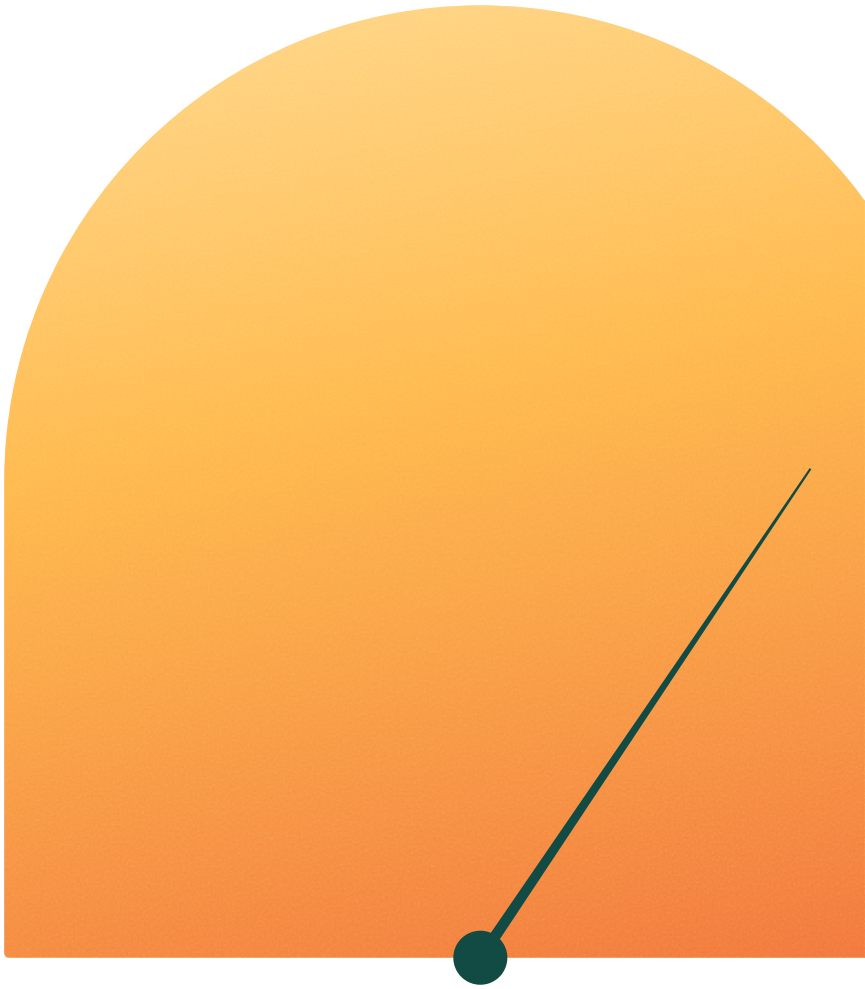
SPECULATIVE INDICATORS FOR INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL RELATIONS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Speculation —Indication

What would we measure if International Cultural Relations were infrastructure for the world we want?



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PART ONE

Why measure this at all

International cultural relations keep being asked to prove themselves with numbers built for something else. This first part sets out the problem, and how the work went about it.

Setting the Scene

Much has been written about culture and sustainable development and much has been debated about whether culture deserves a standalone Sustainable Development Goal in the UN's post-2030 agenda (El Faouri and Sibley 2026) or not. A strong alliance of international cultural networks and culture ministries is advocating for a standalone SDG (UNESCO 2025, culture2030goal Campaign 2025) which positions culture strategically but perhaps also naïvely for a framework that might end up limiting its full potential by applying unchanged development logics, while in academia we have promising calls for culture to be part of the foundational economy to avoid instrumentalisation (Calafati et al. 2026) and for cultural policy to be planetary in scope that "must ideologically and conceptually understand culture as part of nature and vice versa" (Pyykkönen and De Beukelaer 2025).

What many deliberations on the political stage have in common is that they find it quite difficult to situate culture and arts in sustainable development without instrumentalising it. We see culture as the missing foundation of sustainable development (Brennert et al. 2023), breaking out of sectoral echo chambers and self-referential policy silos that do not consider the cross-cutting foundational relevance of culture. The role of International Cultural Relations (ICR) in relation to sustainable development has been much less discussed but presents a similar complexity (Lewis and Ivo Franco 2025); it poses the same dilemma of instrumentalisation vis-à-vis irrelevance: culture being treated as a mere tool of delivery without acknowledging or effectively utilising and amplifying the inherent value of culture; culture being disregarded as a nice-to-have rather than seen as a foundational element of sustainable development.

To address this dilemma and bridge the sectoral divide, one idea is to speak the language of data and use evidence for strategy and policy. However, if we use the same models and logics that see culture as a mere growth engine or tool for social cohesion, we are unlikely to move the needle towards more sustainable development by simply replicating them. The frameworks we have been using are failing us and the planet as they fail to recognise the complexity of relationships. We need to radically re-think collective action and our relationship to ourselves, those around us, and the world at large to achieve sustainability or – even better – regeneration (Wahl 2016). Using measurement and indicators is a compelling starting point as it allows us not just to look toward narrative change but also toward the design and implementation of programmes. Yet, this approach

must necessarily account for the complexity of relationships that has previously been missing to avoid the instrumentalisation trap.

The initial research questions centred mostly around very practical applications of what indicators and methods might help ICR to measure their contributions to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). The intention of this research project, however, was to start the discussion a bit before the point of monitoring, evaluation, and impact measurement, and instead ask the question of how ICR are and should be contributing to sustainable development in the first place. We imagined a variety of ways ICR could play a role in sustainable futures and how to measure these contributions. The intention of this publication is to spark imagination, provoke thought, and envision what ICR could look like in the context of sustainable development through a set of guiding thoughts, future ICR scenarios, and speculative indicators. Therefore, this publication is mostly aimed at the ICR community, whether in practice, policy or research – it is an open invitation to think further, disagree, remix, and build on.

To understand some of the research framing, we must remind ourselves that the UN SDGs are on their way out and the post-2030 framework is currently being debated. Here, we discuss sustainable development as a wider domain of achieving planetary flourishing rather than limiting ourselves to the narrow UN SDG framework which nominally sees culture as a transversal driver but whose indicators are of limited help to ICR at present (Brennert et al. 2023, Lewis and Ivo Franco 2025).

Let's remind ourselves that International Cultural Relations, which will consistently be referred to as ICR in this publication, refer to a long-term, two-way relationship building process between people from different places. While governments can be involved as facilitators, the focus is on developing honest, trust-based people-to-people relationships, not on projecting a certain image or narrative of a country to build goodwill or soft power.

How this was made

In an attempt to escape the echo chamber, this work was designed around a process of conversation with an artist/curator and a sustainable development practitioner, both of whom have dabbled a little in ICR in some capacity beforehand. There was no defined outcome, which in itself is how we believe ICR should be conceived – as relational practice. It is already a positive signal that an institution like ifa has allowed us to explore this less defined, non-traditional approach to research.

Three people, three positions

In fact, the model of a slow, stretched-out conversation between three individuals – a German researcher and cultural policy adviser based in Cambodia (Kai), a Burmese artist and curator based in Germany (Zoncy), and a Bangladeshi-Canadian educator, designer, and social entrepreneur based in Indonesia (Raïsa) – with no particular goal in mind is a form of ICR in itself as we practiced listening, sharing, and learning as well as care and compassion. While our process was not directly grounded in these methods and protocols, methodological inspiration came from the indigenous research methods of yarning and knitting words (McKnight and Yunkaporta 2024). Our intention was to centre positionality, situated knowledge, and lived experience. What struck me (Kai) the most was that this research method, which felt very new and innovative to me, was very familiar to my two conversation partners. There were many similarities in perspective and value between Zoncy and Raïsa that emerged throughout the conversations, not least a deep suspicion of institutions, including those of ICR. As a cultural policy adviser and researcher, I suppose it is not too surprising that I turned out to be the most mentally institutionalised of the three of us – but it was a surprise to me. At the same time, it also confirmed why I wanted to conduct the research this way – to challenge 'conventional', institutional and potentially colonial thinking, including my own.

Four conversations

In our first conversation we stated intentions and established relations: telling stories of how we got here and where we see our connections with the topic and each other. An email summary of our first encounter preceded the second session. Conversation prompts (such as are international cultural relations inherently good? and why measure cultural relations in the first place?) we had prepared were

not actually used much as the conversation flowed quite naturally and ended with some questions of curiosity. Again, an email summary of the previous session and the design of three scenarios that emerged in conversations served as prompts for our third stimulating conversation which ended with identifying some areas we had not yet covered but wanted to address in the fourth session. The email summary of the third session also included a rough first outline of this publication. We started the fourth session with the topic of ICR in the context of technology and the digital which had not come up organically before. For some deeper sensemaking, I took myself on a writing retreat at a lovely homestay, embracing the idea of slowness, trying to condense everything into something shareable while bathing in the beauty of Siem Reap's mighty trees and temples. Overall, there were so many stories of both joy and pain, personal anecdotes, nuggets of wisdom, random thoughts, deep reflections, dreams and longings, and a whole lot of collective sensemaking of what is happening around us, that it is incredibly hard to condense all of these into one somewhat coherent publication.

Writing the scenarios as design fiction

Then, my colleague Phoo Myat, a Burmese writer, designer, and cultural researcher based in Thailand, utilised her design sensibilities to flesh out the individual scenarios we imagined and expanded on them. The scenarios were formulated through design fiction writing. Design fiction is about creative provocations, raising questions, innovations, exploration and it makes an effort to explore new kinds of social interaction rituals (Bleecker 2009). Design fiction questions the limited range of experiences offered through the current systems. The gap between what is existing in reality and the fictional design artefact is the space for discussion, creating alternatives of how things can be. Each scenario is written by answering the following questions:

- **Context:** What world makes this possible? (values, systems, norms, politics, economy, culture, place)
- **Prototype:** What functional thing exists in this world?
- **Narrative:** What happens because of this prototype in the imagined world? How do objects, service, rituals and people act around it?

Prototypes mentioned in the scenarios are in a possible future, where narratives are used to illustrate how these new ideas are positioned within a new context. They are used to provide a narrowing of focus to a particular context, object, or experience. They are created out of the new values of relationalities, socio-cultural, political, and

economic value. They exist to explain how practices can change and expand in a different world than the one we already live in.

What this publication is

It is important that we acknowledge that this publication is a compilation of thoughts and ideas from the four of us and at times enriched by thoughts of other researchers, designers, artists, and activists, many of which require further and deeper engagement. It is less ‘academic’ than what you might be used to; instead it is an attempt to engage with speculative futures and alternative imaginaries. They are not supposed to be right or wrong, they are designed to be conversation starters, for policy and measurement, for practice and programming, as well as for research and inquiry. We invite everyone to take these ideas and play around with them, experiment with them, remix them, or entirely de-construct them. This way, we, too, build relations through intellectual and speculative discourse, and cultural contextualisation. This is how we believe ICR can actually have a role to play in the flourishing of our planet. And it is also why this publication is more colloquial in tone.

PART TWO

Six framing thoughts

Some of the following thoughts kept coming up in our conversations; sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly. Many are interconnected, but for ease of reading, they are separated. These thoughts help to understand how we arrived at the future scenarios and speculative indicators later in the report. These thoughts are neither a comprehensive nor a conclusive framework – some might even be contradictory. Instead, they re-frame some of the underlying thinking and question the existing systems that have brought about ICR as they exist today.

Where we could trace back ideas to scholarly work, we added relevant references. However, due to the nature of our conversational research method, a lot of the ideas here have emerged through stories and dialogue built on the combined and accumulated life-long knowledge and experiences of the three conversation partners, and, therefore, not all threads of ideas can neatly be followed back to any one source.

Culture is an operating system

In short, culture creates relationality.

Culture is how you and I engage with the world: it shapes how we see things and how we interact with people. Culture has also created systems and institutions that make us behave in certain ways by favouring some ontologies over others (Srivastava 2026). It is an interface with the world but also with yourself and has different applications pre-installed: storage of collective memories, shortcuts to community processes, a selection of games, language and emotion processing. In short, culture creates relationality (Escobar 2024). But culture needs to update and evolve, just like an operating system, responding to all the changes happening around and within us. Having a multitude of operating systems in the world – or: plural ways of knowing – is not just good but necessary as it enables us to engage with our diverse biomes and bioregions respectively. Naturally, the operating system also needs to interface with other environmental actors as well as emerging cultural techniques and technologies – welcome to the part of the system the international cultural relations module slots into.

If we understand cultural infrastructure as social and cognitive infrastructure (Calafati et al. 2026) and decide not to update our cultural operating system, we and the world will continue to move towards unsustainability. Some might exploit emerging flaws as humanity evolves but culture does not. We might lose touch and encounter bluescreens more often, while our art becomes meaningless and self-referential. An operating system that nurtures creativity, imagination, and diversity is thus one to be better suited to address future challenges. Imagine a variety of open source innovations instead of monopolistic closed system patches.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ICR?

We need to build, re-inforce, re-write, and update relationality, both on a small and a very large scale. ICR can connect local relations to global relations, work through arts and culture to create collectivity and shared responsibility for the planet, and foster deep, trust-based collaboration.

FRAMING THOUGHT TWO

Biodiversity equals cultural diversity

We are in a symbiotic relationship.

Whether our poems are odes to the rivers or our songs tell of mountain birds, our everyday practices, our beliefs, and our values are shaped by the natural conditions, the life, and its cycles we encounter on a daily basis. This is but one indicator that human culture is always in relation to nature. We are in a symbiotic relationship: when we lose biodiversity, for example through wilful destruction, late-stage capitalism or climate change, we also lose cultural diversity; and if we destroy cultural diversity, for example through colonialism, materialism or modern culture wars, we also lose touch with parts of biodiversity, accelerating its decline. As stewards of this planet and part of planetary biodiversity, humans and their cultural diversity are therefore essential for planetary survival. This relationship is interdependent and built on reciprocity (Kimmerer 2020). As a response, if nature changes, culture must change, too, as culture is a ritualised group response to what we find around us; or as Keola Lake (in Aluli-Meyer 2006) puts it, "culture is the best practice of a group of people."

The UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights has recently highlighted the important relationship between cultural diversity and biodiversity (United Nations Human Rights Council 2026). So, when the United Nations introduces an indicator on minimum dietary diversity for human health and wellbeing into the Sustainable Development Goals Framework (FAO 2025), we might also want to think about what minimum cultural diversity and biodiversity might look like to enable a sustainable, not further degrading future of our planet.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ICR?

ICR must passionately defend and promote cultural diversity and facilitate the multilateral exchange of it. ICR can promote analogous thinking of biodiversity and cultural diversity, especially in programme design, implementation, and evaluation.

FRAMING THOUGHT THREE

Art is conversation, is mediation, is imagination

It is not for embellishment and illustration only.

Art is also exploration, is inquiry, is connection, is worldbuilding, is expression, and is debate. Art is a great many things and then some. (Calafati et al. 2026) But how often do we fully realise this vast potential in programme-based artistic engagement? Whenever we engage with art in the context of ICR, cultural diplomacy or cultural cooperation, there is a chance that institutional logic changes its objectives to influence, power, and hegemonic narratives. While art can be instrumental in achieving sustainable development – and, frankly, it should – we must be aware not to instrumentalise art and use it for embellishment and illustration only, or worse, deliberately deploy art for propaganda and distributing harmful narratives. ICR prioritises people-to-people exchange as opposed to its more state-to-state, state-to-people or institution-to-institution cousins; and yet, agenda setting and programme design usually still sit within institutions, often state-affiliated institutions. The people it seeks to engage are rarely part of the discussion. We currently limit the potential of ICR to fully embrace the potential of arts and culture by not engaging the very artists, cultural practitioners, and communities we want to be part of our activities. Too often do we build institutional programme logics, theories of change, and key performance indicators on top of cultural and artistic processes, the people of which might not even be aware of it. Instead, we should be treating art as the complex, multifaceted and versatile cultural expression it is.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ICR?

The default engagement mode for ICR intermediaries needs to move from telling to listening, from prescribing to co-designing, and from controlling to trusting. We must acknowledge that ICR is in fact its processes, not (just) its outcomes, and that art is a central one.

FRAMING THOUGHT FOUR

People should tell stories

Not institutions, not corporations, and certainly not large language models.

People should tell stories. Not institutions, not corporations, and certainly not large language models or artificial intelligence. Institutions' dedicated role is not to build and tell stories but to facilitate, harbour, and reinforce the stories of artists and communities, and protect and support these storytellers to do just that. And yes, this also extends to curation as a form of storytelling. If art really is all we said above, we need to take a hard look at those institutions that actively engage in storytelling and to what end. While not necessarily hostile or deliberately pushing a certain narrative, they might still be flattening the diversity and nuance of stories; often unknowingly so following an institutional logic that validates such tendencies. In the case of AI, we are looking at an averaged reinforcement of dominant narratives that can lead to memory engineering, accelerate epistemicide, and desecrate cultural knowledge (Khan 2024).

What we need is multiple, layered, contextual narratives that can help to keep stories and alongside the cultures that birthed them alive in all their glorious diversity and nuance as well as plurality and sometimes incompatibility, ready for current and future generations to engage with, learn from, and build their own stories upon them. And of course we also need the wrappers, the infrastructure, the epistemic diversity to allow the stories and their storytellers to flourish.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ICR?

ICR must embrace pluriversality – a world where many worlds and many narratives fit. ICR actors can be the ultimate facilitators and enablers that both protect and promote, both nourish and encourage.

FRAMING THOUGHT FIVE

Deinstitutionalisation, not just decolonisation

Away from key performance indicators and toward relationship.

A lot of ICR are rooted in former colonial relations, and an addition to or vehicle of modern economic and political relations (Chitty et al. 2022, Budziszewska et al. 2025). Intentions aside, it is this uneven bilateralism that makes ICR institutions prone to falling into the traps of building its own narratives and stripping the people and artists it should seek to connect of their room to navigate their own stories and connections. If de-colonised, ICR would apply different power relations, epistemic plurality, engagement logics, and engagement directions. ICR do not even need to only refer to cultural relations between nation-states. ICR could, for example, manifest in the form of inter-Indigenous relations (Budziszewska et al. 2025), beyond national identifiers and potential hegemonic identity narratives.

What if we were to go one step further and think about de-institutionalisation? If de-institutionalised, or perhaps decentralised away from governmental control, ICR might be less concentrated and less project-based, while institutional production logic could be overwritten with process engagement logic – away from key performance indicators and toward relationship not just as a means but as an end. Of course, there is the argument that strong institutions in a rules-based order keep authoritarian tendencies at bay. Seeing this global order collapse in real time, however, it might be worth asking what if ICR were not following central narratives: engagement might be rich but fragmented, powerful but scattered; we would have lots of small pockets of cultural relations shaped directly by the people without an institutional vector that decides who gets to be part of it, what the rules of engagement are, and what product should emerge at the end of each engagement. This is an argument for ICR as a social practice, as agency and embracing a plurality of how cultures know, think, express, and engage. Perhaps, it would turn into something more like international cultural solidarity rather than diplomacy or cooperation (Vellani in Chitty et al. 2022).

