



Development of the evaluation  
framework and value output for the  
project BSR Cultural Pearls

**Final Evaluation Report**

November 2025

**Interreg**  
Baltic Sea Region



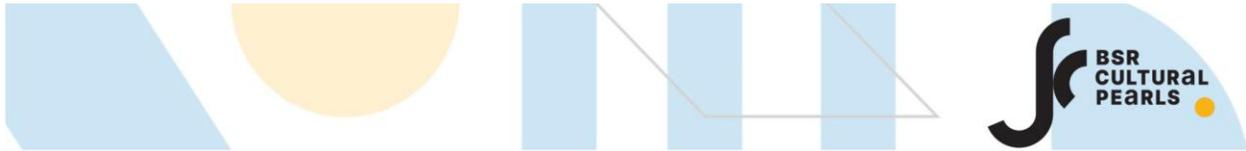
Co-funded by  
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RESILIENT ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES

**BSR Cultural Pearls**





Under the **BSR Cultural Pearls** project, co-funded by **Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme**



Commissioned by **Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC)**

**Northern  
Dimension  
Partnership  
on Culture**

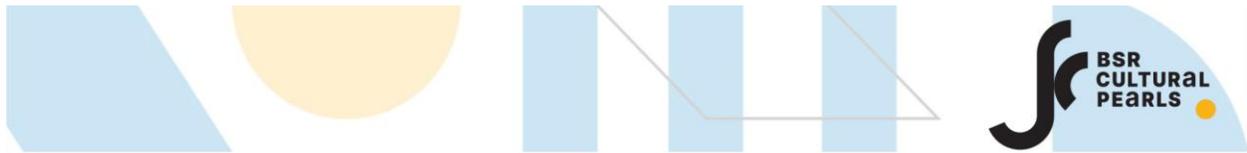
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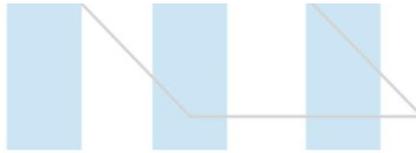


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## Executive summary

The BSR Cultural Pearls initiative positions culture as an instrument for community resilience across small and mid-sized municipalities in the Baltic Sea Region. Operating in 2023–2025 with combined Interreg and partner funding, the programme confers an annual title and supports the co-creation and delivery of Culture and Resilience Action Plans (CuReAPs). This evaluation develops and applies a structured framework to appraise the programme’s contribution to community development, health and well-being, and innovation capacity; it covers first-round title holders in 2024 (Jakobstad/Pietarsaari, Kiel, Rūjiena and Svendborg) and second-round awardees in 2025 (Alytus District, Helsingborg, Kaskinen/Kaskö, Peipsiääre, Płock and Smiltene). The work was completed in two phases: framework design and piloting (2024) and longitudinal and cross-sectional assessment with consolidation into practical tools (2025).

The evaluation adopts a theory-of-change approach, complemented by mixed methods. Primary data comprise semi-structured interviews with 2024 Pearl municipalities conducted approximately one year post-title; interviews and working sessions with 2025 municipalities; and focus groups with mentoring organisations and project partners. Secondary sources include CuReAPs, Seed Money work plans, internal evaluation materials and public documentation. Analytical emphasis is placed on contribution rather than attribution, triangulating quantitative monitoring with qualitative accounts to distinguish symbolic continuity (visibility, narrative artefacts) from substantive continuity (embedded practices, institutional routines, scaled collaborations). The framework formalises 27 outcome areas across three dimensions—community development, health and well-being, and innovation capacity—operationalised through 66 indicators (43 qualitative, 23 quantitative) and aligned tools for municipal surveys and mentor-guided community discussions, enabling consistent evidence to capture across different local capacities.



## Key findings

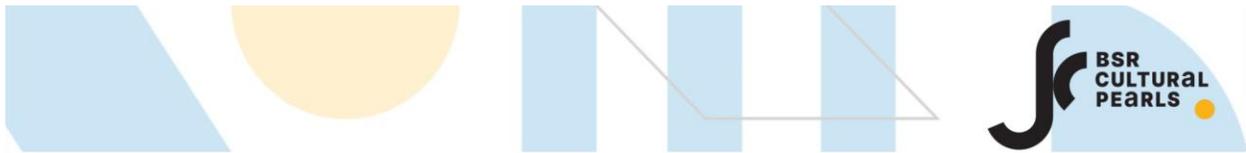
### Short-term impact (Component A)

In the immediate term, the programme is relevant where it mobilises locally resonant entry points and lowers participation thresholds. Municipalities report strengthened community ties through inclusive formats such as place stewardship, intergenerational storytelling, youth hackathons, outreach to underserved neighbourhoods and activation of under-used cultural assets. Perceived gains include increased pride and belonging among participants, new or revitalised social spaces, and thicker interfaces between residents and administrations. Health and well-being effects are primarily psychosocial and proximate (confidence, motivation, reduced isolation) arising from visible, achievable participation. Innovation capacity is expressed in revised working methods: participatory planning routines, cross-departmental cooperation, resident panels, and the first steps towards mainstreaming outreach models within municipal strategy. The mentoring and peer-learning spine is repeatedly cited as catalytic when application processes felt onerous or local buy-in was uncertain.

### Medium- to long-term effects (Component B)

One year on, durable legacies are evident where municipalities used the title to consolidate pre-existing strategies rather than to launch disconnected novelties. In such contexts, episodic participation has matured into patterned engagement—annual bar-camps, intergenerational theatre, and youth producer pathways—supported by administrative adoption of participatory methods. Programme effects at this horizon can be read along three axes: enhanced visibility and reputation within a “cultural resilience” frame; integration of resilience concepts and participatory approaches into municipal discourse and planning; and the use of the title as a social resource that renews local pride and identity. Where structural constraints persist (transport deficits, building condition, budget ceilings), legacies remain more contingent but are still visible in the persistence of community-led spaces, narrative projects and emergent civic competencies stewarded by local NGOs and volunteers.

### Challenges and lessons (Component C)



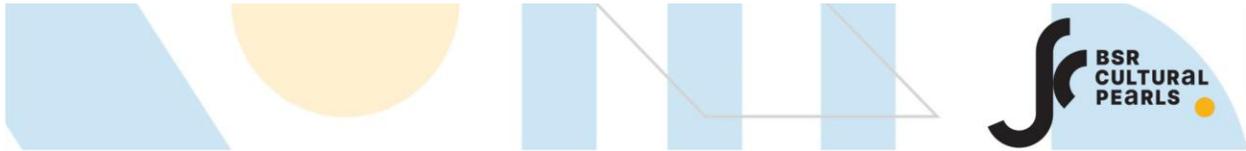
Stakeholders converge on five cross-cutting challenges. First, conceptual ambiguity: “social resilience” can read as abstract without locally meaningful framing; municipalities often re-articulated it as community strength, cohesion or agency to secure buy-in. Second, capacity and time: compressed planning windows and thin staffing impede early co-creation, advance programming with cultural institutions and outreach beyond “usual suspects”. Third, access and infrastructure: in several places, transport and venue condition limit reach and inclusion. Fourth, the network’s tangibility: while enthusiasm for mentoring and exchange is strong, international connectivity can feel inspirational yet intangible without portable collaboration formats. Fifth, monitoring: municipalities value pragmatic, light-touch instruments to evidence change beyond anecdote. Lessons learned emphasise starting from existing assets and strategies, designing low-threshold entry points that entrust residents with genuine responsibility, and treating mentoring and peer exchange as core architecture rather than ancillary support.

## Evaluation framework value-add

The framework translates the programme’s theory of change into a usable architecture that municipalities can implement with proportionate effort. It couples count-based monitoring (e.g., activity frequencies, governance practices, space creation/repurposing, partnership and network footprints) with perception-based, 1–5 scales and narrative prompts for empowerment, cohesion, trust, openness to change and multicultural interaction. It specifies respondent groups and instruments—municipal surveys and mentor-guided community discussions—and includes guidance on sequencing (e.g., eliciting shared vision before values) and contextualisation (e.g., interpreting diversity metrics against local demography). In doing so, it provides a transparent route from indicator evidence to judgements of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability.

## Recommendations

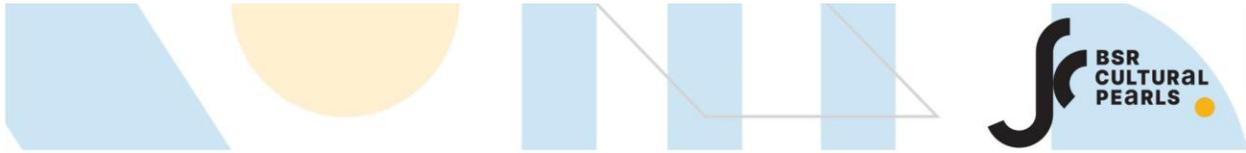
Sustainability hinges on converting episodic success into institutional habit. The report proposes extending timelines—both for application and delivery—to allow genuine co-creation, advance programming with cultural institutions and iterative monitoring; embedding standard participatory methods (resident panels, annual civic rituals, youth leadership pathways) within departmental routines; and resourcing continuity through modest multi-annual envelopes and dedicated mentoring capacity. Communication should be strengthened through a shared narrative and toolkit that translate resilience into accessible, locally relevant language, alongside a light regional communications spine to



amplify municipal stories. Evidence generation should prioritise repeatable, low-burden measures synchronised with municipal rhythms (short before/after prompts on belonging and agency; small cohort follow-ups at three and twelve months; optional photo/audio diaries). Critically, the Baltic-wide network should be operationalised as a diffusion mechanism by curating a small number of “travelling practices” each year—ready-to-adopt modules with concise guidance, co-crediting protocols and light central coordination—so that international exchange yields visible street-level outcomes.

## Outputs for continuity

To support take-up and replication, the evaluation has been consolidated into three practical instruments: a Self-Assessment Tool aligned with the framework’s dimensions and indicators, a Practical Guide for future Pearls and supporting institutions that translates learning into step-by-step implementation advice, and a Value Proposition document tailored to municipal leaders, cultural networks and funders, articulating the programme’s societal contribution and policy fit. Together, these products aim to embed monitoring, strengthen organisational capacity and sustain momentum beyond the current project cycle.



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background and context of the BSR Cultural Pearls project

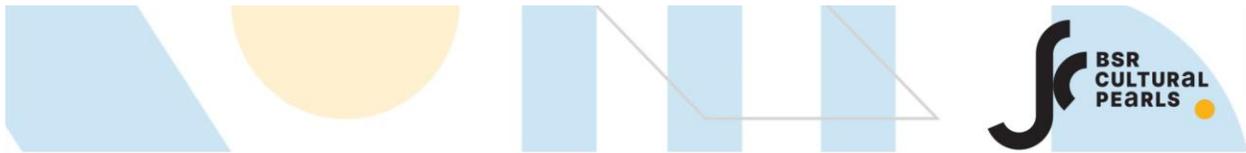
The BSR Cultural Pearls project is an innovative initiative aimed at enhancing social cohesion in smaller cities and municipalities across the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). By leveraging the unique assets of culture and creativity, this project seeks to address pressing societal challenges, such as urbanization, demographic shifts, and economic downturns, while fostering a sense of belonging and community identity.

For the current duration (2023-2025), the project operates under a budget of EUR 3.5 million of which 80 percent, or EUR 2.8 million, come from the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme and the remaining 20 percent from the project partners: Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) – lead partner; Alytus municipality (LV); ARS BALTIC (DE); Baltic Sea Cultural Centre (PL); Danish Cultural Institute (DK); Heinrich Böll Foundation Schleswig-Holstein (DE); Loov Eesti/Creative Estonia (EE); Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture; Regional Council of Ostrobothnia (FI); Ministry of Justice, European Affairs and Consumer Protection of Land Schleswig-Holstein (DE); Varde Municipality (DK); Vidzeme Planning Region (LV).

Since its inception in January 2023, the project has successfully engaged municipalities in designing and implementing Culture and Resilience Action Plans (CuReAPs). These plans prioritize cultural activities as a means of strengthening community ties, addressing local challenges, and promoting sustainable development.

The annual award, titled "BSR Cultural Pearls," is conferred to municipalities that demonstrate exceptional commitment to cultural resilience through well-developed action plans. The BSR Cultural Pearls title recipients for the year 2024 were Svendborg (Denmark), Kiel (Germany), Jakobstad/Pietarsaari (Finland), and Rūjiena (Latvia). These cities exemplify the program's objectives by tackling language barriers, empowering youth, addressing demographic challenges, and fostering community belonging. The international jury chose Smiltene (Latvia), Helsingborg (Sweden), Peipsiääre (Estonia), Płock (Poland), Alytus District (Lithuania), and Kaskinen – Kaskö (Finland) from among 14 candidates to be awarded the title for the year 2025.

## 1.2. Purpose and scope of the assignment



KEA was selected to design and develop a comprehensive evaluation framework for the BSR Cultural Pearls project, enabling stakeholders to systematically assess and measure the project's impacts and value creation. At the core of this assignment is the fundamental question: how can the added value of the Cultural Pearls award be effectively measured and captured within the involved communities and municipalities?

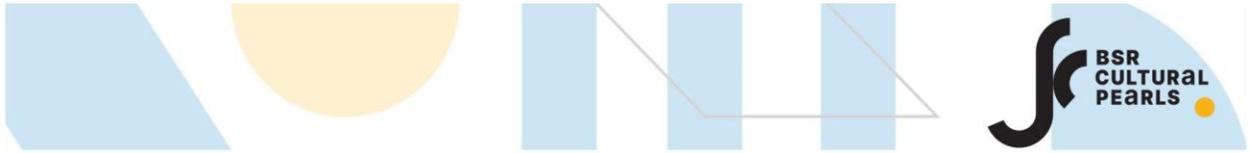
The assignment aims to provide a robust analysis of the project's impact, focusing on its role in promoting social resilience, fostering innovation, and strengthening community capacity. Furthermore, it seeks to identify key lessons learned, address challenges encountered during implementation and deliver actionable recommendations for improving future iterations. By its conclusion in November 2025, the evaluation team assessed both short-term achievements and the medium- to long-term legacy, with a particular emphasis on the award's tangible impacts within participating communities.

Specifically, this assignment addresses:

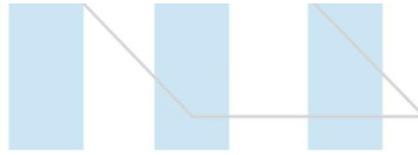
- The relevance and effectiveness of the project in achieving its objectives.
- The sustainability and scalability of its impacts across the BSR municipalities.
- Challenges encountered during implementation and measures to overcome them.
- Insights for refining the project's design and methodology.
- The development of additional resources and tools to support future iterations of the initiative, including the Self-Assessment Tool, Practical Guide, and Value Proposition document.

In line with the Terms of Reference, the evaluation was structured into two key phases. Phase 1 focused on the initial recipients of the award and the development of a robust framework for assessing outcomes. Phase 2 expanded this analysis to encompass subsequent recipients, while also exploring the project's long-term impacts and legacy. Also, during Phase 2 the evaluation team developed additional deliverables aim to translate the evaluation findings into practical, replicable instruments to empower municipalities and stakeholders to plan, measure and sustain the outcomes beyond the project's duration.

Collectively, these phases aim to contribute to a replicable and comprehensive methodology for evaluating cultural resilience and innovation projects in similar contexts. To achieve these objectives, the evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach that integrated both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. This methodology ensures a holistic understanding of the project's multifaceted impacts, enabling the



development of actionable insights that can inform the design of future cultural resilience initiatives.



## 2. Methodology

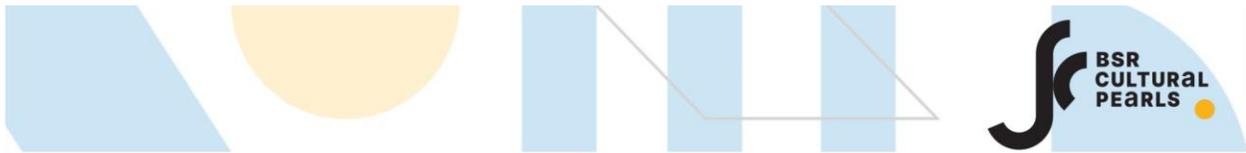
### 2.1. Assignment approach and rationale

The approach adopted for the development of the evaluation framework and the value output of the BSR Cultural Pearls was grounded in the foundational understanding that cultural initiatives have the potential to significantly enhance social resilience within communities. To achieve this, the evaluation framework integrated insights derived from an extensive literature review, which examined methodologies for assessing cultural impacts in fostering resilience, innovation, and sustainable community development. This process was participatory, involving a collaborative virtual workshop where the project coordination team provided valuable input. This engagement ensured that the methodological design reflected both theoretical rigor and practical relevance to the Cultural Pearls initiative.

The approach was closely aligned with the objectives outlined in the Call for Proposals, focusing on the systematic evaluation of the program's effectiveness, added value, impact, and sustainability. The methodological framework encompassed a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies to ensure a comprehensive assessment. Qualitative data collection focused on capturing the nuances of stakeholders lived experiences, perceptions, and insights, while quantitative elements drew on indicators to provide a structured basis for comparison.

The assignment spanned two distinct rounds of implementation. Phase 1 centred on developing and refining the evaluation framework while gathering data from the first round of Pearls title recipients. Phase 2 built upon these foundations to assess longer-term impacts and explore the broader implications of cultural interventions for social resilience. During Phase 2, additional deliverables were developed to consolidate the project's value outputs and to support future Cultural Pearls cycles. These included the Self-Assessment Tool, the Practical Guide for Future Cultural Pearls and Supporting Institutions, and the Value Proposition document. Together, these tools aimed to translate the evaluation findings into practical, replicable instruments that could empower municipalities and stakeholders to sustain and measure cultural value beyond the project's duration.

The **Self-Assessment Tool** was designed to enable current and future Cultural Pearls to evaluate their own progress and capacity. It featured a user-friendly format and clear indicators aligned with the project's strategic dimensions (cultural participation, community engagement, and sustainability). The tool incorporates a scoring system with



interpretive guidance, reflective prompts for qualitative insights, and optional benchmarking mechanisms to compare results across Pearls or project cycles.

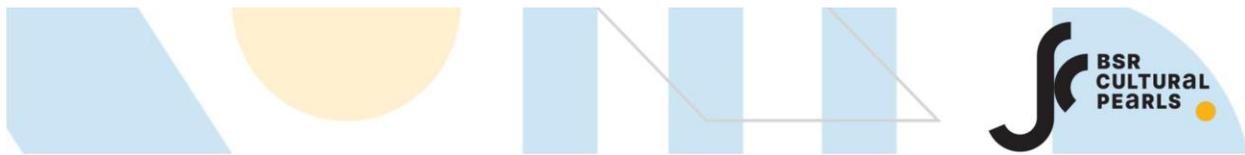
The **Practical Guide** serves as a roadmap for replication and adaptation, outlining step-by-step guidance from application to implementation. It documents roles and responsibilities and provides templates and checklists for planning and reporting. The guide also integrated lessons learned from the evaluation, particularly on stakeholder engagement, co-creation processes, and monitoring strategies.

