

Article

When Peace and Quiet Is Not Enough: Place-Shaping and the Role of Leaders in Sustainability and Quality of Life in Rural Estonia and Latvia

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Abstract: Estonian and Latvian rural inhabitants enjoy many factors enhancing the quality of life, such as the peace and quiet of the countryside, fresh food and rural activities. However, these benefits are insufficient to overcome poor employment prospects in rural areas. Place-shaping practices have transformative powers that are instrumental in achieving sustainable change in communities. The process of reappreciating local landscapes creates memories of positive associations with symbolic meaning; it helps inhabitants to strengthen their sense of place identity and re-grounds their appreciation into a specific local context. Sustainable rural futures require conditions where inhabitants feel listened to and that are responsive to their needs. They also require inspirational leaders to facilitate change and create networks of opportunities, linking inhabitants to the outside world and resources. Leaders may play an important role of re-positioning local communities for the future, creating new experiences or new opportunities, which further feeds re-appreciation of place and enhances quality of life. In order to understand the main issues of the rural areas, two villages with active rural projects in Estonia and Latvia were selected to analyse the role that leaders play in the development of the area and the barriers to a more sustainable approach.

Keywords: sense of place; landscape identity; place dependence; sustainable rural leadership; rurality; sustainable rural futures; sustainability barriers

1. Introduction

Landscapes are containers of collective memories and experiences that shape the identity of inhabitants over time; they provide a sense of place [1]. That sense of place varies in different people, according to their values, beliefs and symbols that have emerged in that landscape. The exact place is not significant; it is the “experience-in-place” that is important [2]. Sense of place is therefore an evolving process where place attachment and place identity combine. It leads to place dependence [3] as its functional value meets the needs and goals of inhabitants [4]. Place is constructed for social and economic purposes through the result of actions that people take in a certain area; it is also a community process where shared values lead to a community or regional identity [2,5]. Place is also a node in a network, connected through relationships to other networks and not tied to territorial boundaries [6]. These networks are linked through external social, economic and political and environmental relations; thus, global forces impact place-shaping practices and result in a dynamic and continuous transformation [6,7].

The actions undertaken by inhabitants, however, are not pre-given and are rarely planned, often occurring via a series of uncoordinated interactions through feedback mechanisms that result

in synchronised behaviour [8,9]. In rural villages, relationships typically occur through tight-knit social-ecological units, although these have been weakened as traditional land-use patterns change [10]. Rural inhabitants value the peace and quiet of the landscapes in which they live and work but suffer from distress when their landscapes will not sustain them with an adequate livelihood [11].

Although the definition of rural is contested [12], it is generally accepted that a rural area is a place of low population density; hence, rural areas face many sustainability issues and are particularly vulnerable to societal and environmental threats linked to out-migration, poverty, lack of institutional resources, access to energy, transportation and climate [7,13]. As such, rural areas are often perceived as lagging behind and dependent politically on the urban centres or even the European Union [14,15].

Rural areas, however, provide urban areas with basic services such as food, water and energy; thus, the sustainability of urban areas is dependent on the sustainability of rural areas [13]. Therefore, there is a need to reduce the geographical inequalities and improve the resilience of rural economies for a sustainable future [13,16,17]. Sustainable place-based adaptations not only need to address the environmental and resource vulnerabilities that exist, but they also need to acknowledge the diverse nature of the localities and not hide the resource-depleted reality of peripheral areas [14,16,17]. Adaptations require a proactive and integrated governance [18–20] to address these issues, and therefore sustainable development should also be rooted in the values that people hold that are connected to the specific environment and culture of each place. However, care should be taken not to over romanticise the traditional way of life as a rural idyll that has been a feature of the creation of the Estonian and Latvian national identities [11,15,21].

