continuity. Based on articles I and II, these expectations may also manifest in measurable outcomes, such as the continued operation of local schools or the maintenance of public services (Cervone, 2017; Pfaffl, 2024). Other valued outcomes include the preservation of historical architecture and settlement patterns (cf. Cattaneo et al., 2020) as well as the vitality of traditions (cf. Wilson, 2015). Communities may also expect “fresh energy” in the form of new skills and ideas. From the perspective of target groups, contribution may simply mean the arrival of interesting people who enrich local life. However, there are cases where changes have not satisfied traditional communities or have led to shifts in the interpretation of heritage (Darling, 2005; Schmitz and Pepe, 2023; Dragan et al., 2024). Rapid in-migration or tourism growth may be seen as a threat to the uniqueness of a place

(cf. McAreavey et al., 2016). These dynamics are part of the postmodern rural landscape and raise concerns about the sustainability of place.

In heritage-based tourism, visitors are introduced to the site's specific uniqueness and are expected to provide feedback, share experiences, or pass on stories (Article III). A contradiction may arise when the uniqueness of a place diminishes with increasing visitor numbers. On one hand, such developments offer communities opportunities for internal growth and economic resilience. On the other hand, they may compromise the distinctiveness of the site and strain local infrastructure (Dragan et al., 2024). Thus, the impacts described in Article III must be assessed differently depending on the site's remoteness and uniqueness. For example, Iru hillfort is perceived as part of the urban landscape and valued more as a recreational area. Changes in visitor numbers are unlikely to have significant effects. In contrast, Forest Brother bunkers—classified as “dark heritage” sites—offer deeply place-specific experiences. Due to their physical accessibility, increasing visitor numbers may reduce their uniqueness and affect local infrastructure.

Article II identifies several factors influencing rural marketing and heritage. First, moderate increases in rural property prices have occurred alongside rising demand. Intentional communities began forming when property prices in target areas were relatively low. Community members emphasized affordability as a decisive factor. Due to limited options, quality was not always a priority. In classical models, low property prices are a motivator for individual migration (Vuin et al., 2016). Temesgen (2020) also notes that rising interest from immigrants can drive price increases. However, demand did not immediately lead to price hikes. Communities emphasized that price agreements remained valid even when decisions took time. In several cases, property owners expressed interest or even responsibility in preserving buildings. A key factor was the development of personal relationships: in many cases, owners agreed to sell at a lower price once convinced that buyers would care for the property.

Second, there was a shift in perception within traditional communities, which began to see existing buildings and settlement patterns as heritage and opportunity. This was reflected not only in property sales but also in exemplary home restoration, the spread of sustainable construction practices, and the appreciation of intangible heritage (cf. Mason, 2014). If an intentional community is sufficiently open, its sustainable development principles may influence local attitudes and even revive traditions and social norms. Roysen and Mertens (2019) describe such effects as the collective transformation of social practices. Article III highlights the uniqueness of experiences offered by communities, which Romão et al. (2018) attribute to endogenous, place-specific resources. By combining these resources with external networks (cf. Shucksmith, 2010), communities create inputs for lifestyle entrepreneurship that support sustainability and differentiation. Neumeier (2017) sees these activities as social innovation—a central component of endogenous rural development. The success of such processes depends on local conditions, but especially on participants' capacity for initiative

and independent action. Article III supports the view that local policy can support different stages of development but cannot fully direct the process.

The activities of communities that value both tangible and intangible heritage play a significant role in shaping local development. This has been highlighted in several rural tourism studies (Giles et al., 2013; Cunha et al., 2020; Shakya and Vagnarelli, 2024). Li et al. (2019) describe community-based development models that emphasize the potential of bottom-up approaches. This supports the principles outlined in Article III, where the inclusion of internal social capital enables heritage-based activities to drive local development. In summary, heritage contributes to local development in multiple ways:

- As a resource for identity and belonging: Heritage strengthens emotional ties to place and fosters community cohesion.
- As a marketing argument: Heritage enhances the attractiveness of rural areas for both visitors and potential residents.
- As a basis for entrepreneurship: Heritage-based activities support lifestyle entrepreneurship and the creation of local economic networks.
- As a driver of innovation: Communities reinterpret and adapt heritage to meet contemporary needs, contributing to social innovation.
- As a tool for cooperation: Heritage initiatives often involve collaboration among communities, local governments, and external stakeholders.

These findings show that heritage is not a static legacy of the past but a dynamic and adaptable resource that can be actively used to shape the future of rural communities.

6.5. Heritage-based marketing: common ground

Articles II and III approach heritage-based community development and marketing from different perspectives. As common ground, both highlight community initiatives, including entrepreneurial efforts, related to crafts, experience-based tourism, and other heritage-driven activities. The appreciation of heritage and its use in tourism and community marketing can be compared across several key aspects.

First, the formation of target groups. The target audience for tourism marketing is significantly broader than for residential marketing. Successful heritage-based tourism marketing depends on the accessibility and attractiveness of the initial information about the destination. Factors influencing target group formation include physical accessibility, visitor interest in and connection to the place, and the diversity of services offered. Positive feedback can expand target groups and involve new stakeholders within the community. Community activities may also increase interest from local governments or investors in heritage sites. According

to Article II, the results of residential marketing are often more random and tied to person-driven initiatives (cf. Stockdale, 2014). Articles I and III do not deny the initiative capacity of local governments but show that their interest tends to grow after initial positive outcomes.

Second, the opportunities offered and the expectations. Visiting heritage sites or moving to rural areas is often driven by purposeful interest. Article III notes that visits may sometimes express personal or ideological sentiments. In the communities and sites studied, visitor expectations were linked to meaningful experiences, which may be shaped by national or patriotic feelings or, as McLean (1998) suggests, identity formation. In addition to identity, Silva and Leal (2015) argue that visiting such places can be associated with pride in ancestral heritage. Articles I and II reveal similar motivations and interests. Rural lifestyle is considered part of identity, and locations in Southeast Estonia are seen as a return to ancestral roots. Migration to rural areas is driven by interest in rural living and shared values within groups. Intentional communities are also open to adopting heritage values offered by traditional communities. Articles I, II, and III confirm that heritage is used as a resource for community development, with marketing activities tailored to match the expectations of target groups.

Third, the role of the entrepreneurial environment, which can be assessed more broadly as an economic context. Entrepreneurship contributes to shaping the region's image, supporting marketing efforts and community sustainability (Gulisova et al., 2025). Forms of cooperation, such as crafts and guiding services (e.g. at the Ennuksemäe Forest Brother bunkers), indicate the emergence of local lifestyle entrepreneurship and its integration into shared services. Based on the characteristics of the target group, Article II shows that in-migrants have used the existing environment to create new businesses or adapt existing ones. Business opportunities were not the primary motivation for the communities studied in Article II. Rather, entrepreneurship was seen as a value accompanying rural migration, reflecting desires for independence, freedom, or personal challenge (cf. Muñoz and Kimmitt, 2019). Among intentional communities, Mooste was specifically supported by the local government to foster entrepreneurship. Articles I and III highlight how communities have successfully utilized local business opportunities through marketing and cooperation.

According to Article II, group-based migration can be understood as lifestyle-driven relocation occurring within a limited time frame, where like-minded individuals move together to a suitable rural area (cf. Meijering et al., 2007a). These intentional communities are typically small (20–50 people), but they are united by shared values and motivations centred on ecological, self-sufficient, and traditional rural lifestyles (Sager, 2018; Lopez and Weaver, 2019). Group-based migration may be partially influenced by national or regional support measures. Existing policies tend to support middle-class quality-of-life migration, which largely corresponds to both the membership of intentional communities and the preferred target group identified by local governments in Article I (cf. Schmied, 2005). Therefore, intentional communities in Southeast Estonia are

characterized by spatial stability and demographic consistency, or even moderate growth.

Heritage is seen in articles II and III as an opportunity for traditional communities to offer something new or previously undiscovered—whether related to tourism or residential development. Rural and experience-based tourism gained attention in the 1990s as agriculture declined and alternative economic activities were sought. However, many of the heritage sites highlighted in Article III became notable destinations primarily due to municipal or private investment. Still, the prior efforts of communities to emphasize the importance of these sites should not be overlooked.

The communities studied in Article II can largely be considered success stories; however, they are not idealized (cf. Grootens, 2019) but rather the result of deliberate decisions. Nevertheless, community-led initiatives do not provide a universal formula for rural marketing. In general, the emergence and functioning of communities can be seen as part of bottom-up regional policy measures. While national policies have offered limited support, it can be argued that traditional top-down interventions have not led to comprehensive change, and the data indicate continued population decline. This particularly affects economically and institutionally weaker regions, confirming Stockdale's (2006) claim that many rural areas lack the internal resources to recover or initiate recovery processes.