Finally, the **Value Proposition** articulates the evaluation findings to different audiences, synthesising the project's core values, evidence of impact, and alignment with broader policy frameworks such as EU cultural strategies and the Sustainable Development Goals. Tailored sections address the specific interests of municipalities, cultural networks, and funding bodies, thereby strengthening the initiative's visibility and advocacy potential.

The rationale for this comprehensive approach was twofold: firstly, it provided a structured yet flexible framework to capture the multifaceted nature of cultural interventions; and secondly, it ensured that the evaluation process remained participatory, inclusive, and reflective of stakeholders' diverse perspectives. This participatory element was particularly important given the initiative's emphasis on fostering community engagement and collaboration. By embedding these principles into the evaluation design, the methodology not only assessed outcomes but also contributed to building shared understanding and capacity among stakeholders.

Based on the proposed study components and corresponding questions proposed in the assignment research design, this Evaluation Report is structured around three components:

Figure 1: Research design



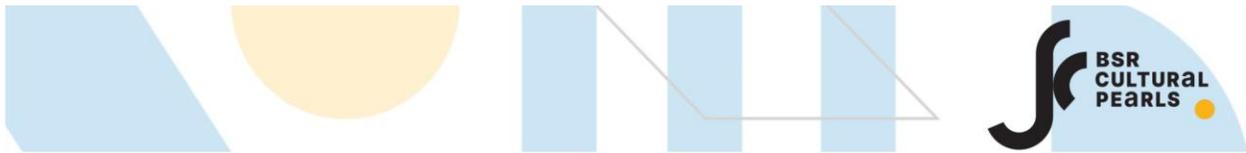
Study component	Study questions
A. Evaluation of the relevance and effectiveness of the BSR Cultural Pearls' actions and of the results achieved in the short-term.	Q1: What is the overall relevance and effectiveness of the BSR Cultural Pearls project, and its added value in promoting social resilience, innovation capacity, and community development in the short-term?
B. Evaluation of the relevance and effectiveness of the BSR Cultural Pearls' actions and of the impacts achieved in the medium/ long-term.	Q2: After one year, have the Pearls' actions left a legacy of social resilience, innovation capacity and community development in the territory? Q3: Are the Pearls' efforts in engaging the cultural and creative sectors in a common effort still active?
C. Evaluation of the main challenges and bottlenecks identified by relevant stakeholders.	Q4: What are the main challenges and lessons learned identified by relevant stakeholders (such as project recipients, mentors, or partners from project consortium)? Q5: What measures can be implemented to ensure and increase the future sustainability, relevance, and effectiveness of the project?

### 2.1.1. Component A: Evaluation of the relevance and effectiveness of the BSR Cultural Pearls' actions and the results achieved in the **short-term**

The assessment of the relevance and effectiveness of the BSR Cultural Pearls' actions in the short term has been significantly informed by a combination of secondary and primary data sources. The literature review provided a robust foundation by synthesizing insights from academic literature and past projects related to cultural impact and social resilience. These secondary sources offered theoretical and practical frameworks to understand how cultural initiatives can promote resilience, innovation capacity, and community development. Moreover, they provided benchmarks and comparative insights that enriched the evaluation's contextual depth.

Primary data collection further substantiated these findings. Specifically, the evaluation team reviewed CuReAPs, Seed Money Initiative Work Plans, and feedback questionnaires from Pearls participants. These documents provided granular insights into how municipalities implemented their initiatives and perceived their immediate outcomes. Interviews conducted with both the 2024 and 2025 BSR Pearls title recipients offered a direct account of their experiences, shedding light on the practical challenges and successes encountered during their title year.

As a methodological note, the consultations to capture short-term impacts were conducted in two distinct rounds, corresponding to the 2024 and 2025 award cycles. This sequential approach enabled the evaluation team to apply lessons learned from the first round to the



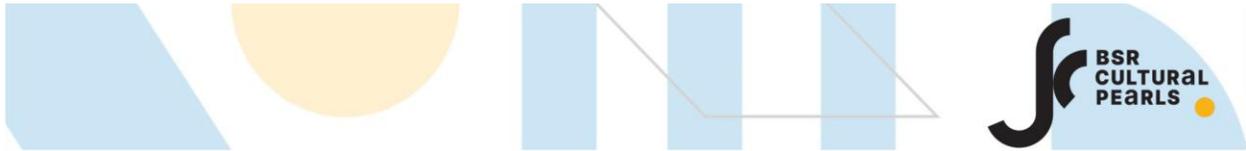
second. Specifically, interview protocols were refined to deepen inquiry into the relationship between cultural participation and social resilience, question phrasing was adjusted to elicit more context-specific examples, and greater emphasis was placed on exploring capacity-building dynamics within local administrations and community partners. This iterative process enhanced the robustness and comparability of findings across both cycles, while ensuring that emerging insights informed continuous methodological improvement.

Additionally, the online working session with project partners to refine the evaluation framework served as a critical opportunity for exploring different methodologies and their adequacy for the purpose of the assignment. At the event, the team was able to discuss and test the preliminary evaluation framework structure, its indicators and data collection strategy. The discussions helped to triangulate findings from the desk research.

### 2.1.2. Component B: Evaluation of the relevance and effectiveness of the BSR Cultural Pearls' action and of the impacts achieved in the **medium to long term**

Component B shifts the analytical focus from short-term outputs to the medium- and long-term consequences of the Cultural Pearls programme. The central evaluative questions concern the extent to which programme interventions have been institutionalised within municipal governance structures, whether they have influenced administrative discourse and strategic priorities, and whether communities continue to identify with the resilience-building trajectories initiated during the award year. This component seeks to trace patterns of continuity manifested in the persistence of participatory practices, the durability of cross-sectoral partnerships, and the degree to which cultural resilience has evolved from a rhetorical construct into an operational principle.

To address these questions, the evaluation employed a qualitative, longitudinal design. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with all 2024 title recipients approximately twelve months after the conclusion of their award year. Interview participants included municipal officials and cultural practitioners engaged in Pearl-related activities. The interview protocol explored perceived changes in visibility and reputation, the integration of cultural resilience frameworks into broader municipal strategies, and the enduring symbolic and practical value of the title in fostering local pride and identity. Respondents were also invited to reflect on the sustainability of implemented actions, the evolution of partnerships with cultural and creative sectors, and any observed spillover effects within neighbouring cities or policy domains.



To enhance validity, these qualitative insights were triangulated with secondary sources, including project reports, and publicly available materials. The synthesis of these data provides an evidence-based assessment of the programme’s relevance and effectiveness in shaping medium- to long-term impacts across three core dimensions: community development, innovation capacity, and health and well-being.

### 2.1.3. Component C: Evaluation of the main **challenges** and **bottlenecks** identified by relevant stakeholders

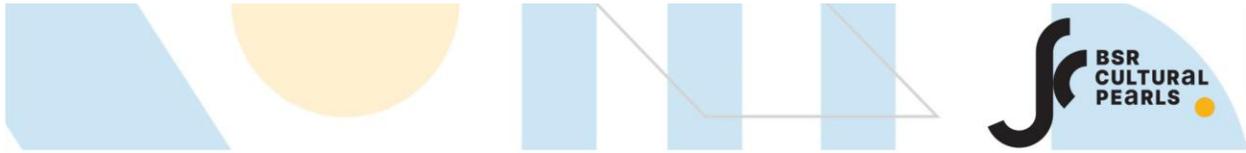
The analysis of challenges and bottlenecks encountered during the implementation of the project drew from a mix of secondary and primary data sources. Insights from desk research, including internal evaluations conducted by project partners and the Pearls themselves, formed the foundational layer of this analysis. These documents captured recurring themes and issues, such as community engagement strategies and the feasibility of implementing some of the monitoring tools suggested. This analysis was complemented by qualitative data obtained complementary bodies of evidence: the 2024 title-holders’ follow-up interviews, the 2025 Pearls’ mid-cycle reflections, and the focus groups involving mentors and project partners assessing success factors and challenges from the project’s key components: the Seed Money Initiative and the peer-learning programme.

By integrating these insights, the evaluation identified areas for improvement and generated actionable recommendations to enhance the project’s sustainability, relevance, and effectiveness in future iterations. This approach ensured that the findings were both evidence-based and reflective of the diverse experiences of key stakeholders.

## 2.2. Evaluation phases and data collection processes

### 2.2.1. Phase 1: Framework development and preliminary data collection

Phase 1 commenced in November 2024 with the inception phase, which set the groundwork for the evaluation. During this period, the evaluation team conducted preliminary desk research to identify relevant sources and refine the methodological approach. This initial scoping process included an analysis of key project documents such as the BSR Cultural Pearls Guidebook, the Seed Money Initiative Roadmap, and the 2024 Pearls CuReAPs. This review provided essential context for understanding the initiative’s goals, processes, and



expected outcomes, which were aligned during the Kick-off Meeting (KOM) with NDPC on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

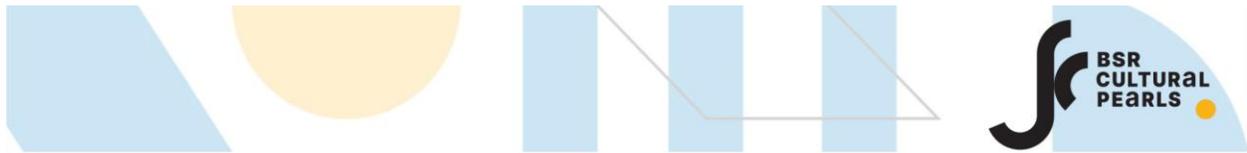
During the meeting, the evaluation team presented its methodological proposals, soliciting feedback from participants to ensure alignment with the client's priorities and expectations. Discussions covered project governance, data collection strategies, and the selection of key stakeholders for interviews and focus groups. This collaborative process enabled the team to finalize its approach and establish a clear roadmap for subsequent activities.

The desk research phase was complemented by a comprehensive literature review, which synthesised existing knowledge on culture-driven social resilience. This review examined more than forty academic and policy-oriented sources, focusing on methodologies, frameworks, and indicators relevant to the BSR Cultural Pearls evaluation framework. The findings informed the design of data collection instruments, evaluation questions, and indicators, and contextualised the assignment within broader regional and thematic dynamics.

Primary data collection, conducted between November 2024 and January 2025, involved in-depth interviews with representatives from the 2024 Pearls and focus groups with mentors and project partners. These methods were selected to capture qualitative insights into the program's implementation and impact. Interviews were conducted with representatives of the four awarded municipalities, focusing on their experiences during their title year, the design and execution of their CuReAPs, and the challenges they encountered. With this, the evaluation team was able not only to assess the award's impact but also inquire about what this evaluation framework should prioritize and the municipalities capabilities of implementing the proposed monitoring tool in the future.

Two focus groups were conducted to gather insights on project implementation and impact. The first, held on 23 January 2025, involved mentoring organisations responsible for guiding municipalities; the second, on 27 January 2025, engaged project partners. Participants discussed how the project had influenced social cohesion, shared best practices in cultural programming, and reflected on structural obstacles such as stakeholder engagement and financial sustainability.

To ensure a rigorous and systematic approach to data collection, the evaluation team developed tailored interview and focus group protocols. These protocols were informed by the findings of the desk research and literature review, as well as continuous feedback from NDPC. Questions were designed to elicit detailed and context-specific responses, enabling the team to explore key themes such as the effectiveness of cultural interventions, the



sustainability of outcomes, and the broader implications for social resilience. Data from these sessions were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and draw meaningful conclusions.

These activities were complemented by a working session on 9 December 2024, during which KEA presented and tested different methodological approaches. The session used an interactive Miro board to refine the logic flow between activities, outputs, and outcomes, and to discuss the three dimensions of social resilience identified by the research team. Participants provided feedback on the proposed indicators and tools, ensuring their alignment with both theoretical and practical needs.

### 2.2.2. Phase 2: Evaluation, consolidation, and capacity-building outputs

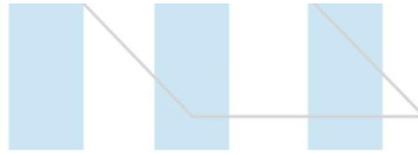
Phase 2, implemented between September and November 2025, focused on applying and refining the evaluation framework to the second round of Cultural Pearls, as well as conducting a longitudinal assessment of the first round's outcomes. It also included the development of key outputs designed to extend the project's impact and legacy.

During this phase, the evaluation team produced this final evaluation report and additional outputs: the Self-Assessment Tool, the Practical Guide, and the Value Proposition. These deliverables were developed in consultation with the NDPC and project partners, drawing on the lessons and data gathered from Phase 1 and exchanges regarding the most useful tools for future iterations of the project. The self-assessment tool operationalised the evaluation framework developed and applied in the context of this evaluation into a usable format; the practical guide translated project learnings into a roadmap for replication; and the value proposition articulated the initiative's strategic vision and societal benefits.

Before finalising the second phase of the evaluation, KEA delivered a presentation during the Macro-Regional Strategies (MRS) Days held in Brussels on 25 September 2025<sup>1</sup>, where representatives from different macro-regions gathered to discuss the shared interest in social resilience and the role of culture in fostering it. This occasion provided a platform for KEA to present preliminary findings from Phase 1 of the evaluation and the Value Proposition.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/whats-new/conferences/EU-strategies-days-2025\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/whats-new/conferences/EU-strategies-days-2025_en)



## 3. Literature review

The research team undertook an extensive literature review consisting of a total of 44 sources. The sources identified included both internal and external sources to the project. Of the sources identified, 39 were external sources and 5 were sources internal to the project, either developed and published or made available to the research team by NDPC. Of the external sources, 28 were academic papers, one was a preliminary study, 1 was a guidebook, 6 were reports, 2 were books, and 1 was a website. All the sources had been published in the last twenty years, with publications spanning from 2005 to 2024, and most of the sources were published in the last ten years. The sources internal to the project were found on the BSR Cultural Pearls Resources website. Internal unpublished documents were provided by NDPC via a secure link. Academic resources were collected from academic databases using Boolean operators and including terms such as “evaluation” AND “social”, etc.

### 3.1. Findings of the literature review

#### 3.1.1. The social dimension of impact

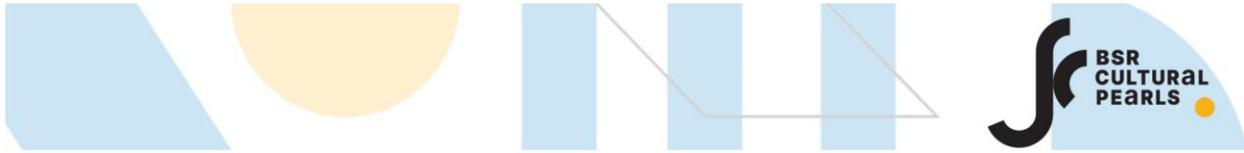
The Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) are an important sector worldwide. Not only do they represent a significant part of the economy, but they directly improve the lives of people, they foster sustainable urban development, support creativity and culture, and advocate for the implementation of the 2030 agenda. Apart from their tangible value (in the form of tangible outputs such as artworks or artisanal products), the CCIs have an important intangible value. They actively promote values such as social inclusion, encourage dialogue and foster community engagement. In addition, sustainable human development is often driven and enabled by culture<sup>2</sup>.

According to Dick Stanley, the social effects of culture, arts, and heritage can be broadly summarised in six effects: enhancing understanding and capacity for action; creating and retaining identity, modifying values and preferences for collective choice, building social cohesion, contributing to community development, and fostering civic participation<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Klein, M. E., Gerlitz, L., Gutowska, E., & Gutowski, P. (2021). Creative and Culture Industry in Baltic Sea Region Condition and Future.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley, D. (2006). Introduction: The Social Effects of Culture. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 31(1).



In the BSR Cultural Pearls project, culture is understood as a mean to strengthen communities, as well as a tool to provide communities with the capacities to be active, inclusive, and engaged. Culture is especially powerful in that it fosters engagement in community members, ideally also reaching those that usually do not participate in public events<sup>4</sup>. This capacity of culture to drive social interactions is useful to foster social resilience. Here, the project understands social resilience as

” the ability of individuals, communities, and societies to withstand and recover from social, economic and environmental shocks and stresses. It involves capacity to adapt and learn from these challenges as well as to maintain or improve social and economic well-being. In simple terms, social resilience is about a community’s ability to overcome hardship together.”<sup>5</sup>

In the Baltic Sea Region, common challenges include climate change, urbanization, economic downturn, segregation, aging society or political tensions.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.1.2. Measuring social impact

Measuring the social impact of cultural interventions is difficult and complex, because the value of such interventions is difficult to monetise. This is especially true for cases in which value is produced indirectly, or where value cannot be measured<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, it is crucial for social enterprises to assess their social impact. Funders are interested in getting guidance on the optimal allocation of their limited resources, and they are concerned about accountability<sup>8</sup>. Concurrently, organisations are expected to be transparent about their social activities by all their stakeholders, and to provide information on their impact in a valid and reliable manner<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Cultural Pearls. Guidebook for Social Resilience

<sup>5</sup> Cultural Pearls. Guidebook for Social Resilience, page 9

<sup>6</sup> Cultural Pearls. Guidebook for Social Resilience

<sup>7</sup> Damtoft, N.F., Lueg, R., van Liempd, D., Nielsen, J.G. (2023). A Critical Perspective on the Measurement of Social Value Through SROI. In: Nikolakis, W., Moura da Veiga, R. (eds) Social Value, Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship: Insights from Theory and Practice. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2_2)

<sup>8</sup> Mook, L., Chan, A., & Kershaw, D. (2015). Measuring social enterprise value creation. In: Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 26(2), 189–207.

<sup>9</sup> amtoft, N.F., Lueg, R., van Liempd, D., Nielsen, J.G. (2023). A Critical Perspective on the Measurement of Social Value Through SROI. In: Nikolakis, W., Moura da Veiga, R. (eds) Social Value, Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship: Insights from Theory and Practice. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2_2)



In the CCIs, stakeholders have struggled to find the right evaluation methodologies and approaches for their projects<sup>10</sup>. In contrast to most programme evaluations, CCI programmes have an added layer of difficulty: their multiple strands (economic, political and social) make it difficult to evaluate projects holistically. In addition, these network constellations are co-constructed in a collaborative process by diverse stakeholders, and they evolve over the course of the initiative<sup>11</sup>. Because of this complex setting, most of the cultural evaluations face value tensions in the evaluation process, that need to be addressed for the project to run smoothly<sup>12</sup>.