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ICR?

We should not shy away from the small and hyperlocal. ICR should centre people and their contexts and at the same time remain curious and open to global and transnational cooperation initiatives.

FRAMING THOUGHT SIX

Policy makers as policy curators

Generating, mediating, and reflecting experience and knowledge.

Policy makers are still those that have an outsized power over how ICR are organised and funded. What if we were to approach policy making with a curator's mindset? The question is no longer simply how to represent others well, but how to transform the conditions under which representation, visibility, and cultural value are produced in the first place. A policy maker with a curatorial mindset engages the work as a genuine method of generating, mediating, and reflecting experience and knowledge. They approach policies not as a site of production of values, but a site of inquiry, focusing less on a fast outcome and more on a slow process. In this case, a policy maker would assume the role of translation, rather than active meaning-making and defining. This means translating the values, hopes and dreams from different stakeholders by not reducing them to a single meaning, but to produce differences. They create conditions in which policies are crafted with and by the communities rather than for the communities. They would bring forth and develop social encounters and circuits, navigate complexity and interdependence of thought, hone in on patterns, filter and synthesise. A policy maker as a curator dismantles hierarchical decision making and creates equitable spaces for inclusive discourse.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ICR?

As somebody with power in designing, deciding, and funding ICR, de-centre yourself and become a steward of relationality. You can create interconnected possibilities of the cultural, ecological, and social conditions from which more just futures can emerge.

PART THREE

Seven Scenarios

All of the previous thoughts lead us to the point where we need to drastically re-imagine what International Cultural Relations can and should be, how it can engage, who should be involved, and how much it can achieve.

01	**Cultural Engagement**	What if ICR nurtured local cultural ecosystems?
02	**Digital Sovereignty**	What if ICR happened on alternative digital platforms?
03	**Ancestral Knowledge**	What if ICR enabled intergenerational exchange?
04	**Livable Futures**	What if ICR built imagination infrastructure?
05	**Peace Across Borders**	What if ICR facilitated exchange in border conflict zones?
06	**Relational Living**	What if ICR connected old and new communities?
07	**Bioregional Governance**	What if ICR took place between bioregions?



INFRASTRUCTURES — CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

Cultural Engagement

What if ICR nurtured local cultural ecosystems?

IN SHORT

Rather than having a central campus, foreign cultural relations agencies are scattered in small satellite spaces around the host country and act as anchors of creative hubs. These physical creative hubs build community, provide hard infrastructure, offer space for experimentation and connection, and spark many opportunities around them. The hubs are designed to attract both non-profit and for-profit creative initiatives, artists and creative enterprises alike. They are characterised by their local rootedness, community care, collective leadership, and ideally resource sharing. At the same time, they welcome foreign creatives, organisations, and companies through pop-up spaces and residencies that enable deep exchange and connection. To support medium- to long-term ecosystem building, ICR actors within the creative hubs serve as catalysts by seeding the space for 5-10 years until it becomes self-sufficient before moving on to build up another satellite creative hub.

SIGNALS OF TODAY

Governments across the world are cutting or redirecting funding for culture, not least because of increasing culture wars being waged as populist agendas receive more and more attention from voters and the media. The polarisation of societies – progressive versus conservative, rules versus strength, compassion versus hate – has found a new battleground in cultural policy and arts funding. Major cultural institutions must deal with hostile takeovers and weaponised programming, while artists face frequent challenges to their artistic freedom, having previously agreed engagements cancelled and being blacklisted. In this era of late-stage capitalism and societal distrust where culture can easily be hyper-politicised, hyper-commodified or publicly forgotten and sidelined entirely, safe spaces for artists disappear at a rapid rate. A lot of cultural organisations as well as foreign cultural institutes limit their engagement to capitals and major cities, serving audiences that already have more exposure and access to the global community. At the same time, we are failing the majority of the Sustainable Development Goals and see a global backsliding of sustainability cooperation. However, there is a growing discourse around positioning culture as part of the foundational economy (Calafati et al. 2026) and recognising culture as foundational to sustainable development (Brennert et al. 2023). On a political level, ministries of culture and UNESCO work towards a stand-alone culture goal in the post-2030 agenda.

A POSSIBLE FUTURE

International Cultural Relations emerge as the champion of culture as the foundation of sustainable development by nurturing cultural ecosystems and infrastructures across the world. Foreign cultural institutes are the safe space that artists and arts communities need to (re)build collective care and leadership. They position themselves as ecosystem builders rather than as a focus institution with curated programmes of national narratives. Embracing the notion of 'culture as global public good', they understand the importance of strong cultural ecosystems that create access for the global public to engage with a diversity of arts and culture. Nurturing cultural ecosystems, strengthening cultural infrastructures, and scaffolding cultural architectures take many forms: investment and incubation, connection and collaboration, protection and freedom, experimentation and insurance, celebration and communication. The resulting structures and connections are the goal – strong local as well as transnational cultural ecosystems are essential for effective planetary sustainable development. These new or reinforced infrastructures that nurture ecosystems are decolonial in nature. ICR actors only play the role of initial facilitator, being a friend of the process and the networks.

Re: Studio space at Inle-Arts

FROM Thandar · Inle-Arts Creative Hub, Institut Gotong Royong Kreatif Indonesia

TO Aung

DATE 23 August 2035

Dear Aung,

My name is Thandar from Inle-Arts creative hub. I am a representative of Institut Gotong Royong Kreatif Indonesia that is working with different cultural professionals, initiatives, and organisations across Myanmar to support the growth of the local cultural ecosystem. I am sitting in a former textile warehouse turned creative hub, a place we have been sharing with many other creatives in the city for the last 3 months, and staring at the faded dye marks on the floor as I am writing to you.

Recently I was informed by one of the co-working space mates that you are in need of a studio space after yours was damaged by last month's flooding. All of us at the hub have been avid fans of your community-rooted arts practice, and we have collectively decided to offer you a temporary working space at our hub without charge. Specifically, you will be offered one of our free studio spaces, which is large enough that we have been occasionally hosting workshops there. We hope it gives you enough room to continue the public sculpture project that you are co-creating with children from IDP camps. Moreover, a sustainable material manufacturing studio that has been co-renting the space with us would like to supply you with materials you may need for your work. Their low-cost materials are 3D printed directly in our hub and can produce highly versatile forms, so I hope you can chat with them about what you need. If you do require to purchase additional items or need financial support to start fixing up your flooded space, we have an emergency fund that could be available within 48 hours once we have majority approval from our hub mates. Our current Indonesian artist-in-residence's practice is also heavily rooted in socially engaged arts, and I believe you two would find a lot to talk about.

Despite being part of the Institut Gotong Royong Kreatif Indonesia, our hub is not a gated community. We are one of the seven rotating cultural hubs in the country that the institute co-rents with local collectives, studios, and independent cultural professionals. We are currently located on the east side of Inle where we will remain for the next two years until our development goals in the area are realised – that is, the space we are co-renting has become self-sufficient. We have a very diverse mix of creatives that keep the environment fun and engaging. To give you a better idea, let me walk you through what my morning looked like today here at Inle-Arts. As I walked in, I saw a fashion student steaming recycled fabrics, and two game designers arguing over sound design near the window. A ceramicist had claimed a corner with all her prototypes. I then saw my deskmate, who is a curator, who was busy figuring out how to make our archives weather-resilient so that we can safely host climate-sensitive materials during the coming humid season. At the coffee counter, I ran into the Director of an Indonesian museum and heritage XR company that had just set up a local pop-up office to test the market here in Inle. She said she was almost overwhelmed by the magnitude of relationships she had built in such a short time. I see every morning as an inspiring and learning moment where I can immerse myself in and feel the pulse of the local scene but also broker meaningful connections with creatives from my home country.

Most of the working space mates gather at least twice a day; an assembly in the morning and a coffee and tea break in the afternoon. Some even stay on and cook dinner together. Everybody who has time, energy or requires a little bit of human connection to feel wholesome again is welcome. In the assembly, we usually discuss space usage schedules, emergency fund and cultural support fund allocations. Though half of the seed funding is from our institute, decisions about where to direct the funds are made collectively by institute representatives and local professionals. Someone recently said our institute's job is to fix leaking roofs. I thought that was very fitting since we are not in the practice of cultural representation, but in the practice of keeping cultural conditions alive and facilitating enriching cultural relationships across borders. We are simply here to tend to what's necessary to thrive so that we may build a sturdier house together with no leaking roofs, all benefiting from the safety of it.

Hope this long convincing has prompted you to accept our invitation. A few additional pieces of bonus information: our seven hubs in the country have different facilities depending on who is co-renting with us, ranging from photo studio, sound room, to woodworking, and more. If you are travelling anytime soon, you are free to use the facilities. Our hub changes shape as well. For example, in the evenings, our library functions as a legal clinic for advising artists whose community spaces are under threat from redevelopment. We sometimes have teenagers using our courtyard space – to test a projection against the wall, to prototype school projects, etc. I think you would love the energy and the diversity this space brings.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon!

Best regards,

Thandar

SCENARIO 01

Speculative indicators

Speculative Indicators: If ICR nurtured local cultural ecosystems, the following indicators would help us understand how well this is going:

IMPACT

Average extent of cultural participation

01 / 09

In the spirit of the 15-minute city that seeks to reduce emissions and create access to basic amenities for people, access to culture can be measured through physical proximity to a creative community hub. Follow-on indicators can include engagement measured through frequency of visits (or being visited) and the perceived importance of cultural infrastructure in people's lives. On top of access through proximity, it is also essential to measure inclusivity. Who and, more importantly, who is not visiting and participating, and do local cultural clusters address this?

WHAT IT MEANS

When ICR actors are local ecosystem participants and even catalysts, they can actively contribute to implementing the concept of culture as a public good. With culture being the foundation of sustainable development, a minimum provision of culture becomes imperative. ICR ensures a minimum cultural diversity.

Number of non-metropolitan cultural ecosystems that hold international cultural relationships

02 / 09

Cities are hotspots of culture but cultural life is rarely limited to urban or metropolitan areas. Yet, cultural infrastructure and opportunities are often clustered in major urban areas, including those facilitating international cultural exchange. This indicator is designed to trace non-metropolitan ICR activities by foreign ICR actors such as national cultural institutes establishing decentralised presences and whether these contribute to a more diverse and balanced engagement between cultural communities locally and internationally.

WHAT IT MEANS

The assumption is that creating opportunities for international cultural exchange outside of a country's central cultural hub creates a broader spread of people that can engage in mutual exchange. By not routing every engagement through the capital, it supports cultural access equity.

Number of forked creative hub and cluster concepts

03 / 09

Every ecosystem is fundamentally different, but all rely on similar types of interdependent relationships. This is also true for local cultural ecosystems. This indicator serves as an alternative proof of concept and measures how often the concept of ICR-seeded creative hubs and clusters has been forked, adapted, or remixed to respond to local realities. It signals both innovation capacity and that the initial seeds planted can lead to new networks.

WHAT IT MEANS

Innovation and adaptation are essential skills required for future resilience and sustainable development on an ever-changing planet. ICR can help kickstart some of these cultural resilience measures and learn from local innovations, transmitting back inspiration for their home communities.

OUTCOME

Type of community protocols adopted that govern local cultural ecosystems

04 / 09

Relationships are governed by protocols – written and codified, understood and unspoken, or smart and automated. They are built on agreed-upon value sets and form the basis of community decision making. This indicator looks at the infrastructure on which relationships are built in different local cultural ecosystems, and whether it contributes to sustainable development and planetary flourishing. It opens up insights into how people treat each other, how they navigate conflict, whether the non-human living world is represented in decision making, and more.

WHAT IT MEANS

As a community member instead of a powerful donor or curator, ICR will be an equal participant in these community protocols, with rights and responsibilities. Local ICR engagement puts the whole community in charge and creates agency on how and how much they want to build international cultural relations.

Success of anti-gentrification measures put in place

05 / 09

Top-down creative hub development often carries a developer logic to increase attractiveness of a physical area, which can lead to rent hikes, brain drain, and other forms of gentrification. This indicator measures which anti-gentrification measures were designed and implemented, and how successful these were. It is also important how the cultural ecosystem engages with its non-cultural sector environment and what interdependencies were established to avoid disneyfication or a sole tourism focus.

WHAT IT MEANS

ICR can create dialogue between cultural ecosystem actors from different parts of the world experiencing similar challenges to learn from one another to ensure long-term livable cities, desirable communities, and affordable living conditions.

Number of long-term international inter-hub relationships that survive an institutional ICR exit

06 / 09

A core measure of successful ICR is the mutual exchange and long-term relationship building it enables. This indicator asks whether institutional ICR can help create de-institutional ICR and lay the foundation to make itself redundant. It tracks the strength of established international inter-hub relationships, how many of those relationships survive the exit of a foreign cultural institute as facilitator, and whether self-managed ICR activities are still being carried out.

WHAT IT MEANS

From a sustainable development angle, this indicator looks at the strengthening of self-organisation and community interest in diverse mutual and ideally multilateral international and intercultural relationships.

OUTPUT

Feeling of community care in local cultural ecosystems

07 / 09

Feelings are subjective by nature. They are an important part of the human condition and are influenced by our emotions and perceptions. The feeling of being in a community of care can create a sense of belonging and identification, ultimately contributing to community care yourself. While measuring feelings can be done through self-reporting, artworks surfacing in cultural hubs might also tell us stories of how people feel in the space and the community.

WHAT IT MEANS

If we recognise cultural spaces as social infrastructure where informal intercultural social exchange can take place, the ICR dimension of fostering local cultural ecosystems is closely linked to the social dimension of building more cohesive and more connected societies. Relevant for sustainable development is that a larger number of people are exposed to community care, as recipient as well as caregiver.

Quality of interdependence in creative hubs and clusters

08 / 09

There are many ways for local cultural and creative ecosystems to both survive and thrive, creative hubs and clusters just being one of them. This indicator captures the quality of how interconnected and interdependent these hubs and clusters are. The dimension of quality should be self-defined by each cluster. A more comparable sub-indicator could be the percentage of individual cultural professionals, non-profit and community initiatives, impact enterprises, and shareholder profit companies that are present in each cluster. In the long-term, tracking what happens to the ecosystem when any one actor leaves is essential to understand interdependencies.

WHAT IT MEANS

While ICR can help to strengthen the foundations of interdependence both locally and internationally, the sustainable development dimension is found in how professional local cultural communities relate to and work with each other.

Financial and environmental costs saved due to resource sharing in creative communities

09 / 09

This indicator is built on a counterfactual understanding of the financial and environmental costs that would have occurred if it would not have been for shift toward resource sharing. Going deeper, it might be worth observing what is shared, how it is shared, how much of it, and what non-monetary value is created through sharing.

WHAT IT MEANS

The indicator signals an ecosystem relationship of reciprocity, mutual aid, and interdependence – something that is built on trust and can be fostered through ICR. It contributes to the sustainable use of resources whilst creating stronger social bonds in communities.

INFRASTRUCTURES — DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY

Digital Sovereignty

What if ICR happened on alternative digital platforms?

IN SHORT

Instead of large centralised, advertisement-driven social media platforms, globally scattered interest groups have built a decentralised, self-governed social-cultural exchange platform. The hubs live from the personal connections that they facilitate, the exchange that happens across languages and cultures, and the trust and understanding that is built among platform members – creators and audiences alike. It is also a place for communal micro-problem solving through collaborative open source building. The infrastructure is decentralised, meaning everybody is equally responsible for its maintenance. This is the most democratic, bottom-up form of ICR possible – no institutions involved and multi-lateral by design.

SIGNALS OF TODAY

A small number of giant technology firms dominate large parts of the internet and the global economy. Social media and e-commerce platforms, search engines and artificial intelligence applications, as well as productivity software and entertainment platforms – many are developed, run, and exploited for commerce by a few corporations from the United States and China. In some cases, this platform capitalism mixes with political influencing akin to a 'broligarcy', creating significant threats to privacy and freedom of expression. Platform algorithms and artificial intelligence models accelerate global epistemicide at an alarming rate. At the same time, the open-source movement is still going strong, issues of data sovereignty and digital decentralisation through blockchains find their way into everyday conversations, and vibe coding is making development of mobile and web applications more accessible than ever before. Concerned individuals and institutions blow the whistle on unethical AI development and use, while some initiatives actively build decolonised AI models. In some countries, young internet users mobilise protest movements through decentralised platforms and even stage elections (Kharel 2025), while in others users are actively deleting their accounts on the platforms of tech giants as a form of disagreement. Moreover, tech giants are increasingly driven by scalable profit models, abandoning long-term innovation ventures that fail to deliver rapid financial returns. On the other hand, digital innovation supported by independent artists, technicians, and creators who build alternative ecosystems are grounded in community needs with potential to open space for more diverse, ethical, and locally relevant visions of future technologies beyond the priorities of the mainstream tech industry.

A POSSIBLE FUTURE

People don't always meet face-to-face – these days, cultural exchange often happens online. Whether community building takes place around weird little niche interests or global sub-cultures, ICR fosters and protects these little digital corners of hope. Built on alternative digital platforms – sometimes whacky, sometimes functional – digital communities revive neighbourhood-like relationships that we have abandoned in the physical world and form new bonds with people across the globe they would never have met. Being in charge of the platforms' code, data, and mechanisms, it is easy to bridge languages and celebrate different ways of knowing and communication. Users seek real communities that can be facilitated, protected, and enriched by different actors in the field of ICR. It feels a bit like the early days of the internet which organised around many small communities of niche interests, where people taught themselves how to code basic websites, and embraced the imperfect nature of this new and ever-evolving medium. As people move away

from big platforms, many small interest groups around the world have stepped in as the enabler of digital alternatives. As champions of freedom of expression and direct people-to-people exchange, these new ICR actors defend these decentral spaces, digitally assist with bridging communication barriers, and help their online communities build the digital worlds they desire, including replacing services they previously had access to with community-based open source action and mutual support and designing creative little modes of playful engagement.

The Commons Belly

Kitchen Field Studio Archive

PUBLISHED ON THE COMMONS BELLY, AN INDEPENDENT MEDIA PLATFORM RUN BY THOSE WHO MAKE ART, WRITE AND COOK.

Cooking Live Streaming Platform 'KitchenHub' Raised Money for Restoration of Heritage Sites After Earthquake

The Commons Belly · Kitchen desk
12 September 2037 · 6 min read

Can a transnational cooking live show raise money for restoring crucial heritage sites damaged by disasters? Kitchen Hub says Yes! The idea for KitchenHub started humbly when two neighbors started exchanging recipes. They didn't speak a common language fluently, but started becoming friends by exchanging recipes from their culture and cooking together. They regularly uploaded cooking videos, ingredient lists via a chat group. Friends joined. Then friends of friends. Then strangers. With the intention of sharing these recipes and culinary stories with a wider audience, the founders created KitchenHub from a free open-source codebase available via HubVerse.