However, long-term sustainability-focused measures have brought new skills and entrepreneurial energy to rural areas (Conti and Sivini, 2023). Paradigm shifts (see OECD, 2006) have emphasized qualitative factors and place-specific solutions (Dax and Fischer, 2018). One possible development path is to highlight rural amenities and competitive advantages, focusing on their marketing potential (Naldi et al., 2021; Song et al., 2022). Although intentional community members and local governments in Article I mentioned the role of chance in community formation and location selection, articles II and III show that place-specific opportunities have been successfully utilized.

Based on articles II and III, rural marketing can be approached spatially on two levels: first, through community-led initiatives, and second, through local government-based strategies. A local government's case-based approach, such as supporting a specific community or implementing measures targeted at a particular group, requires flexibility and the ability to adapt local policies to the situation.

Unlike consciously designed local government strategies (cf. Vuin et al., 2016), Estonia has not yet developed unified, cross-municipal measures to support community-based marketing or intentional communities. First, group-based migration is largely case-specific and lacks dedicated support mechanisms (Article II). Second, tourism strategies are often designed to cover entire territories, leaving community-based or bottom-up initiatives in the background (Article III). According to Article III, marketing related to heritage communities is typically driven by continuous community efforts focused on specific sites.

If heritage is considered a prerequisite for community development, then Dax and Fischer's (2018) framework can be applied, which emphasizes the role of

regional identity in shaping self-awareness and distinctiveness. At the local level, this means mobilizing community capacity and implementing innovative solutions. Rural development is open to external stimuli, but the formation of self-awareness is centrally tied to local heritage and its community-based interpretation. Articles II and III align with Hribar et al.'s (2015) participatory approach, where a functioning community is capable of managing heritage-based products and services.

Managing heritage sites and marketing them in a community context not only means preserving them for the future, but it also involves creating and maintaining social institutions (cf. Mydland and Grahn, 2012). This approach is reflected in articles II and III. Heritage plays a key role in shaping local identity and can support community activities in several ways:

- From the traditional community perspective: preservation, presentation, and use based on need (Article III).
- From the regional marketing perspective: attracting new residents and forming intentional communities (Article II).
- From the intentional community perspective: shaping perceptions and meanings of heritage (Article II).

Therefore, a community's contribution to social innovation can be seen as an opportunity to value local culture and heritage as a marketing argument (cf. Hribar et al., 2015; Signes-Pont et al., 2022; Knapik and Król, 2023). On one hand, this meets people's desires for new experiences and meaningful connections; on the other hand, it offers a development path for regions where traditional strategies have not succeeded. According to articles II and III, communities can act as drivers of regional development and creators of internal networks, offering new services and strengthening internal cooperation.

In most cases described in articles II and III, clear links can be identified between marketing activities and heritage. Thus, it can be concluded that heritage functions as a key marketing element at both local and community levels. Moreover, in peripheral areas, heritage-based marketing may be the primary opportunity for group-based in-migration. Article I confirms that the formation of intentional communities may be limited by the lack of suitable heritage-valued real estate in traditional settlement patterns.

Chi and Marcouiller (2013) have linked the development potential of rural areas to the level of natural amenities, which they interpret both as a form of underdevelopment and as a resource. This perspective allows for parallels to be drawn between heritage-related opportunities and existing development patterns. In the context of community-based in-migration, it can be inferred that in more developed regions, the likelihood of forming intentional communities is lower due to the absence of suitable property that could be valued as heritage (articles I and II).

However, activities aimed at valuing local heritage do not necessarily depend on the presence of a specific heritage object. The interpretation of heritage can take place more broadly—through lifestyle, traditions, or collective memory. Nevertheless, according to Article III, certain limitations may arise from issues related to overtourism or ethical and moral concerns regarding the meaning and value of place.

6.6. Marketing intentional communities in rural Estonia

Among regional policy measures, the responsibility for stabilizing or increasing population numbers is often delegated to local governments. Adapting national measures and implementing local policies allows municipalities to highlight specific competitive advantages. Discussions about the necessity, effectiveness, and adaptability of these measures go beyond evaluating their efficiency; they have become part of the analysis of local government economic and political administrative capacity (see Kattai et al., 2020). Addressing such a multifaceted issue requires the inclusion of diverse stakeholder knowledge and experience to meet local needs (Shucksmith, 2018). From a community perspective, the broad inclusion of social capital in development processes is a valuable resource, enabling the integration of external knowledge and experience (Bosworth et al., 2016). Utilizing these connections and resources creates opportunities for innovative approaches that tailor development measures to local needs.

Traditional growth-oriented strategies have not proven particularly effective in rural contexts (Dax and Fischer, 2018). Many regional policy measures aimed at increasing competitiveness have yielded limited results or affected only small areas, while simultaneously deepening regional disparities (Plüschke-Altöf et al., 2018). Therefore, Grootens (2019) has described belief in regional competitiveness as a limited strategy. One reason for failure may be that many rural development goals, such as job creation or increasing regional attractiveness, are inherently complex and not easily addressed by predefined solutions (Termeer et al., 2015). Even well-managed processes may not produce the desired outcomes. At the local level, municipalities can be seen as practical arenas for developing historically rooted and culturally integrated communities (Vasstrøm and Normann, 2019). Despite interruptions in the historical continuity of Estonian local governments, today's governance model includes links to community-based activities.

From this perspective, the locally planned, community-inclusive, and community-oriented development of competitive advantages is one possible path forward for rural areas (Parlato et al., 2022; Gulisova et al., 2025). Vasstrøm and Normann (2019) argue that if a local government acts at least partially as a mediator between interest groups, it can use governance mechanisms to distribute responsibility and mobilize community resources. This approach also supports the conclusions of Article I, which suggests that local governments can intervene to counteract decline through cooperation with traditional and intentional com-

munities. Such collaborative solutions allow for the better inclusion of social capital and shared responsibility, increasing the likelihood of achieving development goals (cf. Kangro and Lepik, 2025).

The aim of Article I was to assess the opportunities and challenges of rural in-migration marketing strategies from the perspective of local governments. Group-based in-migration can simultaneously fulfil multiple development goals and accelerate the growth of target regions. The article analysed local government marketing activities directed at target groups interested in rural lifestyles. This chapter provides an expanded overview of the article's content, presenting more detailed findings that could not be included in the narrower scope of Article I. From a community perspective, connections are drawn to Article II, and in the context of heritage appreciation, to Article III.

In peripheral regions, various strategies have been applied, including incentive-based approaches and economic stimuli, to slow out-migration. Local governments have used strategic place marketing and developed migration measures to influence urban-to-rural migration (Niedomysl, 2007; Eimermann, 2015). In rural place marketing practices, regional competitive advantages are emphasized, which are often linked to government policies or local initiatives implemented through support programmes and economic measures.

Examples from Nordic countries, whose settlement patterns resemble Estonia's, highlight several initiatives aimed at promoting in-migration through rural marketing (see Niedomysl, 2007; Cassel, 2008; Eimermann et al., 2017). However, Niedomysl (2004) and Eimermann et al. (2017) point out that such marketing is often ineffective, citing problems such as insufficient understanding of target groups or lack of marketing competence. Hospers (2010) also questions the effectiveness of place marketing aimed at attracting new residents in the European context, arguing that people prefer to move to nearby areas with which they already have personal ties or prior experience.

According to Article I, local governments are constrained by limited time and resources, which restricts their ability to engage target groups directly. Often, they lack both the necessary skills and the initiative to establish direct marketing contacts (cf. Eimermann et al., 2017). Targeted activities have been supported by initiatives such as the nationally scaled "Maale Elama" (English translation: Come to the Countryside) programme and the Southeast Estonian "Tule Maale" (English translation: Move to the Countryside) movement. Although some intentional communities mentioned these programmes as starting points, the initiatives were not directly aimed at community formation but rather at promoting rural life and attracting new residents.

Therefore, in the local governments studied, individual and group-based migration can be seen as intertwined phenomena. All participating local governments have encountered the formation of intentional communities and recognize their potential for regional development. These communities have mostly emerged through bottom-up initiatives (Article II), with local governments supporting their adaptation and growth within their means (Article I). It is important to note

that most interactions between communities and local governments have occurred through cooperation rather than formal local government policy.

Municipal leaders identifying lifestyle migrants, especially young families, as the primary target group emphasized the availability and quality of public services. Schools and kindergartens were considered particularly important. Support programmes co-financed by local governments, such as the Young Specialist Programme and the Rural Infrastructure Programme, were also highlighted. Development plans mentioned nature-oriented rural lifestyles as part of the living environment. The emphasis on architectural heritage and the possibility of community-based migration generally entered the focus of local government marketing measures only after the first intentional communities had formed. Although development plans included activities related to cultural heritage, these were not linked to in-migration marketing but rather aligned with the community and cultural goals described in Article III.

Articles I and II emphasized the precondition for community-based migration as the availability of suitable architectural heritage and environment. In all cases, the choice of location was influenced by the availability of appropriate real estate and the presence of an active and informed local agent. The Mauri community stands out, having been established based on a suitable and sufficiently large plot of land. During the planning phase, the size of the plot and the spatial needs of the community members were considered.