It has been argued that moving towards sustainability in Europe by 2030 requires strategies that are inclusive and embedded in place-based development and aligned with the United Nations' Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) [13,16]. However, adopting sustainable landscape governance, where people feel heard and involved, needs inspiration more than mere information. Horlings [18] states that innovative and energetic leadership is required to improve local culture and encourage local contribution to society and community activities that infuse the community with life. She says there is a need to address minds by providing the means to help frame problems and possible solutions, but there is also a need to address hearts as well. It is essential that people's needs are satisfied whilst they also retain a sense of responsibility for their local surroundings [22]. Thus, within regional development, there is a drive to involve and incorporate local stakeholders in their own development through participatory means. This has had variable results [23], as it requires leaders who are capable of networking across sectors to encourage synergies and transform the vision of the future into strategies for action [18]. Most importantly, it needs time as the necessary cooperation and trust are built; this is especially important for countries that have undergone recent intense social transformations, such as Estonia and Latvia [10,11].

A lack of connectivity to place often reduces willingness to contribute to the community and its activities. As mentioned, these elements are not static and are mouldable, continually changing as inhabitants engage with the landscape; thus, informal and formal leadership can be instrumental in supporting the development of thriving communities, through promoting and shaping landscape values [18]. In 2007, Lyons [24] argued that local government should be given the space to fulfil its place-shaping role for constituents. Lyons [3,24], who created the term "place-shaping," defined it as "the creative use of powers and influence to promote the general well-being of a community and its citizens." However, local governments are not the only place-shapers in local communities. Leaders from the micro-family level through community-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local municipalities to national governments all have a role to play in local place-shaping activities. They also have a role to play in establishing the values on which they are based through a passion and commitment for change and an ability to motivate others [18].

Culture can be important for linking the role between people's values and their environment in the co-creation of place-shaping practices and can be used to encourage innovative change to overcome issues that hamper institutional and governance regime. Thus, local NGO leaders in the cultural

sector can play a significant part in place-shaping activities, making their version of history visible and strengthening place identity [25]. Horlings [7] suggests that these changes need to occur in a sustainable cycle of re-appreciation, re-grounding and re-positioning of elements in the landscapes with a:

- re-appreciation of landscape elements and their incorporation into the current narratives of place, deepening landscape identity;
- re-grounding of place-based assets and resources, making them useful to the current generation; and
- re-positioning of alternative, diverse or “hidden” economies and ways of value-adding or altering political-economic relations shaped by globalisation.

These processes have to connect with the needs of the local people and their values, whilst supporting their ideas and recognising their potential to transform and shape place [7,26]. Figure 1 describes how leaders can be instrumental in the process of strengthening a sense of place by guiding the elements of place attachment and landscape identity towards place dependence through dynamic, sustainable place-shaping processes.