HubVerse is a global network of thousands of independently owned servers that function as an interconnected, community-driven alternative to social media giants. Because these servers use a universal communication standard, a user on one platform can seamlessly follow, comment, and interact with someone on an entirely different network. This gives users a variety of content, but also control over what they wish to see and what they don't. This is how KitchenHub amassed 10 million users in just three months. A user does not strictly have to be registered to KitchenHub to see and engage with its content. A member of any platform on HubVerse has access to every other platform on it as well.

For their fundraising event, KitchenHub partnered up with other HubVerse platforms. A visitor can experience cooking live streaming by various creators across the world uploaded to KitchenHub, learn about home grown organic vegetables from GardenHub or listen to origins of culinary cultures, stories and mythologies by RadioHub. How are so many languages used by a diverse mix of creators understood by the audience? There is TranslateHub, powered by translators across the world, simultaneously translating the content into nearly every existing language. The visitor simply chooses the preferred language settings on HubVerse and the content will appear in their own language. "Ultimately, it's about knowledge sharing and co-ownership. The platform is built up by the community, so it's only right that it keeps benefiting the wider community as we grow. We see our work as a catalyst for cross-cultural exchange and promoting understanding," said a volunteer translator on TranslateHub. "We want to create a collaborative culture instead of mass consumption."

The collaborative culture has produced fruitful results. The repository of different languages on TranslateHub is now used as a base for training LLMs that are designed for minority languages that are not usually covered by big tech models. The creators say these new models are rich with cultural data that is unbiased and not influenced by agendas, which can help respective communities protect their cultural expressions better. There are a wide range of projects like this by users. Recently, a gardening aid app for immigrants was released, which gathers information on how to plant seeds from your native country in a non-native soil, and gives step-by-step tips everyday for plant maintenance.

Decentralised digital hubs are becoming increasingly popular as they provide more agency and privacy to the users, while being able to participate in meaningful collective cultures. To join HubVerse, please visit www.joinhubverse.collab.

1.2k *reactions* **318** *reposts* **96** *replies*

SCENARIO 02

Speculative indicators

if this future arrived, the following indicators would help us understand how well it is going.

IMPACT

Vibrancy of digital worldbuilding

01 / 09

Imagining alternative futures – and ideally acting upon them collectively – is a core function of communities. An indicator that measures the vibrancy of worldbuilding can tell us whether imagination is alive and well in our online communities. It can also give us information about who is building, what underlying values and mechanisms these worlds are built on, what novel ideas emerge in the process and how people are engaging with them. It is an indicator that also looks into the vibrancy of artistic expression and cultural dialogue within these communities.

WHAT IT MEANS

Before sustainable development can be practiced, it needs to be imagined. ICR is the ideal vehicle to jointly design worlds we want to live in and set the course for a community consensus on action for sustainable development.

Problems solved through international cultural collective intelligence

02 / 09

Where multiple knowledges converge, ideas were interrogated through different cultural lenses, and art was a respected form of inquiry, solutions to sustainable development challenges have a higher chance of being addressed holistically, culturally responsively, and creatively. This indicator positions ICR as an enabler of collective intelligence and community innovation. Even if problems are not solved, ICR might help to reframe them or open new pathways to approach them.

WHAT IT MEANS

Sustainable development challenges are not isolated problems and need to be addressed by humanity as a whole. ICR could be the glue to facilitate active cultural collaboration on wicked problems.

Cultural data protected

03 / 09

Cultural data can come in many shapes and sizes and will require different approaches to protection. Some data might be culturally sensitive and requires protection to safeguard people and identities. Other cultural data might be governed by community protocols and is to be protected from harmful external use. Some cultural data needs to be protected from AI bots scraping content and companies profiting from it without prior consent or profit-sharing. This indicator category could also measure the development of new LLMs with built-in smart contracts of when and how certain knowledge can be accessed.

WHAT IT MEANS

As culture is foundational to sustainable development, protecting and safeguarding cultural data creates the conditions to use this knowledge meaningfully and respectfully. ICR is the conduit to build this understanding and maintain its infrastructure.

OUTCOME

Quality of participation in decentral self-governance mechanisms

04 / 09

Participation in federated, self-governed online spaces can take many forms, for example voting, moderating or forking an existing platform to create a new one, different one. What is important is not just numbers but also the quality and sincerity of user participation to facilitate meaningful exchange. On the negative side, sub-indicator could also look at whether there are tendencies to re-centralise platforms and concentrate governing power among few.

WHAT IT MEANS

Sovereignty over digital assets and platforms and self-governance are strong indicators of self-determined democratic participation and community organising, which on a global scale can serve as foundational elements of both ICR and sustainable development. Ideally, this happens in conjunction by self-governing for sustainability.

Number of international online friendships that turned into offline friendships

05 / 09

Online spaces have unique properties that allow people to exercise certain personal preferences when engaging with other people, especially across countries and cultures. It also creates access to engage with a much larger pool of people and potentially opens them up to more intercultural learning. Yet, taking online friendships offline is a significant step that signifies a lot of trust or at least curiosity built between people or communities, even though it is limited by mobility privilege. A less strong indicator could measure where people have gone to experience different cultural experiences locally after having been exposed, encouraged, or inspired online.

WHAT IT MEANS

Fostering personal friendships and recognising other individuals with all their cultural layers creates stronger community ties – only in this case, the community is global and probably arranged around similar interests. This is the most basic outcome of ICR.

OUTPUT

Perception of closeness to other online members

06 / 09

The feeling of being close with another person is subjective, non-comparable, and can change regularly. At the same time, it is one of the strongest possible interpersonal indicators telling us about community cohesion and trust. This indicator measures how well a digital sovereign place can make people feel part of a real community.

WHAT IT MEANS

As the digital realm is becoming an ever larger part of our social lives, measuring how digital infrastructure and programming can contribute to international cultural relations is an important dimension. These online relations affect how we build social relations globally, how we perceive the 'other', and whether it helps us to emphasise with others facing sustainable development challenges.

Percentage of repaired and reused server hardware

07 / 09

Online activity, even decentralised one, requires resource-intensive hardware. This indicator measures the contribution of decentralised intercultural online communities to sustainable resource use in the form of repairing broken hardware, reusing old or unused hardware, and recycling unusable hardware. An additional indicator could measure how many percent of decentral server networks are powered by regenerative energy sources.

WHAT IT MEANS

These indicators measure environmental sustainability, responsible consumption and use of resources. Since our online ICR activities always rely on such infrastructure, it is important to show and practice the necessary sustainability awareness.

Number of languages actively used across the platform

08 / 09

This indicator speaks directly to the protection and promotion of cultural, linguistic and epistemic diversity. In a place where non-globally dominant languages interface with each other and explore each other's nuances, especially when they are not translated through English, Mandarin or Hindi first, culture is not just exchanged, it is being activated and contributes to preserving a plurality of different ways of seeing and understanding the world. If this extends to sign languages and those exclusively transmitted orally, we further expand the pool of possible cultural relations, and practice inclusion.

WHAT IT MEANS

Giving people opportunities to live and express their cultural identities and communicate, share with, and learn from other people across the globe contributes not just to more intercultural understanding but potentially also to more collaboration and plural ways of global problem-solving.

Diversity of cluster communities

09 / 09

Communities and identities form at different levels. While it can be difficult to fully imagine a large-scale community identity, niche and neighbourhood-sized communities can achieve genuine personal connection much easier. The internet enables these communities to be decentralised, international and intercultural. It is also a space for existing but dispersed communities, such as diasporas, to re-connect. Ultimately, a strong sense community builds community support mechanisms – formal or informal. Taking community building a step further, the indicator could also look at the percentage of communities that engage in collaborative open-source design and solution building.

WHAT IT MEANS

The cluster communities itself are a product of ICR and the infrastructure that sustains it.



HISTORIES X FUTURES — ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE

Ancestral Knowledge

What if ICR enabled intergenerational exchange?

IN SHORT

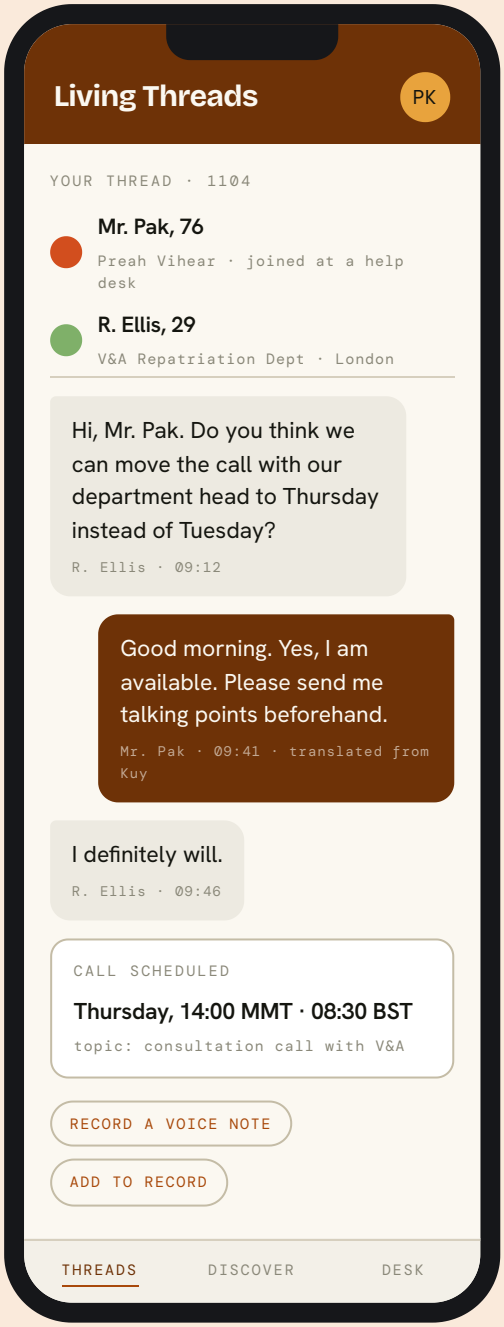
An intervention platform manufactures relationships between elders and younger citizens, where intergenerational exchange happens through informal, self-directed encounters. The platform's core function is not just knowledge transfer but mutual reinvention, allowing relationships to flow both ways generationally. This mode of ICR helps elders become active contributors whose lived experience reshape collective meaning-making regardless of geographical situatedness. It ensures cultural knowledge is passed down human-to-human and heard through lived real-life stories rather than encountered through secondhand accounts.

SIGNALS OF TODAY

We're witnessing a backsliding of minority rights as majority politics experience a global resurgence. The rights and stories of many people are not just at risk of being curtailed but actively fight against epistemicide. Young indigenous and other marginalised people especially have to navigate majority systems that often do not care for them. Older generations that have fought for some of these rights in the first place are now facing new issues, such as systemic ageism and loneliness. As populations age and the generational divide grows, there is a real need for more connections. Some of these are addressed by new initiatives matching young and old culture buddies to attend arts events together. Technological advancements have also simplified communication across large distances and even language divides, making it easier for people to stay in touch with their families and communities even when living elsewhere. And while multigenerational family homes become rarer, the concept itself is widely recognised as beneficial for the social development of young people.

A POSSIBLE FUTURE

ICR are international, but ICR are now also intergenerational. Cultural and knowledge exchange is not only needed between countries and cultural communities but also between different generations. With rapid technological advancement, accelerating climate change, and growing life expectancy around the world, we relate to the world differently and many stories are bound to be forgotten within a generation. ICR are making space and time for inter-generational exchange and deep cultural learning to happen – within and beyond your community. The telling of stories and sharing of living realities in times when migration is a reality for many and people lose touch with the stories, histories, and knowledges that sustain us is evermore important to know who we are and where we come from. Learning from our elders is just as important as navigating the stories of our contemporary world – ICR actors are the ones holding space for such plural storytelling. For them, creating those stronger bonds between young and old, and anyone in between is not only relevant within small communities but also across borders, regions, and communities.


Living Threads
PK
YOUR THREAD · 1104
Mr. Pak, 76
Preah Vihear · joined at a help desk
R. Ellis, 29
V&A Repatriation Dept · London
Hi, Mr. Pak. Do you think we can move the call with our department head to Thursday instead of Tuesday?
R. Ellis · 09:12
Good morning. Yes, I am available. Please send me talking points beforehand.
Mr. Pak · 09:41 · translated from Kuy
I definitely will.
R. Ellis · 09:46
CALL SCHEDULED
Thursday, 14:00 MMT · 08:30 BST
topic: consultation call with V&A
RECORD A VOICE NOTE
ADD TO RECORD
THREADS
DISCOVER
DESK

Living Threads

GLOBAL GLAM ALLIANCE FOR SOLIDARITY · PROTOTYPE

QUALITATIVE DATA REPORT

1104	76	Preah Vihear	V&A Museum
USER ID	AGE	REGION	PARTNER

ABOUT THE APPLICATION

Living Threads, a prototype application created by the Global GLAM Alliance for Solidarity, wants to test whether intervention platforms can be created to support intergenerational exchanges. The project intends to better integrate the lives of elderly citizens into the future, and give them a valuable position in contributing to new ways of living. To target both young and old citizens, Living Threads deploy a dual strategy. A user can create a profile with interests and questions they may have and discover people who align with them. A user may also join via help desks stationed at the participating cities across the world. The help desks make it easier for elderly citizens to join the platform who may have challenges with technology.

USER EXPERIENCE

User 1104, Mr. Pak (aged 76), based in Preah Vihear in Cambodia, is contributing his knowledge to a digitisation project the Victoria & Albert Museum has been funding. Mr. Pak and a young historian from the UK met through the app. Mr. Pak joined the platform through a help desk stationed near his home. A few days later, he had a phone call from the young historian.

The historian, working for the Repatriation Department of the V&A Museum, is questioning the ethicality of digitising ancient Kuy ceremonial axes and daggers. These iron tools were created during ceremonies presided over by shamans and hold a specific relationship to the land, the forest, and the spirits. Being a native of the culture the items came from, Mr. Pak has become her primary consultant in understanding more about the ceremonial traditions, and discussing whether it is appropriate to digitally preserve, collect, and showcase these items for general public view. People with cultural ownership of the items would feel disrespected even after the objects have been returned since sacred items are still being publicly observed and might be misused in a digital format. Mr. Pak is now consulting the museum whether to proceed with digitisation and how knowledge of the culture can be kept without public display. He is happy to contribute his cultural traditions and knowledge to others while also feeling valued since his retirement.

SPECIFIC INTERGENERATIONAL EXCHANGES

On top of the digitisation project, the historian and Mr. Pak began brainstorming ways to share cultural knowledge with a wider audience. The historian proposed circulating memes on social media as a form of outreach to spark young people's interest. Mr. Pak was not easily persuaded. His experience of memes had largely been as a form of mockery, rather than as layered symbols of irony and humor. As an elderly, it is also challenging for him to grasp the trends popularised first in the western societies. Through repeated conversations, however, he came to see how quickly meme culture spreads, and how familiar catchphrases and imagery could reinforce cultural identity, belonging, and closeness. He now feels positively about the idea and is actively working with the historian to build a social media presence around their co-created memes, with a possible "memes manual" for elders down the line; something they hope will help older generations participate more easily in pop culture conversations.

SCENARIO 03

Speculative indicators

if this future arrived, the following indicators would help us understand how well it is going.

IMPACT

Extent of sacredness of cultural knowledge and data retained

01 / 09

This indicator assesses whether intergenerational international cultural relationships hold opportunities for passing on ancestral knowledge. It is not important to know what constitutes sacred data as long as knowledge holders have confirmed it is being safeguarded and passed on according to access protocols enshrined in the knowledge itself. This also means no institution has the right to push for universal access.

WHAT IT MEANS

While this indicator could be read as intellectual property protection, it is more a socio-cultural indicator protecting and transmitting cultural diversity and cultural sovereignty. ICR can be instrumental in this. Self-determination and agency are key factors in realising sustainable development.

Extent of ancestral knowledge recognised in science and education

02 / 09

While this indicator still creates a dichotomy between ancestral knowledge and Western science and education, this indicator is designed to measure whether ICR activities contribute to the mutual recognition and gradual merging of the two. It would be important to document what happens when they met, whether terms and protocols are respected, and whether benefits and usability are mutual.

WHAT IT MEANS

Recognising and applying knowledge from a variety of sources and finding the sweet spot to address sustainable development challenges holistically is what ICR can mediate.

Acceptance of multiplicity of historic narratives

03 / 09

Historic narratives are rarely uncontested and change over time, especially at society level. This indicator is not about homogenisation but about overcoming friction and ensuring peaceful coexistence in the face of seeming incompatibility of narratives. This is a democracy and pluralism indicator as it measures how well a society can acknowledge different readings of history and what they mean to different people from different cultures, countries, and generations. It is also an indicator of power concentration versus plurality.

WHAT IT MEANS

Intergenerational ICR is an important instrument to allow different historic narratives, both individual and societal, to enter a conversation about peaceful coexistence and social cohesion.

OUTCOME

Number of museums, archives, and libraries that activate their collections through international intergenerational exchange

04 / 09

Memory and art institutions have a unique responsibility to engage their audiences around the knowledges and transmitted through the collected art and other cultural objects. International intergenerational exchange offers a unique opportunity to activate collections and engage people in dialogue that unlocks new knowledge. It is important to document how knowledge that emerged through international intergenerational exchange was subsequently used in these institutions. Questions of power concentration and community control must be considered.

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator is mostly aimed at institutional ICR opportunities and how working through the vector of international-intergenerational can create new meaning and engagement with existing cultural knowledge.

Level of integration of elder knowledge into civic organising and ways of living

05 / 09

Situated, embodied and ancestral knowledge hold much value and need to be treated on equal terms to the canon of Western empiric research traditions. This indicator explores whether these forms of knowledge are considered and respected in local political and community organising. A follow-on indicator could measure how often elder knowledge actually changed a decision.

WHAT IT MEANS

When plural knowledges find their way into civic problem-solving and decision-making, new opportunities to solve sustainable development challenges might emerge. ICR can function as an ally and facilitator of different cultural perspectives, even within local communities.

Number of international intergenerational exchanges taking place outside of structured interventions

06 / 09

The best measure of a successful programme is whether it continues after the intervention has ceded. This is also true for international intergenerational exchange as it looks at whether initial contacts have transformed into enduring cultural relationships. Ideally, this indicator will only make sense in the initial stages and later become obsolete as there are too many exchanges to count.

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator is an outcome of intergenerational ICR activities. While it does not directly address any sustainable development relationship, it is implied that creating the relational infrastructure for more international intergenerational exchange can facilitate more dialogue on sustainability and instill a desire to protect.

OUTPUT

Perceived communication gap between generations

07 / 09

In true intergenerational exchange, knowledge should flow in both directions. When young and old understand and can function in both separate culture spheres, the foundations for cross-generational reconciliation are built. This also means being content with any friction that might arise.

WHAT IT MEANS

Apart from weaving a stronger web of global societal relationships, intergenerational communication and understanding contributes to knowledge transfer that might harbour sparks for the solving of sustainable development challenges. ICR ensures acts as a facilitator to enable intergenerational exchange across borders and cultures.