Later arrivals highly valued proximity to community members with similar values, which also influenced property choices. Group representatives monitored real estate listings, but the decisive information usually came from local agents or traditional community contacts. In some cases, local governments also facilitated contact or provided property information. Although local governments had long encountered real estate enquiries, the collection and dissemination of information became more systematic once their role in the process was recognized. Information exchange was further supported by growing cooperation between traditional community leaders and those managing property data. These findings partially support Vasstrøm and Normann's (2019) view that local governments have the potential to act more strategically in collaboration with communities to achieve mutually beneficial goals. As a result, some local governments expanded the responsibilities of development specialists or appointed contact persons responsible for sharing real estate information.

Minor differences between local governments and intentional communities regarding priorities for public services can be explained by the communities' desire for autonomy or their perception of being located in peripheral areas. Article II shows that newcomers to rural areas did not expect immediate access to all services. In some communities, homeschooling was considered (e.g. Parmu) or a local school was established (e.g. Säanna). The presence of schools or other services nearby was not seen as a barrier to relocation. In all cases, the number of students in local schools increased following the formation of intentional communities. For example, the survival of Hargla School in Valga municipality was attributed to the emergence of the Parmu community. Although local govern-

ments assessed their role in the formation of intentional communities as modest, the existence of social infrastructure may serve as an argument for newcomers when making relocation decisions.

The “Maale Elama” programme focused on introducing employment opportunities alongside housing options. Municipal leaders emphasized entrepreneurship opportunities based on the characteristics of the target group. Although the role of municipalities often remained limited to creating a supportive environment, several communities (e.g. Parmu, Karula, Nedsaja) actively utilized local opportunities. Mooste municipality directly supported entrepreneurship by renovating manor buildings to provide suitable spaces and fostering a creative and heritage-oriented business environment. The mayor’s personal contacts and initiative attracted several companies important for heritage and creative industries. Bosworth and Finke (2020) describe such entrepreneurs as agents of change and modernization—key components in urban-to-rural lifestyle migration.

The local government’s initiative in supporting the formation of intentional communities and group-based migration can be illustrated by the example of the Sänna community. A former school building owned by the local government was offered to a potential group of in-migrants as a base for living and pursuing their goals. Rõuge municipality, which manages the building, stated that such properties do not necessarily need to be sold but can be made available for community use. The assumption is that such offers attract people with shared values to rural areas. Inspired by the success of Sänna, the local government is considering offering other unused public buildings to emerging or relocating communities. This could stimulate the formation of new intentional communities or the development of core areas.

However, it must be noted that a community centred around a single building may not ensure long-term viability in the Estonian context. The Sänna Culture Manor community partially resembles the model of the Mõisamaa community, which ceased operations. Most members of the Sänna community own property in traditional dispersed settlements. From the local government’s perspective, offering buildings to communities is a way to revitalize peripheral areas, maintain public services through delegation, and preserve buildings that would otherwise be difficult to sell. Renting or allocating buildings to intentional communities is a common practice internationally (cf. Lockyer et al., 2011; Griffith et al., 2024), but in Estonia, it remains relatively rare.

Outside the Sänna case, marketing aimed at community-based migration has mostly relied on local activists or traditional community initiatives. These leaders created or maintained contact with urban networks interested in rural life. Regional agents operated largely independently, involving traditional communities when needed to introduce the area or gather real estate information. Group-based migration was a new phenomenon; therefore, community activities were not aligned with official local government policies, though they were not in conflict either. It was assumed that incoming residents would form a permanent and locally integrated community that would not cause social tensions or conflicts with traditional communities (cf. Ham and Woolcock, 2022). This aligns with

Shaw's (2005) view that such community expansion represents cultural and social diversity, which local governments can use to develop their living environments.

Local governments supported the marketing efforts of local activists by providing relevant information about local work and living conditions or development plans (e.g. Parmu and Nedsaja). This information was mainly used to support relocation decisions (e.g. Karula), not to directly identify target groups. In the case of the Mauri community, the municipal leader acted as a contact person between the landowner and the community initiator.

In addition to the perspectives of local governments, entrepreneurial opportunities, and heritage preservation, intentional communities emphasize the principles of sustainable development as a key element of their activities (Casey et al., 2020; Nogueira et al., 2024). These same principles apply to heritage management in the context of tourism (Hribar et al., 2015; Cunha et al., 2020). From a sustainability perspective, the arrival of new residents presents an opportunity to apply their skills in building renovation, landscape maintenance, and business development (Article II). According to Nogueira et al. (2024), intentional communities integrate sustainability-oriented practices into their everyday lives, thereby shaping social behaviours that may collectively influence the broader community.

Based on articles I and II, it can be argued that the behavioural norms and role modelling of in-migrants make sustainable development ideas more visible and acceptable to the local community. This influence is reciprocal: the traditional community develops a deeper appreciation for its place and heritage, while in-migrants value local knowledge, skills, and customs.

In summary, the integration of regional strengths, such as heritage, natural living environments, and community potential, enables local governments to renew their development policies. Cooperation with communities requires the introduction or enhancement of certain services, allowing local governments to utilize the resources offered by communities for the comprehensive development of the region (see Kangro and Lepik, 2025). Recognizing needs and forming partnerships is essential, where the local government provides security through social infrastructure and services, and communities contribute through their skills, entrepreneurial initiatives, and project-based collaboration (Article II). More broadly, rural in-migration reflects a level of societal maturity, where the competitive advantages of regions and traditional communities are recognized and valued.

6.7. Destination novelty and choice

In Estonia's recent history, there have been periods when the attractiveness of rural areas temporarily increased. For example, in the 1980s, economic developments in agriculture briefly accelerated urban-to-rural migration (Sjöberg and Tammaru, 1999). However, this process cannot be viewed through the lens of

community formation, as migration was primarily driven by housing and income opportunities provided by employers (e.g. collective farms, state farms, forestry units). At the same time, the easing of restrictions on individual farming allowed households to increase income through private agricultural production.

Unlike in several Central and Eastern European countries, intentional communities did not emerge in Estonia during this period (cf. Kok, 1999; Farkas, 2017). In Hungary and Poland, the beginning of community movements was linked to regime-critical creative groups relocating to rural areas. In Estonia, there was a noticeable trend of artists acquiring summer homes in Western Estonia and on the islands (see Põllo, 2025), but this did not develop into a lifestyle-based or ideologically motivated community movement. The first known community-related initiative appeared in the 1980s in the Karula region, where people with nature conservation values gathered around the local forestry office (Article II).

The preservation of settlement patterns was significantly influenced by the spread of summer home culture, which began in the 1960s and 1970s. Summer homes were built primarily near cities, considering transport connections and natural surroundings (Leetmaa et al., 2012). Ownership of summer homes became popular along Estonia's northern coast and in Lahemaa National Park (Järv et al., 2015) as well as in Western Estonia and on the islands. Forced collectivization, rural modernization, and urbanization had a strong impact on the continuity of traditional communities (Pärdi, 2008). However, limited resources, construction restrictions, and generational shifts in values may have contributed to the preservation of historical farm architecture and settlement patterns.

Sailer-Fliege (1999) notes that in Central and Eastern Europe, historical buildings were often replaced by new housing developments in cities, while in peripheral rural areas, decline rather than replacement occurred. The preservation of rural architecture was also supported by regulatory constraints: size restrictions applied to new buildings but were not enforced for older farmhouses. To a lesser extent, Nordic influences, such as those conveyed through Finnish television, also shaped rural architecture and its symbolic value (see Alatalu, 2011). Improvements in public transport and the rise in private car ownership increased accessibility to rural areas. Although development pressure on coastal areas remains high (see Kull et al., 2007), interest in other regions of Estonia has grown for both summer homes and permanent residences.

Article II highlights that improved media representation has contributed to place marketing. Lagerqvist (2014) and Wallis (2017) emphasize the role of media in shaping positive imagery and place identity. Lifestyle magazines targeting middle-class families present rural life through farmhouses, summer homes, interior design, and gardening trends. According to Wallis (2017), these publications offer “micro-myths” of rural life—social imaginaries that create space for lifestyle exploration and the pursuit of authenticity. Conversely, Plüschke-Altöf (2017) has shown how negative media portrayals can influence attitudes and misunderstandings about rural areas.

Articles I and II support the claim by Jafarli and Canavari (2025) that the best advertisement for a region is the presence of new residents and the messages they

share. This demonstrates the “liveability” of a place and supports earlier arguments about bottom-up competitive advantage formation (cf. Giles et al., 2013; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). From a community perspective, previous migrants act as “lifestyle brokers” who shape the destination’s image (Åkerlund, 2013). Similarly, in tourism marketing, the emergence of new destinations is supported by the promotion of valued heritage and the dissemination of related messages (cf. Carson and Carson, 2018). In addition to media, personal connections, professional networks, and community movement training and information exchange play important roles. Despite differences in visibility and media coverage, communities confirmed the importance of role models in valuing heritage and using it for community development (Article III). For example, in the case of Forest Brother bunkers, communities have taken the lead in highlighting post-World War II heritage (see Seil, 2011). Although resistance movements have been acknowledged in society, community contributions to their interpretation and promotion have remained modest.