The European Commission funded project UNCHARTED, listed three types of tensions that can arise in evaluation processes in their report “Conflicting dynamic of valuation in the cultural sphere” (2023):

- a. Variation in valuation: A tension exists between cultural evaluations (which focus on emotions, expressions, and sensations) and social evaluations (which focus on identity, political, and relational). The resolution of this type of conflict is contingent on habits, individual contexts and content.
- b. Axial tension between actors: Cultural projects tend to include actors from diverse backgrounds, involved at different stages of the evaluation process, and with potentially conflicting personal values and interests. The possible solutions are twofold: on the one hand, evaluators can choose to exclude one of the actors supporting one of the poles of the debate. However, this leads to polarisation. On the other hand, evaluators can choose to integrate different value regimes and reframe the conflictual situation into positive terms.
- c. Evaluative tool tension: In the case that stakeholders do not agree on the methodology and appropriate indicators for an evaluation, this can cause evaluative tool tensions. This tension can be resolved by adapting the format and the dynamic of the evaluation through the mediation of public managers and making the evaluation a participatory and accessible process.<sup>13</sup>

These factors have led to the development of some standardised tools that are commonly employed in evaluations of cultural projects, adapted to specific needs and aimed at reducing tensions. Tools commonly employed in evaluations include qualifications,

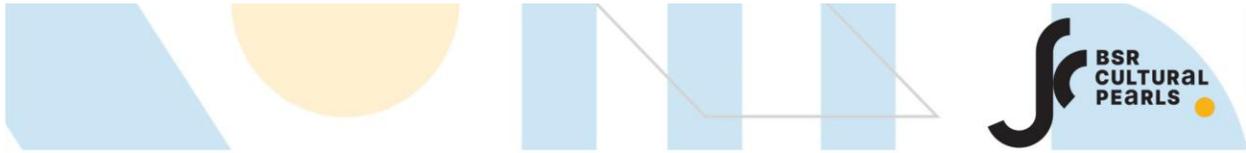
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<sup>10</sup>Connell, J. P., & Kubisch, A. C. (n.d.). Applying a Theory of change approach to the evaluation of comprehensive community initiatives: progress, prospects, and problems.

<sup>11</sup>Connell, J. P., & Kubisch, A. C. (n.d.). Applying a Theory of change approach to the evaluation of comprehensive community initiatives: progress, prospects, and problems.

<sup>12</sup> UNCHARTED, European Commission. Report on the conflicting dynamic of valuation in the cultural sphere (2023)

<sup>13</sup> UNCHARTED, European Commission. Report on the conflicting dynamic of valuation in the cultural sphere (2023)



professional criteria, evaluation guides, quantitative indicators, and qualitative indicators<sup>14</sup>. In general, evaluation tools become more diversified the more actors and organisations are involved in the process of evaluation. In addition, evaluation tools become more specialised when external actors carry out the evaluation, and when projects count on funding.

The most widespread methodologies are Theory of Change (ToC), the Most Significant Change, Social Impact Assessment, and Social Return on Investment.

### *Theory of change*

ToC is a useful tool to evaluate the overall functioning of a given project. According to Moon, Chan & Kershaw, “a ToC starts with long-term goals and then uses backward mapping to identify the preconditions and interventions necessary to achieve that goal. It is completed to understand how, when and why good is being done.”<sup>15</sup>

This approach for evaluating cultural projects in the CCIs is carried out in three stages:

- i. Surfacing and articulating a ToC
- ii. Measuring the project’s activities and intended outcomes
- iii. Analysing and interpreting the results of an evaluation, including their implications for adjusting the initiative’s ToC and its allocation of resources.<sup>16</sup>

For the CCIs, Connell & Kubisch define a ToC evaluation as “a systematic and cumulative study of the links between activities, outcomes, and contexts of the initiative”.<sup>17</sup> According to the authors, a good ToC should include three attributes:

- i. It should be **plausible**. Project stakeholders should ask whether the available evidence and common sense suggest that the activities (should they be implemented) will lead to the desired outcomes.
- ii. It should be **doable**. Project stakeholders should understand whether the initiative possesses the necessary economic, technical, political, institutional and human resources needed to carry out the initiative.

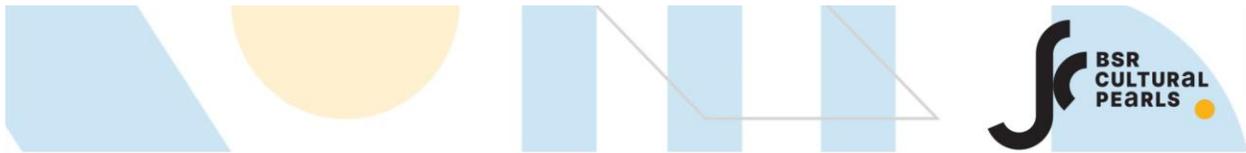
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<sup>14</sup> UNCHARTED, European Commission. Report on the conflicting dynamic of valuation in the cultural sphere (2023)

<sup>15</sup> Measuring Social Enterprise Value Creation: The Case of Furniture Bank. Mook, L., Chan, A., & Kershaw, D. (2015). Measuring social enterprise value creation. In: Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 26(2), 189–207: 192

<sup>16</sup> Connell, J. P., & Kubisch, A. C. (n.d.). Applying a Theory of change approach to the evaluation of comprehensive community initiatives: progress, prospects, and problems.

<sup>17</sup> Idem.



- iii. It should be **testable**. Project stakeholders should make sure that the ToC is specific and complete enough that an evaluator can track its progress in credible and useful ways.<sup>18</sup>

The authors recommend including the following questions into the planning process:

- *What longer-term outcomes does the CCI seek to accomplish?*
- *What interim outcomes and contextual conditions are necessary and sufficient to produce those longer-term outcomes, beginning with penultimate outcomes and moving through intermediate to early outcomes?*
- *What activities should be initiated and what contextual supports are necessary to achieve the early and intermediate outcomes?*
- *What resources are required to implement the activities and maintain the contextual supports necessary for the activities to be effective, and how does the initiative gain the commitment of those resources?<sup>19</sup>*

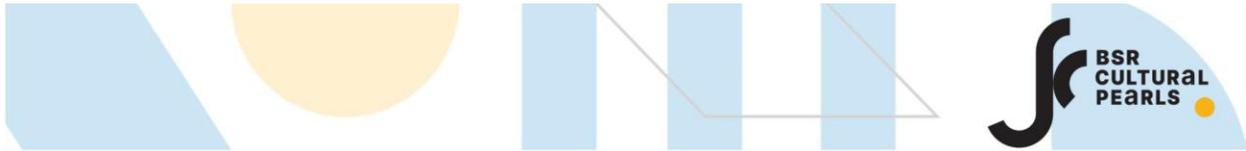
Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of employing the ToC methodology for CCI project evaluations:

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Provides a clear framework (explanation of complex pathways + identification of assumptions)	Over-simplification risk (causal explanation when interlinked)
Facilitates stakeholder alignment (and thus reduces potential tensions)	Resource intensive
Well adapted for monitoring and evaluation (provides structure for measurement and identifies gaps)	Potential for conflict
Builds accountability	Challenges in Measurement

The ToC methodology presents several advantages for their use in evaluations but also disadvantages. One significant advantage is that it supports the idea that projects should be evaluated as processes. With this approach, evaluators try to understand not only if

<sup>18</sup> Idem.

<sup>19</sup> Idem.



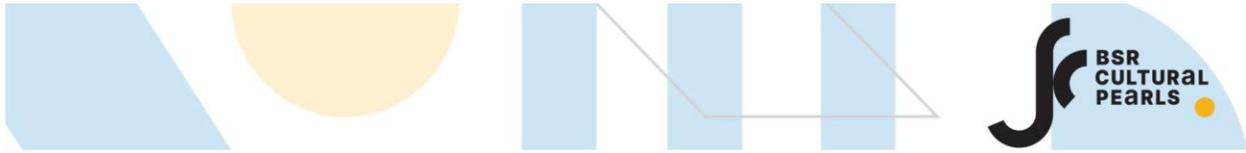
activities produced change, but also how and why<sup>20</sup>. Through it, evaluators can identify more clearly what to measure, which helps to guide choices about the right moment and the right tools to measure the identified elements. In addition, a ToC clarifies accountability adjudication. If a ToC is explicit, the accountability structure will also be explicit and consensually validated. By articulating a ToC in the beginning of a project and achieving an agreement on the theory by all the stakeholders, tensions associated to causal attribution of impact can be reduced. According to the authors, this builds accountability, facilitates evaluating the project, and supports stakeholder alignment.

However, ToC also presents several disadvantages. Evaluating CCI projects is a complicated enterprise, mainly because of the different planes of impact (social, economic, or political) present, as well as potentially differing values and interests that different stakeholders might have. In an evaluation scenario, this can lead to challenges in measuring the project. A possible problem might be the attempt to mitigate this complication by overly simplifying the evaluation context and deriving causal explanations for interlinked matters. Disagreements between stakeholders might arise when identifying intermediate outcomes, which can be a politically loaded process<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Connell, J. P., & Kubisch, A. C. (n.d.). Applying a Theory of change approach to the evaluation of comprehensive community initiatives: progress, prospects, and problems.

<sup>21</sup> Connell, J. P., & Kubisch, A. C. (n.d.). Applying a Theory of change approach to the evaluation of comprehensive community initiatives: progress, prospects, and problems.



## 4. Building the evaluation framework

### 4.1. Choosing the right evaluation methodology for BSR Cultural Pearls

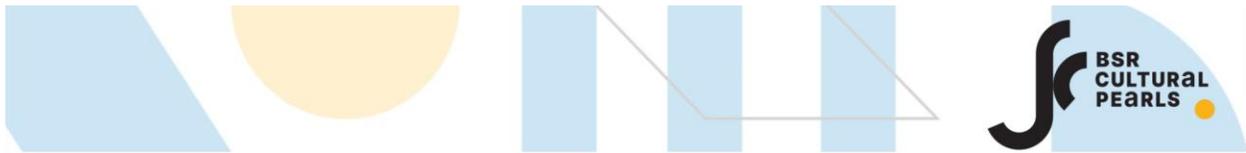
For coherence and clarity, the assessment of various the methodologies analysed, along with their respective advantages and disadvantages, are presented in Annex 1: Comparative Analysis of Cultural Impact Evaluation Methods. This annex compiles the main findings of the literature review, providing a structured comparison of different approaches, including Social Impact Assessment (SIA), Most Significant Change (MSC), and Social Return on Investment (SROI). By consolidating this analysis, we aim to offer a comprehensive reference for selecting the most appropriate evaluation framework for cultural resilience projects. After careful consideration and discussions during the interactive working session on December 09, 2024, the research team concluded that the most adequate methodology for evaluating Cultural Pearl's impacts and interventions is the ToC.

While SROI is one of the most quantitative tools available, it relies on proxies and calculations that are often unique to the case study being analysed. As a result, the methodology does not provide a robust basis for comparison. Calculating Pearls' SROI would require extensive resources and knowledge of how to create proxies, which may not be readily available. Therefore, the research team does not consider this to be an appropriate methodology for evaluating BSR Cultural Pearl's interventions.

Social Impact Engagement is a common evaluation tool used primarily to assess the sustainability of a project. It is best suited to large, complex projects that require technical analysis. While SIA is a relatively quick tool where the appropriate infrastructure is in place, and can provide important insights as a predictive tool, it is not a suitable tool for conducting ex-post evaluations.

The Most Significant Change methodology is an excellent tool for engaging the community and stakeholders through the technique of storytelling. However, relying solely on the Most Significant Change methodology can lead to a biased view of the context being evaluated. To avoid this, it should always be used in conjunction with other methodologies.

For the BSR Cultural Pearls project, ToC is an appropriate methodology because it can be easily adapted to different scenarios. It is a tool that provides a clear framework and can help break down complex pathways. In addition, evaluations using ToC measure outcomes against planned initiatives. This is particularly useful in the context of evaluations of cultural interventions, which often include elements that are difficult to quantify. Given the diverse and multifaceted nature of Pearls' interventions, the research team believes that basing an



evaluation framework on a ToC approach will ensure replicability across Pearls and provide a robust framework.

This does not mean that this methodology should be used exclusively. The research team will provide an evaluation framework based on this methodology, which can be supplemented on a case-by-case basis as the capacity of individual Pearls allows. In particular, the research team believes that the Most Significant Change methodology could be a good complement to the evaluation framework developed.

## 4.2. Indicators

The initial literature review and desk research, together with a participatory working session with the representatives from the Council of the Baltic Sea States and of NDPC, allowed for the development of a set of indicators to measure the social impact generated in the implementation phase of the CuReAPs, and to exchange views on the evaluation framework, specifically the impacts and outcomes selected and developed. It was conducted using Miro Board and divided into three exercises:

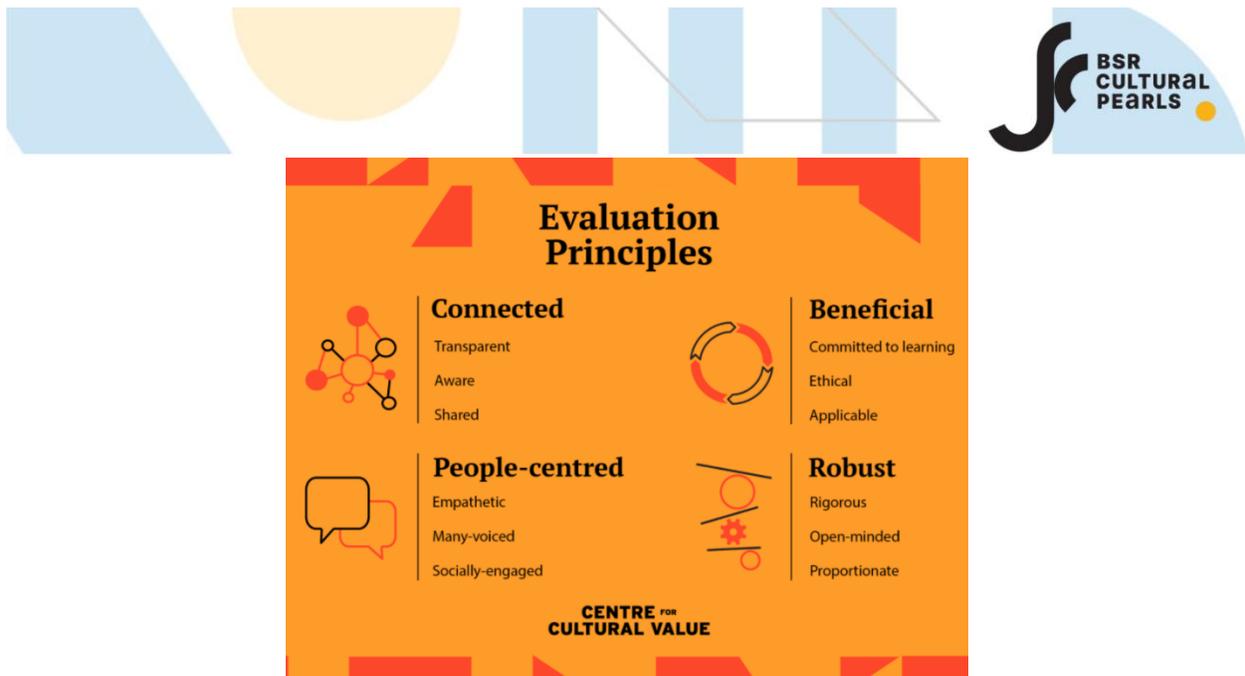
The first board on Miro outlined the evaluation principles KEA adopted for assessing the BSR Cultural Pearls. These principles also serve as a guide for the Pearls to develop their CuReAPs, monitor and report their activities in the future. It is built from four principles which emphasize that evaluations should be:

- Beneficial — committed to learning, ethical, and applicable;
- Robust — rigorous, open-minded, and proportionate;
- People-centred — empathetic, many voiced, and socially engaged;
- Connected — transparent, aware, and shared.

Figure 2: Evaluation Principles as informed by the Centre for Cultural Value<sup>22</sup>

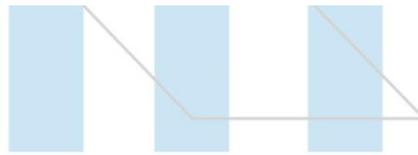
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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.culturalvalue.org.uk/our-work/evaluation/evaluation-principles/>



The second exercise focused on validating the impact chain model to be applied in the BSR Cultural Pearls' evaluation framework. Every project activity requires, on one hand, resources and inputs to be implemented, including infrastructure, staff, knowledge and skills, narratives and discourses, and norms and regulations. On the other hand, it produces outputs in the short term, outcomes in the medium term, and impacts in the long run. Whereas outputs are more easily measurable through quantitative indicators, outcomes and impacts are more difficult to grasp due to their qualitative nature. Evaluation tools to measure outputs, outcomes, and impacts must be carefully designed to ensure proper data collection and analysis. Evaluation tools must be carefully conceived to measure these levels effectively. During the workshop, participants provided feedback on two main points:

- i. **Ex-ante and Ex-post evaluation:** Participants discussed the feasibility of conducting evaluations before and after project implementation to compare baseline and final benchmarks. It emerged that awarded Pearls often lack experience in impact evaluations. As a result, a simplified approach with a single round of data collection and analysis was considered the most practical solution.
- ii. **Flexibility in the evaluation framework:** Participants debated the level of openness in the evaluation framework. Since municipalities differ in their experience and capacity to assess project impacts, KEA will develop a detailed, ready-to-use evaluation framework. However, municipalities with sufficient expertise will have the option to adapt the framework to suit their local context and needs.



Impact chain (8 minutes)

### Discussion

1. General impressions and/or comments?
2. Evaluations can be ex-ante (baseline), in itinere, and ex-post. In the case of awarded Pearls, do you think it is feasible to envision both an ex-ante and an ex-post evaluation?
3. How much do we want to keep it open and leave Cultural Pearls the space to craft their own indicators and evaluation tools?