Percentage of population that count somebody from a different country and different generation among their friends

08 / 09

This simple output indicator measures whether a youth might have an elder across cultural or national lines they can ask for help, and vice versa. The relationship facilitates knowledge transfer and combats loneliness for both young and old.

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator underscores ICR's role to build relational infrastructure that can be instrumented for international intergenerational cultural exchange. Ultimately, the indicators asks whether ICR can reduce loneliness whilst creating new relationships and communities.

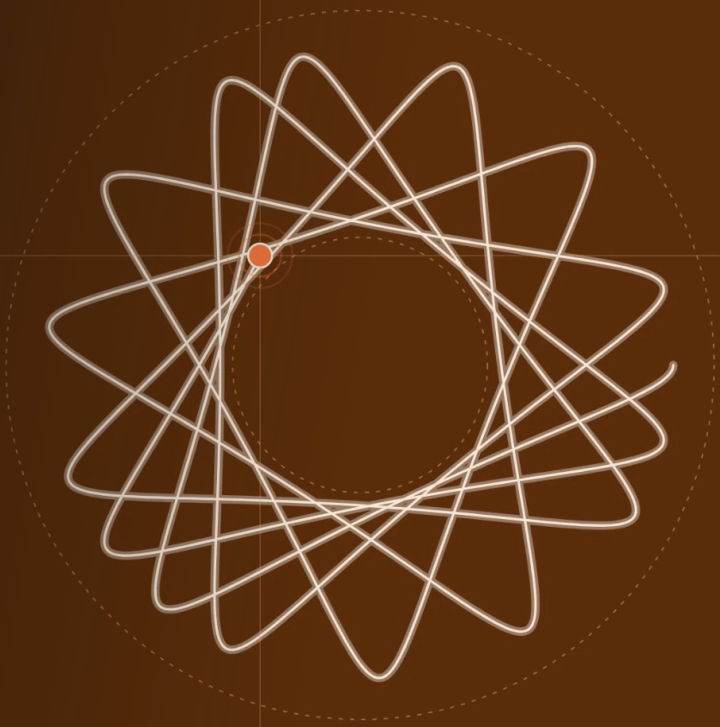
Feeling of openness toward stories, values, and knowledge brought by immigrant families

This perception indicator must be measured from both the host country and the immigrant perspective to get an accurate reading of openness. A more tangible complementary indicator can be the presence of immigrants' stories in local archives, libraries, and public events, and whether they are met with respect and curiosity.

WHAT IT MEANS

Cultural openness toward newcomers, including those of all ages, indicates whether a community has the potential for meaningful dialogue and collective action – something foundational to build toward sustainable development locally and globally. ICR actors can be the ideal facilitator.

Livable Futures



What if ICR built imagination infrastructure?

> "So that's one of my theories of change. If it doesn't exist, I build it and I build it the way I would like to live in the future because I'm practicing the future today." (Bastida 2026)

IN SHORT

Neighborhood community organisers in two countries pair up multi-faith neighborhoods, turning local hangouts into zine-making workshops. Residents document their hopes and struggles in zines, which get swapped with their partner neighborhood after each session, letting people compare notes, spot shared problems, and borrow each other's solutions. The exchange builds both local and cross-border friendships, sometimes sparking real joint action on issues both sides face. This mode of ICR is raw, on-the-ground, and contributes to hyperlocal sustainability solutions through inter-neighbourhood sharing and learning.

SIGNALS OF TODAY

We have an imagination crisis. Policy makers apply the same old models that have failed before to entirely novel problems of unprecedented complexity, while young people feel paralysed by hopelessness. It doesn't help that films, games, and literature conjure up more and more apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic worlds, feeding further into the existential dread of what might be to come. At the same time, politicised education systems teach us to respect the status quo and the powers that maintain it, while algorithmically created social media echo chambers tell us what we already believe or should desire. All of this is exacerbated by the mountains of AI slop recycling their own uninspired feedback loops. On the other side, we have prominent voices calling to turn the polycrisis into a polytunity (Ang 2025), university courses on futures studies, and the emergence of systems thinking in development cooperation programmes. In the ICR community, we see recognition of the importance of arts and culture to enable people to imagine new or alternative futures (Chitty et al. 2022), while in the creative private sector, experiments with artistic intelligence, artists as consultants, and cross-innovation start to appear more frequently. But imagination and hope is also about exercises in radical democracy, many forms of which – such as citizen assemblies, participatory grantmaking, and forum theatre – are still enjoying great interest from communities around the world.

A POSSIBLE FUTURE

Time, space, and resources are the key ingredients for artists to take us on a journey through our imagination. ICR actors have realised the immense potential of creating nurturing environments that facilitate the co-creation of hopeful and desirable futures. Where they have invested in slow, sustained connections of diverse groups of people, neighbourhood visions were designed and implemented, collective futures of how we want to encounter each other globally were imagined, and new modes of sustainable living have found their way into mainstream development policies. On a regular basis, artists invite people to shared cultural experiences (Escobar in Potts and Facer 2025) and encourage them in guided creative imagination exercises to dream and express themselves, embracing each and everyone's way of seeing and making sense of the world they currently inhabit and the world they want to live in. ICR actors do not just ensure that the 'infrastructure' is available but also that imagination exercises are accessible to diverse participants and perspectives – encountering the 'other' and building community is where the real learning happens. Providing and maintaining imagination infrastructure for the global public is also an opportunity for ICR to unlearn some of its inherent coloniality (Kulundu in Potts and Facer 2025) – only together can we embrace the

polytunity. And as the world – including us – is constantly changing, it will take constant connecting and imagining, constant designing and prototyping to build today how we would like to live in the future. And if we're lucky, we might also succeed in re-introducing diversity and hopefulness into AI loops, school curricula, and political debates.

NEIGHBOURS HERE · NEIGHBOURS THERE

How can we be happier together?

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Saturdays, 10am–3pm

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ISSUE 04 ·

HOW *can we* BE HAPPIER together?

a zine made 1,400 km apart.

About

"How can we be happier together?" is a cross-border exchange project, initiated by different multi-faith neighbourhoods in two countries. Represented by community organisers of each country, the organisers arrange dialogues between members of the neighbourhoods so that the residents can imagine a collective future together, and learn from one another about a peaceful plural society. Cross-border exchanges reduce the isolation of individuals, turn what may be perceived as private struggles into shared ones, helping residents spark new ideas of how to create tolerant societies.

← READ THIS BIT TWICE

how it works

Representatives of each neighbourhood befriend the residents and invite them to casual meet-ups and workshops. The process involves discussing the changes the neighbors desire in their physical spaces, policies and development of the neighbourhood. They then slowly introduce the interested residents to zine-making where they can express their ideas in a visual and digestible method.

ZINES TRAVEL BOTH WAYS

The results of the discussions so far (the resident wishes for the neighbourhoods and their current issues) are made into zines, which are shared between the two neighbourhoods after every workshop session. The residents can read the outputs of another neighbourhood after each session. They can then discuss the contents, find commonalities in their problems or learn from unique solutions the other neighbourhood came up with. Through this process, the residents not only establish relationships between neighbors but also international relationships and motivated residents would team up to create real-life solutions to their problems in the neighbourhood.

WISHES, WARD 3

more benches in parks

a Friday farmers market to sell / buy goods

lights along the canal path, it's very dark at night

more public prayer rooms

areas assigned for community art works

COLLECTED 14 MARCH

dreams, collected at the table

My dream is to have a garden area where my mother can plant her favorite vegetables.

I want to have more friends. I feel very lonely after school. I have nowhere to meet my classmates for a playdate.

I want to learn some recipes from my neighbour.

borrowed from the other side

1. Public Yoga sessions at the park every weekend mornings where neighbors can exercise together.
2. Paired friendship program for children of different faith.
3. Rotational hosting of community meet-ups at neighbours' homes.

HOW CAN WE BE HAPPIER TOGETHER

Printed and folded at the session.



workshop sessions: every first sunday, 15:00 · bring fun stories and dreams.

SCENARIO 04

Speculative indicators

if this future arrived, the following indicators would help us understand how well it is going.

IMPACT

Occurrence of AI slop

01 / 08

The more plural and hopeful imagined futures are absorbed by AI crawlers and find their way into AI training sets, the higher the chance of diversifying AI outputs away from slop and dystopian future scenarios. This impact indicator assesses how effectively human intelligence and creativity, fuelled by different ways of knowing, can influence artificial knowledge outputs and counter-act technological epistemicide.

WHAT IT MEANS

The ICR activity of mediating and promoting different epistemologies on a global scale directly impacts whether we can collectively imagine and aspire more sustainable futures. As the human application of AI is increasingly becoming a cultural technique, including in solving sustainable development challenges, ICR becomes even more important in protecting and promoting diverse cultural expressions and knowledge within training sets.

Commitment toward the global community in national development and resilience plans

02 / 08

To assess how deeply international cultural imagination infrastructure is aiding a planetary approach to sustainable development, this indicator measures policy impact. Only when national development and resilience plans do not stop at their own borders but consider both causes and impacts of sustainability challenges on a global scale are we moving closer to sustainable development. Further applications of this indicator can ask whether other countries and non-citizens are meaningfully considered and whether reciprocal relationships, mutual aid, and solidarity are effectively built into those plans.

WHAT IT MEANS

This impact indicator measures whether ICR's support of imagination infrastructure has been successful to create not just societal but also political recognition of sustainability as a planetary issue.

Percentage of public companies with an artist board member

03 / 08

Imagination needs to happen in every aspect of society, including government and business. This indicator measures whether artists as proponents of creativity and imagination are represented in all aspects of society, not just as entertainers. Additional indicators can look at how often the artist-board members disagree with a decision, if they have a creative veto, whether they are listened to and respected. The indicator could also be broadened to measure whether imagination methods are embedded in any organisation that holds a budget.

WHAT IT MEANS

When imagination for sustainable futures is considered in board rooms, a multi-stakeholder approach toward sustainable development-focused decision-making becomes more feasible. ICR actors can help to lay foundations for imagination infrastructure and promote artistic intelligence that governments and the private sector can build on.

OUTCOME

Implementation of imagined neighbourhood futures

04 / 08

This outcome indicator firmly looks at implementation beyond the benefits of the imagination process itself. This indicates how relatable, inspiring, and inclusive the imagined neighbourhood futures were. Follow-on indicators should investigate whether the imagined neighbourhood futures actually got put into action, by whom, and whether they created any tangible change for the neighbourhood. For example, has the implementation connected the neighbourhood more to the global community or not.

WHAT IT MEANS

Moving towards a united vision as a neighbourhood is key to cooperation, solidarity, and solving local sustainability challenges. And as a cross-neighbourhood imagination facilitator, ICR are creating the conditions for their implementation to become successful.

Number of recurring intercultural imagination festivals

05 / 08

Festivals are a great opportunity to bring together a variety of different cultural expressions, worldviews, values, and visions for the future. Art often plays an important role in this. What if ICR could support the setup of small and large intercultural imagination festivals that feature arts, ideas, collective imagination, and cultural exchange, and act as tangible outcomes of soft imagination infrastructure.

WHAT IT MEANS

The need for more collective imagination of hopeful and desirable planetary futures and the celebration of creativity to realise these futures can converge in festivals and other formats.

OUTPUT

Moments of awe

06 / 08

This indicator measures a unique human experience: the feeling of awe in the face of something they or a fellow human imagined or created. What triggered the feeling, when and how did it occur? This natural human response helps us understand how we relate to what is around us, how we value it, and whether we see ourselves as part of it.

WHAT IT MEANS

Where ICR can support the setting up of imagination infrastructure across borders, the real moments of awe that people experience only occur when this imagination infrastructure is used. They indicate a deep emotional connection and inspiration that can then be channeled into action for sustainable futures and more moments of awe.

Number of inclusive neighbourhood gatherings that use imagination methods

07 / 08

Healthy and sustainable neighbourhoods meet and co-create. This output indicator measures the vibrancy of neighbourhood cooperation using imagination methods. This form of soft imagination infrastructure contributes to social cohesion and more dialogue about desirable, liveable futures.

WHAT IT MEANS

Neighbourhoods are important organisational units that many people find relatable and worth acting for. If ICR is involved in promoting neighbourhood gatherings and the co-creation of neighbourhood futures, there is a good chance that these futures are interculturally responsive.

Perception of sustainability challenges as planetary issues

08 / 08

This indicator measures whether we recognise sustainability challenges affecting the entire planet as our responsibility instead of passing them on to the next higher level of decision-making because they feel too far away. This assessment of “imagine global, act local” is implicitly also looking at a sense of global solidarity that drives individual action. A follow-on indicator can be recognition of any cultural roots of sustainability challenges.

WHAT IT MEANS

As a global connector that can also set thematic agendas, ICR are uniquely positioned to build awareness, create understanding, and foster necessary solidarity to treat the planet as a shared habitat.



PEOPLE X LAND — PEACE ACROSS BORDERS

Peace Across Borders

What if ICR facilitated exchange in border conflict zones?

IN SHORT

Untethered to national immigration systems, joint institutions are situated between borders to hold and facilitate cross-border cultural exchange, especially when the formal relations between the nations are strained. These institutions issue travel documents for people on both sides of the border to sustain ongoing cultural relationships, including cultural workers and audiences. This infrastructure exists for a bottom-up, relationship-based form of ICR, deliberately facilitating sustained person-to-person and community-to-community contact where formal diplomacy has stalled.

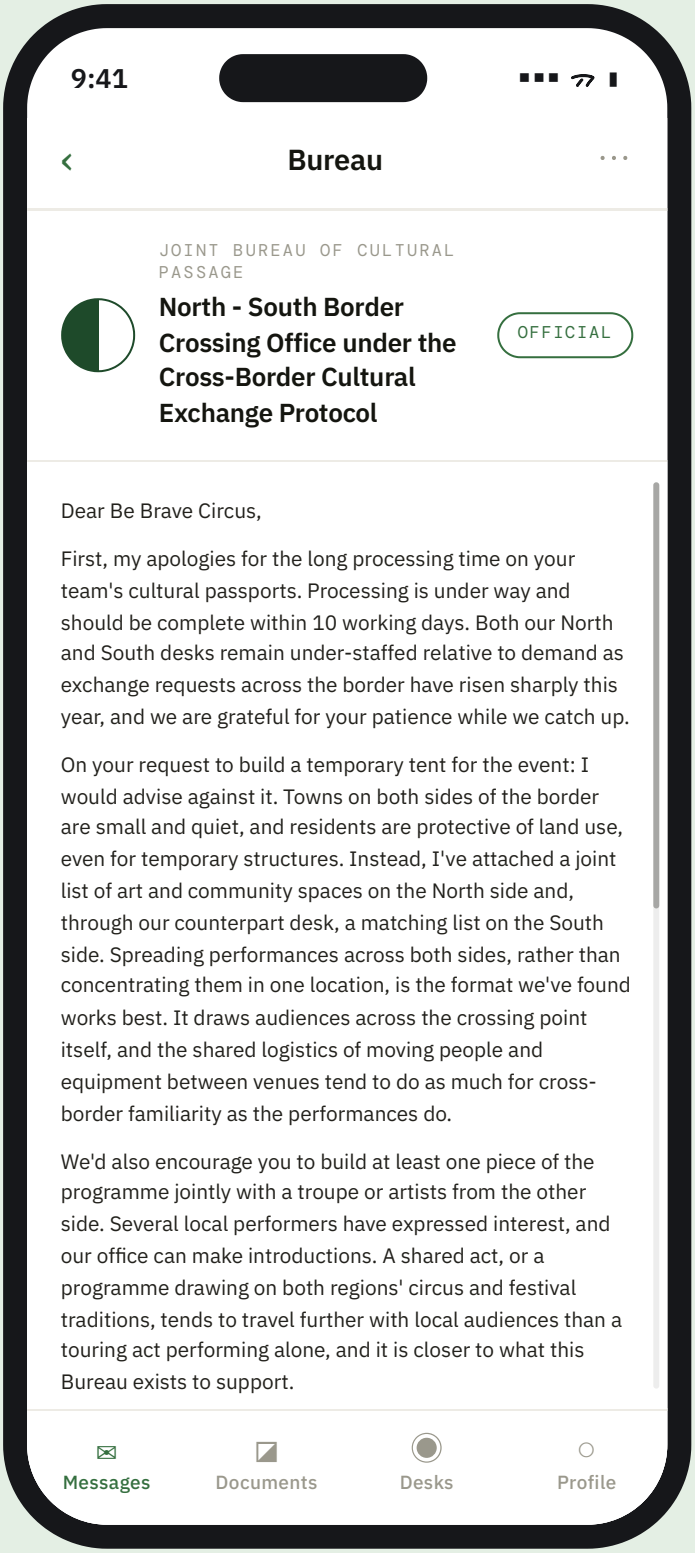
SIGNALS OF TODAY

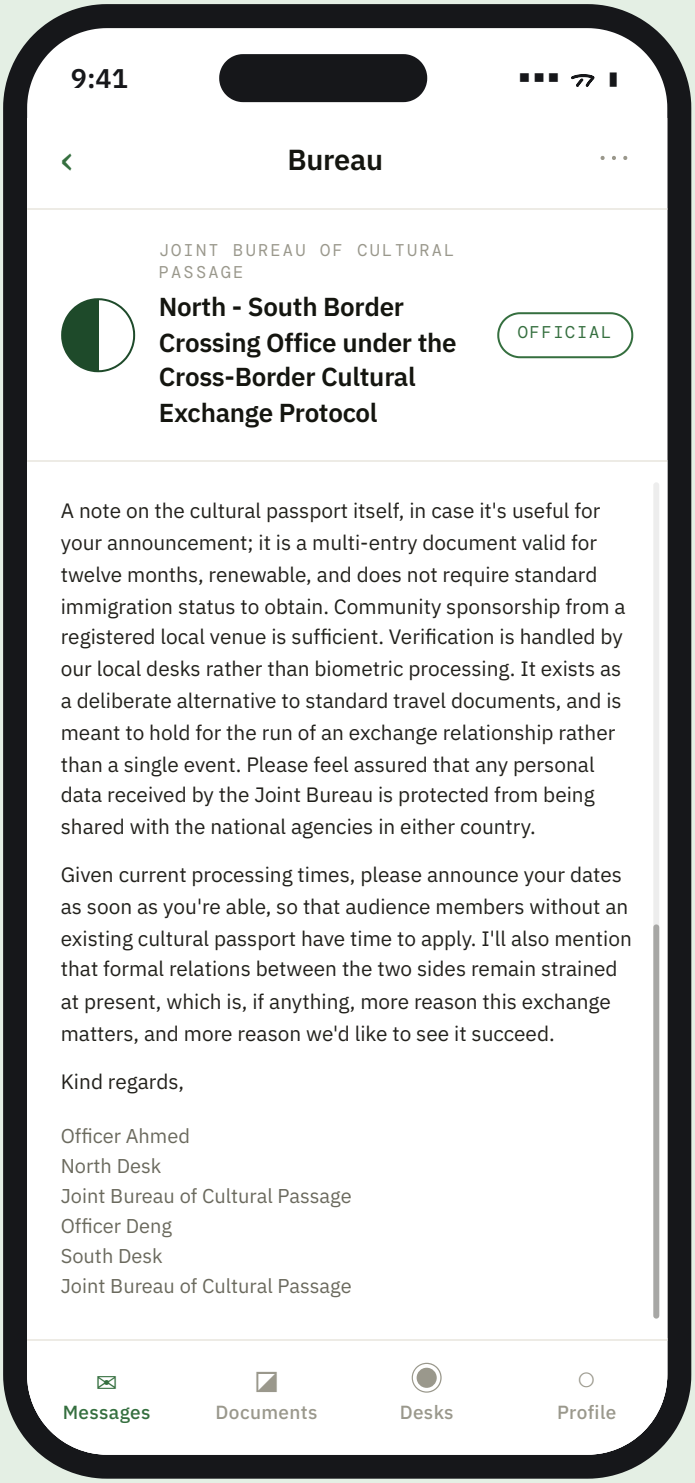
Violent conflicts are ever-present in the world. We're witnessing growing military budgets and new arms races, a rise in authoritarianism, the weaponisation of trade, and a resurgence of nationalist expressions and exclusive notions of ethno-nationalism. The effects of these political and economic tensions in addition to climate change-induced extreme weather events and other natural disasters contribute to enormous numbers of refugees and displaced people in all parts of the world. To make things more difficult for people on the move is the downgrading of their passports, which makes migration hard and catches people in limbo, often in temporary shelters without legal status, the right to work or access to basic public infrastructure. This happens despite ongoing digitalisation of visas, travel permits, and arrival cards through biometric data that can more efficiently track movements and permissions. The planned temporal limitation of these situations often also prevents effective integration efforts. Mediating integration, exchange, and dialogue to build trust and understanding when other forms of communications have broken down is one of the roles ICR likes to assign itself to (edgeandstory and Lanka.pro 2026, Chitty et al. 2022). And yet, these activities are often in urban centres, depend on official diplomatic relations, and might only reach a small group of people.