In Article II, communities identified specific criteria for choosing a location. In addition to the Mooste case, which was highly place-specific and initiated by the local government, three general approaches to location selection emerged:

- The Mõisamaa community searched for a suitable location across all of Estonia.
- The Parmu and Sänna communities limited their search to Southeast Estonia. Members of the Karula community also considered Southeast Estonia and Viljandi County.
- The Nedsaja community restricted its search to the territory of Setomaa municipality. Similarly, the Mauri community focused on the territory of Misso municipality.

The suitability of a living environment was influenced by non-measurable factors, which, depending on the group, could simultaneously serve as prerequisites and final decision-making criteria.

Due to the desire for novelty, authenticity, and access to heritage-related resources, the communities discussed in articles II and III are mostly located away from urban centres. In Article II, this is explained by the intentional communities’ preference for separation, which coincides with the availability of suitable real estate in these areas. Many of these regions have been considered declining peripheries with limited positive media coverage (see Plüschke-Altöf, 2018; Martin and Liiva, 2024). However, the diversity of residential options, the novelty of places, and the revitalization of some peripheral areas support Leetmaa’s (2020) claim that the diversity of living environments is a distinctive value in Estonia.

Sutherland (2019) describes regional vitality as the result of favourable conditions converging, offering a conceptual model of gentrification. Adapting this model to the context of community-based migration and the formation of intentional communities allows for the identification of prerequisites and

influencing factors in peripheral regions (see Figure 5). Based on current research data, Sutherland’s component of local out-migration can be excluded from the model. The emergence of communities was made possible in part because population decline occurred before the onset of in-migration and the formation of intentional communities. According to articles II and III, local residents have begun to value their living space more, inspired by the example of in-migrants. Thus, the model replaces local out-migration with mutual integration. Especially in the cases of Nedsaja, Karula, and Parmu, there is a need to expand the concept of cultural adaptation to include the preservation or even revival of local heritage and customs by newcomers.

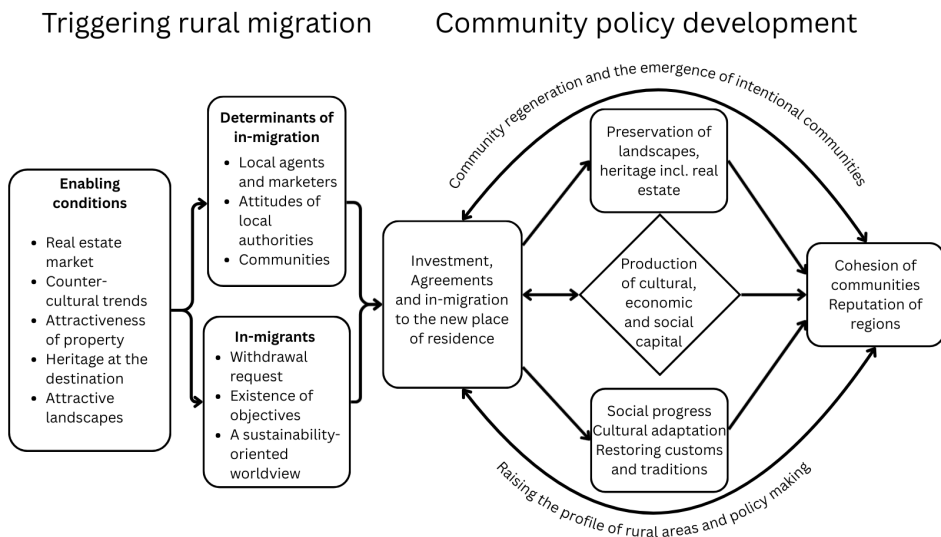


Figure 5. Conceptual model of community-based rural development (adapted by the author from Sutherland, 2019)

The conceptual model of community-based rural development (Figure 5) does not explicitly incorporate components related to local services and infrastructure; instead, these aspects are reflected through the attitudes and actions of local governments. Long-term population decline has placed pressure on local governments, which may not consider the maintenance of certain services to be economically viable (see Arenguseire Keskus, 2025). In Southeast Estonia, functioning services combined with the availability of property have created favourable conditions for in-migration. Although the overall migration potential is modest in scale, it often involves younger, more educated, and community-oriented middle-class individuals. Therefore, a local government’s willingness and capacity to maintain or provide services can be seen as an indicator of its readiness to engage with potential in-migration.

In addition to community-based migration, the Southeast Estonian context aligns with Lerfald’s (2024) argument regarding the importance of public services and local consumption among second-home owners. An analysis of urban-

to-rural migration patterns (Incaltarau et al., 2024) suggests that the presence of infrastructure can support both the expansion of second-home ownership and broader in-migration. Although intentional communities did not consider proximity to local services as a primary criterion for place selection, these services remain an important factor alongside community relationships (cf. Hoogerbrugge and Burger, 2022). Thus, the readiness and approach of local governments may influence future in-migration and the expansion of existing intentional communities.

The community-based development model (Figure 5) can be partially applied to the field of heritage management discussed in Article III. Communities engaged in heritage stewardship can leverage the opportunities arising from this internal resource, creating tourism services based on place value and thereby strengthening internal community cohesion. The development of such services is largely dependent on local government support. Community contributions to the preservation and marketing of place meaning are comparable to place-based residential marketing. According to Halfacree (1997), these factors—across articles I, II, and III—create conditions for the reproduction of communities and offer input for community-oriented policy-making at the local government level.

6.8. Societal impact of intentional communities

The motives behind urban-to-rural migration can range from pragmatic business opportunities to personal value-driven choices, including the desire to improve quality of life or raise children in a safer environment (Bello et al., 2022). Based on articles I and II, the dominant message from communities was the desire to live in accordance with their values, clearly indicating lifestyle-driven migration motives. Article III reflects the transmission of heritage values by communities and, to some extent, lifestyle choices. This phenomenon has been described as a shift away from consumer society towards a post-productivist rural space (Halfacree, 2007; Mitchell, 2019).

Implementing opportunities that motivate migration supports the fulfilment of various stakeholder goals and expectations. Traditional communities, together with intentional communities and other in-migrants, have shaped a social environment where structures considered local resources are used more effectively. Meijering et al. (2007a) have pointed out the complex relationships between intentional communities and mainstream society. In contrast, articles I, II, and III confirm the mutually supportive nature of regional cooperation and provide a basis for assessing the impact of intentional communities.

Social infrastructure and local services have found better use as a result of in-migration or increased visitor numbers. Additionally, intentional communities have initiated new activities that support both community goals and local government efforts. In cooperation with local governments, ownership models for buildings have been diversified to enable community use. Public buildings have been allocated to communities (e.g. Karula, Säanna), maintaining moderate public

oversight and ensuring collaborative management. Intentional communities (e.g. Parmu, Mauri) have adapted buildings for community activities using project-based solutions, supported by both local governments and the communities themselves. The existence, renovation, and revitalization of such community buildings was considered important. Articles I and II confirm Cattaneo et al.'s (2020) claims that, in addition to architectural value, revitalized community buildings serve as social connectors, contributing to local vitality. Sustainable revitalization of heritage is one way to preserve and, according to Article II, even regenerate communities.

At the local level, the contribution of traditional and intentional communities to heritage use shows some differences. In Article III, traditional communities' involvement in heritage preservation is complemented by tourism-oriented activities, incorporating both tangible and intangible heritage (see Viejo-Rose, 2015). According to Shakya and Vagnarelli (2024), engaging with heritage and presenting its values strengthens social cohesion by helping communities interpret the past through shared memories. Thus, heritage use is primarily object-centred. In Article II, some of the heritage-related activities of intentional communities are directed towards collaboration with traditional communities. These include efforts to preserve both intangible and tangible cultural heritage, which primarily have a local impact by enhancing the value of the home or living area. However, such activities are also seen as opportunities to inspire other communities or broader cultural regions in Southeast Estonia. Mouraz et al. (2024) argue that restoring material heritage contributes not only to environmental sustainability and economic efficiency but also to social development, cohesion, and belonging.

Articles I and II describe initiatives by intentional communities to preserve culture and heritage, often carried out in cooperation with traditional communities. For example, the Parmu community revived the century-old Hargla fair, which is now organized as the "Night Fair", maintaining its location and broad community involvement. In Karula, efforts were made to restore local traditions in brass band and choral music, including the introduction of music education for children.

For many community members, the motivation to move to rural areas was described as a desire to "return to one's roots". This notion is not easily defined. Some newcomers interpret "roots" as a general ancestral connection to rural life, while others refer specifically to family origins in Southeast Estonia. This cultural-historical identification and action may inspire intentional communities to extend their goals to other communities. For example, the Nedsaja community's efforts to preserve language and culture have the potential to influence the entire municipality with a shared cultural background.