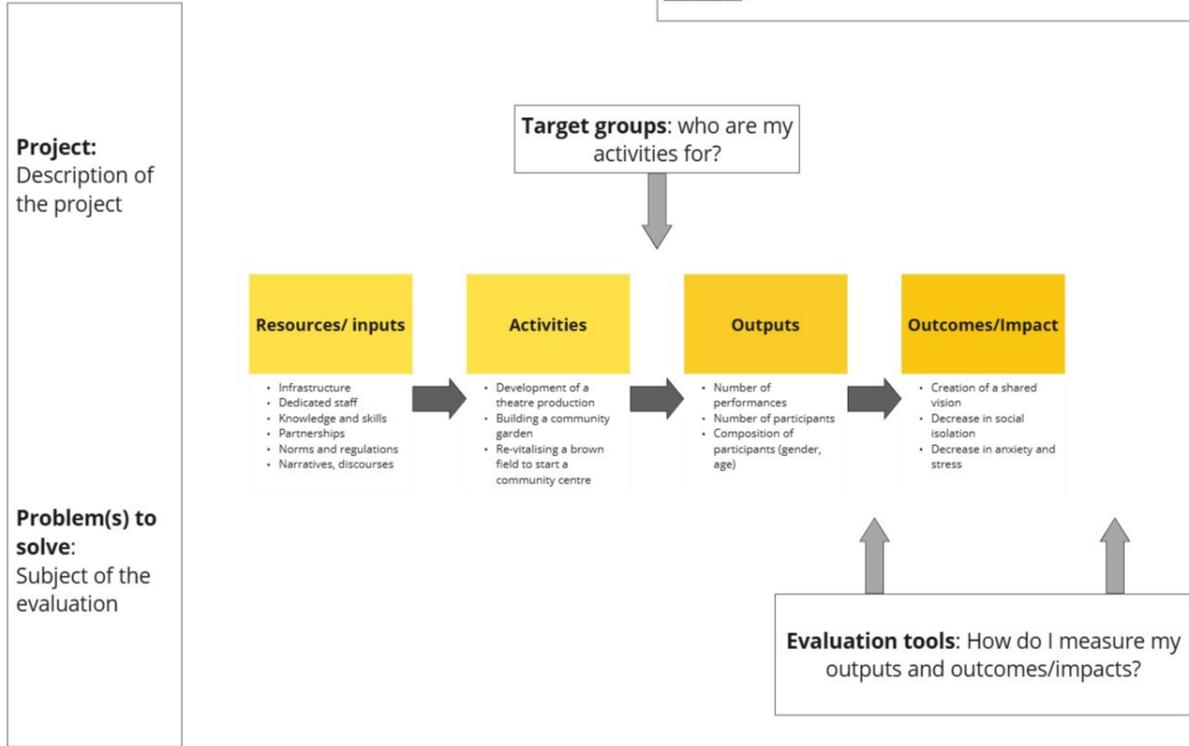
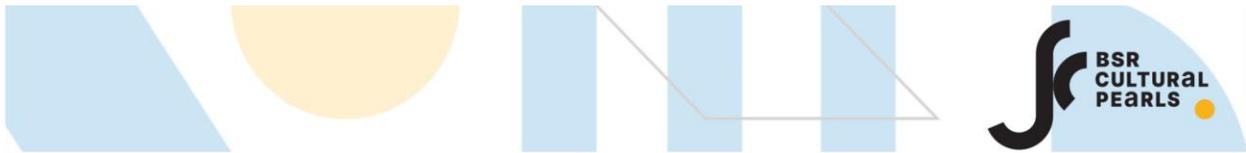


Figure 3: Impact chain exercise

In the third and final exercise, a concentric model was presented where the inner core is constituted by the impact that the CuReAPs aim at generating — **social resilience**. In the middle circle, a set of outcomes have been selected from literature for their ability to generate social resilience. These 27 outcomes pertain to three main dimensions — **(i) innovation capacity, (ii) community development, and (iii) health and well-being**. The **outer circle** includes specific project activities designed to achieve the identified outcomes and, ultimately, the core impact of social resilience. During the workshop, participants were asked to reflect upon the following questions:

- *Are the outcomes clearly formulated?*
- *Are the outcomes relevant?*
- *Is there any relevant outcome missing?*
- *Is there any missing dimension of impact?*



Participants provided feedback by adding post it notes to the Miro board, positioning their suggestions next to relevant outcomes, and discussing their observations openly.

### Definition

**Social resilience:** Social resilience refers to the ability of individuals, communities, and societies to withstand and recover from social, economic and environmental shocks and stresses. It involves capacity to adapt and learn from these challenges as well as to maintain or improve social and economic well-being. In simple terms, social resilience is about a community's ability to overcome hardship together.

### Exercise (5 min.)

1. Read carefully each outcome.
2. Reflect upon the following questions:
  - Are the outcomes clearly formulated?
  - Are the outcomes relevant?
  - Is there any relevant outcome missing?
  - Is there any missing dimension of impact?
3. Write down your answers on post-its and drag them close to the outcome they refer to.

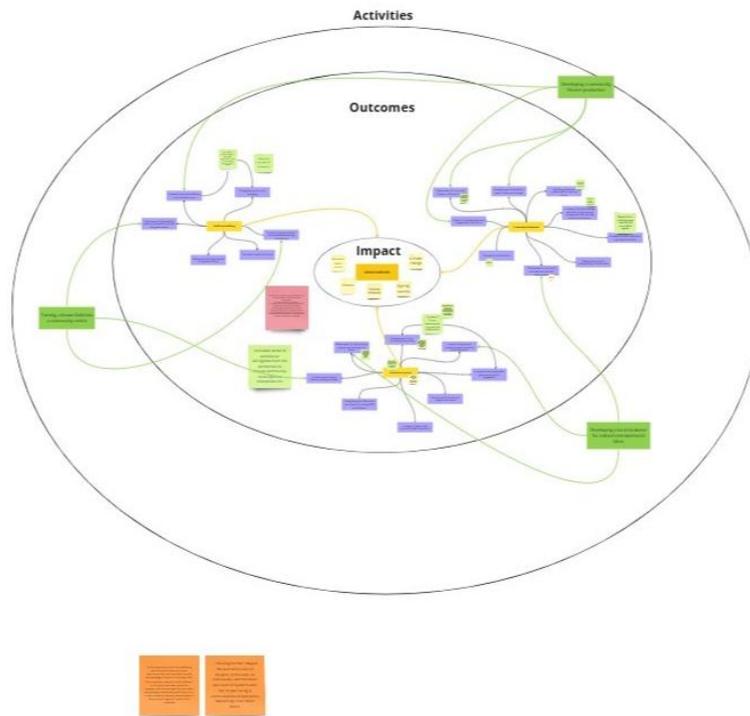
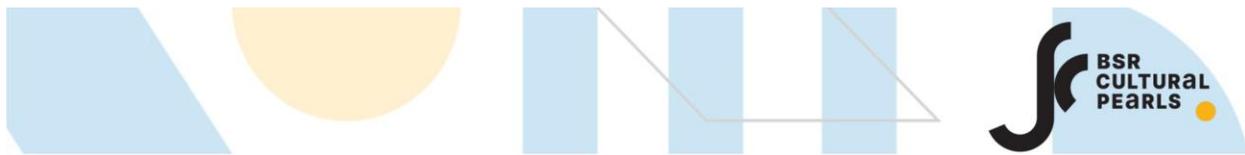


Figure 4: Pathways towards social resilience

## 4.3. The evaluation framework

The participatory workshop led to the validation and refinement of **27 outcomes**. For each outcome:

- A maximum of three indicators (quantitative and qualitative) were developed.
- Each indicator was paired with corresponding evaluation questions.
- Target groups (e.g., communities, municipalities, or both) were identified as the primary beneficiaries from whom data will be collected.
- Suitable data collection tools were proposed to gather the necessary information for each outcome. From interviews and focus groups, it emerged that the most appropriate data collection tool targeted at communities is mentor-guided group discussions or focus groups. According to the interviewees, written surveys or



questionnaires would hinder people’s engagement and participation. It was suggested that interviews could serve as a beneficial data collection tool for municipalities, provided the project’s budget allows for the involvement of external consultants. As an alternative, written questionnaires could be utilized to gather the necessary data.

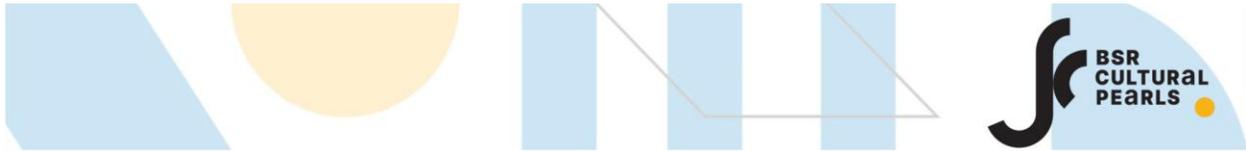
This structured approach ensures that the evaluation framework is both comprehensive and adaptable, providing a solid foundation for assessing the impact of the BSR Cultural Pearls projects while allowing flexibility for varying local capacities. Written questionnaires are particularly suited to collecting data from the awarded municipalities, as they align well with the quantitative nature of the indicators used to measure impacts at the municipal level. Conversely, impacts on communities, which rely more on qualitative indicators, would benefit from methods such as interviews or focus groups to provide richer, context-specific insights.

The achievement or non-achievement of the 27 outcomes will be assessed through 66 indicators in total, of which 43 are qualitative in nature and 23 quantitative. It is important to note that while some indicators are classified as quantitative, they are designed to gather qualitative insights using Likert scales (ranging from 1 to 5). These scales help translate complex qualitative phenomena into measurable data, making the results clear and accessible to the target audiences.

Furthermore, 28 of the total indicators aim at collecting relevant evaluation data from the municipalities, whereas 24 from the communities on whom the awarded projects seek to have an impact, and 14 to both.

Target	Data collection tool	Qualitative indicators	Quantitative indicators	Total
Community	Group discussion	23	1	<b>24</b>
Municipality	Survey	6	22	<b>28</b>
Both	Survey, Group discussion	14	0	<b>14</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>43</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>66</b>

The framework operationalises a theory of change in which culture-led participation is expected to strengthen community development, improve health and well-being, and build innovation capacity at municipal and neighbourhood levels. It is designed to move beyond activity counting by capturing changes in practices, relationships, and governance arrangements, and by differentiating between symbolic continuity (residual artefacts,



reputational effects) and substantive continuity (institutionalisation of methods, routinisation of partnerships, and scaling).

### 4.3.1. Dimensions and Outcomes cluster

#### *i. Dimension I: Community Development*

Strengthening the community is one of the most effective outcomes that leads to the generation of social resilience and social cohesion in communities. But how to achieve it? And most importantly for the purpose of this report, how to measure the development of community values?

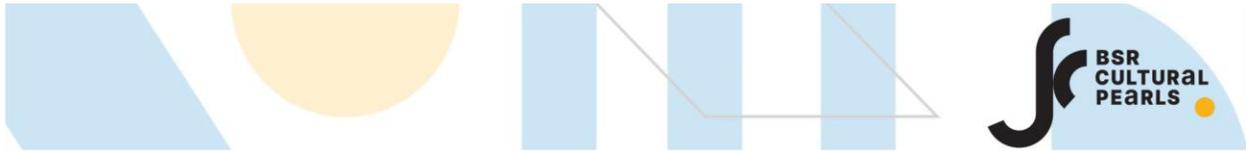
The research team has identified ten specific outcomes, each with their indicators and related evaluation questions. The linked outcomes include strengthening local identity and sense of place; alignment around shared values; skills and knowledge transfer; constructive handling of conflict; empowerment and agency; inclusion; shared futures; social capital and trust; and civic responsibility. For example, indicators cover the number and type of heritage-focused activities, with follow-up prompts on how heritage was used in practice (story development, craft, intergenerational exchange), and qualitative self-reports of pride and place attachment from participants.

#### **Strengthening local identity, sense of place, and heritage**

A useful indicator to measure community development is the ability to strengthen the local identity of a place, by increasing a community's sense of place and local pride. The research team has identified two indicators for this outcome: (1) the number and type of project activities focusing on local heritage; and (2) the increase of local identity, pride and sense of place by community members. The first indicator is quantitative and can be measured by looking at how many project initiatives and activities involved local heritage. The second indicator is qualitative and can be measured by asking community members in a group discussion if they felt that their sense of pride in their local identity increased after participating in the project activities. In addition, if the community members felt a greater connection to their municipality after participating in the project.

#### **Developing and/or strengthening shared values**

The development and/or strengthening of shared values can be measured in a qualitative way. One important indicator is the level of agreement on key shared values within a community. After an intervention, one would expect the key shared values of a community to be better aligned. This can be tested by asking community members what the most important values that need to be shared within a community are for them. In addition,



community members can be directly asked if shared community values are better aligned among project's participants because of the project. This question examines the perception of increased alignment on shared values within a community.

**Increase in knowledge and skills through training (intergenerational) learning practices, dialogue.**

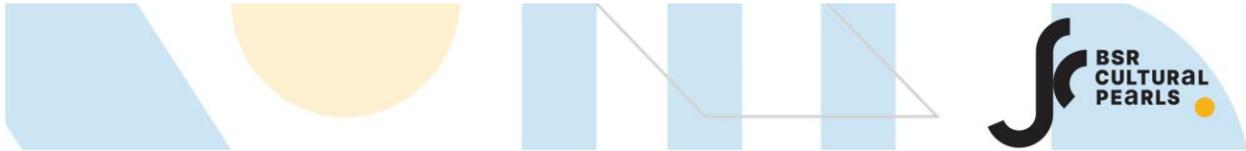
Community development can also be measured by analysing the increase in knowledge and skills achieved through trainings, (intergenerational) learning practices, and dialogue. For this outcome, the research outcome has identified three indicators (two quantitative and one qualitative): (1) the number of trainings, workshops and learning practices conducted as part of the project, (2) the number of people participating in trainings, workshops, and learning practices, as well as (3) the community's perception of new knowledge and skills acquired. The first two can be measured by counting the conducted interventions and gathering the data on the number of participants. The last indicator can be evaluated by asking the community members if they have acquired new skills and knowledge because of taking part in the project's activities.

**Increase in openness to raise awareness around and discuss conflicting issues**

Another measurable outcome of an intervention directed at fostering community development is the increase in openness to raise awareness around and discuss conflicting issues. This outcome can be measured in a qualitative way through three identified indicators: (1) the type of conflicting issues openly addressed and discussed, (2) the perception of the increase in openness to raise awareness and discuss conflicting issues, and (3) the resulting outcome from the open conversation and discussion. Questions to be asked to the municipality and the community members include if the project activities facilitated the open discussion of project activities, if the project and its activities have created an open space for participants to address conflicting issues arising in the community, and the final resolution or outcomes that these conversations have brought to the community.

**Increase of conflicts' resolution practices and models**

The previous outcome is related to a community's ability to implement resolution practice and models. The increase of this outcome can be measured with one quantitative and one qualitative indicator. For the quantitative part, the municipalities can count how many conflict resolution practices and models were adopted in the development and implementation of the project activities. For the qualitative part, municipalities and community members can be asked if the project and its activities helped in solving existing



and ongoing conflicts in the community, to measure the types of already existing conflicts that have successfully been solved thanks to the project's activities.

#### Enhancement of community empowerment and self-determination (agency)

Another important factor that contributes to the development of a community constitutes the enhancement of community empowerment and self-determination (the community members' agency within the community). For this outcome, the research team has identified three relevant indicators, one quantitative and two qualitative. The quantitative indicator is the existence of co-creation or co-design processes by the typology of stakeholders. For this indicator, the municipalities can report the number of such processes implemented through the intervention. The two qualitative indicators include the perception of increase in self-determination and individual empowerment, as well as the perception of the increase in community empowerment. To evaluate these indicators, community members can be asked to rank their perceptions on a scale from one to five.

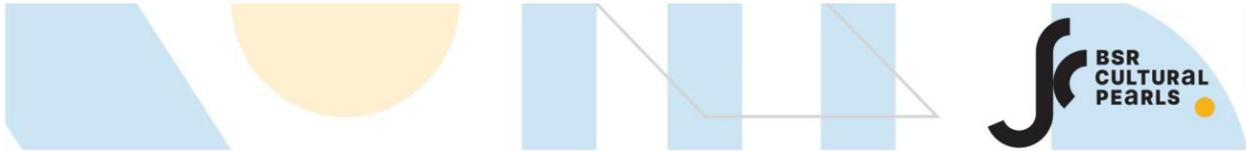
#### Increase in social inclusiveness

The increase in social inclusiveness can be measured in a purely quantitative way. The research team has identified three indicators: (1) the diversity of beneficiaries (especially among marginalised groups), (2) the diversity in the staff composition, and (3) the diversity in the artistic programming. These indicators can be evaluated by asking the community about the percentage of certain groups (in the framework: women and non-binary, under 35, Indigenous people, people belonging to the LGBTQIA\* community, people with disabilities, people with different nationalities/ethnicities) amongst the beneficiaries, or by asking the municipalities about the percentage of certain groups (in the framework as explained before) among the staff in charge of developing and implementing the project and its activities. Municipalities can also be asked how many project activities and events were dedicated to the specific target groups (in the framework: children and families, elderly, Indigenous communities, displaced people, street dwellers, and people with disabilities).

#### Creation of a shared vision and imaginaries for the future

The creation of a shared vision and imaginaries for the future is an important outcome that builds social cohesion. The indicator for this outcome is the description of a shared vision built because of the project, and it can be measured in a qualitative way by asking municipalities and communities to describe if the project contributed (and in what way) to build a shared vision for the community.

#### Development of trust and social cohesion leading to social capital



The development of trust and social cohesion leading to social capital has been identified as an important outcome that counts with three indicators: (1) the increase in the level of trust towards the municipality, (2) the increase in the level of trust towards other community members, and (3) the perception of the increase in social cohesion. These indicators can be measured in a purely qualitative way, by asking community members (a) if their level of trust towards the municipality has increased as a result of the project and its activities, (b) if the level of trust towards the community members has increased as a result of the project and its activities, and (c) to what extent community members feel more connected to their community and its members on a scale from 1 to 5.

#### Development of sense of responsibility to the community and the place

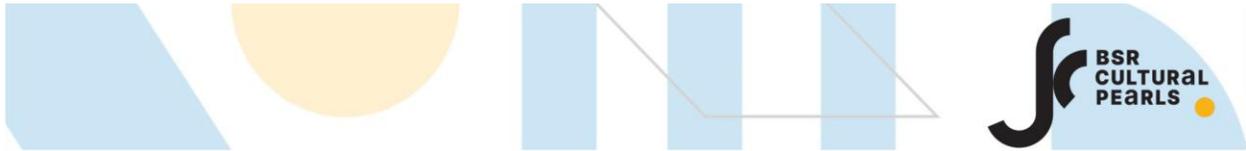
Finally, the last identified important outcome that contributes to community development is the sense of responsibility to the community and the place. The indicators for this outcome are two, both qualitative: (1) the increase in the sense of responsibility to the community, and (2) the increase in the sense of responsibility to the place. The first indicator can be evaluated by asking municipalities and communities whether they feel more responsible toward their community and its members because of the project and its activities. The second indicator can be evaluated by asking municipalities and communities whether they feel more responsible toward their municipality and/or city because of the project and its activities.

### ***ii. Dimension II: Health and Well-being***

The development of health and well-being is an important dimension. To measure it, the research team has identified seven outcomes with their respective indicators. They include improved access to and use of public/green spaces, opportunities for personal development (e.g., volunteering), strengthened belonging and solidarity, denser supportive relationships, increased personal confidence and motivation, and reductions in anxiety and isolation. Indicators range from counts of newly created or revitalised spaces and usage perceptions to self-assessed emotional states and time spent in social interaction during and after activities.

#### Enhancement of accessibility, quality, and availability of public and green spaces

The enhancement of accessibility, quality, and availability of public and green spaces is a vital component in bettering the social resilience of a community. Three indicators can be used to measure it: (1) the number of new green/ public spaces created and made accessible to the community, (2) the number of existing public/green spaces that were given



a new life, and (3) the perception and use of these spaces by project's beneficiaries. The first two indicators can be measured quantitatively, by looking at how many new public and/or green spaces were created and made available to the community through the project, and at how many were revitalised. The last indicator can be measured qualitatively by asking the community how they perceive and use these new or newly revitalised spaces.

#### Creation of opportunities for personal development (i.e. volunteering)

Another significant outcome that contributes to the health and well-being of a community is the creation of opportunities for personal development (i.e. volunteering). Here, the research team identified three indicators – the first two quantitative and the last qualitative: (1) the number and type of opportunities for personal development generated by the project activities, (2) the number of people taking advantage of these opportunities, and (3) the community's perception and testimonies of increased personal development. The last indicator can be measured by asking the community if they think that participating in the project activities gave them the opportunity to develop personally.