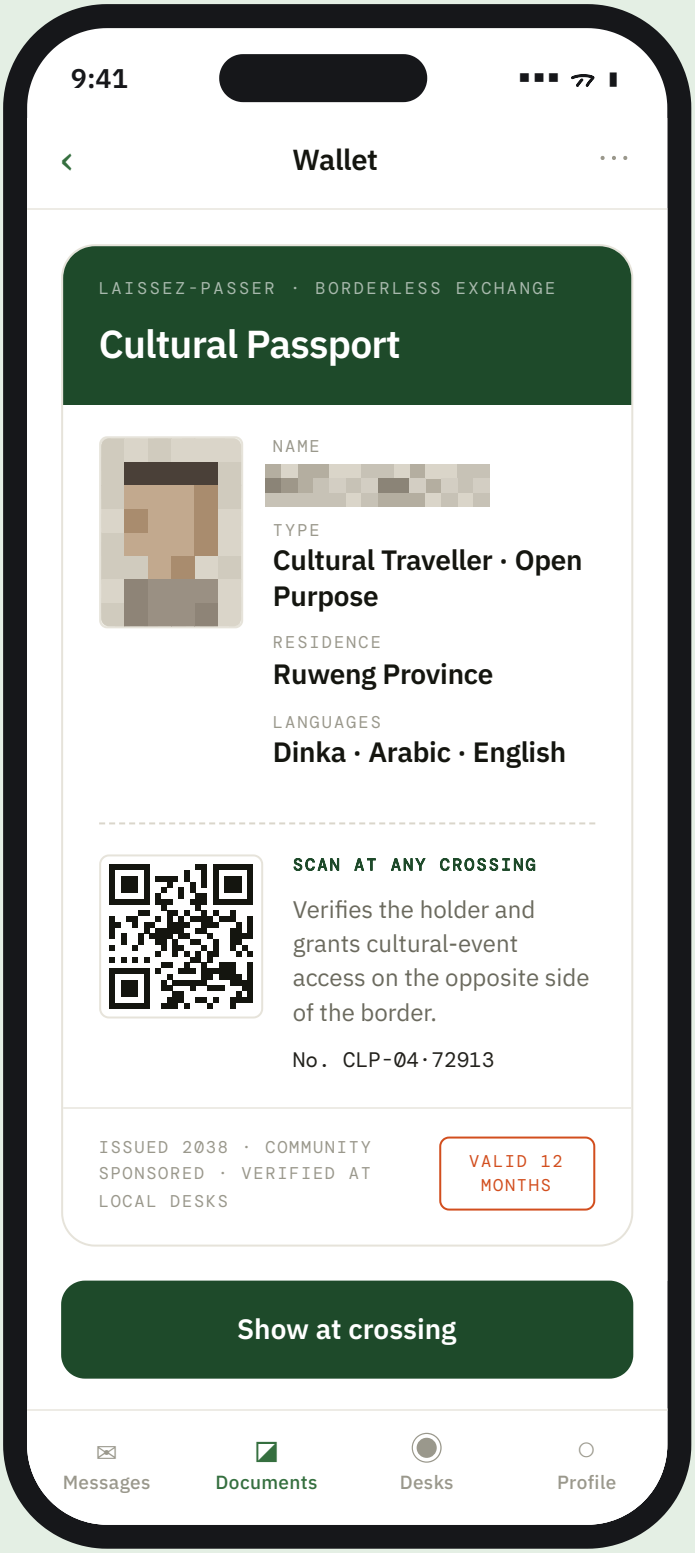
A POSSIBLE FUTURE

As conflicts surge and hate sprouts, ICR activities have shifted from capitals and urban centres to peripheral areas, especially border regions. People in these areas are often far away from national power concentrations and public attention while at the same time living in close proximity to people whom they might not share a language, culture, religion, ethnicity or economic class with. And while borders might sometimes allow flows, they are ultimately designed to divide. As a conscious contribution to conflict prevention and peacebuilding, local ICR actors facilitate cultural exchange and maintain channels of communication with neighbours across borders in fragile environments. The institutional assumption is that the stronger the people-to-people cross-border ties, the harder it is for governments to engage in conflict. Human logic is much simpler: if I know you, understand you, and respect you, I cannot hate you, cannot dehumanise you. ICR's peacebuilding mission is a humanising effort through the collective marvel and celebration of diverse arts and communal cultural experience as well as the negotiation of shared heritage and memories. The real challenge is not just working across different languages, value sets, aesthetics, and narratives but bridging the actual physical borders imposed by states. Local ICR actors mobilise their deep knowledge and networks on the ground to create burgeoning cultural contact zones where previously there was

fragility and vulnerability (edgeandstory and Lanka.pro 2026). Foreign and multilateral ICR actors are taking note, too, as they explore how they can leverage their third-party diplomatic charm in these fragile contexts. They are seen to increasingly cooperate with local ICR actors on each side of the border to help facilitate first exchanges, build bridges for future engagement, and introduce their own artists as cultural sector mediators.


9:41
Bureau
JOINT BUREAU OF CULTURAL PASSAGE
North - South Border Crossing Office under the Cross-Border Cultural Exchange Protocol
OFFICIAL
Dear Be Brave Circus,
First, my apologies for the long processing time on your team's cultural passports. Processing is under way and should be complete within 10 working days. Both our North and South desks remain under-staffed relative to demand as exchange requests across the border have risen sharply this year, and we are grateful for your patience while we catch up.
On your request to build a temporary tent for the event: I would advise against it. Towns on both sides of the border are small and quiet, and residents are protective of land use, even for temporary structures. Instead, I've attached a joint list of art and community spaces on the North side and, through our counterpart desk, a matching list on the South side. Spreading performances across both sides, rather than concentrating them in one location, is the format we've found works best. It draws audiences across the crossing point itself, and the shared logistics of moving people and equipment between venues tend to do as much for cross-border familiarity as the performances do.
We'd also encourage you to build at least one piece of the programme jointly with a troupe or artists from the other side. Several local performers have expressed interest, and our office can make introductions. A shared act, or a programme drawing on both regions' circus and festival traditions, tends to travel further with local audiences than a touring act performing alone, and it is closer to what this Bureau exists to support.
Messages
Documents
Desks
Profile


9:41
Bureau
JOINT BUREAU OF CULTURAL PASSAGE
North - South Border Crossing Office under the Cross-Border Cultural Exchange Protocol
OFFICIAL
A note on the cultural passport itself, in case it's useful for your announcement; it is a multi-entry document valid for twelve months, renewable, and does not require standard immigration status to obtain. Community sponsorship from a registered local venue is sufficient. Verification is handled by our local desks rather than biometric processing. It exists as a deliberate alternative to standard travel documents, and is meant to hold for the run of an exchange relationship rather than a single event. Please feel assured that any personal data received by the Joint Bureau is protected from being shared with the national agencies in either country.
Given current processing times, please announce your dates as soon as you're able, so that audience members without an existing cultural passport have time to apply. I'll also mention that formal relations between the two sides remain strained at present, which is, if anything, more reason this exchange matters, and more reason we'd like to see it succeed.
Kind regards,
Officer Ahmed
North Desk
Joint Bureau of Cultural Passage
Officer Deng
South Desk
Joint Bureau of Cultural Passage
Messages
Documents
Desks
Profile


9:41
Wallet
LAISSEZ-PASSER · BORDERLESS EXCHANGE
Cultural Passport
NAME
TYPE
Cultural Traveller · Open Purpose
RESIDENCE
Ruweng Province
LANGUAGES
Dinka · Arabic · English
SCAN AT ANY CROSSING
Verifies the holder and grants cultural-event access on the opposite side of the border.
No. CLP-04·72913
ISSUED 2038 · COMMUNITY SPONSORED · VERIFIED AT LOCAL DESKS
VALID 12 MONTHS
Show at crossing
Messages
Documents
Desks
Profile

SCENARIO 05

Speculative indicators

if this future arrived, the following indicators would help us understand how well it is going.

IMPACT

Co-designed cross-border futures

01 / 09

When communities can imagine a common future across the border that keeps them separated, we enter territory of peacebuilding. The indicator can further ask what those futures are and whether they are inclusive. The indicator could also measure the occurrence of jointly held but unreconciled histories and memories on which the futures are built.

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator is qualitative in nature and can hold everything from artistic expression to written manifestos as evidence of co-designed futures. The ICR at work are actively contributing to careful cross-border dialogue on the way to peaceful societies.

International trade of cultural and creative goods and services generated in border regions

02 / 09

Cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are already recognised as a vector of ICR. Cross-border creative business relationships carry more than trade value – they carry meaning, culture, and memory. This weighs even more when cooperation and trade of cultural and creative goods take place in fragile border settings. The consumption of cultural products from across the border can indicate a change in affinity or curiosity and potentially growing familiarity.

WHAT IT MEANS

Livelihoods, economic diversification, inter-community dialogue, and peacebuilding are all sustainable development dimensions that ICR can facilitate here, on top of the inherent value of cultural exchange.

Number of new intentional relational infrastructure with systemic resilience mechanisms

03 / 09

Relational infrastructure can be but is not limited to a physical form. It can appear as spaces, collectives, ensembles, micro-organisations or digital communities that build trust, make meaning, and hold memory (edgeandstory and Lanka.pro 2026). Importantly, it must be able to withstand change in political and security directions. This indicator measures what new infrastructures with built-in resilience mechanisms have emerged.

WHAT IT MEANS

For ICR, the task is to support not just the cultural relations but the cultural relations infrastructure that can help communities to maintain these relations and contribute to sustainable peace.

OUTCOME

Balance of cross-border cultural exchange

04 / 09

ICR have a history of uneven power balances. This indicator captures whether cultural exchange in border areas is symmetrical and whether responsibilities and opportunities are equally distributed. This includes looking at who sets agendas, who curates, where does funding come from, which language is used, and more.

WHAT IT MEANS

Ensuring balance in ICR is important to strengthen cultural diversity, agency, and respect between countries and communities, especially in fragile settings.

Number of personal friendships across borders in border regions that survive violent escalations

05 / 09

ICR can build trust and understanding. Whether these bonds are strong enough becomes apparent when violence flares up. Can these friendships withstand pressure from their own national or cultural groups? Do friends actively refuse to participate in acts of violence? Is there visible solidarity and resource-sharing?

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator measures the outcome of cross-border ICR activities and whether the resulting relationships can survive even outside institutional programming.

Number of cross-border co-productions that were showcased on both sides of the border

06 / 09

Co-productions across borders can indicate not just cultural-economic activity but also whether cultural industry relations successfully translate into professional cooperation. While the artistic discipline is irrelevant, the indicator should look at full cultural collaboration, including aspects of producing, distributing, and experiencing a co-production – did all of these aspects take place on both sides of the border? And if not, what were the obstacles?

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator examines the vibrancy of professional cross-border cultural production as well as how balanced that cooperation is. The sustainable development dimension of these ICR outcomes can be seen in the willingness of people to work together, economically and culturally, for better collective outcomes, ultimately laying the foundations for lasting peace.

OUTPUT

Percentage of cultural activities attended by people from both sides of the border

07 / 09

This simple indicator assesses the inclusivity and intention of cultural border events by noting how many are attended by people from both sides of the border. Further questions to explore can include who attended, how and how much they interacted with each other. While simply counting events rarely provides substantive insights, the quality of exchange does as it indicates the immediate success of cross-border ICR engagement.

WHAT IT MEANS

Attending a cultural event with people from across the border means sharing an experience and is the first step to slowly building relationships to unfamiliar cultures and communities.

Moments of genuine connection felt with people from across the border

08 / 09

A feeling of connection with somebody from another country might seem intangible but is at the heart of ICR. This indicator of moments of genuine connection could measure emotions as well as sensory experiences, but also artwork made, shared and experienced. The ‘moment’ is defined by the person experiencing it. Whether it was intended by a programme or incidental does not matter, but it is important that we can learn from them. Similarly, it is not relevant who experienced the moment but when and how these moments happened.

WHAT IT MEANS

Genuine connection with other people over cultural bridges is the currency of ICR. The more moments of genuine connection can be facilitated, the closer we get to a stronger social fabric, especially where other forces might work against it.

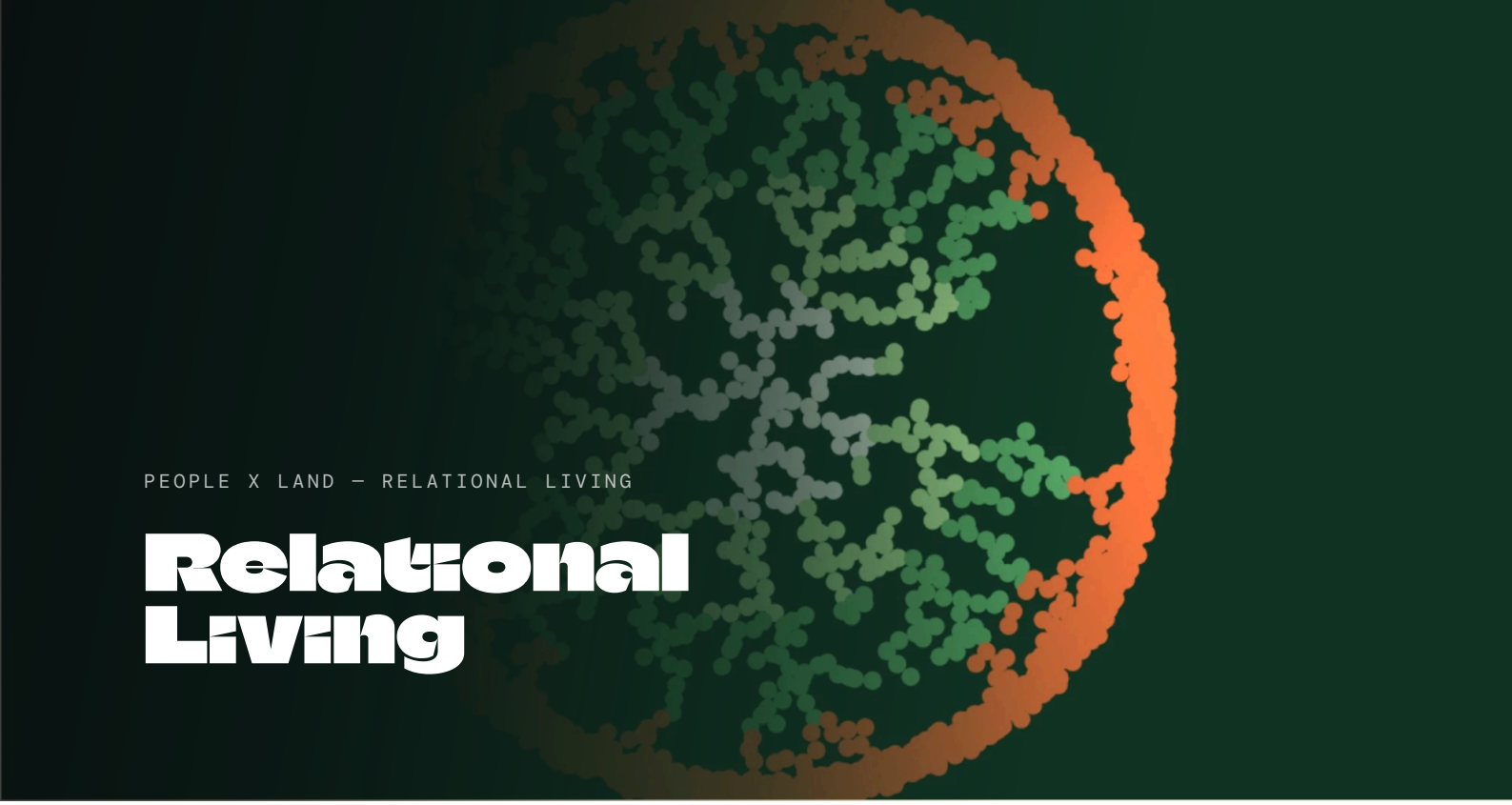
Number of humanising artworks created

09 / 09

Too often do public rhetoric and media reporting during times of fragility and conflict tend to fan the flames of hate. This indicator of perception looks at whether artists counteract these tendencies by creating artworks that humanises the ‘other’. Follow-on indicators could include measuring whether these artworks contribute to lowering the extent of dehumanising language in media and politics. ‘Artworks’ is to be understood loosely and may include anything from physical objects, choreographies, something recorded, all the way to concept art and more.

WHAT IT MEANS

When we humanise the ‘other’, we establish a relationship. Working through the power art, ICR can contribute to this process of humanising people and sow seeds for further peaceful engagement.



PEOPLE X LAND — RELATIONAL LIVING

Relational Living

What if ICR connected old and new communities?

IN SHORT

Community belonging here is created through low-stakes shared activities, which might be a forest walk or a cooking session, where organisers set no explicit goal beyond people spending unstructured time together and connecting to the local environment. Local organisations can facilitate gatherings for old and new members of the community to mingle. Friendship, language acquisition, and cultural exchange accumulate organically from these activities once trust is built through repeated contact. Through this process, newcomers to the community gain not just company but develop a sense of belonging, and the old members have a chance to understand their neighbours and form new relations. This form of ICR is the response when you find the international right at your doorstep.