Some community members cited the preservation of local dialects as part of their identity and belonging. According to Article II, this phenomenon was observed in three communities, each with different contexts based on the current status of the dialect and previous local efforts. In Parmu, new residents actively worked to preserve the fading Hargla dialect. In Nedsaja, the Seto language and

culture were promoted through new initiatives across the entire municipality. In Karula, knowledge of the local dialect was considered an important part of identity.

Sager (2018) notes that in peripheral areas, some marginalized groups may prefer minimal contact with local authorities, even at the expense of material well-being. Some intentional communities have initially preferred greater autonomy but eventually reached needs-based cooperation with traditional communities or local governments. These contacts may not be regular or daily, and their impact outside the intentional community may be limited. For example, the Mõisamaa community, which defined itself as a classical ecovillage, organized several events in cooperation with the traditional community and took over some local government responsibilities. In the case of the Mauri community, the local government respected the community's wish to remain as autonomous as possible while supporting the development of necessary infrastructure. However, even in these communities, some members work in local businesses or institutions and maintain ties with the local government. In these examples, separation is more conditional, although both Mõisamaa and Mauri were close to such principles during their founding phase.

Marketing activities supporting community development have been reflected in the development plans of several local governments discussed in Article III. Although communities and networks play an important role in regional marketing, major investments in site restoration or infrastructure development typically remain the responsibility of local governments. Communities have also attracted project-based funding, with local governments contributing to these efforts. Such investments create conditions for internal community development (e.g. Ennukse-mäe) or enable further investment (e.g. Asva hillfort).

Partnerships between communities and local governments in fulfilling public responsibilities are a common theme across all three articles (I, II, III). Although local government marketing efforts often remain secondary to community initiatives, intentional communities are seen as having significant potential to support broader regional development. One form of mutual cooperation or partnership is described as the delegation of public responsibilities (Article I). These responsibilities include:

- delegating the operation of local governments institutions;
- collaborating on project-based activities, including project management; and
- implementing development plan objectives through community action.

Local government activities are driven by both the need and the desire to strengthen communities (Article I), while the internal motivation of communities is the driving force behind development (articles II and III). A distinct area of focus is the recognition and preservation of heritage (articles I and II), and the development of tourism based on heritage (Article III). These activities are not isolated from other development goals or limited to local government initiatives. Often, the initiative for service delegation or community building renovation does

not originate in the local government but emerges as an opportunity alongside the formation of intentional communities.

For example, in Sänna Culture Manor, the community manages the local library, and the same building houses a private school. In Karula, the renovation and maintenance of the community building is carried out in cooperation with the local government. The restoration of community buildings is linked to community strengthening and is partially reflected in the EU CAP Network (2023) goals and national programmes within local government development plans. However, the initiative must come from the community, and the emergence of intentional communities has created opportunities to implement these goals. Viewing delegation as a form of social innovation, Kangro and Lepik (2025) suggest that it can be adapted as a community-led process.

7. SUMMARY

This doctoral dissertation examines heritage-based rural marketing through the lenses of community-led in-migration and the use of historically significant sites. While both themes have been addressed in previous research, the specific role of communities—particularly intentional and traditional ones—in shaping marketing practices and engaging with heritage remains underexplored. The involvement of local governments in these processes also warrants closer attention. Although rural tourism has received substantial scholarly focus, the contribution of traditional communities to heritage management—especially regarding dark heritage—has only recently emerged as a distinct area of enquiry. This is largely due to historical factors and the prevailing assumption that heritage-related responsibilities lie primarily with national institutions rather than local communities.

The three peer-reviewed articles underpinning this dissertation explore how communities contribute to the revitalization of rural areas through locally initiated marketing efforts and the valorisation of cultural heritage. Both traditional and intentional communities are shown to influence rural development not only as migration target groups but also as service providers and stewards of heritage. Their activities go beyond internal organization, encompassing broader roles in shaping local development trajectories, sustaining cultural continuity, and interpreting place-based values. In communities oriented towards development, marketing becomes an integrated function, supporting visibility, identity formation, and strategic collaboration.

Article I focuses on lifestyle migrants as a key target group in rural marketing. The findings indicate that conventional top-down strategies have often lacked effectiveness, primarily because they overlook community-specific contexts and fail to foster lasting connections with local life and values. In contrast, community-led initiatives—driven by local activists and residents—have demonstrated greater success by shaping place identity and actively engaging like-minded newcomers. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of target group expectations and supports the development of meaningful relationships between migrants and their new environment. Local governments contribute by providing enabling conditions, such as access to services and a supportive infrastructure.

Article II explores the relationship between community-led migration and rural revitalization, drawing on case studies from six intentional communities. These communities are not simply outcomes of group-based relocation but represent proactive social actors bound by shared values, lifestyle orientations, and interpersonal networks. They establish and maintain social infrastructure, initiate entrepreneurial activities, and enrich cultural and educational life, thereby enhancing their adaptability to rural contexts and fostering integration with traditional communities. Through these processes, they contribute meaningfully to the strengthening of local identity. Although local governments have offered support, their involvement has often been reactive. The most successful examples highlight the importance of collaboration with local activists and the creation of enabling conditions for long-term community sustainability.

Article III examines how traditional communities engage with cultural heritage, particularly through the preservation and interpretation of archaeological and dark heritage sites. Emotional attachment and lived memory emerge as central drivers behind community efforts to maintain, commemorate, and narrate these places. Rather than passive recipients, communities act as active interpreters, shaping the meaning of heritage in ways that reflect their values, histories, and local contexts. The study underscores that institutional heritage management tends to be centralized and object-oriented, often neglecting community perspectives. In contrast, community-led heritage practices offer pathways to connect past and present, foster social cohesion, and reinforce place-based identity. Heritage thus becomes a catalyst for internal networking, tourism development, and the growth of lifestyle-oriented entrepreneurship.

All three articles offer a critical perspective on institutional approaches to rural development. Formal strategies, such as official development plans and marketing frameworks, frequently overlook the potential of communities and fail to provide the flexibility or resources needed to support grassroots initiatives. In particular, the absence of targeted marketing strategies within local governments has led to missed opportunities for engaging value-based communities. In contrast, community-led efforts—rooted in local needs, identities, and collaborative practices—have proven to be more effective and sustainable. In response, several local governments have begun to engage with both intentional and traditional communities, fostering new forms of cooperation, reinforcing place-based identity, and contributing to inclusive socio-economic development.

A recurring theme across all three articles is the cultural and identity dimension of rural development. Migrants often seek environments that resonate with their values, and when such alignment is achieved—particularly within intentional communities—it fosters sustainable practices in heritage preservation and drives social innovation. Heritage sites acquire meaning through personal and collective memory, reinforcing emotional ties to place. These findings suggest that rural development in the Estonian context is not solely a matter of economics or demography but is fundamentally shaped by cultural identity and a sense of belonging. Traditional and intentional communities alike act as custodians of cultural continuity, generating new interpretations and connections between past, present, and future.

In conclusion, the articles collectively show that rural marketing is most effective when it builds upon locally embedded resources and the experiential knowledge of traditional communities. The arrival of new residents and the emergence of intentional communities position them not only as beneficiaries but also as co-creators in the marketing and development process. These dynamics are central to sustaining rural vitality through value-driven and context-sensitive strategies. Development-oriented communities—both traditional and intentional—play a transformative role that goes beyond internal organization. They generate cultural meaning, foster social cohesion, and advance sustainable development goals. In particular, sustainability principles are crucial for the preservation and adaptive reuse of tangible heritage. A community-led approach, grounded in

initiative and collaboration, offers a more resilient and inclusive pathway for addressing rural development challenges. The engagement of intentional communities represents not only participation but also a substantive partnership capable of driving meaningful and lasting change.

Comparative analysis of articles I, II, and III

This doctoral dissertation investigates the multifaceted role of communities in rural development, focusing on group-based in-migration, place-based marketing, the emergence of intentional communities, and the stewardship of cultural heritage. The comparative analysis synthesizes the key findings of articles I, II, and III, identifying both shared themes and distinct contributions. This approach offers a deeper insight into how traditional and intentional communities shape rural marketing strategies and contribute to regionally embedded development processes.

Articles I and II examine group-based in-migration and its role in shaping rural spatial development. Both articles identify intentional communities as a distinct migration target group with the capacity to support demographic renewal and stimulate local economies. Article I adopts a strategic lens, focusing on local government marketing practices and the importance of clearly defined target groups. It argues that effective rural marketing must align with community-specific values, goals, and lifestyle orientations. Article II complements this by presenting an empirical perspective, showcasing how intentional communities contribute to rural vitality through sustainable renovation, service provision, and collaborative structures. These communities are not passive recipients of place-based marketing but active agents who co-create their environments and foster new social frameworks. Together, the articles illustrate how strategic intent and lived practice intersect in community-led rural development.