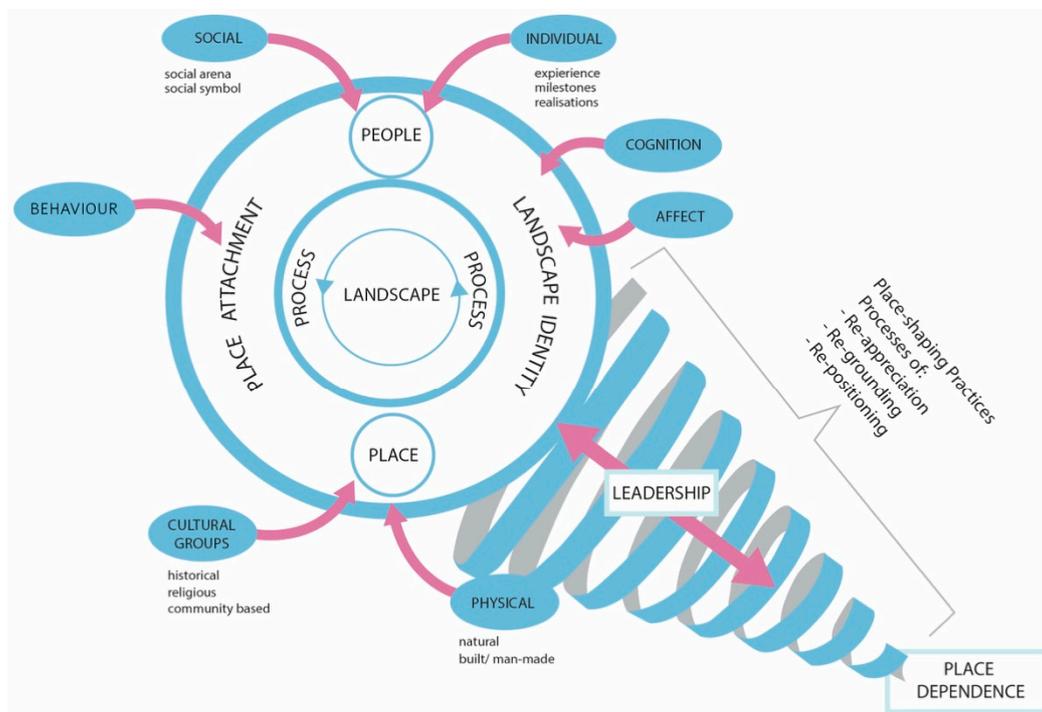


Figure 1. This figure puts landscapes at the heart of a sense of place (adapted from Storie et al. [11]). It illustrates how sense of place evolves through the interaction of place attachment and landscape identity based on a person’s experience within a landscape, where a person’s experience reflects how they perceive a place (cognition), the influence a place has on an individual (affect), and the resulting behaviour it elicits. Social, cultural and physical aspects all play a part through the re-appreciation, re-grounding and re-positioning of landscape elements, which leads to a greater place dependence as a landscape meets the needs of an individual. Sustainable leadership, which is self-motivated, open, supportive and well-networked (see Table 1), can drive and encourage this process through actions that deepen landscape identity and increase place attachment, leading to greater place dependence. Likewise, increasing place dependence, for example through increased employment opportunities, can increase place attachment and landscape identity in a virtuous circle.

Primdahl et al. [10] argue that rural landscape planning is weakened because place-making perspectives are often ignored; thus, there is a need to generate ideas for an improved co-design process,

which in turn adds legitimacy to planning policies [27]. Participation also helps to build resilience and can encourage community development in a wider sense by stimulating a place-centric view of the challenges and possibilities of a place [25,26]. The value-oriented leadership framework [18] helps to answer why change occurred and the role that leadership played.

Local leaders in sustainable development are usually highly regarded; they need an ability to listen and to be able to encourage people to communicate both within the group and between groups. They also need an ability to create new cultural nodes for social interaction. Without the initiative of these leaders, development or change often lacks direction and strategy [9,18]. Besides passion and commitment, leaders require political support, an ability to network beyond their own private interests and must have an ability to reflect on the success and failures of the development process [9,18]. According to Horlings [18], the ability of sustainable leadership to listen to others, facilitate communication, and manage power structures within the group is influenced by four attributes:

Table 1. Value-orientated leadership.

	Inner World	Outer World
Individual	Subjective-psychological attributes, which are the internal values that motivate a leader's actions. They also reflect the ability of the leader to lead others.	Inter-subjective, cultural attributes, which are the ability to bring ideas and opportunities together to effect change. This requires an ability to appreciate and utilise alternative views. Sustainable development also requires a change in the external world in order to maintain its momentum.
Collective	Objective, physical and behavioural attributes, which refers to the ability of leaders to encourage themselves and others to act sustainably and responsibly to those around them	Inter-objective, systems attributes, which refers to the ability of leaders to create networks and bridges between different organisations and how a leader builds bridges between different organisations by encouraging cooperative behaviour

The four attributes are inseparable. Often a problem in one area leads to problems in other areas, and communication is key to all of them. Sustainable development needs leaders who can inspire others to act in the local community's interests. The framework, therefore, is an important tool for elucidating the different aspects of the roles that leaders play in promoting sustainable development. It is important in identifying the strengths and weaknesses in community leadership.