SIGNALS OF TODAY

Migration is a fact of our times. People looking for opportunities, people fleeing violence, people escaping hardship, people moving for love. As the effects of climate change – changing weather patterns, extreme weather events, land degradation, etc. – compound, they also increasingly contribute to these migration flows. So, we migrate to cities, become efficient salarypeople, drown in anonymity, embrace an urban individualised lifestyle, and endure the populist anti-immigration rhetoric often screaming at us from the television and city squares. Public services are corporatised, further disconnecting you from community that would otherwise have provided mutual aid. Slowly, your cultural practices and ancestral memory connected to land become obsolete, the connection severs. Some communities have realised the harm this does. We occasionally witness anti-anti-immigration movements that advocate against the criminalisation of migration and see voluntary organising to welcome refugees and newcomers into their own communities. In some indigenous communities, an official ceremony like a pōwhiri or Welcome to Country formally acknowledges a welcome of visitors and an invitation for dialogue.

A POSSIBLE FUTURE

When the international arrives at your doorstep, ICR is not something that happens in a far away country but right where you are – at home. We know that arts and culture can provide healing and connection. It builds community and opens dialogue. This is most needed when new people join existing communities in places they have never lived before, especially in the context of forced displacement. They might feel out of place and still process trauma, or they grapple with the realities of having to move to provide for themselves. Either way, the moment they leave, a fundamental aspect of their identity is also left behind – the tether to their home community, their biocultural rhythm, their daily rituals, their annual celebrations, and their connection to the land on which they lived. This is exactly where ICR at home is making a difference: carefully providing the cultural and social infrastructure so that new relations between people and people and between people and land can be crafted. Not to replace but to add. A long crafts table, a communal kitchen, a forest walk – all steeped in local history and memory – become generative third spaces where old and new communities encounter each other, and the gathering becomes the art. (Younes 2026) Such spaces and by extension ICR's intermediary role creates opportunities for newcomers to contribute and make their own connections to people and land outside the logics of ownership, commerce, and consumption. The result is a strong connection between newcomers, local people, and land as something shared. It builds intentional community. And intentional community provides care and mutual aid,

it supports healing, and it establishes a relationship to something you want to protect and cherish, something that gives back and provides. Once you shift your understanding of private land as a “bundle of rights” to property that has a “bundle of responsibilities” attached (Kimmerer 2020), ICR at home has achieved what it set out to do.

Voice mail #3

RE: COMMUNITY FOREST WALKS



1:22

TRANSCRIPTION

“Hi Mrs. Nandar, thank you very much for recommending me community forest walks. My mother and I had a blast. I am feeling relieved now as my mother seemed to have broken out of isolation and made some friends. Today she is teaching them how to bake our traditional rice cakes with local flowers. During the meet-up, the group had a nice walk through the forest, did mushroom hunting and cooked dinner together after we got back to the literacy council classrooms. I have enrolled my mother in one of the beginner classes as well, which hopefully ease her language problems and find some more friends to feel comfortable with. She has been rambling about regular forest walks with her new illustrator friend, who will aid her in recording edible flowers in the local areas, which can be used in our traditional recipes. It’s possible my mother will be an established cookbook author soon enough! She now has activities to do in the daytime while I am away on work and it is bringing me some relief. Hope to see you soon on one of the walks.”

SCENARIO 06

Speculative indicators

if this future arrived, the following indicators would help us understand how well it is going.

IMPACT

Rate of local democratic participation

01 / 08

A community that comes together regularly, actively welcomes and integrates newcomers, and cares about the place, the land, the people, and the cultures in their neighbourhood is likely to want to self-determine their future. While local democratic participation can be a good proxy indicator for the success of ICR activities in a multicultural community, the indicator also needs to ask what type of participation is possible for all community members – even those without citizenship – and whether democratic political engagement from newcomers is generally welcomed.

WHAT IT MEANS

Building on a feeling of belonging and a sense of responsibility and care, civic participation is the translation of these feelings into action. It shows us who has put down roots they want to protect by practicing collective action for collective benefits.

New ecological and cultural knowledge entering community practice

02 / 08

Alongside people entering a community, their wealth of knowledge and practices does, too. This indicator asks what ecological and cultural knowledge people bring that is not just welcomed but actively translated into existing community practices. It asks what of that knowledge is transferable and what practices merge with local ones to create something new.

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator shows us how easy it is for new arrivals to connect with the resident community and the land, and contribute effectively. The integration of new cultural knowledge into community practice shows the impact of building strong cultural relationships and fostering a sense of stewardship for sustainable community outcomes.

Fusion of vernacular design approaches

03 / 08

Creativity and innovation can be born out of friction. The function of design is to channel this friction into solutions. And since design is culturally influenced, the functional fusion of design approaches and aesthetics can be a powerful indicator for the cultural relations within a community. When vernacular design from two or more traditions meet and engage with one another respectfully yet creatively, we likely look at the impact of ICR. A further investigation can ask about the modes of collaboration, and how the exchange of and engagement with cultural knowledges took place to better understand the design outputs.

WHAT IT MEANS

Design is the ultimate problem-solver built on cultural knowledge. When design feeds from multiple cultures, the potential for innovation and sustainability solutions grows.

OUTCOME

New skills and sustainable business models that contribute to local economic diversification

04 / 08

Innovation can come from iteration and inspiration, but it might also come from integration. When new people with unique experiences, values, and skill sets enter a community that they want to be part of, they can add to the local economic fabric through ideas and products that only they could offer, likely through a unique cultural lens. The indicator can also track whether there are barriers for groups of people, such as the right to work, to earn money, and to own businesses.

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator measures the success of ICR activities connecting old and new communities through economic innovation. Taking this indicator further could include tracking the rate of intellectual property entering and being generated in a community. In turn, the resilience resulting from economic diversification contributes to sustainable development.

Newcomers that become part of community land trusts

05 / 08

This indicator combines elements of community inclusion, ownership in local governance, and building new connections to land and community. When new community members get a seat at the table that governs local public resources, it shows that the existing community has developed enough of a trust relationship with the newcomer to integrate them into important decision making for the stewardship of the local natural world. In an extension of the indicator, it could also be documented how much new cultural-biological knowledge flows into the decision-making of these land trusts.

WHAT IT MEANS

When people leave their previous homes behind to make a new one elsewhere, it is important to not just connect with the local community but also with the land they are settling on. ICR can be the vessel to create these new social and environmental relations of care.

OUTPUT

Number of communal meals shared per year

06 / 08

The number of communal meals shared is a proxy for relational living in a community, indicating genuine human interaction and sharing through the means of cultural practice and connection to local ingredients. Of course, the number of shared meals alone only tells part of the story. Understanding who invites and who gets invited, who cooks and who eats, what gets cooked and what gets eaten are equally important to better understand the balance and reciprocity of ICR through the sharing of culinary culture.

WHAT IT MEANS

Meals are heritage, creativity, an expression of living with the land, and a mode of relational infrastructure, this ICR output touches on multiple social, cultural, and environmental aspects of sustainable development, such as social cohesion, cultural diversity, and sustainable consumption.

Average number of languages spoken per event

07 / 08

ICR at home means bringing different cultural communities together – often this comes with language barriers. Looking at the average number of languages spoken per event indicates diversity in such community exchange and a general openness to include people from many different backgrounds. The quality and balance of how languages are represented, valued, possibly translated, taught and learnt also plays into better understanding how accessible and inclusive these events are.

WHAT IT MEANS

Ensuring that linguistic cultural relations have a space in community exchange helps with integration and a feeling of welcomeness. At the same time, it preserves cultural diversity and the cultural knowledge embedded therein.

Feeling of community belonging within neighbourhood

When do you truly feel you belong somewhere, especially when you are newly arriving? The answer to this very subjective question is captured by this indicator. The indicator can further ask whether ‘new’ people feel welcome and whether ‘old’ people feel a reinvigorated sense of community. Feeling you belong to a neighbourhood community creates a sense of responsibility and care for the same, which is the first step toward sustainable communities.

WHAT IT MEANS

This shift from a programmatic approach to one that enables and amplifies feelings of belonging and connection can be the guiding star for ICR actors.



PEOPLE X LAND — BIOREGIONAL GOVERNANCE

Bioregional Governance

What if ICR took place between bioregions?

IN SHORT

International cultural relations here are actually not international but are designed with bioregions as the core geographic differentiator, potentially surpassing national boundaries or being found as smaller units within existing borders. When cultural diversity and biodiversity are connected, bioregions hold endemic cultural knowledge and identity. Inter-bioregional ICR, thus, can facilitate cultural and ecological knowledge exchange and the building of deep relationships based on a common understanding of stewardship and reciprocal living with nature. At the same time, the exchange also strengthens local cultural practices. This scenario is simultaneously the most analogous form of ICR – just in different non-national units – and the most removed from traditional ICR logic as it adds an additional axis of exchange – the one with the natural environment.

SIGNALS OF TODAY

Global environmental protection and climate change treaties are failing, while some countries withdraw from the UN system altogether. Science denialism is not an individual stance anymore but is actively propagated by national governments and media networks, often leading to deregulation. At the same time, we are witnessing a global backsliding of functioning democracy and a return to strongman international relations, many of which follow an ethno-nationalist agenda. While the global system of UN governance appears to break down, we have nascent bioregioning movements across the globe, focusing on the hyperlocal and how to enact meaningful change. Civil society laboratories and projects experiment how new lenses and modes of sustainability could work if traditional governance systems fail. There is also an increasing amount of environment and regeneration focused artist residencies that are deeply embedded in their localities (Ostendorf-Rodríguez 2023) and an increasing awareness of artists' role in advocating for environmental sustainability through creative commissions and pavilions at global conventions, thus being very much in the international sphere of action.

A POSSIBLE FUTURE

"Think global, act local" has been around since the 1970s – and is now experiencing its ICR renaissance. While the general concept of bioregionalism has been practiced by many people for centuries, it is around the same time that the term bioregionalism first emerged in international discussion. A bioregion is "a territory revealed by similarities of biophysical and cultural phenomenon" which "offers a scale of decentralization best able to support the achievement of cultural and ecological sustainability." (Aberley 2005) Today's rise of bioregional organising and the creation of soft governance structures parallel to state institutions has led to new models and desires of international, or shall we say interbioregional exchange. In order to connect people to planetary realities, interbioregional cultural relations engage people around very local issues first. Increasing relationality (Escobar 2024) to your immediate local environment shapes and reinforces bio-cultural identities and builds care. But planetary flourishing can only be achieved collectively. Localised cultural knowledge also exists fragmented in stories and embodied in intercultural exchange (Yunkaporta 2024, 2021). That is why bioregional ICR actors engage communities inter-bioregionally. Through careful programming, we explore each other's cultural and embodied knowledges and connect through shared cultural experiences, such as food, story, or performance. We learn from practices, share memories, and co-design global futures. This is how we create true interbioregional cultural relations.

ARTWORK STATEMENT

Rheomorph Plot #04

Rheomorph — from the Greek rheo (flow) and morph (form): a shape that exists only in the act of changing.

The Rheomorph Network is a constellation of designated wetland plots across the world's delta regions, each held in trust by a local cluster of civil organizations, land defenders, and artist collectives native to that water. Each plot is a physical data bank: which serves as a living archive of bio-materials and cultural embodied knowledge of the region and of its visitors.

Rheomorph Plot #04 is the network's Mekong site. Knowledge moves between plots through keepers; artists, scientists, designers, writers, or researchers who travel from one delta to another, carrying a piece of their home region's environmental knowledge to deposit here, and returning home with something learned from the Mekong that may serve their own land's survival. The aesthetic and the empirical are not separated here. What a keeper brings may be observation in artistic form, which could be a fisherman's song about tidal shift or a mythology about the river god's temper which could be a record of flood patterns. The plot is used as a laboratory of exchange and experimentation. The keeper is allowed to plant, build on the land (with consultation of native organisations to ensure the activities do not harm but enrich the bioregion), or study the land, create cultural rituals and artifacts with the locals.

Each contribution is archived twice: physically, left as an object, planted within the plot itself or orally and culturally among the people. Then they are digitally stored on a shared archive accessible to every plot in the network. The contributions are recorded first in its original language, with translation offered only as a companion so that the plot preserves not only the knowledge itself, but the endangered or minority languages it was first spoken or sung in.

PRINCIPLES OF EXCHANGE

A song for a song.

No knowledge leaves a delta without something returning to it. A keeper who receives a song, story, or practice from a partner region composes, adapts, or documents something of comparable weight from their own waters, intended as new knowledge to inform the partner region's own understanding of its land.

Presence for presence.

Knowledge does not transfer by record alone. Each partner community sends at least one young person into apprenticeship in the other's delta. What moves between deltas is carried, physically, by a person standing in the other region's water.

SCENARIO 07

Speculative indicators

if this future arrived, the following indicators would help us understand how well it is going.

IMPACT

Extent of land regeneration

01 / 09

Land regeneration can take many shapes: re-wilding, ecosystem learning, the re-emergence of endangered species, healthiness of the mycelial network, and much more. Given the connection between cultural diversity and biodiversity, we can also observe if regeneration of local cultural knowledge occurs.

WHAT IT MEANS

Regeneration goes beyond sustainable development. It measures slowing down, healing, and recovering what might have been lost. For ICR, the important question is what cultural knowledge and diversity could be recovered through cultural exchange and building relations that have regeneration as the modus operandi.

Number of non-human entities represented on ICR governance bodies

02 / 09

When you recognise cultural and biological diversity as two sides of the same coin, inviting biodiversity representatives into cultural and ICR decision-making seems only natural. This indicator measures whether non-human entities, such as rivers, mountains or the land in general holds rights they can represent when decisions about international cultural relations are deliberated and made.

WHAT IT MEANS

For sustainable development, the implications are enormous: the natural environment has a seat at the table that makes decisions that it is affected by. The interesting questions emerge when the natural environment gets involved in cultural decisions.

People-land reciprocity

03 / 09

This top-level indicator examines the overall reciprocity between people and the land. Has ICR contributed to human ability, viability, and willingness to live in, on, and with the land? Reciprocity could be measured in limits observed, flows understood, gifts recognised, and more.

WHAT IT MEANS

Recognising that humanity is part of nature and has a responsibility of stewardship by living in a reciprocal relationship is more than sustainable development – it is sustainable balance.

OUTCOME

Extent of respect for bioregional stewards in civic institutions

04 / 09

Institutions function in internal logics. Examining how much bioregional stewardship is respected and integrated within these logics shows us how much change this way of thinking about our environment could possibly make in civic institutions.

WHAT IT MEANS

ICR here acts as a form of local validation through the organisation of inter-bioregional exchange – connecting bioregional stewards and empowering them in their civic activism. As bioregional stewards they would represent the cultural and biological diversity of the constituency.

Healthiness of rivers traversing bioregions

05 / 09

Cultural relations that translate into environmental cooperation is the outcome this indicator measures. It looks at shared resources, shared stories, shared knowledge, and shared responsibility. Questions of governance inevitably need to be answered: how is upstream activity of a river traversing more than bioregion affecting downstream life, and how is this discussed and decided upon.

WHAT IT MEANS

A healthy river is a strong indicator for an overall healthy ecosystem. Peaceful, cooperative, and culturally respectful governance of the same is a similarly strong indicator for the social institutions and cooperation that makes it possible.

Solidarity among bioregions

06 / 09

When bioregions become uninhabitable due to climate change, do other bioregions with whom cultural relations were built happily receive these climate refugees and under what terms? This is the central question behind this indicator of migration, peace, and sustainable communities. If ICR has been successful in building strong cultural bonds between people from different bioregions, the indicator shows us whether this translates into tangible long-term solidarity.

WHAT IT MEANS

The sustainable development implications are clear: solidarity between communities that deeply care for the environment will continue to work for the protection and regeneration of the same.

OUTPUT

Recognition of link between cultural and biological diversity

07 / 09

People's cultures have evolved in relation to the natural environments they lived in. This link is visible in everything from the ingredients used in meals and the architectural designs responding to local climates to the songs reflecting natural rhythms. At the same time, culture holds immense embedded ecological knowledge. A decline in cultural knowledge might trigger a decline in ecological stewardship. Globally, losing diversity of one might also create a loss for the other.

WHAT IT MEANS

This awareness indicator measures whether bio-cultural knowledge is recognised as a legitimate database for preservation and regeneration of a region. ICR can play an important role in promoting planetary cultural diversity, and ultimately contribute to environmental regeneration.

Number of new bioregional cultural stewards who are not native to their bioregion

08 / 09

Migration is a reality and climate change is only accelerating it. The challenge of settling into a new place, likely a new bioregion, will not just be determined by social integration but also whether newcomers can assume ecological and cultural stewardship for their new homes. This indicator is not about indigenisation but about relational living. ICR can be a key facilitator of cross-bioregional learning and exchange, making it easier for bioregional stewards to adapt to new homes without shedding their responsibility to the land.

WHAT IT MEANS

Sustainable development is driven by human agency. Supporting stewards of culture and environment through bioregional cultural exchange and learning ultimately aids planetary action.

Vibrancy of seed exchange across bioregions

As climates change, some bioregions might lose defining ecological features that cultures had responded to for centuries if not millennia. Cultural knowledge might need to adapt. Interbioregional ICR can close a knowledge gap between changing bioregional realities. This might include exchanges of species to help the struggling ecosystems to recover. This highly specific indicator measures the vibrancy of such exchanges, including the research and ancestral knowledge on seed behaviour on parts of the ecosystem and the cultural stewarding practices required to avoid invasive or otherwise harmful processes.

WHAT IT MEANS

This tangible ICR output is a proxy indicator for the bioregional cultural exchange that might help populations adapt to climate change and engage in regeneration practices.

PART FOUR

All sixty-one indicators

Every speculative indicator from the seven scenarios gathered in one place. Read what it measures and what it would mean.

Every indicator, by level

Impact

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT · INFRASTRUCTURES

Average extent of cultural participation

In the spirit of the 15-minute city that seeks to reduce emissions and create access to basic amenities for people, access to culture can be measured through physical proximity to a creative community hub. Follow-on indicators can include engagement measured through frequency of visits (or being visited) and the perceived importance of cultural infrastructure in people's lives. On top of access through proximity, it is also essential to measure inclusivity. Who and, more importantly, who is not visiting and participating, and do local cultural clusters address this?

WHAT IT MEANS

When ICR actors are local ecosystem participants and even catalysts, they can actively contribute to implementing the concept of culture as a public good. With culture being the foundation of sustainable development, a minimum provision of culture becomes imperative. ICR ensures a minimum cultural diversity.