Articles I and III both explore how communities contribute to shaping regional identity and perceived attractiveness. They emphasize that traditional and intentional communities are not passive recipients of development strategies but active producers of place meaning. Article I frames intentional communities as value-driven target groups whose lifestyles influence the effectiveness of place-based marketing. These communities serve as catalysts for reimagining rural identity and attracting others with similar orientations. Article III introduces a cultural and affective layer, illustrating how communities engage with heritage by preserving sites, interpreting their significance, and linking historical narratives to contemporary life. In this comparison, the cultural depth of Article III enriches the strategic lens of Article I, underscoring the importance of internal motivation and emotional investment as key conditions for meaningful and context-sensitive marketing.

Articles II and III both examine community practices related to heritage, with Article II focusing on intentional communities and Article III on traditional ones. Each highlights hands-on activities such as building restoration, event organization, and the safeguarding of cultural memory. Article II underscores how inten-

tional communities contribute to the creation of social and economic infrastructure, often addressing gaps left by formal institutions. Article III adds a cultural and interpretive layer, showing how traditional communities engage with heritage by generating meaning, narrating history, and shaping collective memory. These activities are not solely functional; they are embedded in cultural expression and identity formation. In this comparison, Article III provides a broader context for the practices described in Article II, framing them within a continuum of heritage preservation, where tangible elements are closely linked to belonging, identity, and historical continuity.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis demonstrates that both traditional and intentional communities act as multi-dimensional agents in rural marketing, shaping regional development through the creation of cultural meaning. Strategic, empirical, and cultural perspectives complement one another, offering a holistic understanding of how communities contribute to place-based marketing processes. A central aspiration among intentional communities is to attain autonomy as creative actors, whose collaboration with traditional communities influences not only the physical landscape but also local identity and heritage narratives. The interplay between the articles provides a conceptual framework for interpreting heritage-based development from both community perspectives. These insights support the analysis of community-based rural marketing and community-led promotional practices, while also addressing the core research questions of this dissertation.

Research Question 1: How have place marketing activities initiated and supported community-based in-migration to rural areas?

Local governments have implemented various place marketing initiatives, yet their effectiveness has varied considerably. The most impactful efforts have emerged through collaboration with traditional communities, targeting value-driven groups with an interest in rural lifestyles and the potential to form intentional communities. Two primary strategies can be identified: first, municipalities can provide infrastructure and services that facilitate the emergence of intentional communities; second, traditional communities themselves can act as informal marketing agents, identifying and engaging potential newcomers. Over time, these roles are often assumed by integrated residents who promote the region through personal narratives and lived experience, thereby supporting the expansion of existing communities.

While local governments may lack the capacity for direct marketing, they can play a crucial role by fostering enabling conditions and participating in community development planning. Effective collaboration includes project-based initiatives, transparent property information exchange, and the provision of essential services. In summary, place marketing proves most successful when it is targeted, community-led, and aligned with the values and expectations of specific groups. Generic or passive marketing approaches that overlook local distinctiveness tend to yield limited and unsustainable outcomes.

Research Question 2: How does the treatment of cultural heritage as a resource influence the development of community-based in-migration and tourism?

Communities perceive cultural heritage as a foundational element of identity and belonging. Across the traditional and intentional communities examined in this dissertation, heritage-related activities—ranging from site preservation to cultural interpretation—have played a central role in shaping local development. Cultural heritage, including historical sites, vernacular architecture, dialects, and local customs, has served as a compelling marketing asset for attracting both visitors and new residents. In many cases, the concept of heritage has been broadened to include settlement patterns and landscapes, thereby expanding its relevance in migration and tourism contexts.

Traditional communities have increasingly taken on active roles in managing and presenting heritage, while intentional communities have used heritage to construct identity and enhance regional appeal. These communities have restored and repurposed public buildings not only for internal use but also to support broader community integration. Heritage—both tangible and intangible—is viewed as a resource that fosters meaning, cohesion, and continuity. It also enables self-realization, supports sustainable development, and provides a basis for lifestyle entrepreneurship.

The creation of heritage-centred environments strengthens emotional attachment to place and stimulates innovation in community practices. In this context, heritage is not a static legacy but a dynamic and inclusive resource that underpins identity formation and marketing differentiation. Recognizing spatial practices and landscapes as heritage in a broader sense supports both in-migration and tourism development. This also opens avenues for local governments to engage meaningfully in heritage-based initiatives, reinforcing the idea that heritage is a lived and participatory process rather than a solely institutional concern.

Research Question 3: What are the impacts of community-based in-migration on local development and community functioning?

The findings across the articles indicate that group-based in-migration has introduced active, educated, and socially engaged individuals into rural areas, catalysing a range of transformative changes. These include the emergence of new businesses, the revitalization of cultural life, and the preservation of local traditions. Population growth has contributed to the maintenance of public services, while intentional communities have demonstrated stability and successful integration with traditional communities. From the perspective of social innovation, intentional communities have assumed public responsibilities, participated in local planning processes, and fostered new forms of collaboration with municipalities.

Restoration activities, such as landscape renewal and building renovation, have not only preserved heritage assets but also enhanced the region's attractiveness

and long-term sustainability. The skills and perspectives of newcomers have shifted local understandings of value and broadened the discourse around sustainable development. Within traditional communities, heritage-related initiatives have strengthened social cohesion, deepened the sense of belonging, and created meaningful opportunities for civic participation.

Community-based in-migration has generated cultural, economic, and social impacts, increasing resilience in peripheral regions. Despite occasional randomness in destination selection, when supported by targeted place marketing and heritage valorisation, such migration has proven to be a key driver of rural vitality.

The success of these processes hinges on local initiative and cooperative relationships with municipal authorities. Reciprocal collaboration between communities and local governments—especially when aligned with development plans—can amplify impact. Heritage, when understood as a dynamic and lived resource, becomes a powerful tool for community development, particularly when combined with social capital. Expanding the notion of heritage to include surrounding landscapes and everyday spatial practices enhances place identity and meaning. In the context of group-based marketing, identifying and understanding target groups is essential. Established intentional communities can play a strategic role in engaging these groups further. Similar principles apply to heritage-focused place marketing, where local governments have the capacity to design sustainable support mechanisms for community-led initiatives.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This doctoral dissertation demonstrates that the sustainable development and vitality of rural areas are closely linked to the roles of communities, local governments, and cultural heritage. The findings confirm that community-based immigration, especially the formation of intentional communities, has proven to be an effective way to revitalize rural regions. New residents bring social innovation, entrepreneurship, and new forms of cooperation, which help to maintain public services, enliven local cultural life, and strengthen regional identity. The active role of communities is evident both in attracting new residents and in mobilizing internal resources.

Cultural heritage is increasingly regarded as a dynamic resource that supports both identity and regional vitality. The valorisation and use of heritage in marketing help to increase the attractiveness of rural areas for both newcomers and visitors. Communities are important interpreters and custodians of heritage, linking historical sites and traditions with contemporary life and development goals.

The results show that the effectiveness of place marketing and development strategies largely depends on cooperation between communities and local governments. Traditional, top-down marketing and development models are often not flexible enough and do not sufficiently consider local needs. More successful are bottom-up initiatives, where communities and local governments work together, share responsibility, and create flexible solutions. The role of local governments is primarily to create favourable conditions, provide infrastructure and services, and support cooperation.

It is important to emphasize that effective place marketing requires a clear definition of target groups and consideration of their expectations. A value-based approach is particularly important, addressing those who seek not only a place to live in rural areas but also community belonging, identity, and the opportunity to contribute to local development. Both intentional and traditional communities are important sources of social innovation and entrepreneurship. They create new services, stimulate local entrepreneurship, and help to maintain and develop public services. Community entrepreneurship is often linked to heritage, crafts, creativity, and sustainability.

Heritage-making is a constantly evolving process interpreted by communities, involving newcomers, local residents, and authorities. This enables the creation of new meanings and the strengthening of community cohesion.

Based on the results of this dissertation, several promising avenues for future research can be identified. First, it would be valuable to examine the long-term effects of intentional communities on local governance structures, particularly regarding service provision, participatory planning, and institutional adaptation. Further inquiry could focus on the relational dynamics between intentional and traditional communities, with attention to trust-building, integration processes, and potential sources of friction. The evolving role of cultural heritage in com-

munity-led development also warrants deeper exploration, especially how heritage is reinterpreted, negotiated, and mobilized by new residents within diverse rural contexts. Given the increasing role of virtual platforms in shaping perceptions of place, the impact of digital marketing and online networks on rural migration patterns and community formation presents a timely and relevant research direction. Finally, future studies could assess the economic sustainability of community-based entrepreneurship and its contribution to regional resilience, including how intentional communities influence regional identity formation and counteract peripheral stigmatization through value-driven development practices.

In conclusion, this dissertation confirms that the sustainable development of rural areas is based on community initiative, cooperation with local governments, and the valorisation of cultural heritage. Communities are not merely objects of development but active agents and creators of meaning, whose contribution is essential for shaping both regional identity and social cohesion.