This paper reviews the knowledge gathered over a period of time on two villages that were judged from expert opinion to have been a success in re-shaping their community. Using Horlings value-orientated leadership framework [18], multiple empirical sources and ongoing observations from the authors were examined for the role that leaders played in shaping the trajectory of community place-shaping. It will examine the bridging and supporting roles that leaders play in two villages, Obinitsa in Estonia and Kaldabruņa in Latvia, that have undergone a renaissance since regaining independence in 1990s. It examines how the fluid sense of place has changed over time and the role that place-shaping and leadership have played. Obinitsa, in Estonia, has recovered its strong Seto cultural roots; this has become a focal point for development in the village. Kaldabruņa, in Latvia, in contrast, has constructed a new identity despite considering itself as in the middle of nowhere. Its new identity is based on creative enterprise and creating opportunities for tourism by adapting historical roots, such as a tourist trail based on the local historical writer, Rainis. Yet both communities still suffer similar problems to those faced by many in Estonian and Latvian rural areas, such as out-migration coupled with low employment opportunities and loss of services.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Case Study Area

Obinitsa and Kaldabruņa (Figure 2) were also chosen due to their remote location, far from larger settlements. They provide an opportunity to understand the problems rural areas face when they are insulated from urban influences. Obinitsa is situated in the Setomaa municipality in Võrumaa (county), where Võru, the nearest town, is 30 km away. Kaldabruņa is situated in the municipality of Rubene Novads, and the nearest city of Daugavpils is approximately 48 km away. Obinitsa has 160 inhabitants, and Kaldabruņa has approximately 100.



Figure 2. The case study areas of Obinitsa, Estonia, and Kaldabruņa, Latvia.

As can be seen in Table 2, Obinitsa has more resources than Kaldabruņa. Local people in both villages provide cultural activities and food for both residents and tourists. Both villages are situated in similar topographical areas with hilly landscapes. This is unusual in both countries, as both Estonian and Latvian landscapes have predominantly flat terrain. Forests, ponds and lakes are also common in both countries and a feature of both areas [11,28,29].

Table 2. Infrastructure in the Obinitsa and Kaldabruņa municipalities.

Resource	Obinitsa	Kaldabruņa
Library	√	X
Shop	√	√
Kindergarten	√	X
Gym	√	X
Museum	√	√
Church	√	√
Village Centre	√	√
Gallery	√	√
Cafe	√	√

Resources in the villages √ present in the village, X not present.

The Seto people of Obinitsa are a linguistic and cultural minority within Estonia; therefore, there has been a strong focus on creating events based on local Seto traditions [14]. The aim has been to strengthen the local cultural identity and re-create historical architectural features unique to the area. For example, local Seto handicrafts are made for sale and traditional costumes are worn at local events such as *kirmas* or folk parties. These parties are based on kinship and fostering inter-generational communication. Just as important to the Seto people is folk music, which includes playing an instrument, and their special *leelo* singing. Inhabitants also honour their ancestors according to Russian Orthodox traditions with picnic celebrations in graveyards. In Obinitsa, despite the strong Seto culture and the events to aid development in the area, the development process has stalled and out-migration continues.

Issues arose in Setomaa after the Soviet Union collapsed and the border was set between Estonia and Russia. This negatively impacted place-shaping of inhabitants as it limited access for Estonian inhabitants to some of their relatives and the traditional cultural, religious and economic centre of the Setomaa region, Pechory (about 10 km from Obinitsa). Life was made even more difficult for local inhabitants as they lost the market for their home production [30]. Furthermore, many iconic landscape features are situated on the Russian side of the border, such as ancestral graveyards, the Sacred Oak and Caves in Pechory Monastery, the ancient fortress of Irboska, and the monastery at Maly. During this time, some inhabitants resided in or relocated to the Estonian side of the border.

On the other hand, Kaldabruna did not have a strong regional identity; instead, residents have created their own traditions through a series of events. These events have been instrumental in developing a sense of place in the area and a new local identity. The most famous event is the local hay festival, but other regular events take place throughout the year and enhance a sense of community and attract visitors. Small business ventures developed and established by the local NGO, Üdenszīmes, sell products in a local shop. A tourist trail based on the route from the birthplace of the celebrated historical writer Rainis to the church he attended as a child was created to connect visitors to the local landscape as seen through his eyes. In Kaldabruna, the population continues to decline even though the NGO, Üdenszīmes, has initiated a lively hub with young incomers.

Both villages suffered from rapid economic decline after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which resulted in significant out-migration. Many of the interviewees of Obinitsa and Kaldabruna voiced concerns about the loss of inhabitants, especially younger people. Raagmaa et al. [12] argued that the collapse was more severe in Estonia, but it led to the establishment of strong, local self-help organisations with a focus on post-productive development. They also argued that the Latvian authorities supported rural production for longer, and therefore the change was slower. Both countries have benefited from the influx of knowledge and resources after accession to the European Union in 2004.