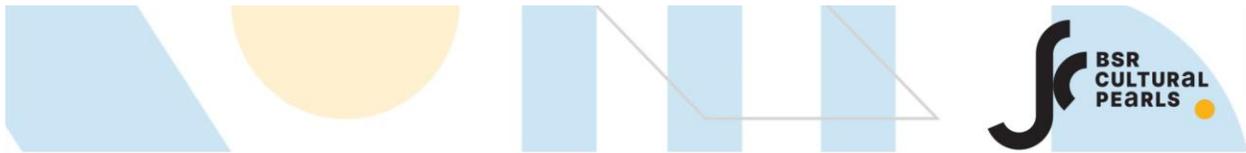
#### Strengthening community belonging

The outcome of strengthening community belonging can be measured with the following three indicators: (1) the perception of belonging among community members, (2) the instances of community-led initiatives, and (3) the increase in sense of solidarity and mutual support. The first indicator can be measured by asking the community if after participating in the project and its activities, they feel a stronger sense of belonging to their municipality and to the people living in it. For the second indicator, the community and the municipality can be asked whether, because of the project, any community-led initiatives have been developed and implemented. Finally, the third indicator can be evaluated by asking the community if after the project they feel more prone to support and help other members of the community when in need.

#### Development of supportive and strong relationships

For the development of supportive and strong relationships the research team has developed three indicators: (1) the level of support perceived by other participants, (2) the development of new relationships and strengthening of existing ones, and (3) the description of relationships built through the project. The evaluation questions to answer to these indicators include to describe the relationships built through the project and its activities, and to rank several sentences on a scale from one to five (i.e. "Thanks to the project's activities I have built new relationships").

#### Increase in personal confidence and motivation to act



The increase in personal confidence and motivation to act can be measured through two identified indicators: (1) the level of confidence perceived by project beneficiaries, and (2) the level of motivation to act developed by project beneficiaries. The research team has identified a series of evaluation questions to measure the indicators, including the extent to which their personal confidence has increased as part of the project's activities, and the increase in motivation to contribute to a cause or initiative after taking part in the project.

#### Decrease in anxiety and stress

The decrease in anxiety and stress can be measured qualitatively by asking community members about the extent to which they felt a series of emotions during and after participating in the project's activities on a scale from one to five, including statements such as 'I felt happy' or 'I felt distressed'.

#### Decrease in individual isolation

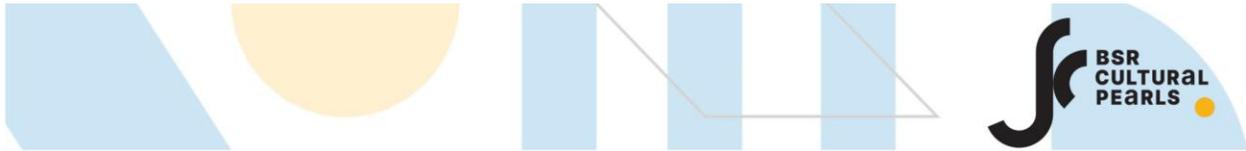
The decrease in individual isolation can be measured qualitatively by asking community members about the amount and quality of time spent in social interactions. The corresponding evaluation question is the extent to which the community member agrees to a series of statements, including 'During the project's activities I enjoyed the company of other people' or 'During the project's activities I felt less lonely'.

### ***iii. Dimension III: Innovation Capacity***

Innovation capacity is the third outcome dimension of this framework. For the development of this framework, the research team identified a total of ten outcomes, each with their own indicators and evaluation questions. The outcomes include enhanced understanding of shared local challenges; inspiration and capacity to act; strengthened networks; multicultural integration; creation/repurposing of social interaction spaces; participatory decision-making; research partnerships; multi-stakeholder governance; interdisciplinary practice; cross-sector collaboration; and openness to change. Indicators include instances of new initiatives inspired by the Pearl, participatory decision-making practices adopted, and continued cross-sector collaborations post-project.

#### Enhancement of understanding, inspiration, needed capacities, and methods for action

The enhancement of understanding, inspiration, needed capacities, and methods for action can be measured with the help of three qualitative indicators. The first one is the increase in understanding of shared societal issues that the municipality and the community are facing. It can be measured by asking the community and the municipality if, because of the



project's activities, they have gained a deeper understanding of these issues. The second indicator covers the number and type of new initiatives that were inspired by the project but developed as separate and independent from it. The third indicator covers the increase in skills and capacities, as well as the acquisition of methods for action. This can be measured by asking whether the project activities the participants have gained new skills, knowledge, or methods to effectively address shared community or societal challenges.

### Strengthening of collaboration and networks

For measuring the strengthening of collaborations and networks, the research team has developed three indicators: (1) the number and type of networks the community has taken part in, (2) the type of participation in the networks, and (3) the number of events/projects resulting from networking. These indicators can be evaluated by consulting with the municipalities.

### Promotion of multi-cultural integration practices

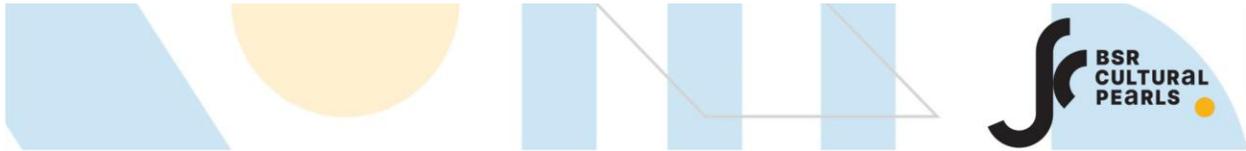
The promotion of multi-cultural integration practices can be measured through three indicators. The first indicator covers the openness of communities towards multiculturalism and can be measured qualitatively by asking community members about their openness towards multiculturalism after participating in the project's activities. The second indicator covers the number of events and activities organised with a focus on promoting multi-cultural integration. Finally, the third indicator covers the number of participants from a diverse cultural background.

### Creation of spaces and recreational opportunities for social interaction

The creation of spaces and recreational opportunities for social interaction can be measured through three indicators: (1) the number of new spaces and recreational opportunities created for social interaction, (2) the number of existing spaces that were repurposed to promote social interaction and recreational activities, and (3) the perception and use of these spaces by the project's community. The last indicator can be evaluated by asking community members how they perceive and use these new or newly revitalised spaces.

### Increase in participatory decision-making processes

For the evaluation of the increase in participatory decision-making processes, the research team has identified three indicators. The first indicator covers the number of participatory decision-making practices adopted in the design, planning, and implementation of the project. The second indicator covers the type of stakeholders involved in participatory



decision-making, by asking the municipalities which stakeholders were involved and why. The third indicator is concerned with the stakeholder perception of their influence on decision-making. This can be evaluated by asking community members about the extent to which they feel involved and listened to when decisions about the project and its activities are made (on a scale from 1 to 5).

#### Increase in research and university-based cooperation

The increase in research and university-based cooperation can be measured by looking at the number of partnerships developed with research institutes and universities. This is a quantitative indicator that can be evaluated by asking for the pertinent data from the municipality.

#### Increase of multi-stakeholder governance and civic engagement

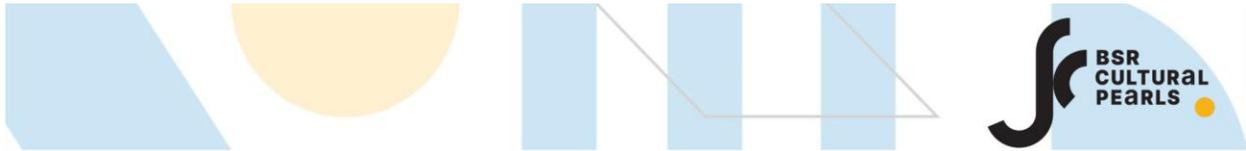
To measure the increase of multi-stakeholder governance and civic engagement, the research team has identified three indicators: (1) the degree of collective leadership of the organisation, (2) the involvement of users and/or community in the board, and (3) the number of participatory processes conducted at the governance level. The first indicator can be evaluated by asking the municipalities to what extent they feel that the leadership within the organisation is shared and collective, rather than centralised or hierarchical. The second indicator can be discerned by asking municipalities if a board has been appointed to design and implement the Culture and Resilience Action Plan.

#### Enhancement of inter-disciplinary approaches and actions

The enhancement of inter-disciplinary approaches and actions can be measured through two indicators: (1) the number of interdisciplinary approaches and actions adopted, and (2) the longevity of interdisciplinary approaches and actions. The second indicator can be evaluated by asking municipalities if the interdisciplinary approaches developed during the project have been continued to be implemented after the project activities came to an end.

#### Increase in cross-sectorial and cross-departmental collaborations (i.e. between municipalities and the creatives)

The research team has identified two indicators to measure the increase in cross-sectorial and cross-departmental collaborations (i.e. between municipalities and the creatives): (1) the number of collaborations developed with organisations in other sectors or departments (public administration, private foundations, social entities, cultural organisations or professionals), and (2) the longevity and evolution of collaboration with key stakeholders. The latter can be evaluated by asking municipalities if cross-sectorial and cross-



departmental collaborations developed during the project continued after the project came to an end.

### Increase in sense of openness and willingness to change and innovate

Finally, the research team has identified three indicators to measure the increase in the sense of openness and willingness to change and innovate. The first indicator covers the perception of increased sense of openness and willingness to change and innovate. The second indicator focuses on the instances in which the municipalities and participants have adapted to new approaches, and finally the last indicator covers the instances in which innovations were introduced because of the project activities.

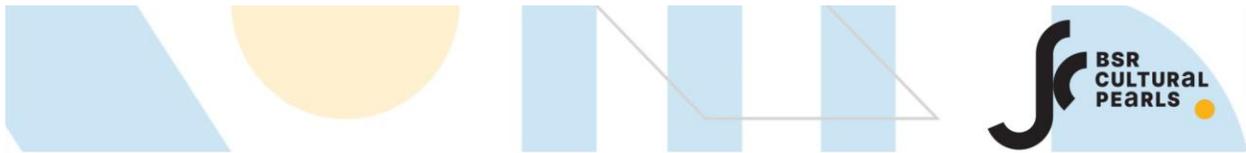
## 5. Evaluation findings

### 5.1. Component A: Evaluation of the relevance and effectiveness of the BSR Cultural Pearls' actions and the results achieved in the **short-term**

Q1: What is the overall relevance and effectiveness of the BSR Cultural Pearls project, and its added value in promoting community development, social resilience in the perspective of health and wellbeing, and innovation capacity in the short-term?

#### *Community development*

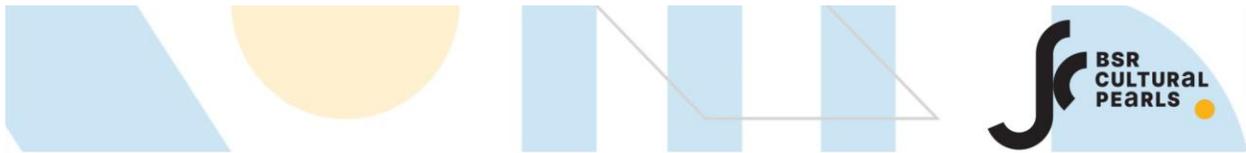
The four 2024 Pearls managed to impact positively on the community development of their respective communities. The award made inhabitants feel proud of themselves, their community, and their heritage. Many of the interventions highlighted the local heritage of the municipalities, such as the Old Fire Station in the case of Jakobstad/Petersaari. In the case of Rūjjena, the award provided the chance for previously unexplored cross-border exchange, which was received very positively by the inhabitants. In the case of Kiel, the sense of pride was especially fostered in children, who experienced co-creation for the first time during interventions such as the Children's Sailing Picture Parade. In Svendborg, activities such as the urban mapping with FLUK Art School or the nature immersion with Passion for Nature contributed to feelings of rootedness in youth members and enhanced their sense of local identity. The projects provided participants with new skills and created moments of knowledge transfer. The challenges within the communities were thematised as part of the interventions, i.e. through the engagement of the expert Miriam Attias (a specialist in



neighbourhood integration in multicultural cities) in the municipality of Jakobstad/Pietersaari. Through this workshop, the municipality reached important conclusions that will shape the course of future integration activities, particularly in relation to the dynamics that ensure successful integration of inhabitants. Jakobstad/Pietersaari excelled in promoting co-creation and co-design using the town's resident panel. All the municipalities produced targeted activities that directly focused on the identified target groups, and so the project activities and events were perfectly aligned with the challenges experienced by these groups. As a result of the interventions, the inhabitants of the communities felt more empowered to use their voice to shape cultural initiatives. All the awardees successfully implemented activities targeted at developing a shared vision and imaginary for the future, such as through Rūjiena's Riga 8 street project or the Inclusive Concert Series in Kiel. As per the conducted consultations, participants to the implemented activities felt more connected to and included in the community, and the activities increased the level of trust. Especially the municipalities that focused their efforts on the development of communitarian spaces (such as the Old Fire Station in Jakobstad/Pietersaari) reported that inhabitants felt a greater sense of responsibility towards the community after implementing the project. In the case of Svendborg, the project successfully tackled the difficult task of engaging youth members affected by loneliness.

Across the six 2025 Pearls, the programme has been most immediately legible in the ways it brought residents into shared spaces, both physical and conversational, and, in doing so, shifted local narratives from passivity to participation. In Alytus District, participatory events were consciously designed to draw in groups that do not typically engage in cultural life, which in turn fostered confidence, belonging and a renewed sense of community spirit; the cumulative impression locally is that such inclusive formats are now more likely to recur, normalising culture as a routine means of coming together. In Helsingborg, targeted formats such as intergenerational storytelling and youth dialogues opened practical channels between residents and the city administration, allowing young people and seniors to interact with policy conversations on their own terms and to see their experiences reflected in the city's development discourse. Kaskinen/Kaskö's experience was notable for the way a single flagship action (the wooden house and construction fair) became a focal point for civic pride, catalysing cooperation across municipal departments and drawing in residents who had initially been sceptical; the fair also helped bridge between newer and longer standing populations.

In Peipsiääre, community development took the form of structured youth engagement around a Hackathon process, with dialogue and feedback sessions that gave the

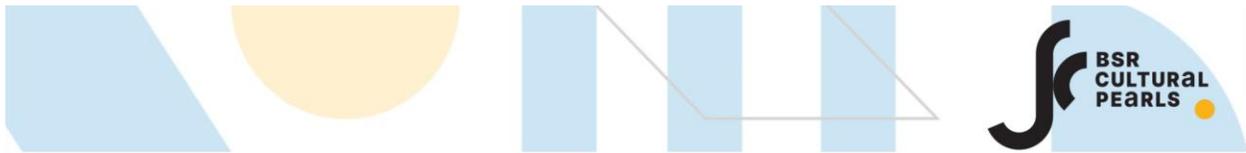


municipality a clearer view of how younger residents envisage the region's future; although broader intergroup relationships are still emerging, the new conversations are seen as a foundation for further connections and recurring participation. Płock's "culture to go" approach put residents in outlying communities at the centre of planning from the outset, creating a strong sense of ownership and forging new relationships among neighbours who had previously lacked collaborative habits; the municipality now regards these ties as a platform for subsequent local initiatives. Smiltene, meanwhile, used the revitalisation of the Jāņukalns openair stage to couple hands-on stewardship with cultural programming: low threshold cleanup actions, residence panels and cross institutional collaboration together strengthened trust, generated a shared sense of achievement and reestablished the site as a gathering point that attracts visitors as well as locals.

The picture that emerges is of relevance grounded in locally resonant entry points: architecture in Kaskinen/Kaskö, neighbourhood level access in Płock, youth voice in Peipsiääre, place based stewardship in Smiltene, and of effectiveness expressed through the practicalities of participation and the ease with which residents could find a role. Even where awareness of the Pearl label itself was modest, as in a large city such as Helsingborg, the programme's formats still established connective tissue between communities and institutions that had been harder to cultivate through routine municipal channels.

### *Health and wellbeing*

Through the implementation of the BSR Cultural Pearls award, the four 2024 Pearls could significantly enhance the health and well-being of their communities. In the case of Rūjiena, a new public space was created, and in the case of Jakobstad/Pietersaari, an old public space was revitalised. The cleaning of Riga 8 street in Rūjiena successfully involved the community and because of it, an area of the municipality was cleaned and a cultural space for theatre improvisation was established. The sustainability of the project was ensured through the community's creation of their own NGO to manage the space. In Jakobstad/Pietersaari, the renovation of the Old Fire Station was received with great enthusiasm, and it is now used for different communal purposes. In all the municipalities, the projects created significant opportunities for personal development. Especially notable is Svendborg's CultureConnection initiative, a 12-week programme for young people experiencing discontent or mental distress, as well as the Milife co-creating event that engaged hundreds of 7<sup>th</sup>-grade students. Another notable example is Kiel's Kick-Off Barcamp "Kieler Kulturkraft 2024", which brought together around 120 participants of the social and cultural sector to promote exchange and strengthen the cultural ecosystem of

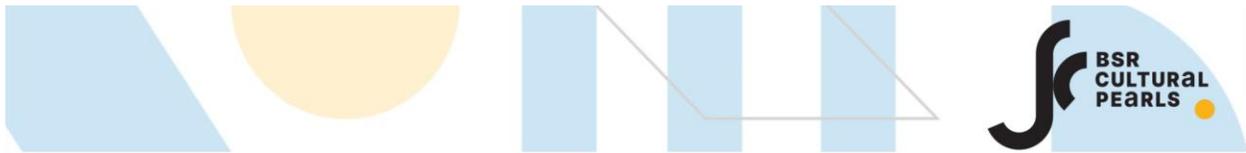


the city, as well as its social cohesion. The four municipalities reported that the implemented activities enhanced the sense of belonging of the community members. In addition, in some cases, the BSR Cultural Pearls award title set the spark to secure further funding that guarantees the sustainability of the implemented projects. Instances of community-led initiatives underline the ability of the BSR Cultural Pearls project to strengthen community belonging. Furthermore, the four awardees managed to propose activities that enhanced the development of strong relationships, i.e. through initiatives such as Rūjiena's 'Meet Your Neighbour'. Especially in the case of children who got to try out new things (i.e. being on a boat for the first time), the Kieler municipality reported that the personal confidence of participants increased.

Short term wellbeing outcomes are necessarily impressionistic at this stage, yet there is consistent qualitative evidence that inclusive, participatory cultural activity has lifted morale, deepened belonging and provided residents with credible ways to contribute to local life. Regarding the 2025 Pearls, in Alytus District, participants reported renewed confidence and togetherness as a direct effect of being invited in, rather than spoken at; this social encouragement was as important as the content of the events themselves. Helsingborg's teams are cautious about attributing population level change in a city of its size, but those directly involved—particularly seniors and young people—described increased pride and a stronger sense of belonging, which the municipality now sees as a base for sustained participation.

Kaskinen/Kaskö presents perhaps the clearest affective shift: residents articulated a move from resignation to optimism, with the fair functioning as proof that positive change is possible and worth repeating; new ties across age groups and between established and newer residents strengthened that effect. In Peipsiääre, the very act of listening to youth and integrating their views into municipal planning appears to have been wellbeing enhancing in its own right, signalling that local futures are not decided at a distance. Płock's early codesign process similarly cultivated a sense of agency, reflected in high participation and a reported uplift in ownership among residents in culturally underserved areas. Smiltene's combination of collective labour and culture—people of different generations cleaning, planting and then returning to a reanimated stage for performances—has been associated locally with stronger belonging, pride and more frequent, low friction interactions between residents, municipal teams and cultural organisations.