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SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Maapiirkondade turundus: seosed kohaliku omavalitsuse, kogukondade ja kultuuripärandiga

Käesolev doktoritöö käsitleb kogukonnapõhist sisserännet ja kohaturundust kui omavahel seotud nähtusi, mis mõjutavad maapiirkondade arengut, identiteeti ning sotsiaalset sidusust. Uurimistöö keskmes on küsimus, kuidas kujundavad kogukonnad ja omavalitsused sisserändega seotud praktikaid ning milline on nende osa piirkondliku ligitõmbavuse ja kultuurilise tähenduse loomisel. Töö tugineb kolmele teadusartiklile, mis käsitlevad kogukondade ja omavalitsuste tegevust, kultuuripärandi kasutust ning turundusstrateegiate mõju regionaalsele arengule.

Maapiirkondade elujõulisus on viimastel aastakümnetel olnud surve all, kuid samal ajal on esile kerkinud uued arenguvõimalused, mis põhinevad keskkonnahoidlikel väärtustel, kultuuripärandil ja kogukondlikul ettevõtlikkusel. Need suundumused on alternatiivid senistele majanduskasvule ja tsentraliseeritud planeerimisele keskendunud mudelitele. Rühmadel põhinev sisseränne ja tahtlike kogukondade kujunemine esindavad uut lähenemist, kus maapiirkonda kolitakse mitte ainult elukoha, vaid ka väärtuste ja elustiili tõttu. Sellised kogukonnad loovad uusi sotsiaalseid struktuure, tugevdavad kohalikku identiteeti ning panustavad kultuuripärandi säilitamisse. Kindlatele sihtrühmadele suunatud kohaturundus aitab esile tõsta piirkondade eripära ning luua tähenduslikke seoseid inimeste ja paikade vahel.

Doktoritöö eesmärk on analüüsida, kuidas kogukonnad ja omavalitsused kujundavad maapiirkondade arengut, kasutades turunduslikke ning kultuurilisi ressursse. Uurimistöö läheneb teemale erialadevaheliselt, mis ühendab elemente kultuurigeograafiast ning kultuuripärandi ja kogukonnapõhise arengu vaatenurgad. Töö vastab kasvavale vajadusele mõista, kuidas maapiirkonnad suhestuvad sotsiaalsete ja kultuuriliste muutustega, mis on seotud sisserände, kogukondliku arengu ning pärandiloomega. Eriti keskendutakse sellele, kuidas erinevad pooled, nagu sisserändajad, traditsioonilised kogukonnad ja omavalitsused, loovad paigale tähendusi ning kujundavad piirkondliku identiteedi ja tulevikunägemuse.

Doktoritöö keskendub kolmele põhilisele uurimisküsimusele, mis käsitlevad kogukonnapõhise sisserände, kultuuripärandi ja kohaturunduse seoseid maapiirkondade arengus.

1. Kuidas on kohaturundus algatanud ja toetanud kogukonnapõhist sisserännet maapiirkondadesse? Artiklid I ja II analüüsivad omavalitsuste strateegiaid ning kogukondade praktikaid, mis on suunatud uute elanike kaasamisele.
2. Kuidas mõjutab kultuuripärandi käsitlemine ressursina kogukonnapõhise sisserände ja turismi arengut? Kõik kolm artiklit vaatlevad pärandi osa identiteedi kujundamisel ja piirkondliku ligitõmbavuse suurendamisel.

3. Millised on kogukonnapõhise sisserände mõju kohaliku arengule ja kogukondade toimimisele? Artiklid I ja II keskenduvad kogukondade sisemisele dünaamikale, koostööle omavalitsustega ning sotsiaalsele ja majanduslikule mõjule.

Uurimistöö tugineb artiklipõhisele struktuurile, kus iga artikkel puudutab uurimisteema eri tahku. Metoodiliselt kombineeritakse kvalitatiivseid uurimismeetodeid, võimaldades süvitsi mõista kogukondade motivatsioone, tähendusi ja tegevusloogikat, mis jääks kvantitatiivsete meetodite puhul varjatuks. Lähenemine on erialadevaheline ning ühendab ruumilise planeerimise, kultuuripärandi, kogukonnapõhise arengu ja regionaalpoliitika perspektiivid.

Artikkel I keskendub kohalike omavalitsuste osale kogukonnapõhise sisserände puhul. Metoodiliselt tugineb artikkel kohalike arengudokumentide sisuanalüüsile, poolstruktureeritud intervjuudele omavalitsusjuhtidega ja kuues tahtlikus kogukonnas fookusrühmade küsitlusele. Uurimuse keskmes on omavalitsuste strateegiline mõtlemine, suhtlus uute kogukondadega ning võimekus sisserände suunamisel ja toetamisel. Analüüs toob esile, kuidas omavalitsused tajuvad kogukonnapõhist sisserännet ning milliseid võimalusi ja piiranguid nähakse koostöös alternatiivsete kogukondadega.

Artikkel II uurib kogukondade sisemist toimimist, väärtusmaailma ja koostöövõrgustikke, keskendudes sellele, kuidas kogukonnad ise haakuvad paigaga ja loovad tähenduslikke suhteid. Metoodika põhineb osaleval vaatlusel, süvaintervjuudel ja dokumentide analüüsil seitsmes kogukonnas. Uurimistöö läheneb kogukondadele kui aktiivsetele tegutsejatele, kes kujundavad oma identiteeti ja arendustegevust igapäevase praktika kaudu. Osalev vaatlus võimaldas uurijal kogeda kogukondade elu seestpoolt, mõista nende väärtusi ja koostöömehhanisme ning jälgida, kuidas kujuneb paiga kogukondlik tähendus. Fookusrühmade intervjuud andsid üksikasjaliku ülevaate kogukondade motivatsioonidest, tegutsemisest ja suhetest kohalikega.

Artikkel III kajastab kultuuripärandi kasutust kogukonnapõhise turunduse kontekstis. Metoodiline lähenemine ühendab fookusrühmade arutelud, dokumentide analüüsi ja juhtumipõhise lähenemise, keskendudes konkreetsetele objektidele ning juttudele, mida loovad kogukonnad ja omavalitsused seoses pärandiga. Uurimisobjektid on kultuuripärandit tähtsustavates piirkondades tegutsevad kogukonnad. Juhtumipõhine analüüs võimaldas süvitsi uurida, kuidas kasutatakse pärandit identiteedi loomiseks, turunduslikel eesmärkidel ja kogukondliku kuuluvuse väljendamiseks.

Kokkuvõttes võimaldab kombineeritud kvalitatiivne metoodika avada maapiirkondade arenguprotsesside kultuurilisi ja sotsiaalseid kihistusi. Artiklite kaudu rakendatud lähenemised toetavad doktoritöö eesmärki mõista, kuidas kogukonnad ja omavalitsused sobituvad paigaga, loovad tähendusi ning kujundavad maapiirkondade tulevikku.

Dokoritöö teoreetiline raamistik tugineb paigapõhisele arengule, kogukonnapõhisele tegevusele, kultuuripärandi tähendusele ja regionaalpoliitikale. Maapiirkondade arengut käsitletakse mitmetasandilise protsessina, kus koht, identiteet ja

kogukondlikud väärtused mängivad keskset osa. Paigapõhise lähenemise tähtsust rõhutavad Tuan (1977), Scannell ja Gifford (2017) ning Lewicka (2008), kelle käsitluses omandab paik tähenduse kogemuste, mälestuste ja sotsiaalse praktika kaudu. See on eriti tähtis maapiirkondades, kus elukeskkond ja kultuuripärand on tihedalt seotud kuuluvustundega.

Kogukonnad toimivad aktiivsete arendajatena, mobiliseerides sisemisi ressursse ja kujundades identiteeti. Ühiste väärtuste ja eesmärkidega tahtlikud kogukonnad esindavad alternatiivseid elustiile ning pakuvad uusi lahendusi maapiirkondade elavdamiseks (Meijering *et al.*, 2007a; Temesgen, 2020). Nende tegevus võib erineda traditsiooniliste kogukondade arusaamadest, kuid tuua kaasa sotsiaalset innovatsiooni ja uusi koostöövorme. Alt üles algatused võimaldavad luua arenduspraktikaid, mis lähtuvad kohalikest vajadustest ja väärtustest (Castro-Arce ja Vanclay, 2020), toetades nii sotsiaalset sidusust kui ka piirkondlikku elujõulisust.

Kultuuripärandit käsitletakse üha enam dünaamilise ressursina, mis toetab identiteeti, kuuluvust ja piirkondlikku elujõulisust. Selle turunduslik potentsiaal seisneb piirkondade ligitõmbavuse suurendamises nii sisserändajatele kui ka külastajatele (Hribar *et al.*, 2015; Bardone *et al.*, 2020). Pärandi tähendus kujuneb kogukondade tõlgenduste kaudu, mis seovad ajaloolised paigad ja tavad tänapäevase elu ning arengu eesmärkidega. Smith (2006) rõhutab, et pärand on sotsiaalne konstruktsioon, mis peegeldab võimusuhteid ja kultuurilisi valikuid. Harrison (2013) lisab, et arusaam pärandist muutub pidevalt. Seetõttu tuleb pärandit käsitleda kui dialoogilist protsessi, kus erinevad rühmad loovad ja vaidlustavad tähendusi.