The research task, therefore, was to define the problems in Obinitsa and Kaldabruna that are hindering local community development and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the local development process. Additionally, the authors sought to understand what kind of changes in local landscapes, socially, culturally and physically, have recently emerged and to identify the role of inspirational leaders, if any, in those changes.

2.2. Data Gathering Methods

Data from several studies were collated for the purpose of this paper from both published papers [11,28,29] and masters' theses [31,32]. Using the authors' knowledge of these places, they were re-examined for information regarding the actions of leaders in the two communities studied and relevance to the questions.

In Obinitsa in 2015, 10 inhabitants were interviewed examining place attachment and readiness to participate; participants ranged in age from 26 to 82 years of age. Professions included those involved in the cultural industries, a pensioner, a teacher, and a mechanic (six females and four males) [11]. In 2017, a further study was conducted that focused on the leadership in village development and

15 inhabitants were interviewed; ages ranged from 27 to 60 years old, and professions included self-employed, cultural activity workers, a pensioner and a farmer.

In both cases, interviewees were selected by purposive sampling to include representatives from the Seto and non-Seto community and from as many different age groups as possible, bearing in mind that many in the 18- to 25-year-old age group have left for education or work. The semi-structured questions guided the interviews. The questions allowed conversations to be developed in which many more questions could also be asked, depending on previous answers and the emotions these answers evoked.

In Kaldabruņa, the NGO Ūdenszīmes and community inhabitants were studied from 2014 to the present. Ūdenszīmes was considered an organization exhibiting successful development. Elements leading to landscape identity and self-esteem that contributed to community development were elucidated through a variety of workshops, interviews and questionnaires. These were as follows: workshops: “A Reflection Day” (May 2014) and “Building the Local Story” (March 2016); interviews: “Building Community-based Learning Evaluation for CLLD/LEADER” (April 2016 with Matteo Metta, Wageningen University) and “Ūdenszīmes’ Relationship to Landscape” (November 2016); and a questionnaire, “Personal reflections on Kaldabruņa” (February 2017, based on three simple questions, “What is your best memory of Kaldabruņa? What are your feelings about Kaldabruņa? Which places are special to you and why?”) [29].

It is important to note that, in both case study areas, gatekeepers were used to gain access to the community. The gatekeepers were members of the communities or well-known to the community, who aided the development of an atmosphere of trust. This resulted in interviews with a greater depth and insight [11,29].

The data from the previous studies were re-analysed to formulate and compare the elements that contributed to the distinctive sense of place for both parishes. The data were examined to establish how people felt about the areas in which they lived, their relationship to the community and how these were connected to the leadership activities that shaped the landscape identity of the areas. The data were evaluated to elicit the processes connected with place-shaping practices [7] and the role that leadership played in landscape development [18].

3. Results

3.1. Introduction

The analysis of the data revealed different landscape values in the case study areas. Overall, many of the interviewees expressed appreciation for the local landscape, citing it as the primary reason for living there. Interviewees also indicated a connection to the rural nature of their landscape, the feeling of freedom and the happy memories they have associated with the place, with many expressing place attachment through a deep sense of home.

The smell of grass in the wind. Smiling companions. Mutual understanding. I also like the place name Kaldabruņa [deep well]. I want to live here all my life with my loved ones. Female, 44, Kaldabruņa

As mentioned, both villages are located in hilly areas of otherwise predominantly flat countries, and interviewees expressed an appreciation for the variety in the landscape that is different from other places in Estonia and Latvia.

A beautiful hilly landscape, which we really like. When something makes us angry, then nature is that what calms us down. This nature, this landscape is the main reason we live here. Male, 42; Female, 30, Obinitsa

My fields, pastures. Dviete floodplain meadows, birches. Because it’s my world. Female, 65, Kaldabruņa

The interviews also revealed an attachment to the forested landscapes as they are important to local inhabitants for foraging and recreation. People are attached to their landscape views and

clear-felling changes these vistas, leading to an impact on their emotions; this was especially true in Obinita, where forests also had a connection to local myths and legends.