While none of the cases claim measurable health outcomes at this juncture, the proximity of cultural action to everyday life, and the way participation was scaffolded to be achievable and visible, seem to have produced immediate psychosocial benefits. Where ambition

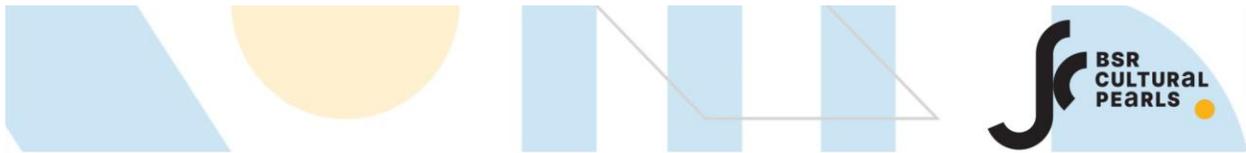


outstripped communication—most evident in the difficulty some municipalities faced in translating the concept of “social resilience” into locally meaningful language—wellbeing gains were still observable among active participants, suggesting that narrative framing can follow practice so long as the practice remains grounded in resident priorities.

### *Innovation capacity*

The BSR Cultural Pearls award leveraged on and increased the innovation capacities of the four municipalities. As a result of the project activities, the municipalities could gain a deeper understanding of the shared societal issues that the municipality and its community are facing. Notably, the BSR Cultural Pearls award allowed some of them to scope the extent of intervention needed in the field of social resilience. The BSR Cultural Pearls Award allowed the municipalities to put the spotlight on this topic, which generated important insights into what areas need further attention. As previously mentioned, some projects initiated during the award year inspired community members to develop new independent initiatives. The workshops conducted as part of the activities allowed municipalities and community members to gain new skills, knowledge and methods to effectively address shared challenges in all the three communities. As a result of the project, the organisations took part in local and informal networks, starting with the BSR Cultural Pearls’ own events. Some of these events provided the space for the Cultural Pearls to exchange on their action plans and to create a network of professionals, which was perceived very positively by municipalities. Multiculturalism was explicitly promoted in most of the municipalities. In Jakobstad/Pietersaari, the community was already familiar and open to multiculturalism, but this experience provided them with specific tools for active integration. In the case of Rūjiena, the BSR Cultural Pearls programme facilitated the cross-border exhibition with Estonia. Initially hesitant to engage in co-creation activities, the community members ultimately became motivated to collaborate in the development of their own cultural project: the theatre improvisation space. Finally, the municipalities were able to engage CCS professionals and local actors through the award, as well as education centres. In Svendborg, for example, the municipality worked closely with the FLUK Art School the Svendborg Library, the Harders Music Scene and the NGO Passion for Nature to shape their activities. This network and these collaborations can be leveraged in further initiatives.

Analysing the 2025 awardees, the programme’s most distinctive short-term contribution to innovation capacity lies in how it has reframed relationships between departments, between institutions and residents, and between localities and international peers, thereby expanding the repertoire of what municipalities consider possible. Alytus District describes the Pearl as a rare platform for international networking which, when combined with



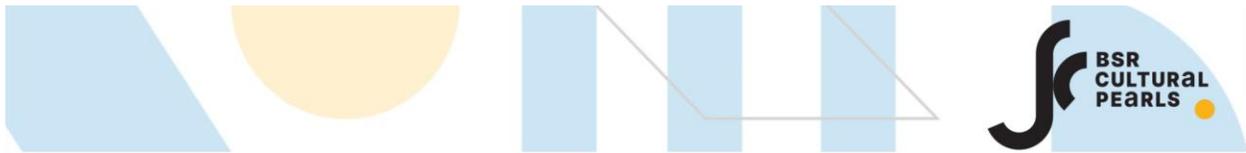
inclusive methods, generated collaborations that go beyond preexisting municipal structures. Helsingborg reports that “resilience” has entered the working vocabulary of the administration, providing a conceptual throughline for future inclusion and city development work and a prompt for more participatory design. Kaskinen/Kaskö points to strengthened interdepartmental cooperation and a change in administrative attitudes—from scepticism to proactive engagement—once the award created both a mandate and a motivation to act; resident feedback has already seeded thinking about how to institutionalise recurring, resilience-oriented events.

Peipsiääre highlights cross sector partnerships forged through the Hackathon planning, with the process itself functioning as a platform for public dialogue; the municipality sees in this the scaffolding for recurring events and a more porous relationship with external stakeholders. In Płock, although the web of partners did not dramatically widen, existing collaborations deepened and a “culture to go” model is being positioned for mainstreaming within city strategy, normalising the extension of cultural provision to underserved areas as a standard municipal function rather than a project exception. Smiltene demonstrates how practical tools (community surveys, a digital heritage route and continued mentorship) can be combined with resident led governance (such as residence panels) to build municipal competence for inclusive cultural planning and delivery.

At a programme level, mentoring, webinars and the peer network are repeatedly cited as accelerants, especially where application processes initially felt onerous or where internal buy in was uncertain; in several cases, these supports shifted projects from disengagement to confident implementation and, crucially, opened doors to sustained cross border learning beyond the immediate Pearl cycle. The immediate innovation, then, is not only in discrete products or events but in the governance routines, language and partnerships that now underpin municipalities’ approach to culture led resilience.

## 5.2. Component B: Evaluation of the relevance and effectiveness of the BSR Cultural Pearls’ action and of the impacts achieved in the **medium to long term**

Evidence for this component is drawn from the year after reflections and interviews with awardee cities and towns, together with the programme’s own long-term impact prompts on visibility and reputation, integration of cultural resilience frameworks into municipal strategies, and the title’s perceived contribution to local pride and identity.

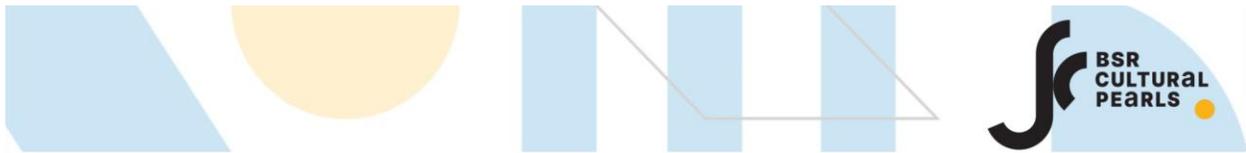


A year on, the most persuasive signs of relevance are found where the Pearl has been used to reinforce and mature preexisting strategies, and where participation has been tied to specific places, practices and partnerships that people care about. Svendborg is exemplary in this respect: the title added political weight to youth centred culture as a route to resilience, helped secure further funding, and has been folded back into municipal planning so that cultural spaces operate as hubs for leadership, volunteering and skills acquisition. The course that introduces young people to roles in NGOs and cultural institutions signals a shift from “project participation” to durable civic pathways, while visible creative outputs such as murals continue to make young people’s agency tangible.

Kiel’s trajectory is one of consolidation: while not producing many brand-new cross sector collaborations, it has normalised participatory methods within the Creative City department and maintained several actions beyond the title year. The recurring bar camp format and the theatre against loneliness remain active, the latter valued for its intergenerational character; even one-off street level artworks and wall tiles function as civic reminders, extending the project’s mnemonic footprint in daily life. Political attention to social resilience has grown, suggesting that the Pearl’s vocabulary has travelled into institutional priorities.

Jakobstad’s experience speaks to visibility, networks and community anchoring. The title year is associated with a stronger cultural profile for the city and a sense of closer connection between residents, the municipality and local cultural life. Although the physical renovation of the Old Fire Station has not yet begun, the building is programmed actively with concerts, social dances, weddings and even a disco for older residents -transforming a planned asset into a living venue while capital works are prepared. The “cultural friend” system, which pairs residents with similar interests to encourage attendance and counter loneliness, indicates a wellbeing-oriented strand that can outlast the project cycle. At the municipal level, interdepartmental collaborations have widened and the city’s network across the Baltic Sea Region has thickened, with invitations to join wider platforms reinforcing reputation and reach.

Rūjiena offers a more contingent picture, where community energy and ingenuity have generated a legacy under difficult structural conditions. The establishment of Rīgas Street 8 as a cultural hub, stewarded by a resident led NGO, has persisted as a recognisable place for concerts, quizzes and meetings. The cross-border storytelling initiative, Postcards from the Border, continues through exhibitions and a bilingual website, keeping everyday narratives of the Latvian Estonian borderlands in circulation. Yet transport barriers, limited budgets and infrastructure need temper the scale of effect, and the language of cultural or social resilience has not fully landed in wider municipal priorities. The case nonetheless



shows how small towns can broaden their own understanding of culture from events to shared narratives and skills, while signalling that continuity requires multiyear support and better integration into policy and budgets.

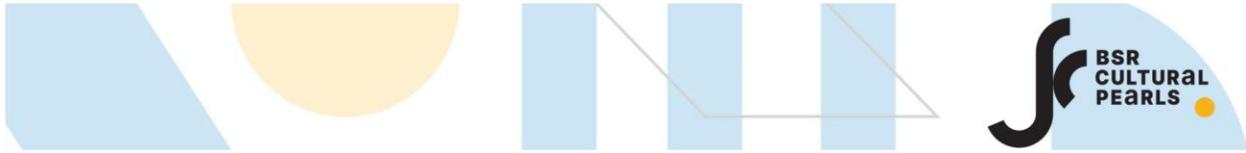
Across these varied contexts, the programme's longer arc is visible in three intertwined areas: first, in the enhancement of local reputation and visibility within a cultural resilience frame; second, in the degree to which resilience concepts and participatory methods have been embedded in administrative routines; and third, in how the title has been used as a social resource to renew pride and identity. The framework questions that anchor these areas (on visibility and reputation, strategic integration and perceived value) remain a useful lens for reading the legacy each Pearl is assembling.

Q2 — After one year, have the Pearls' actions left a legacy of social resilience, innovation capacity and community development in the territory?

Overall, the evidence suggests that the Cultural Pearls initiative has generated a discernible legacy, although its depth and configuration vary according to municipal scale, resource endowment and pre-existing strategic orientation. Where a clear trajectory from the award year to current practice can be observed, community development appears to have transitioned from episodic participation to more structured and recurrent forms of engagement. Kiel exemplifies this pattern: the institutionalisation of participatory planning within the Creative City department, coupled with the continuation of annual bar camps and intergenerational theatre projects, has embedded civic rituals that sustain collective interaction and cultural co-production.

In Svendborg, the progression from youth involvement to youth leadership and volunteering—both within cultural institutions and civil society organisations—signals a qualitative shift in innovation capacity. This evolution is underpinned by cross-sectoral partnerships and supplementary funding streams, enabling young residents to acquire competencies and confidence to initiate and deliver cultural interventions autonomously.

Jakobstad illustrates a pragmatic form of legacy, where the activation of the Old Fire Station as a cultural venue, despite pending structural renovations, has maintained civic visibility. The introduction of the “cultural friend” scheme constitutes a low-threshold social innovation aimed at mitigating isolation and reinforcing cultural participation. While modest in scale, such mechanisms create enabling conditions for sustained impact if adequately resourced. Rūjiēna demonstrates resilience through adaptive strategies: a locally



constituted NGO continues to animate Rīgas Street 8 as a cultural hub, while cross-border storytelling initiatives preserve intangible heritage and foster identity work. These gains coexist with structural constraints—transport deficits, infrastructural deterioration and fiscal limitations—yet the foundational scaffolding for long-term continuity is evident, contingent upon municipal integration and multi-annual support.

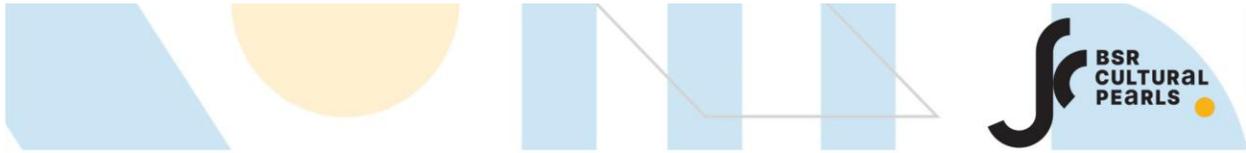
In synthesis, where the Pearl designation has functioned as a lever for institutional learning and routinised participatory practice rather than as a symbolic accolade, there are credible indications of durable social resilience and innovation capacity. Conversely, in contexts where systemic constraints remain unresolved, the legacy is more fragile, though still manifest in the persistence of community-led spaces, narrative-based projects and emergent civic competences.

Q3 — Are the Pearls’ efforts in engaging the cultural and creative sectors in a common effort still active?

Engagement with cultural and creative sector actors remains substantively active, albeit with variations in intensity and scope. In Kiel, the pattern is one of consolidation rather than expansion: existing collaborations have deepened through iterative activities, and participatory modalities have become embedded within municipal operational routines. This suggests a transition from project-based engagement to procedural normalisation, even if the breadth of partnerships has not significantly widened.

Svendborg reports the establishment of new partnerships and the mobilisation of additional resources for cultural and social projects. Cultural spaces have been strategically positioned as platforms for youth-led coordination with institutions and NGOs, while the introduction of structured volunteering pathways formalises a continuum from participation to contribution, thereby reinforcing the sector’s civic infrastructure.

Jakobstad’s award year catalysed a heterogeneous constellation of cultural actors that includes museum services and technical departments generating synergies perceived as transferable to future initiatives. The municipality’s integration into regional networks and receipt of external recognition further amplify its cultural profile and partnership potential. In Rūjiena, the NGO stewarding Rīgas Street 8 sustains a nexus between residents, cultural organisers and municipal stakeholders, while the bilingual storytelling platform maintains transnational collaboration among artists, curators and community historians. Here, the



principal challenge is not the absence of activity but its precariousness: continuity is heavily reliant on voluntary labour in the absence of dedicated financial and infrastructural support.

Taken collectively, the cultural and creative sectors exhibit ongoing mobilisation, particularly where municipalities have institutionalised participatory governance and provided tangible platforms (physical venues, recurring programmes, and structured events) that incentivise sustained engagement. Where such anchoring mechanisms are weaker, stakeholder reflections converge on similar prescriptions: enhanced inter-Pearl connectivity, augmented communication capacity to amplify collaborative outputs, and, critically, multi-annual resourcing to prevent the erosion of civic creativity through over-reliance on discretionary effort.

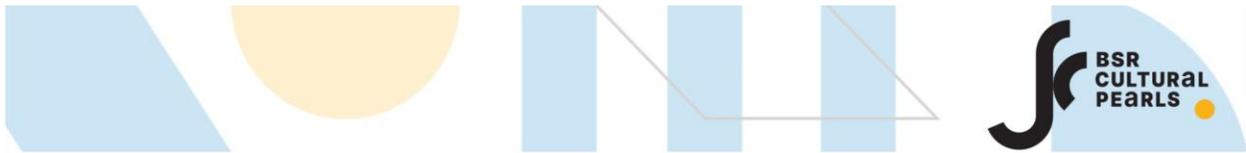
### 5.3. Component C: Evaluation of the main **challenges** and **bottlenecks** identified by relevant stakeholders

Rather than concentrating on internal process-related issues, such as coordination and management, the research team has focused this section on challenges that directly impact the project's capacity to create value. These challenges are particularly significant as they may influence the adoption and effective implementation of the evaluation framework developed.

This approach aligns with the assignment's broader objectives, emphasizing the external factors and barriers that could hinder the project's ability to achieve its goals. The evaluation draws on feedback provided by the 2024 and 2025 Pearls, complemented by insights shared by project mentors and partners. Together, these perspectives offer a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles faced and their potential implications for the project's outcomes and legacy.

This analysis sheds light on areas requiring attention to enhance the framework's relevance, applicability, and overall success, ensuring that it effectively supports the long-term goals of the project.

Q4: What are the main challenges and lessons learned identified by relevant stakeholders?

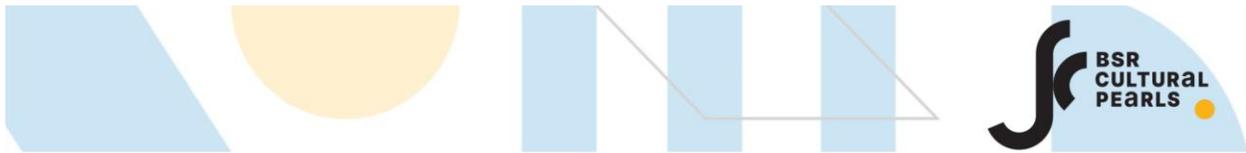


A first, persistent challenge is conceptual: several municipalities struggled to translate “social resilience” into locally resonant language and actionable formats. In Helsingborg, the term required careful framing to be meaningful to residents, and awareness of the Pearl itself remained uneven across a large urban population; yet once specific intergenerational and youth dialogues were in motion, the underlying practice travelled more easily than the label. Peipsiääre reported a similar vocabulary gap, particularly in outreach to young people, where schools are few and the term “resilience” did not map neatly onto everyday concerns; concerted listening through hackathon dialogues helped bridge that distance, but only after additional effort within the municipality to secure internal buy in.

The second aspect is operational and organisational. Small and mid-sized authorities repeatedly cite tight budgets, thin staffing and bureaucratic friction as bottlenecks. Some municipalities judged the budget modest and at times unevenly allocated, with governance issues absorbing time that could have been directed to participants. From another angle, a municipality attested that engaging beyond the “usual suspects,” coordinating across a winter hiatus and tailoring formats to both youth and seniors stretched limited resources and municipal procedures. Larger cities are not immune: as one of them affirmed it would have welcomed additional human resources and a stronger connective tissue between Pearls to better exploit the network and heighten international visibility.

A third theme concerns access and infrastructure. For example, Rūjiena’s cultural hub at Rīgas Street 8 has community legitimacy but sits within a constrained physical and transport environment; poor connections from surrounding villages and the building’s condition limit reach, while outmigration and an ageing population intensify the inclusion challenge. The result is a set of target success stories whose structural impact depends on multiyear support and municipal anchoring. Kaskinen-Kaskö offers a counterpoint: a single flagship action, the wooden house and construction fair, became a civic magnet and reset local mood, but it also revealed how quickly momentum can stall if events are not institutionalised and if scepticism within administrations is not actively worked through. Mentoring helped them over a complicated application and clarified expectations, underlining the importance of timely, practical guidance.

A fourth pattern is about networks and learning. Stakeholders praise the mentoring and webinars for demystifying processes and providing peer reassurance, yet several note that the international network can feel inspiring but abstract if not translated into concrete collaboration opportunities. One of the teams, for instance, valued the exposure but found it harder to activate the network for specific, coproduced ventures; the insight prompted



them to double down on strengthening existing local strategies where the Pearl could add real weight, particularly around youth leadership and cross sector working.