Traditsioonilised majanduskasvule ning konkurentsivõimele keskenduvad regionaalpoliitika mudelid ei ole sageli suutnud lahendada maapiirkondade demograafilisi ja sotsiaalseid probleeme. Uued lähenemised, nagu Barca aruanne (2009), rõhutavad paigapõhist, lõimitud ja kogukonnakeskset arengut, kus kohalikud teadmised, kultuurilised väärtused ning koostöövõrgustikud on keskse tähtsusega. Selline lähenemine eeldab, et arengustrateegiad lähtuvad kohalikest vajadustest ning et kogukonnad ja omavalitsused osalevad aktiivselt otsustusprotsessides ja tuleviku kujundamises.

Doktoritöö teoreetiline raamistik lähtub arusaamast, et maapiirkondade areng on kultuuriliselt ja sotsiaalselt põimunud protsess, kus paiga tähendus, kogukondlikud tavad ning pärandiloome on tihedalt seotud. Paigapõhise arengu, kogukonnapõhise innovatsiooni ja kriitilise pärandiuuringu ühendamine võimaldab analüüsida piirkondlikke muutusi viisil, mis arvestab elanike kogemusi, väärtusi ja tulevikunägemusi. Nii saab hinnata, kuidas sisserändajad, traditsioonilised kogukonnad ja omavalitsused sobituvad paigaga, loovad tähendusi ning kujundavad tulevikunägemusi.

Uurimistö näitab, et kogukonnapõhine sisseränne ei ole pelgalt demograafiline nähtus, vaid seotud sügavamate väärtuste, elustiilivalikute ja sotsiaalsete suhetega. Tahtlikud kogukonnad toovad maapiirkondadesse uusi ideoloogiaid ja tavasid, mis võivad olla kohalike traditsioonidega vastuolus, kuid samas neid rikastada. Nende tegevus haakub kohalike omavalitsuste arengustrateegiatega,

tuues muuhulgas esile vajaduse paindliku ja kultuuritundliku poliitikakäsitluse järele.

Kohaturundust käsitletakse doktoritöös kui kultuurilist ja poliitilist praktikat, mille kaudu kujundatakse paiga identiteeti ning ligitõmbavust. Erinevalt majanduskesksest lähenemisest rõhutatakse turunduse seotust väärtuste, kuuluvustunde ja tähendusloomega. Turundusprotsessis valitakse, milliseid lugusid ja sümboleid esindatakse, mis tähendab, et kohaturundus võib toimida nii kaasava kui ka välistava mehhanismina.

Omavalitsused mängivad siin kesket osa, olles vahendajad erinevate kogukondade vahel. Nad seisavad tasakaalu otsimise ülesande ees: soovitakse meelitada uusi elanikke, kuid samas säilitada olemasolevate kogukondade identiteeti ja sidusust. Töö toob esile, et sihtrühmade määratlemine ja nendega suhtlemine on sageli piiratud, eriti kui puudub selge arusaam soovitud paigakuvandist.

Kogukondade vaates on kohaturundus tihedalt seotud eneseesitlusega – sellega, kuidas kogukond end näeb ja soovib nähtavaks teha. Traditsioonilised kogukonnad võivad tajuda ametlikku turundust kui pealesurutud või võõrast, eriti kui see ei kajasta nende igapäevast elu ja väärtusi. Samas võivad kogukonnad ise olla aktiivsed turundajad, kasutades kohalike ressursse, pärandit ja sotsiaalseid võrgustikke oma maine kujundamiseks ning sarnaste väärtustega inimeste kaasamiseks. Kohaturundus ei ole seega üksnes omavalitsuste tööriist, vaid ka kogukondlik praktika, mille kaudu luuakse uusi suhteid, tähendusi ja arenguhooni.

Kultuuripärandit käsitletakse doktoritöös kui mitmetähenduslikku ja muutuvat ressursi, mille tähendus kujuneb kogukondade tõlgenduste kaudu. Pärand ei ole staatiline objekt, vaid sotsiaalne konstruktsioon, mis peegeldab võimusuhteid, ajaloolisi valikuid ja tänapäevaseid vajadusi. Seda kasutatakse nii identiteedi loomiseks kui ka turunduslikel eesmärkidel, kuid see võib olla ka konfliktide allikas, kui erinevad rühmad tõlgendavad pärandit vastuoluliselt. Pärandiloome on dialoogiline protsess, milles osalevad nii sisserändajad, kohalikud elanikud kui ka ametkonnad.

Kokkuvõttes näitab doktoritöö, et maapiirkondade areng on keerukas ja mitmetasandiline protsess, kus sisseränne, turundus ja pärand on omavahel tihedalt põimunud. Need nähtused ei toimi eraldi, vaid väljenduvad igapäevastes olukordades, tähendusloomes ja poliitilistes otsustes. Maapiirkondade arengut saab käsitleda kui kultuuritundlikku ja dialoogilist protsessi, kus erinevate poolte hääled, kogemused ja väärtused on nähtavad ning arvestatavad.

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01.03.2021–... Tartu Ülikool, Humanitaarteaduste ja kunstide valdkond, Viljandi kultuuriakadeemia, loovettevõtluse teadur (0,70)
01.08.2020–... Eesti Maaülikool, õppejõud (0,50)
01.09.2017–28.02.2021 Tartu Ülikool, Humanitaarteaduste ja kunstide valdkond, Viljandi kultuuriakadeemia, loovettevõtluse teadur (0,70)
01.01.2016–31.08.2017 Tartu Ülikool, Humanitaarteaduste ja kunstide valdkond, Viljandi kultuuriakadeemia, kultuurikorralduse ja projektitöö lektor (1,00)
12.11.2015–31.12.2015 Tartu Ülikool, Viljandi Kultuuriakadeemia, kultuurikorralduse ja projektitöö lektor (1,00)
01.09.2014–11.11.2015 Tartu Ülikool, Viljandi Kultuuriakadeemia, kultuurikorralduse ja projektitöö lektor (0,50), osakonna juhataja
01.09.2014–22.01.2015 Tartu Ülikool, Viljandi Kultuuriakadeemia, projekti-juht (0,35)
01.07.2014–31.08.2014 Tartu Ülikool, Viljandi Kultuuriakadeemia, osakonna juhataja
04.11.2013–31.08.2014 Tartu Ülikool, Viljandi Kultuuriakadeemia, ettevõtluspraktikate koordinaator (1,00)
15.11.2002–03.11.2013 Halliste Vallavalitsus, vallavanem (1,00)
01.01.1996–14.11.2002 Viljandi Maavalitsus, peaspetsialist (1,00)

Articles forming the basis of the dissertation/Dissertatsiooni põhipublikatsioonid

- Rõigas, A., Veemaa, J., & Rennu, M. (2025). Marketing intentional communities in rural Estonia. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift – Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 79(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00291951.2025.2453173>
- Rennu, M., Rõigas, A., & Araste, L. (2023). Artisans seeking shelter: Craftspeople moving to the countryside and (new) local communities. *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica*, 66(2), 357–382.
- Kurisoo, T., Lillak, A., Rõigas, A., & Tint, K. (2024). The role of communities in preserving, using and remembering heritage: Archaeological monuments and dark heritage sites in Estonia. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 30(2), 195–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2023.2284733>

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- Rennu, M., & Rõigas, A. (2025). The smell of tar and a sense of gratitude: Craftsman in Southern Estonian intentional communities. Paper presented at nefk2025 – Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference, Åbo Akademi, Turku, Finland.
- Kurisoo, T., Lillak, A., Rõigas, A., & Tint, K. (2024). Kogukonnad ja kultuuri-pärand Eestis: järeltusi nelja juhtumiuuringu põhjal. Tutulus: Eesti arheoloogia aastakiri, 10–12.
- Rõigas, A. (2024). Communities from the local government's point of view. Versus, 21.02.2024.
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- Rennu, M., & Rõigas, A. (2024). Fieldwork notes through the eyes of a craftsman: Economic interests, local and cultural cooperation in the intentional communities of Southern Estonia. In T. Teidearu & P. Nõmm (Eds.), *Sustainability in Practice: DIY Repair, Reuse and Innovation. Programme and Abstracts*, 56. Tartu: Estonian National Museum.
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- Kliimask, J., & Rõigas, A. (2022). Soviet-era apartment houses and rural landscapes: The case of Estonia. In I. Javakhishvili (Ed.), *Landscape Dimensions of Sustainable Development. Book of Abstracts*, 32. Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press.

- Rennu, M., Rõigas, A., & Araste, L. (2020). Artisan seeks shelter: New peripheral communities and traditional handicrafts. In Á. Fülemlile et al. (Eds.), *Creative Heritage in the Making – Contemporary Folk Design*. 14. Budapest: Institute of Ethnology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
- Rõigas, A. (2020). Linnast maale. *Maja: Eesti arhitektuuri ajakiri*, 99, 72–77.
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