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT · INFRASTRUCTURES

Number of non-metropolitan cultural ecosystems that hold international cultural relationships

Cities are hotspots of culture but cultural life is rarely limited to urban or metropolitan areas. Yet, cultural infrastructure and opportunities are often clustered in major urban areas, including those facilitating international cultural exchange. This indicator is designed to trace non-metropolitan ICR activities by foreign ICR actors such as national cultural institutes establishing decentralised presences and whether these contribute to a more diverse and balanced engagement between cultural communities locally and internationally.

WHAT IT MEANS

The assumption is that creating opportunities for international cultural exchange outside of a country's central cultural hub creates a broader spread of people that can engage in mutual exchange. By not routing every engagement through the capital, it supports cultural access equity.

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT · INFRASTRUCTURES

Number of forked creative hub and cluster concepts

Every ecosystem is fundamentally different, but all rely on similar types of interdependent relationships. This is also true for local cultural ecosystems. This indicator serves as an alternative proof of concept and measures how often the concept of ICR-seeded creative hubs and clusters has been forked, adapted, or remixed to respond to local realities. It signals both innovation capacity and that the initial seeds planted can lead to new networks.

WHAT IT MEANS

Innovation and adaptation are essential skills required for future resilience and sustainable development on an ever-changing planet. ICR can help kickstart some of these cultural resilience measures and learn from local innovations, transmitting back inspiration for their home communities.

DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY · INFRASTRUCTURES

Vibrancy of digital worldbuilding

Imagining alternative futures – and ideally acting upon them collectively – is a core function of communities. An indicator that measures the vibrancy of worldbuilding can tell us whether imagination is alive and well in our online communities. It can also give us information about who is building, what underlying values and mechanisms these worlds are built on, what novel ideas emerge in the process and how people are engaging with them. It is an indicator that also looks into the vibrancy of artistic expression and cultural dialogue within these communities.

WHAT IT MEANS

Before sustainable development can be practiced, it needs to be imagined. ICR is the ideal vehicle to jointly design worlds we want to live in and set the course for a community consensus on action for sustainable development.

DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY · INFRASTRUCTURES

Problems solved through international cultural collective intelligence

Where multiple knowledges converge, ideas were interrogated through different cultural lenses, and art was a respected form of inquiry, solutions to sustainable development challenges have a higher chance of being addressed holistically, culturally responsively, and creatively. This indicator positions ICR as an enabler of collective intelligence and community innovation. Even if problems are not solved, ICR might help to reframe them or open new pathways to approach them.

WHAT IT MEANS

Sustainable development challenges are not isolated problems and need to be addressed by humanity as a whole. ICR could be the glue to facilitate active cultural collaboration on wicked problems.

DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY · INFRASTRUCTURES

Cultural data protected

Cultural data can come in many shapes and sizes and will require different approaches to protection. Some data might be culturally sensitive and requires protection to safeguard people and identities. Other cultural data might be governed by community protocols and is to be protected from harmful external use. Some cultural data needs to be protected from AI bots scraping content and companies profiting from it without prior consent or profit-sharing. This indicator category could also measure the development of new LLMs with built-in smart contracts of when and how certain knowledge can be accessed.

WHAT IT MEANS

As culture is foundational to sustainable development, protecting and safeguarding cultural data creates the conditions to use this knowledge meaningfully and respectfully. ICR is the conduit to build this understanding and maintain its infrastructure.

ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Extent of sacredness of cultural knowledge and data retained

This indicator assesses whether intergenerational international cultural relationships hold opportunities for passing on ancestral knowledge. It is not important to know what constitutes sacred data as long as knowledge holders have confirmed it is being safeguarded and passed on according to access protocols enshrined in the knowledge itself. This also means no institution has the right to push for universal access.

WHAT IT MEANS

While this indicator could be read as intellectual property protection, it is more a socio-cultural indicator protecting and transmitting cultural diversity and cultural sovereignty. ICR can be instrumental in this. Self-determination and agency are key factors in realising sustainable development.

ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Extent of ancestral knowledge recognised in science and education

While this indicator still creates a dichotomy between ancestral knowledge and Western science and education, this indicator is designed to measure whether ICR activities contribute to the mutual recognition and gradual merging of the two. It would be important to document what happens when they met, whether terms and protocols are respected, and whether benefits and usability are mutual.

WHAT IT MEANS

Recognising and applying knowledge from a variety of sources and finding the sweet spot to address sustainable development challenges holistically is what ICR can mediate.

ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Acceptance of multiplicity of historic narratives

Historic narratives are rarely uncontested and change over time, especially at society level. This indicator is not about homogenisation but about overcoming friction and ensuring peaceful coexistence in the face of seeming incompatibility of narratives. This is a democracy and pluralism indicator as it measures how well a society can acknowledge different readings of history and what they mean to different people from different cultures, countries, and generations. It is also an indicator of power concentration versus plurality.

WHAT IT MEANS

Intergenerational ICR is an important instrument to allow different historic narratives, both individual and societal, to enter a conversation about peaceful coexistence and social cohesion.

LIVABLE FUTURES · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Occurrence of AI slop

The more plural and hopeful imagined futures are absorbed by AI crawlers and find their way into AI training sets, the higher the chance of diversifying AI outputs away from slop and dystopian future scenarios. This impact indicator assesses how effectively human intelligence and creativity, fuelled by different ways of knowing, can influence artificial knowledge outputs and counter-act technological epistemicide.

WHAT IT MEANS

The ICR activity of mediating and promoting different epistemologies on a global scale directly impacts whether we can collectively imagine and aspire more sustainable futures. As the human application of AI is increasingly becoming a cultural technique, including in solving sustainable development challenges, ICR becomes even more important in protecting and promoting diverse cultural expressions and knowledge within training sets.

LIVABLE FUTURES · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Commitment toward the global community in national development and resilience plans

To assess how deeply international cultural imagination infrastructure is aiding a planetary approach to sustainable development, this indicator measures policy impact. Only when national development and resilience plans do not stop at their own borders but consider both causes and impacts of sustainability challenges on a global scale are we moving closer to sustainable development. Further applications of this indicator can ask whether other countries and non-citizens are meaningfully considered and whether reciprocal relationships, mutual aid, and solidarity are effectively built into those plans.

WHAT IT MEANS

This impact indicator measures whether ICR's support of imagination infrastructure has been successful to create not just societal but also political recognition of sustainability as a planetary issue.

LIVABLE FUTURES · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Percentage of public companies with an artist board member

Imagination needs to happen in every aspect of society, including government and business. This indicator measures whether artists as proponents of creativity and imagination are represented in all aspects of society, not just as entertainers. Additional indicators can look at how often the artist-board members disagree with a decision, if they have a creative veto, whether they are listened to and respected. The indicator could also be broadened to measure whether imagination methods are embedded in any organisation that holds a budget.

WHAT IT MEANS

When imagination for sustainable futures is considered in board rooms, a multi-stakeholder approach toward sustainable development-focused decision-making becomes more feasible. ICR actors can help to lay foundations for imagination infrastructure and promote artistic intelligence that governments and the private sector can build on.

PEACE ACROSS BORDERS · PEOPLE × LAND

Co-designed cross-border futures

When communities can imagine a common future across the border that keeps them separated, we enter territory of peacebuilding. The indicator can further ask what those futures are and whether they are inclusive. The indicator could also measure the occurrence of jointly held but unreconciled histories and memories on which the futures are built.

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator is qualitative in nature and can hold everything from artistic expression to written manifestos as evidence of co-designed futures. The ICR at work are actively contributing to careful cross-border dialogue on the way to peaceful societies.

PEACE ACROSS BORDERS · PEOPLE × LAND

International trade of cultural and creative goods and services generated in border regions

Cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are already recognised as a vector of ICR. Cross-border creative business relationships carry more than trade value – they carry meaning, culture, and memory. This weighs even more when cooperation and trade of cultural and creative goods take place in fragile border settings. The consumption of cultural products from across the border can indicate a change in affinity or curiosity and potentially growing familiarity.

WHAT IT MEANS

Livelihoods, economic diversification, inter-community dialogue, and peacebuilding are all sustainable development dimensions that ICR can facilitate here, on top of the inherent value of cultural exchange.

PEACE ACROSS BORDERS · PEOPLE × LAND

Number of new intentional relational infrastructure with systemic resilience mechanisms

Relational infrastructure can be but is not limited to a physical form. It can appear as spaces, collectives, ensembles, micro-organisations or digital communities that build trust, make meaning, and hold memory (edgeandstory and Lanka.pro 2026). Importantly, it must be able to withstand change in political and security directions. This indicator measures what new infrastructures with built-in resilience mechanisms have emerged.

WHAT IT MEANS

For ICR, the task is to support not just the cultural relations but the cultural relations infrastructure that can help communities to maintain these relations and contribute to sustainable peace.

RELATIONAL LIVING · PEOPLE × LAND

Rate of local democratic participation

A community that comes together regularly, actively welcomes and integrates newcomers, and cares about the place, the land, the people, and the cultures in their neighbourhood is likely to want to self-determine their future. While local democratic participation can be a good proxy indicator for the success of ICR activities in a multicultural community, the indicator also needs to ask what type of participation is possible for all community members – even those without citizenship – and whether democratic political engagement from newcomers is generally welcomed.

WHAT IT MEANS

Building on a feeling of belonging and a sense of responsibility and care, civic participation is the translation of these feelings into action. It shows us who has put down roots they want to protect by practicing collective action for collective benefits.

RELATIONAL LIVING · PEOPLE × LAND

New ecological and cultural knowledge entering community practice

Alongside people entering a community, their wealth of knowledge and practices does, too. This indicator asks what ecological and cultural knowledge people bring that is not just welcomed but actively translated into existing community practices. It asks what of that knowledge is transferable and what practices merge with local ones to create something new.

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator shows us how easy it is for new arrivals to connect with the resident community and the land, and contribute effectively. The integration of new cultural knowledge into community practice shows the impact of building strong cultural relationships and fostering a sense of stewardship for sustainable community outcomes.

RELATIONAL LIVING · PEOPLE × LAND

Fusion of vernacular design approaches

Creativity and innovation can be born out of friction. The function of design is to channel this friction into solutions. And since design is culturally influenced, the functional fusion of design approaches and aesthetics can be a powerful indicator for the cultural relations within a community. When vernacular design from two or more traditions meet and engage with one another respectfully yet creatively, we likely look at the impact of ICR. A further investigation can ask about the modes of collaboration, and how the exchange of and engagement with cultural knowledges took place to better understand the design outputs.

WHAT IT MEANS

Design is the ultimate problem-solver built on cultural knowledge. When design feeds from multiple cultures, the potential for innovation and sustainability solutions grows.

BIOREGIONAL GOVERNANCE · PEOPLE × LAND

Extent of land regeneration

Land regeneration can take many shapes: re-wilding, ecosystem learning, the re-emergence of endangered species, healthiness of the mycelial network, and much more. Given the connection between cultural diversity and biodiversity, we can also observe if regeneration of local cultural knowledge occurs.

WHAT IT MEANS

Regeneration goes beyond sustainable development. It measures slowing down, healing, and recovering what might have been lost. For ICR, the important question is what cultural knowledge and diversity could be recovered through cultural exchange and building relations that have regeneration as the modus operandi.

BIOREGIONAL GOVERNANCE · PEOPLE × LAND

Number of non-human entities represented on ICR governance bodies

When you recognise cultural and biological diversity as two sides of the same coin, inviting biodiversity representatives into cultural and ICR decision-making seems only natural. This indicator measures whether non-human entities, such as rivers, mountains or the land in general holds rights they can represent when decisions about international cultural relations are deliberated and made.

WHAT IT MEANS

For sustainable development, the implications are enormous: the natural environment has a seat at the table that makes decisions that it is affected by. The interesting questions emerge when the natural environment gets involved in cultural decisions.

BIOREGIONAL GOVERNANCE · PEOPLE × LAND

People-land reciprocity

This top-level indicator examines the overall reciprocity between people and the land. Has ICR contributed to human ability, viability, and willingness to live in, on, and with the land? Reciprocity could be measured in limits observed, flows understood, gifts recognised, and more.

WHAT IT MEANS

Recognising that humanity is part of nature and has a responsibility of stewardship by living in a reciprocal relationship is more than sustainable development – it is sustainable balance.

Outcome

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT · INFRASTRUCTURES

Type of community protocols adopted that govern local cultural ecosystems

Relationships are governed by protocols – written and codified, understood and unspoken, or smart and automated. They are built on agreed-upon value sets and form the basis of community decision making. This indicator looks at the infrastructure on which relationships are built in different local cultural ecosystems, and whether it contributes to sustainable development and planetary flourishing. It opens up insights into how people treat each other, how they navigate conflict, whether the non-human living world is represented in decision making, and more.

WHAT IT MEANS

As a community member instead of a powerful donor or curator, ICR will be an equal participant in these community protocols, with rights and responsibilities. Local ICR engagement puts the whole community in charge and creates agency on how and how much they want to build international cultural relations.

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT · INFRASTRUCTURES

Success of anti-gentrification measures put in place

Top-down creative hub development often carries a developer logic to increase attractiveness of a physical area, which can lead to rent hikes, brain drain, and other forms of gentrification. This indicator measures which anti-gentrification measures were designed and implemented, and how successful these were. It is also important how the cultural ecosystem engages with its non-cultural sector environment and what interdependencies were established to avoid disneyfication or a sole tourism focus.

WHAT IT MEANS

ICR can create dialogue between cultural ecosystem actors from different parts of the world experiencing similar challenges to learn from one another to ensure long-term livable cities, desirable communities, and affordable living conditions.

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT · INFRASTRUCTURES

Number of long-term international inter-hub relationships that survive an institutional ICR exit

A core measure of successful ICR is the mutual exchange and long-term relationship building it enables. This indicator asks whether institutional ICR can help create de-institutional ICR and lay the foundation to make itself redundant. It tracks the strength of established international inter-hub relationships, how many of those relationships survive the exit of a foreign cultural institute as facilitator, and whether self-managed ICR activities are still being carried out.

WHAT IT MEANS

From a sustainable development angle, this indicator looks at the strengthening of self-organisation and community interest in diverse mutual and ideally multilateral international and intercultural relationships.

DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY · INFRASTRUCTURES

Quality of participation in decentral self-governance mechanisms

Participation in federated, self-governed online spaces can take many forms, for example voting, moderating or forking an existing platform to create a new one, different one. What is important is not just numbers but also the quality and sincerity of user participation to facilitate meaningful exchange. On the negative side, sub-indicator could also look at whether there are tendencies to re-centralise platforms and concentrate governing power among few.

WHAT IT MEANS

Sovereignty over digital assets and platforms and self-governance are strong indicators of self-determined democratic participation and community organising, which on a global scale can serve as foundational elements of both ICR and sustainable development. Ideally, this happens in conjunction by self-governing for sustainability.

DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY · INFRASTRUCTURES

Number of international online friendships that turned into offline friendships

Online spaces have unique properties that allow people to exercise certain personal preferences when engaging with other people, especially across countries and cultures. It also creates access to engage with a much larger pool of people and potentially opens them up to more intercultural learning. Yet, taking online friendships offline is a significant step that signifies a lot of trust or at least curiosity built between people or communities, even though it is limited by mobility privilege. A less strong indicator could measure where people have gone to experience different cultural experiences locally after having been exposed, encouraged, or inspired online.

WHAT IT MEANS

Fostering personal friendships and recognising other individuals with all their cultural layers creates stronger community ties – only in this case, the community is global and probably arranged around similar interests. This is the most basic outcome of ICR.

ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Number of museums, archives, and libraries that activate their collections through international intergenerational exchange

Memory and art institutions have a unique responsibility to engage their audiences around the knowledges and transmitted through the collected art and other cultural objects. International intergenerational exchange offers a unique opportunity to activate collections and engage people in dialogue that unlocks new knowledge. It is important to document how knowledge that emerged through international intergenerational exchange was subsequently used in these institutions. Questions of power concentration and community control must be considered.

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator is mostly aimed at institutional ICR opportunities and how working through the vector of international-intergenerational can create new meaning and engagement with existing cultural knowledge.

ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Level of integration of elder knowledge into civic organising and ways of living

Situated, embodied and ancestral knowledge hold much value and need to be treated on equal terms to the canon of Western empiric research traditions. This indicator explores whether these forms of knowledge are considered and respected in local political and community organising. A follow-on indicator could measure how often elder knowledge actually changed a decision.

WHAT IT MEANS

When plural knowledges find their way into civic problem-solving and decision-making, new opportunities to solve sustainable development challenges might emerge. ICR can function as an ally and facilitator of different cultural perspectives, even within local communities.

ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Number of international intergenerational exchanges taking place outside of structured interventions

The best measure of a successful programme is whether it continues after the intervention has ceded. This is also true for international intergenerational exchange as it looks at whether initial contacts have transformed into enduring cultural relationships. Ideally, this indicator will only make sense in the initial stages and later become obsolete as there are too many exchanges to count.

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator is an outcome of intergenerational ICR activities. While it does not directly address any sustainable development relationship, it is implied that creating the relational infrastructure for more international intergenerational exchange can facilitate more dialogue on sustainability and instill a desire to protect.

LIVABLE FUTURES · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Implementation of imagined neighbourhood futures

This outcome indicator firmly looks at implementation beyond the benefits of the imagination process itself. This indicates how relatable, inspiring, and inclusive the imagined neighbourhood futures were. Follow-on indicators should investigate whether the imagined neighbourhood futures actually got put into action, by whom, and whether they created any tangible change for the neighbourhood. For example, has the implementation connected the neighbourhood more to the global community or not.

WHAT IT MEANS

Moving towards a united vision as a neighbourhood is key to cooperation, solidarity, and solving local sustainability challenges. And as a cross-neighbourhood imagination facilitator, ICR are creating the conditions for their implementation to become successful.

LIVABLE FUTURES · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Number of recurring intercultural imagination festivals

Festivals are a great opportunity to bring together a variety of different cultural expressions, worldviews, values, and visions for the future. Art often plays an important role in this. What if ICR could support the setup of small and large intercultural imagination festivals that feature arts, ideas, collective imagination, and cultural exchange, and act as tangible outcomes of soft imagination infrastructure.

WHAT IT MEANS

The need for more collective imagination of hopeful and desirable planetary futures and the celebration of creativity to realise these futures can converge in festivals and other formats.

PEACE ACROSS BORDERS · PEOPLE × LAND

Balance of cross-border cultural exchange

ICR have a history of uneven power balances. This indicator captures whether cultural exchange in border areas is symmetrical and whether responsibilities and opportunities are equally distributed. This includes looking at who sets agendas, who curates, where does funding come from, which language is used, and more.

WHAT IT MEANS

Ensuring balance in ICR is important to strengthen cultural diversity, agency, and respect between countries and communities, especially in fragile settings.

PEACE ACROSS BORDERS · PEOPLE × LAND

Number of personal friendships across borders in border regions that survive violent escalations

ICR can build trust and understanding. Whether these bonds are strong enough becomes apparent when violence flares up. Can these friendships withstand pressure from their own national or cultural groups? Do friends actively refuse to participate in acts of violence? Is there visible solidarity and resource-sharing?

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator measures the outcome of cross-border ICR activities and whether the resulting relationships can survive even outside institutional programming.