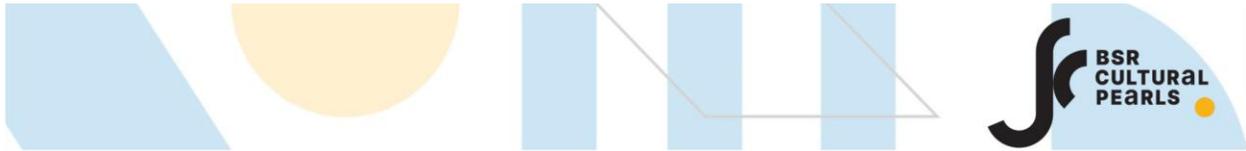
Finally, monitoring and evidence posed a quiet, consistent difficulty. Municipalities can describe palpable shifts in pride, belonging and participation among those directly involved, but population level effects are harder to verify without repeated measures and simple instruments embedded in routine practice. Svendborg explicitly notes the challenge of assessing broader change even where individual trajectories such as confidence, skills, and volunteer engagement are evident; Helsingborg is careful not to overclaim citywide impact despite strong qualitative feedback from seniors and youth. These cautionary notes are less a weakness than an honest signal that providing future Pearls with performance monitoring and assessment tools is extremely valuable not only from the funding agencies perspective, but also to back the narrative with tangible impacts.

Across these challenges, the lessons are remarkably convergent. Start from what already has traction locally and use the Pearl to strengthen and legitimise it; build visible, shared achievements that residents can own, then stitch those achievements into policy, budgets and departmental routines. Trust residents with genuine responsibility and design low threshold entry points; where that was attempted, communities responded with energy and engagement.

Finally, treat mentoring and peer exchange not as add-ons but as the project's backbone. Their role in capacity-building, problem-solving and adaptive learning was repeatedly cited as decisive in overcoming implementation bottlenecks. The network dimension amplifies this effect: inter-Pearl connectivity and cross-border exchange have emerged as critical enablers of knowledge transfer, innovation diffusion and reputational capital. Strengthening this network through regular interaction, thematic collaborations and integration with complementary European platforms represents a strategic lever for consolidating the project's relevance and sustainability over time.

**Q5: What measures can be implemented to ensure and increase the future sustainability, relevance, and effectiveness of the project?**

The next iteration of the programme will benefit most from measures that convert episodic success into institutional habit. The first is to secure continuity through light, multiyear scaffolding. The Pearls experiences show how one-year bursts of activity plant seeds but struggle to mature without predictable municipal lines or dedicated micro funds; modest, multiannual envelopes tied to simple milestones would allow local champions to plan,



reduce volunteer burnout and stabilise partnerships with cultural and social actors. Jakobstad’s ongoing activation of the Old Fire Station, complete with social formats like the cultural friend system, suggests that even before capital works are complete, programmatic continuity can anchor a place in people’s routines; securing the staffing and small grant ecology around such activation would lock in gains.

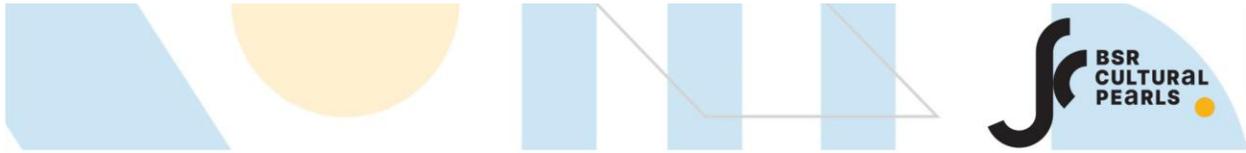
A second measure is to embed participation in the machinery of city administration. Kiel’s institutionalisation of participatory planning within the Creative City department, and Svendborg’s integration of youth leadership pathways into cultural spaces and NGO volunteering, indicate how a shift in working methods outlasts individual projects. Codifying these methods ensures that engagement remains a default rather than an exception, and it creates predictable platforms onto which international partners can be integrated into.

Third, communication deserves strategic investment at two levels: locally, several Pearls ask for a clearer, shared story and a practical toolkit to translate “resilience” into everyday language; where municipalities struggled to convey the value of the title, awareness and pride lagged the substance of the work. A communications kit cocreated with past Pearls using plain language frames, visual assets, population specific examples and a guide to local media could raise recognition without adding administrative load. Regionally, a public relations and communications campaign could amplify city narratives, recycling them across the Baltic network and making the international dimension feel real, as Kiel proposed.

Fourth, facilitate the application process by providing annotated exemplars, a short “first mile” clinic with mentors, and a checklist that maps requirements to typical municipal data sources.

Fifth, make evidence easy and useful. Municipalities ask for small sets of repeated measures aligned with their capacities: attendance by neighbourhood and age band; simple before and after prompts on belonging and agency; a light follow-up at three and twelve months for a rotating sample of participants; and a photo or audio diary option to capture narrative change. The municipalities’ difficulty in tracing system level effects despite rich individual stories argues for such pragmatic tools that can be embedded in routine practice and revisited annually.

Finally, the Baltic-wide network must be operationalised in ways that generate tangible, locally relevant outcomes. While the evaluative evidence confirms a clear appetite for transnational exchange, some stakeholders observed that international connectivity often remains limited. That would transform the network from a symbolic layer into a functional mechanism for innovation diffusion, enabling municipalities to co-credit and co-own



practices while reinforcing the programme’s identity as a collaborative ecosystem. Existing exemplars of activities already concluded can offer viable prototypes for this portability strategy.

## 6. Recommendations for successful use of the Evaluation Framework

To capture the full range of impacts from the BSR Cultural Peals, an effective evaluation framework is essential. It serves as a tool for understanding the outcomes and measuring the success of various initiatives, ensuring that the project is not only achieving its objectives but also creating lasting, meaningful change within the community. However, simply having an evaluation framework is not enough. Its success hinges on how well it is designed, implemented, and adapted throughout the course of the project.

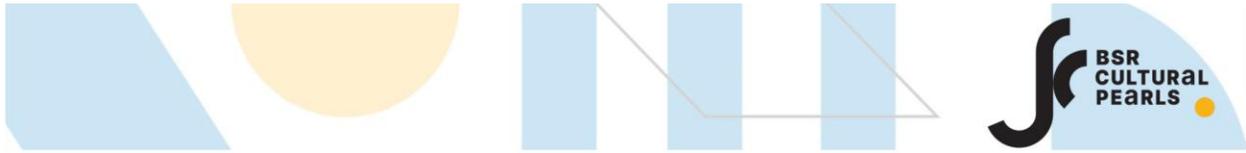
This section outlines a set of recommendations aimed at optimizing the use of the evaluation framework for tracking impacts across community development, health and well-being, and innovation capacity. These recommendations are designed to ensure the evaluation process is comprehensive, inclusive, and results-driven according with the ToC approach selected.

These recommendations emphasize the importance of clear objectives, timely and accurate data collection, continuous feedback, stakeholder engagement, and a focus on long-term, sustainable outcomes. By adopting these practices, the evaluation framework will not only provide valuable insights into the project’s effectiveness but also contribute to the overall learning and growth of the community.

### 6.1. Short-term recommendations for current implementation

#### Define clear objectives and expected outcomes

- **Recommendation:** establish clear and measurable objectives that align with desired outcomes. Ensure these objectives are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound).
- **Action:** use the outcomes outlined in the framework to clearly articulate project goals and expected changes.



### Engage stakeholders in the evaluation process

- **Recommendation:** involve community members, project partners, and local government representatives in the design and execution of the self-assessment. An alternative is to empower mentors to gather structured feedback from community members throughout the implementation phase.
- **Action:** conduct workshops or focus groups to identify relevant indicators and ensure the framework captures the needs and concerns of the community.
- Provide training for mentors on impact assessment methods and how to apply the evaluation framework, ensuring they can guide municipalities in tracking progress effectively.

### Select appropriate indicators and measurement methods

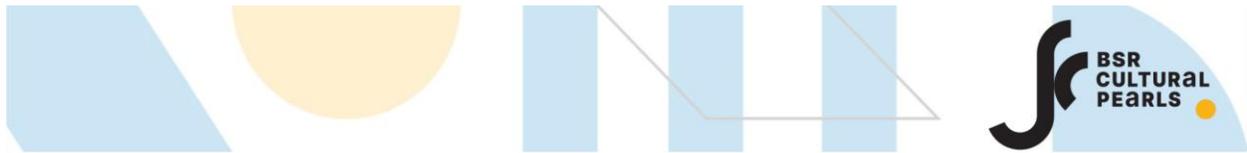
- **Recommendation:** use both qualitative and quantitative indicators that reflect the project's outcomes. Employ methods like surveys, interviews, and focus groups to capture comprehensive data.
- **Action:** develop a balanced approach to data collection by combining indicators that measure both tangible outputs (e.g., Number of workshops held) and intangible outcomes (e.g., Changes in community sense of belonging).

### Ensure data collection is timely and ongoing

- **Recommendation:** collect baseline data early in the project and plan for regular follow-up data collection at multiple points throughout the implementation phase.
- **Action:** schedule data collection at key project milestones and review progress to make timely adjustments to the project if needed.

### Create a clear reporting and dissemination strategy

- **Recommendation:** ensure that evaluation findings are communicated effectively to all stakeholders, including the community, funders, and policymakers.



- **Action:** prepare accessible, concise reports and share results through presentations, infographics, and community meetings. Use digital platforms to reach a wider audience.

### Encourage participation and inclusivity in data collection

- **Recommendation:** actively involve a diverse range of community members, especially marginalized groups, in the evaluation process.
- **Action:** use culturally sensitive methods and outreach to ensure all segments of the community are represented, with particular attention to underserved populations.

## 6.2. Long-term recommendations for sustainability and impact

### Build capacity for future evaluations

- **Recommendation:** strengthen the community’s capacity to conduct evaluations and monitor progress after the project ends.
- **Action:** provide training in monitoring and evaluation techniques for local partners and community members to ensure sustainability of the evaluation process.

### Foster long-term stakeholder engagement

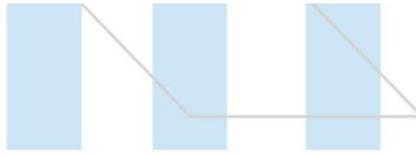
- **Recommendation:** build strong relationships with stakeholders that will continue beyond the project’s initial implementation.
- **Action:** develop long-term partnerships with local governments, universities, and community organizations to maintain momentum and leverage resources for sustaining impact.

### Support long-term community ownership

- **Recommendation:** encourage the community to take ownership of the evaluation process and outcomes to ensure that the project's impact is maintained in the long run.
- **Action:** develop community-led monitoring and evaluation systems, ensuring that local leaders are trained to manage the evaluation process and make data-driven decisions about the community's development.

### **Incorporate a longitudinal evaluation component**

- **Recommendation:** establish a system for tracking the long-term impact of awarded municipalities beyond their title year.
- **Action:** introduce follow-up evaluations at 1 year, and 3 years post-award to assess the sustainability of implemented initiatives.



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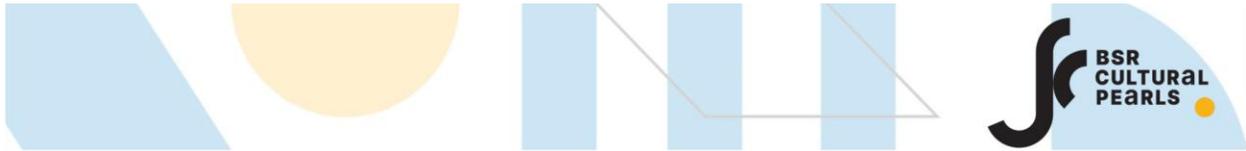
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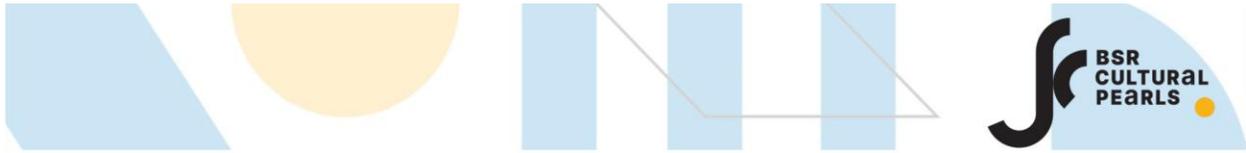
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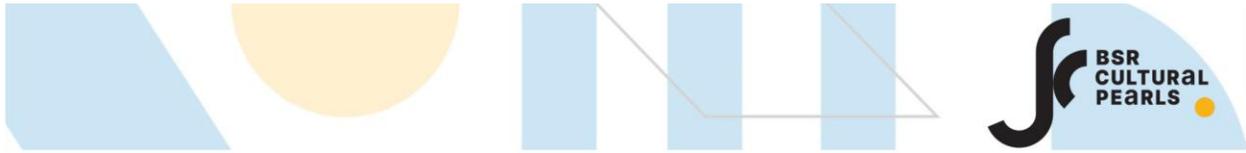
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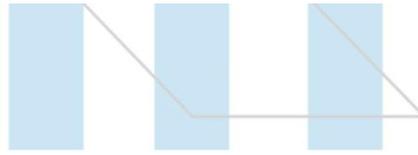
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## 8. Acknowledgements

The evaluation team wishes to acknowledge the valuable contributions of all stakeholders consulted through interviews and focus groups. These included representatives from the 2024 and 2025 Cultural Pearls municipalities, cultural and creative sector practitioners, project partners responsible for strategic oversight, and mentors who provided technical guidance and capacity-building support throughout the implementation cycle. Their insights were instrumental in shaping the analysis and ensuring that the findings reflect the diverse experiences and perspectives across the title awardees.

### 8.1. List of stakeholders consulted

#### Cultural Pearls Y1

Jakobstad-Pietarsaari (FI) - Päivi Rosnell.

Jakobstad-Pietarsaari (FI) - Johan Lithén.

Kiel (DE) - Annette Wiese-Krukowska.

Kiel (DE) - Anne Czichowski.

Kiel (DE) - Janna Sellmer.

Rūjiena (LV) - Madara Seile.

Rūjiena (LV) - Lelde Ābele.

Svendborg (DK) - Pernille Laier Larsen.

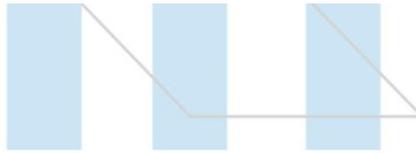
#### Cultural Pearls Y2

Alytus District (LT) – Andrė Zenevičienė.

Kaskinen – Kaskö (FI) – Elna Virta.

Kaskinen – Kaskö (FI) – Jonas Söderlund.

Helsingborg (SE) – Ola Jacobson.



Peipsiääre (EE) – Liis Lainemäe.

Płock (PL) – Inga Kujawa Zawadzka.

Smiltene (LV) – Evija Dzvinke.

## Project mentoring organisations

Regional Council of Ostrobothnia (represented by Pia Blomstrom).

Vidzeme Planning Region (represented by Lelde Ābele and Liene Jakobsone).

Baltic Sea Cultural Centre (represented by Krystyna Wroblevska and Magdalena Zakrzewska).

Heinrich Boll Foundation Schleswig-Holstein (represented by Fynn-Ole Eisenhuth and Lea Luekemeier).

Creative Estonia (represented by Eva Leemet, Tiiu Allikmäe and Kersti Kilg).

Varde Municipality (represented by Peter Holm Lindgaard and Marie Federsen).

Alytus city municipality administration (represented by Kristina Daugeleviciene and Neringa Rinkeviciute and Ineta Dimsiene).

Skåne County (represented by Jenny Tingvall Kornmacher).

## Project partners

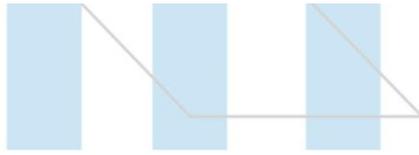
Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat (Lead partner, represented by Felix Schartner Giertha).

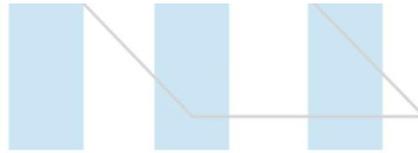
NDPC (represented by Kristīne Lipiņa and Krista Petajajarvi).

Danish Cultural Institute (represented by Žanete Eglīte and Andra Jakoviča).

Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Areas, European Affairs and Consumer Protection of Land Schleswig-Holstein (represented by Kaarina Williams, Lena Backes and Franziska Kapteina).

ARS BALTICA (represented by Egija Saņņikova and Marcus Hagemann);





## 9. Annex

### 9.1. Comparative analysis of cultural impact evaluation methods

#### *The Most Significant change*

The most significant change methodology is a qualitative evaluation approach that is based on participation. This methodology can be used to complement other data gathered in the evaluation process (including quantitative data), to provide a full picture. This tool is used to identify what matters the most to the involved stakeholders, and why.

The methodology is based on gathering stories of change, that are gathered by stakeholders through a shared discussion. The most significant change methodology is based on four steps:

- i. Defining the project: Deciding on what should be evaluated and who the storyteller should be.
- ii. Story collection: Listening to the stories and recording them.
- iii. Story reflection: Discussing the gathered stories and foster peer learning as part of the process. Identifying key themes with the group, as well as learning points.
- iv. Feedback and dissemination: Learning from the reflection. Analysing and synthetising the data to shape future activities. Potentially complement the stories with other data<sup>23</sup>.

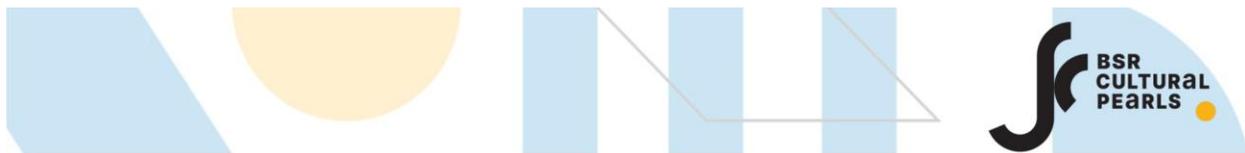
Examples on how this storytelling can work – in addition than through discussion - is by using poems, free writing, map drawing (such as journey maps), illustrated postcards and creative mapping.

Table outlining advantages and disadvantages of employing the Most Significant Change methodology for CCI project evaluations:<sup>24</sup>

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Inclusive	Highly subjective
Flexible	Resource intensive

<sup>23</sup> Most Significant Change: Getting Excited About Evaluation (2024)

<sup>24</sup> The Little Book of Creative Evaluation (2023)



Qualitative insights	Time intensive
Focus on learning	Challenge: Balancing narratives

By working across and with different disciplines and sectors, this methodology creates an inclusive atmosphere. It increased the engagement of partners and stakeholders by putting their collaboration and participation at the centre. Tools such as co-design and co-creation, as well as methods from arts and creative practices, facilitate this further. The methodology also actively promotes listening and responding to different voices. For this reason, this method is a highly flexible one that embraces uncertainty, and it can be adapted to respond to the particularities of the given evaluation context. Finally, the methodology is well suited for peer learning experiences, as it produced new knowledge and promotes understanding among stakeholders.<sup>25</sup>

However, the main challenge that this methodology poses is its high subjectivity, as it relies on the subjective experience of individuals. In relation to this, it can be a challenge for evaluators to successfully balance narratives. Furthermore, these approaches can be resource intensive and require extra time, budget, and human power. The methodology is good to complement other methodologies; however, it does not successfully address evaluation requirements on its own<sup>26</sup>.

### *Social Impact Assessment (SIA)*

The SIA is a methodology used to evaluate the social consequences of a project, such as the effects of an intervention on people’s way of life, their culture, their community, their political systems, or their health and well-being<sup>27</sup>. SIA evaluations are people-centred: they focus on understanding how interventions affect people. Therefore, usually SIA evaluations are conducted in close collaboration with community members<sup>28</sup>.