PEACE ACROSS BORDERS · PEOPLE × LAND

Number of cross-border co-productions that were showcased on both sides of the border

Co-productions across borders can indicate not just cultural-economic activity but also whether cultural industry relations successfully translate into professional cooperation. While the artistic discipline is irrelevant, the indicator should look at full cultural collaboration, including aspects of producing, distributing, and experiencing a co-production – did all of these aspects take place on both sides of the border? And if not, what were the obstacles?

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator examines the vibrancy of professional cross-border cultural production as well as how balanced that cooperation is. The sustainable development dimension of these ICR outcomes can be seen in the willingness of people to work together, economically and culturally, for better collective outcomes, ultimately laying the foundations for lasting peace.

RELATIONAL LIVING · PEOPLE × LAND

New skills and sustainable business models that contribute to local economic diversification

Innovation can come from iteration and inspiration, but it might also come from integration. When new people with unique experiences, values, and skill sets enter a community that they want to be part of, they can add to the local economic fabric through ideas and products that only they could offer, likely through a unique cultural lens. The indicator can also track whether there are barriers for groups of people, such as the right to work, to earn money, and to own businesses.

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator measures the success of ICR activities connecting old and new communities through economic innovation. Taking this indicator further could include tracking the rate of intellectual property entering and being generated in a community. In turn, the resilience resulting from economic diversification contributes to sustainable development.

RELATIONAL LIVING · PEOPLE × LAND

Newcomers that become part of community land trusts

This indicator combines elements of community inclusion, ownership in local governance, and building new connections to land and community. When new community members get a seat at the table that governs local public resources, it shows that the existing community has developed enough of a trust relationship with the newcomer to integrate them into important decision making for the stewardship of the local natural world. In an extension of the indicator, it could also be documented how much new cultural-biological knowledge flows into the decision-making of these land trusts.

WHAT IT MEANS

When people leave their previous homes behind to make a new one elsewhere, it is important to not just connect with the local community but also with the land they are settling on. ICR can be the vessel to create these new social and environmental relations of care.

BIOREGIONAL GOVERNANCE · PEOPLE × LAND

Extent of respect for bioregional stewards in civic institutions

Institutions function in internal logics. Examining how much bioregional stewardship is respected and integrated within these logics shows us how much change this way of thinking about our environment could possibly make in civic institutions.

WHAT IT MEANS

ICR here acts as a form of local validation through the organisation of inter-bioregional exchange – connecting bioregional stewards and empowering them in their civic activism. As bioregional stewards they would represent the cultural and biological diversity of the constituency.

BIOREGIONAL GOVERNANCE · PEOPLE × LAND

Healthiness of rivers traversing bioregions

Cultural relations that translate into environmental cooperation is the outcome this indicator measures. It looks at shared resources, shared stories, shared knowledge, and shared responsibility. Questions of governance inevitably need to be answered: how is upstream activity of a river traversing more than bioregion affecting downstream life, and how is this discussed and decided upon.

WHAT IT MEANS

A healthy river is a strong indicator for an overall healthy ecosystem. Peaceful, cooperative, and culturally respectful governance of the same is a similarly strong indicator for the social institutions and cooperation that makes it possible.

BIOREGIONAL GOVERNANCE · PEOPLE × LAND

Solidarity among bioregions

When bioregions become uninhabitable due to climate change, do other bioregions with whom cultural relations were built happily receive these climate refugees and under what terms? This is the central question behind this indicator of migration, peace, and sustainable communities. If ICR has been successful in building strong cultural bonds between people from different bioregions, the indicator shows us whether this translates into tangible long-term solidarity.

WHAT IT MEANS

The sustainable development implications are clear: solidarity between communities that deeply care for the environment will continue to work for the protection and regeneration of the same.

Output

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT · INFRASTRUCTURES

Feeling of community care in local cultural ecosystems

Feelings are subjective by nature. They are an important part of the human condition and are influenced by our emotions and perceptions. The feeling of being in a community of care can create a sense of belonging and identification, ultimately contributing to community care yourself. While measuring feelings can be done through self-reporting, artworks surfacing in cultural hubs might also tell us stories of how people feel in the space and the community.

WHAT IT MEANS

If we recognise cultural spaces as social infrastructure where informal intercultural social exchange can take place, the ICR dimension of fostering local cultural ecosystems is closely linked to the social dimension of building more cohesive and more connected societies. Relevant for sustainable development is that a larger number of people are exposed to community care, as recipient as well as caregiver.

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT · INFRASTRUCTURES

Quality of interdependence in creative hubs and clusters

There are many ways for local cultural and creative ecosystems to both survive and thrive, creative hubs and clusters just being one of them. This indicator captures the quality of how interconnected and interdependent these hubs and clusters are. The dimension of quality should be self-defined by each cluster. A more comparable sub-indicator could be the percentage of individual cultural professionals, non-profit and community initiatives, impact enterprises, and shareholder profit companies that are present in each cluster. In the long-term, tracking what happens to the ecosystem when any one actor leaves is essential to understand interdependencies.

WHAT IT MEANS

While ICR can help to strengthen the foundations of interdependence both locally and internationally, the sustainable development dimension is found in how professional local cultural communities relate to and work with each other.

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT · INFRASTRUCTURES

Financial and environmental costs saved due to resource sharing in creative communities

This indicator is built on a counterfactual understanding of the financial and environmental costs that would have occurred if it would not have been for shift toward resource sharing. Going deeper, it might be worth observing what is shared, how it is shared, how much of it, and what non-monetary value is created through sharing.

WHAT IT MEANS

The indicator signals an ecosystem relationship of reciprocity, mutual aid, and interdependence – something that is built on trust and can be fostered through ICR. It contributes to the sustainable use of resources whilst creating stronger social bonds in communities.

DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY · INFRASTRUCTURES

Perception of closeness to other online members

The feeling of being close with another person is subjective, non-comparable, and can change regularly. At the same time, it is one of the strongest possible interpersonal indicators telling us about community cohesion and trust. This indicator measures how well a digital sovereign place can make people feel part of a real community.

WHAT IT MEANS

As the digital realm is becoming an ever larger part of our social lives, measuring how digital infrastructure and programming can contribute to international cultural relations is an important dimension. These online relations affect how we build social relations globally, how we perceive the 'other', and whether it helps us to emphasise with others facing sustainable development challenges.

DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY · INFRASTRUCTURES

Percentage of repaired and reused server hardware

Online activity, even decentralised one, requires resource-intensive hardware. This indicator measures the contribution of decentralised intercultural online communities to sustainable resource use in the form of repairing broken hardware, reusing old or unused hardware, and recycling unusable hardware. An additional indicator could measure how many percent of decentral server networks are powered by regenerative energy sources.

WHAT IT MEANS

These indicators measure environmental sustainability, responsible consumption and use of resources. Since our online ICR activities always rely on such infrastructure, it is important to show and practice the necessary sustainability awareness.

DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY · INFRASTRUCTURES

Number of languages actively used across the platform

This indicator speaks directly to the protection and promotion of cultural, linguistic and epistemic diversity. In a place where non-globally dominant languages interface with each other and explore each other's nuances, especially when they are not translated through English, Mandarin or Hindi first, culture is not just exchanged, it is being activated and contributes to preserving a plurality of different ways of seeing and understanding the world. If this extends to sign languages and those exclusively transmitted orally, we further expand the pool of possible cultural relations, and practice inclusion.

WHAT IT MEANS

Giving people opportunities to live and express their cultural identities and communicate, share with, and learn from other people across the globe contributes not just to more intercultural understanding but potentially also to more collaboration and plural ways of global problem-solving.

DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY · INFRASTRUCTURES

Diversity of cluster communities

Communities and identities form at different levels. While it can be difficult to fully imagine a large-scale community identity, niche and neighbourhood-sized communities can achieve genuine personal connection much easier. The internet enables these communities to be decentralised, international and intercultural. It is also a space for existing but dispersed communities, such as diasporas, to re-connect. Ultimately, a strong sense community builds community support mechanisms – formal or informal. Taking community building a step further, the indicator could also look at the percentage of communities that engage in collaborative open-source design and solution building.

WHAT IT MEANS

The cluster communities itself are a product of ICR and the infrastructure that sustains it.

ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Perceived communication gap between generations

In true intergenerational exchange, knowledge should flow in both directions. When young and old understand and can function in both separate culture spheres, the foundations for cross-generational reconciliation are built. This also means being content with any friction that might arise.

WHAT IT MEANS

Apart from weaving a stronger web of global societal relationships, intergenerational communication and understanding contributes to knowledge transfer that might harbour sparks for the solving of sustainable development challenges. ICR ensures acts as a facilitator to enable intergenerational exchange across borders and cultures.

ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Percentage of population that count somebody from a different country and different generation among their friends

This simple output indicator measures whether a youth might have an elder across cultural or national lines they can ask for help, and vice versa. The relationship facilitates knowledge transfer and combats loneliness for both young and old.

WHAT IT MEANS

This indicator underscores ICR's role to build relational infrastructure that can be instrumented for international intergenerational cultural exchange. Ultimately, the indicators asks whether ICR can reduce loneliness whilst creating new relationships and communities.

ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Feeling of openness toward stories, values, and knowledge brought by immigrant families

This perception indicator must be measured from both the host country and the immigrant perspective to get an accurate reading of openness. A more tangible complementary indicator can be the presence of immigrants' stories in local archives, libraries, and public events, and whether they are met with respect and curiosity.

WHAT IT MEANS

Cultural openness toward newcomers, including those of all ages, indicates whether a community has the potential for meaningful dialogue and collective action – something foundational to build toward sustainable development locally and globally. ICR actors can be the ideal facilitator.

LIVABLE FUTURES · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Moments of awe

This indicator measures a unique human experience: the feeling of awe in the face of something they or a fellow human imagined or created. What triggered the feeling, when and how did it occur? This natural human response helps us understand how we relate to what is around us, how we value it, and whether we see ourselves as part of it.

WHAT IT MEANS

Where ICR can support the setting up of imagination infrastructure across borders, the real moments of awe that people experience only occur when this imagination infrastructure is used. They indicate a deep emotional connection and inspiration that can then be channeled into action for sustainable futures and more moments of awe.

LIVABLE FUTURES · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Number of inclusive neighbourhood gatherings that use imagination methods

Healthy and sustainable neighbourhoods meet and co-create. This output indicator measures the vibrancy of neighbourhood cooperation using imagination methods. This form of soft imagination infrastructure contributes to social cohesion and more dialogue about desirable, liveable futures.

WHAT IT MEANS

Neighbourhoods are important organisational units that many people find relatable and worth acting for. If ICR is involved in promoting neighbourhood gatherings and the co-creation of neighbourhood futures, there is a good chance that these futures are interculturally responsive.

LIVABLE FUTURES · HISTORIES × FUTURES

Perception of sustainability challenges as planetary issues

This indicator measures whether we recognise sustainability challenges affecting the entire planet as our responsibility instead of passing them on to the next higher level of decision-making because they feel too far away. This assessment of "imagine global, act local" is implicitly also looking at a sense of global solidarity that drives individual action. A follow-on indicator can be recognition of any cultural roots of sustainability challenges.

WHAT IT MEANS

As a global connector that can also set thematic agendas, ICR are uniquely positioned to build awareness, create understanding, and foster necessary solidarity to treat the planet as a shared habitat.

PEACE ACROSS BORDERS · PEOPLE × LAND

Percentage of cultural activities attended by people from both sides of the border

This simple indicator assesses the inclusivity and intention of cultural border events by noting how many are attended by people from both sides of the border. Further questions to explore can include who attended, how and how much they interacted with each other. While simply counting events rarely provides substantive insights, the quality of exchange does as it indicates the immediate success of cross-border ICR engagement.

WHAT IT MEANS

Attending a cultural event with people from across the border means sharing an experience and is the first step to slowly building relationships to unfamiliar cultures and communities.

PEACE ACROSS BORDERS · PEOPLE × LAND

Moments of genuine connection felt with people from across the border

A feeling of connection with somebody from another country might seem intangible but is at the heart of ICR. This indicator of moments of genuine connection could measure emotions as well as sensory experiences, but also artwork made, shared and experienced. The 'moment' is defined by the person experiencing it. Whether it was intended by a programme or incidental does not matter, but it is important that we can learn from them. Similarly, it is not relevant who experienced the moment but when and how these moments happened.

WHAT IT MEANS

Genuine connection with other people over cultural bridges is the currency of ICR. The more moments of genuine connection can be facilitated, the closer we get to a stronger social fabric, especially where other forces might work against it.

PEACE ACROSS BORDERS · PEOPLE × LAND

Number of humanising artworks created

Too often do public rhetoric and media reporting during times of fragility and conflict tend to fan the flames of hate. This indicator of perception looks at whether artists counteract these tendencies by creating artworks that humanises the 'other'. Follow-on indicators could include measuring whether these artworks contribute to lowering the extent of dehumanising language in media and politics. 'Artworks' is to be understood loosely and may include anything from physical objects, choreographies, something recorded, all the way to concept art and more.

WHAT IT MEANS

When we humanise the 'other', we establish a relationship. Working through the power art, ICR can contribute to this process of humanising people and sow seeds for further peaceful engagement.

RELATIONAL LIVING · PEOPLE × LAND

Number of communal meals shared per year

The number of communal meals shared is a proxy for relational living in a community, indicating genuine human interaction and sharing through the means of cultural practice and connection to local ingredients. Of course, the number of shared meals alone only tells part of the story. Understanding who invites and who gets invited, who cooks and who eats, what gets cooked and what gets eaten are equally important to better understand the balance and reciprocity of ICR through the sharing of culinary culture.

WHAT IT MEANS

Meals are heritage, creativity, an expression of living with the land, and a mode of relational infrastructure, this ICR output touches on multiple social, cultural, and environmental aspects of sustainable development, such as social cohesion, cultural diversity, and sustainable consumption.

RELATIONAL LIVING · PEOPLE × LAND

Average number of languages spoken per event

ICR at home means bringing different cultural communities together – often this comes with language barriers. Looking at the average number of languages spoken per event indicates diversity in such community exchange and a general openness to include people from many different backgrounds. The quality and balance of how languages are represented, valued, possibly translated, taught and learnt also plays into better understanding how accessible and inclusive these events are.

WHAT IT MEANS

Ensuring that linguistic cultural relations have a space in community exchange helps with integration and a feeling of welcomeness. At the same time, it preserves cultural diversity and the cultural knowledge embedded therein.

RELATIONAL LIVING · PEOPLE × LAND

Feeling of community belonging within neighbourhood

When do you truly feel you belong somewhere, especially when you are newly arriving? The answer to this very subjective question is captured by this indicator. The indicator can further ask whether 'new' people feel welcome and whether 'old' people feel a reinvigorated sense of community. Feeling you belong to a neighbourhood community creates a sense of responsibility and care for the same, which is the first step toward sustainable communities.

WHAT IT MEANS

This shift from a programmatic approach to one that enables and amplifies feelings of belonging and connection can be the guiding star for ICR actors.

BIOREGIONAL GOVERNANCE · PEOPLE × LAND

Recognition of link between cultural and biological diversity

People's cultures have evolved in relation to the natural environments they lived in. This link is visible in everything from the ingredients used in meals and the architectural designs responding to local climates to the songs reflecting natural rhythms. At the same time, culture holds immense embedded ecological knowledge. A decline in cultural knowledge might trigger a decline in ecological stewardship. Globally, losing diversity of one might also create a loss for the other.

WHAT IT MEANS

This awareness indicator measures whether bio-cultural knowledge is recognised as a legitimate database for preservation and regeneration of a region. ICR can play an important role in promoting planetary cultural diversity, and ultimately contribute to environmental regeneration.

BIOREGIONAL GOVERNANCE · PEOPLE × LAND

Number of new bioregional cultural stewards who are not native to their bioregion

Migration is a reality and climate change is only accelerating it. The challenge of settling into a new place, likely a new bioregion, will not just be determined by social integration but also whether newcomers can assume ecological and cultural stewardship for their new homes. This indicator is not about indigenisation but about relational living. ICR can be a key facilitator of cross-bioregional learning and exchange, making it easier for bioregional stewards to adapt to new homes without shedding their responsibility to the land.

WHAT IT MEANS

Sustainable development is driven by human agency. Supporting stewards of culture and environment through bioregional cultural exchange and learning ultimately aids planetary action.

BIOREGIONAL GOVERNANCE · PEOPLE × LAND

Vibrancy of seed exchange across bioregions

As climates change, some bioregions might lose defining ecological features that cultures had responded to for centuries if not millennia. Cultural knowledge might need to adapt. Interbioregional ICR can close a knowledge gap between changing bioregional realities. This might include exchanges of species to help the struggling ecosystems to recover. This highly specific indicator measures the vibrancy of such exchanges, including the research and ancestral knowledge on seed behaviour on parts of the ecosystem and the cultural stewarding practices required to avoid invasive or otherwise harmful processes.

WHAT IT MEANS

This tangible ICR output is a proxy indicator for the bioregional cultural exchange that might help populations adapt to climate change and engage in regeneration practices.

Some notes on the speculative indicators

There are some thoughts that have not fully been considered in the design of the speculative indicators for the ICR scenarios. These thoughts are compiled here as a jumping off point for those that want to engage with the idea of speculative indicators further:

01. We must not only measure the positive but also the potential negative aspects and the harm that can be done. If we close our eyes to what can go wrong, or even not happen at all, our measuring becomes one-sided and can be misused for self-congratulatory advocacy or worse.

02. When we talk about sustainable development and regeneration, we are talking about futures, potentially far far away futures. Many of these cannot be captured in short-term indicators. Short-term here means everything less than 10 years from now, possibly even 50 years. We might need to apply the seventh-generation framework to actually measure real impact.

03. As some of the scenarios touch on de-institutionalisation, some indicators would need to be operationalised in a way that no institution could ever see or access the data, for example to protect the people involved in the activities, the sacredness of cultural knowledge, or simply the core ICR-mechanism employed, e.g. decentralisation. A similar consideration goes for data that will be fed (or not) into AI training sets.

04. While perhaps more imaginative, many indicators are still formulated from an institutional, more global sustainable development perspective measuring and justifying the respective ICR approach used. However, many of the actual ICR actors imagined in the scenarios might not need these types of indicators or might reject the logic of data collection in principle altogether.

05. Most fundamentally, and outright contradictory to our articulated belief in the inherent value of culture, many of the indicators designed are instrumental in nature, serving sustainable development outcomes rather than being fundamental to it. This is a central weak spot of this indicator framework design, and one we need to solve urgently if we want culture and cultural relations to be recognised holistically in the global sustainable development frameworks to come.

Working through some of these contradictions of speculative indicators holds great potential for further engagement, and we hope that this is the start of more imaginative and critical engagement with the concept as well as the futures of ICR and sustainable development.

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https://www.ifa.de/en/

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This list of papers, reports, podcasts, interviews, toolkits, and policy documents is not just for referencing purposes. It is an active invitation and recommendation to further engage with all of these sources and explore.

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