During the SIA, evaluators commonly start by identifying the relevant stakeholders and communities for the project. Then, the evaluation focuses on identifying key social issues

<sup>25</sup> The Little Book of Creative Evaluation (2023)

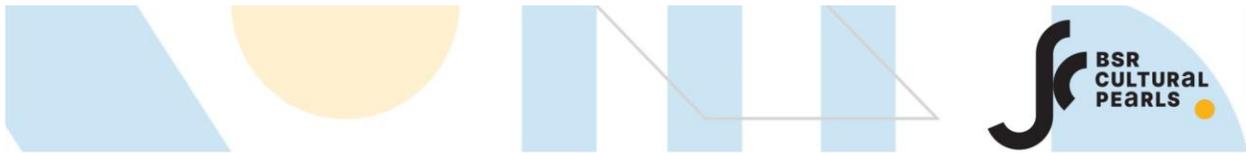
<sup>26</sup> The Little Book of Creative Evaluation (2023)

<sup>27</sup> International Institute for Sustainable Development (2016). Social Impact Assessment (SIA).

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<sup>28</sup> International Institute for Sustainable Development (2016). Social Impact Assessment (SIA).

<https://www.iisd.org/learning/eia/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/SIA.pdf>



affecting the stakeholders (i.e. community history, Indigenous communities, key industries present, etc.). This is a multidimensional analysis that covers a vast range of social factors, including economic changes, health and safety, cultural and heritage impacts, community cohesion and displacement, and education and access to resources. Further, evaluators should provide an overview of government legislation and policies that directly affect either the stakeholders or the identified social issues. The next step consists of explaining the methodology used, particularly the ways in which the communities were involved in the process, followed by an identification of potential social impacts and predictions. Finally, the evaluators should propose mitigation measures<sup>29</sup>. SIAs are often conducted as part of Environmental Impact Assessments, or independently<sup>30</sup>.

Table outlining advantages and disadvantages of employing the SIA methodology for CCI project evaluations:

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Promotes sustainable development <sup>31</sup>	Only ex ante <sup>32</sup>
Engages the stakeholders <sup>33</sup>	Data Challenge <sup>34</sup>
Mitigates negative impacts <sup>35</sup>	Resource Challenge <sup>36</sup>
Regulatory compliance <sup>37</sup>	Uncertainty and Subjectivity <sup>38</sup>

Using SIA has significant advantages: due to the close collaboration and importance given to stakeholders, it is a tool that significantly engages them. Engaging stakeholders can mitigate the risks of tensions in an evaluation, as well as the potential negative outcomes of

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.iisd.org/learning/eia/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/SIA.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> International Association for Impact Assessment, Social Impact Assessment, <https://www.iaia.org/wiki-details.php?ID=23>

<sup>31</sup> International Association for Impact Assessment, Social Impact Assessment, <https://www.iaia.org/wiki-details.php?ID=23>

<sup>32</sup> Feor, Leah, Amelia Clarke, and Ilona Dougherty. 2023. "Social Impact Measurement: A Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Directions" *World 4*, no. 4: 816-837. <https://doi.org/10.3390/world4040051>

<sup>33</sup> International Institute for Sustainable Development (2016). Social Impact Assessment (SIA). <https://www.iisd.org/learning/eia/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/SIA.pdf>

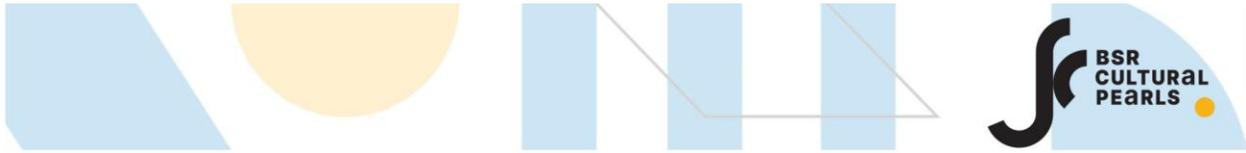
<sup>34</sup> [https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/BRA/Social%20Impact%20Assessment\\_%20analysis.pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/BRA/Social%20Impact%20Assessment_%20analysis.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> International Institute for Sustainable Development (2016). Social Impact Assessment (SIA). <https://www.iisd.org/learning/eia/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/SIA.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> [https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/BRA/Social%20Impact%20Assessment\\_%20analysis.pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/BRA/Social%20Impact%20Assessment_%20analysis.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14615517.2020.1765302#d1e136>

<sup>38</sup> [https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/BRA/Social%20Impact%20Assessment\\_%20analysis.pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/BRA/Social%20Impact%20Assessment_%20analysis.pdf)



an intervention. In addition, SIAs actively promote sustainable development, which is crucial for the long-lasting effects of interventions. Finally, often SIAs are required to comply with regulations or grant agreements<sup>39</sup>.

Perhaps the biggest disadvantage to the purpose of this report that SIA carries is that it is most effective as an ex-ante intervention evaluation tool, but not ex-post<sup>40</sup>. Another significant disadvantage of SIA is that data gathered is often unreliable and quickly becomes outdated<sup>41</sup>. In addition, it is resource and time intensive.

### *Social return on investment*

The social return on investment (SROI) methodology represents a combination between social accounting and cost-benefit analysis. On the one hand, it considers the economic, social, and environmental approaches present in a project. This broadens the perspective of performance. On the other hand, it compares the total costs of a project to its total benefits to evaluate a project.<sup>42</sup>

SROI assumes that value is created, but also destroyed, in several ways. It includes measures for non-financial items (such as volunteer work) by using market proxies, with money as the common unit to convey value (in this case, the hourly wage that the workers would have received if they would have been paid, multiplied by the hours worked).<sup>43</sup>

SROI is based on seven principles<sup>44</sup>:

- i. It should involve stakeholders
- ii. It should understand what changes
- iii. It should value the things that matter
- iv. It should only include what is material
- v. It should not overclaim
- vi. It should be transparent
- vii. The results should be verifiable.

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<sup>39</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14615517.2020.1765302#d1e136>

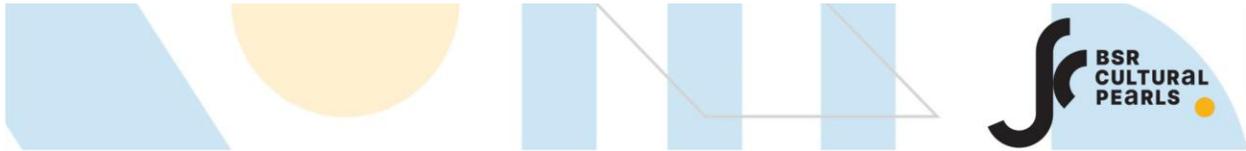
<sup>40</sup> Feor, Leah, Amelia Clarke, and Ilona Dougherty. 2023. "Social Impact Measurement: A Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Directions" *World* 4, no. 4: 816-837. <https://doi.org/10.3390/world4040051>

<sup>41</sup> [https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/BRA/Social%20Impact%20Assessment\\_%20analysis.pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/BRA/Social%20Impact%20Assessment_%20analysis.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Mook, L., Chan, A., & Kershaw, D. (2015). Measuring social enterprise value creation. In: *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 26(2), 189–207.

<sup>43</sup> Mook, L., Chan, A., & Kershaw, D. (2015). Measuring social enterprise value creation. In: *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 26(2), 189–207.

<sup>44</sup> Mook, L., Chan, A., & Kershaw, D. (2015). Measuring social enterprise value creation. In: *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 26(2), 189–207.



And it is structured into six stages<sup>45</sup>:

Stage 1: Establishing scope and identifying the key stakeholders:

- Here, the streams of social impact are established (e.g. the impact on people's dignity, their happiness, direct employment, etc). In addition, the stakeholders should be identified.

Stage 2: Mapping outcomes through stakeholders' engagement:

- As a first step, the inputs need to be mapped. These are the contributions that are made by stakeholders in order for the activity to happen, and they include financial, in-kind, volunteer contributions, and other. The value for non-monetary items is established at market rate.

Stage 3: Evidencing outcomes and giving them value:

- In this stage, evaluators need to comprehend what changes for the key stakeholder groups.

Stage 4: Establishing impact:

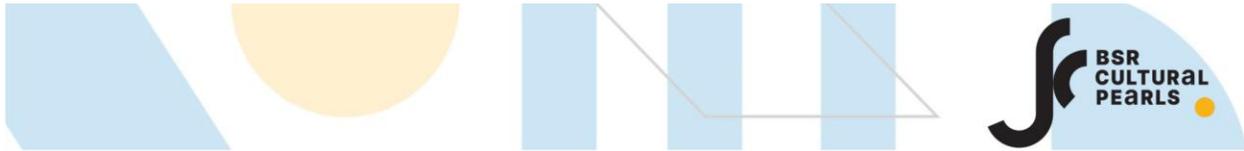
- Here, evaluators need to attempt to monetise change through cost related expenses in relation to if the intervention had not been done. A practical example can be found in the example of the Furniture Bank case study: by receiving furniture, beneficiaries' stress diminishes, which prevents mental health crises and other health consequences. These consequences can be then calculated statistically, understanding what it would cost the government (in the case of a public health insurance) to cover the costs of a mental health crisis or other health consequences. This surplus can be used as a revenue item in the calculation.

Stage 5: Calculating the SROI ratio (value generated per unit invested).

Stage 6: Reporting, using, and embedding.

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<sup>45</sup> Ragozino, S. (2018). Social Impact Evaluation in culture-led Regeneration Processes: Reflections on the "Social Return on Investment" perspective. *plNext - Next Generation Planning*, 7, 63–81. <https://doi.org/10.24306/plnxt/50>



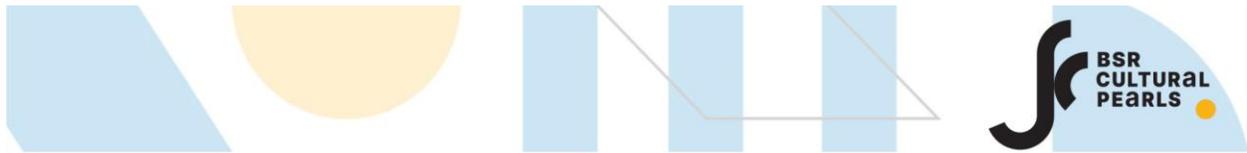
## Valuation methods and practical examples<sup>46</sup>:

There are different approaches to valuating methods. What follows is an example of how to apply SROI to the forest industry, outlining different valuation approaches.

1. **Comparison cost/cost saving/market value:** covers the amount of money it would take to recreate the same benefit, how much money the initiative would save, or the market value of a similar activity measured at market value.
  - Example: Assuming that a forest is a safe place and a place that can have a therapeutic effect on mental health issues, the cost benefit would result from the calculation of costs of counselling hours saved.
2. **Willingness-to-pay/required compensation:** covers the amount of money a person is willing to pay for a social benefit, or how much they would need as a compensatory payment for them to accept a negative consequence.
  - Example: If an organisation offers to plant trees for free in a neighbourhood, the proxy used for the SROI would either be the price people are willing to pay for the planted trees, or the compensation these people would require to accept that there are no trees planted in the neighbourhood.
3. **Average household spending:** covers the monetised valuations from consumer's actual preferences.
  - Example: If an organisation offers free guides through nature, the proxy for valuation would be the average household spending in the area for guides in nature.
4. **Hedonic pricing:** covers the price premium that is developed through social actions.
  - Example: If an organisation seeks to increase the positive impact of forests through activities (e.g. improved air quality), the proxy used for valuation would be the difference between house prices in an area without a forest and bad air quality, vs. Similar houses in an area with a forest and higher air quality.
5. **Cost-of-use estimates:** covers the value of distance travelled or time used on a certain service.
  - Example: If an organisation provides free access to an activity park in a forest, the valuation proxy would be the monetised value of giving up time or travel to a specific place to use the activity park.
6. **Opportunity cost:** covers the monetary benefits not received because of not choosing another project.

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<sup>46</sup> Damtoft, N.F., Lueg, R., van Liempd, D., Nielsen, J.G. (2023). A Critical Perspective on the Measurement of Social Value Through SROI. In: Nikolakis, W., Moura da Veiga, R. (eds) Social Value, Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship: Insights from Theory and Practice. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2_2)



- Example: If an organisation decides to not harvest trees in an area to improve the biodiversity, the proxy used would be the value that would have been achieved if the trees would have been harvested.

Table outlining advantages and disadvantages of employing SROI for CCI project evaluations:

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Monetisation of Social Impact <sup>47</sup>	Cost intensive <sup>48</sup>
Clearer understanding of social value <sup>49</sup>	Resource intensive <sup>50</sup>
Improved accountability and responsibility <sup>51</sup>	Difficulties in Measuring Intangible Outcomes <sup>52</sup>
Focus on outcomes <sup>53</sup>	Focus on financial metrics <sup>54</sup>
	Over-simplification of social value <sup>55</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Damtoft, N.F., Lueg, R., van Liempd, D., Nielsen, J.G. (2023). A Critical Perspective on the Measurement of Social Value Through SROI. In: Nikolakis, W., Moura da Veiga, R. (eds) Social Value, Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship: Insights from Theory and Practice. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2_2)

<sup>48</sup> Damtoft, N.F., Lueg, R., van Liempd, D., Nielsen, J.G. (2023). A Critical Perspective on the Measurement of Social Value Through SROI. In: Nikolakis, W., Moura da Veiga, R. (eds) Social Value, Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship: Insights from Theory and Practice. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2_2)

<sup>49</sup> Damtoft, N.F., Lueg, R., van Liempd, D., Nielsen, J.G. (2023). A Critical Perspective on the Measurement of Social Value Through SROI. In: Nikolakis, W., Moura da Veiga, R. (eds) Social Value, Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship: Insights from Theory and Practice. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2_2)

<sup>50</sup> Damtoft, N.F., Lueg, R., van Liempd, D., Nielsen, J.G. (2023). A Critical Perspective on the Measurement of Social Value Through SROI. In: Nikolakis, W., Moura da Veiga, R. (eds) Social Value, Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship: Insights from Theory and Practice. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2_2)

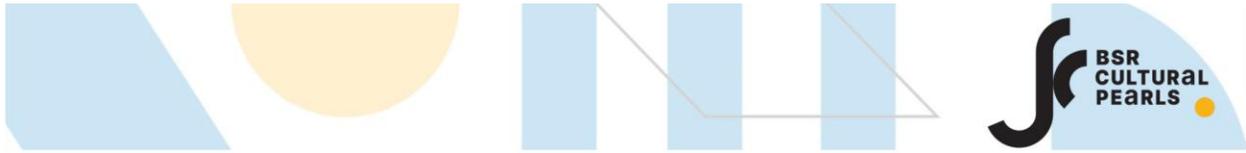
<sup>51</sup> Damtoft, N.F., Lueg, R., van Liempd, D., Nielsen, J.G. (2023). A Critical Perspective on the Measurement of Social Value Through SROI. In: Nikolakis, W., Moura da Veiga, R. (eds) Social Value, Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship: Insights from Theory and Practice. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2_2)

<sup>52</sup> Manero, A., Taylor, K., & Nikolakis, W., Adamowicz, W., Marshall, V., Spencer-Cotton, A., Nguyen, M., & Grafton, R. Q.(2022). A systematic literature review of non-market valuation of Indigenous peoples' values: Current knowledge, best-practice, and framing questions for future research. *Ecosystem Services*, 54, 101417.

<sup>53</sup> Damtoft, N.F., Lueg, R., van Liempd, D., Nielsen, J.G. (2023). A Critical Perspective on the Measurement of Social Value Through SROI. In: Nikolakis, W., Moura da Veiga, R. (eds) Social Value, Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship: Insights from Theory and Practice. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2_2)

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<sup>55</sup> Damtoft, N.F., Lueg, R., van Liempd, D., Nielsen, J.G. (2023). A Critical Perspective on the Measurement of Social Value Through SROI. In: Nikolakis, W., Moura da Veiga, R. (eds) Social Value, Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship: Insights from Theory and Practice. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2_2)



SROI is one of the most popular tools to measure social value, as it allows for the monetisation of social impact. It has many advantages: it can help visualise the value of social interventions by making tangible intangible values. This allows for a clearer understanding of social value<sup>56</sup>. The focus on outcomes improves the accountability structures and allocation of responsibilities of an organisation, if the stakeholders find consensus on the used proxies and measurement approaches.

However, implementing SROI can represent a feasibility challenge for its high costs, uncertain estimates, and issues with comparability, subjectivity in measurements, and legitimacy of conclusions. SROI is not appropriate for comparing different projects, as social enterprises often have widely divergent missions, stakeholder groups, locations, etc. There are certain categories of social value (such as the value of lives saved) that are hard to monetise, and if monetised, rely on subjective perceptions and judgements<sup>57</sup>. In this way, social value is over-simplified. Finally, the focus on financial metrics might pose difficulties in some scenarios, e.g. in cases with differing ontological understandings of the world (for example, Indigenous ontologies of nature differ from Western ontologies, which makes establishing consensual proxies an almost impossible task)<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> Damtoft, N.F., Lueg, R., van Liempd, D., Nielsen, J.G. (2023). A Critical Perspective on the Measurement of Social Value Through SROI. In: Nikolakis, W., Moura da Veiga, R. (eds) Social Value, Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship: Insights from Theory and Practice. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2_2)

<sup>57</sup> Damtoft, N.F., Lueg, R., van Liempd, D., Nielsen, J.G. (2023). A Critical Perspective on the Measurement of Social Value Through SROI. In: Nikolakis, W., Moura da Veiga, R. (eds) Social Value, Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship: Insights from Theory and Practice. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23145-2_2)

<sup>58</sup> Manero, A., Taylor, K., & Nikolakis, W., Adamowicz, W., Marshall, V., Spencer-Cotton, A., Nguyen, M., & Grafton, R. Q. (2022). A systematic literature review of non-market valuation of Indigenous peoples' values: Current knowledge, best-practice, and framing questions for future research. *Ecosystem Services*, 54, 101417.

## 10. Appendices

In support of this final evaluation report, the research team is submitting a supplementary package comprising key resources developed and utilised throughout the evaluation process. These materials are intended to facilitate continued use, adaptation, and dissemination of the evaluation tools and findings within the BSR Cultural Pearls programme and among its stakeholders.

The package includes:

- **The Evaluation Framework**, which outlines the conceptual and methodological structure underpinning the assessment of relevance, effectiveness, and impact across the programme's components.
- **The Self-Assessment Evaluation Tool**, designed to support municipalities in monitoring their progress and reflecting on the outcomes of their cultural resilience strategies.
- **A Practical Guide for the Use and Data Management of the Tool**, providing step-by-step instructions for implementation, data collection, and interpretation, as well as recommendations for integrating the tool into routine municipal practices.
- **A Value Proposition Slide Deck** and its **Executive Summary**, summarising the strategic benefits of the Cultural Pearls initiative for municipalities, cultural stakeholders, and regional partners, and offering a communication resource to support advocacy and stakeholder engagement.

These appendices are intended to enhance the usability and transferability of the evaluation findings and to support future iterations of the programme in embedding cultural resilience as a sustainable and strategic priority.