Right now, this tree cutting is actually a big issue, so I cannot talk about positive feelings when thinking about the landscape or invite a tourist into a nice forest area. Female, 63, Obinita

Generally, inhabitants felt that the countryside was a good place for raising children because they appreciated the fact that children can also enjoy a safe natural environment without parents having to worry.

I wanted to have that freedom, that you can send kids out and don't have to think about cars, etc. It a nice place to grow children up. Female, 39, Obinita

Concerns were raised, however, in both communities regarding the lack of educational opportunities for children and young people in the area; it was suggested as a major reason that young people would leave. In both villages, school-aged children travel long distances for school each day and interviewees felt this was unfair on the children. Respondents also felt that the school closures have had a negative effect on families wishing to return. Whilst it is accepted that life in the countryside often results in a lower availability of material resources, the studies showed that the main advantages perceived by inhabitants in both villages are fresh air, a clean environment, silence, and solitude; these aspects are important to the landscape identity of rural people.

State-Controlled to Privatised Place-Shaping

Both Obinita and Kaldabruņa were under the Soviet system from the 1940s to 1991. This was a time when the state-controlled place-shaping activities. Few inhabitants remembered the collectivisation process; most lived in the villages with collective farms or *kolkhozes*. They were either farmworkers or worked in ancillary professions, such as teaching. Some of the older inhabitants in both villages were nostalgic for the Soviet era when there were more workers on the collective farms.

I worked in the kolkhoz, but after that it started to be a very hard time for me. I had no job and money. In the Russian time, life was quite good. Male, 70, Obinita

In the kolkhoz years. I was a veterinarian; there were many people working, a life filled with meaning. Female, 75, Kaldabruņa

Many interviewees also remembered the community-based cultural activities organised by the local leaders of the *kolkhoz* that gave a sense of unity. This was also a time when many people grew their own vegetables and pastured animals on smaller fields, but various activities would be done collectively. For example, villagers would gather to plant potatoes household by household. After these workdays, people would hold a party, where they could visit and enjoy each other's company. These community events were important for communication and attachment to the community.

People worked during the week and at weekends they were free and then they worked together. When it was potato picking time, then all people came together and picked all the house's potatoes. Back in time people communicated more with each other. Male, 55, Obinita

After the Soviet era, people went through a chaotic period when work disappeared, as institutions connected to the *kolkhozes* and related industries were closed [11,15]. Many interviewees still remember this chaotic era, and although they felt it was right to regain their freedom, they were still affected by the decisions to dismantle the Soviet system. The overall impression from the interviews was that, in this process, the people were forgotten. Moreover, respondents felt that modern farm practices, with increased mechanisation and the lack of any alternative large employer, have negatively impacted communities as people left the rural areas for work. Additionally, the wages for any employment, such as agriculture, are low, greatly affecting living standards in the two areas.

3.2. Sustainable Place-Shaping

Horlings' [7] sustainable place-shaping practices theory describes how actions in one area change over time: the actions that had an impact on the past, those that affect place-shaping now, and those actions that have the potential in the future. Interviewees in both communities described how things had changed, what or who has caused these changes, and their ideas for the future of their areas. Tables 3 and 4 describe the most important aspects of place-shaping in the two communities, followed by a description of place-shaping in each place. As stated, place-shaping occurs at multiple levels in a community.

3.2.1. Sustainable Place-Shaping in Obinitsa

As mentioned, the renaissance in Obinitsa was built upon the Seto culture and traditions. This renaissance came from formal and informal leadership within the Seto community, who set up various organisations and events. For example, the Seto Kingdom festival, set up in 1994 and is connected to the Seto traditions and the Seto community, was aimed at drawing together the Seto community both in Setomaa and from other areas including other areas of Estonia and Russia. It also provides a space to re-appreciate cultural practices and traditions and an event to draw tourists. Some events in Obinitsa, however, are based on a mixture of old Seto traditions and non-Seto events. For example, *Paasapäiv*, or Transfiguration Day, on the 19th of August, is the cemetery and church feast day. After church, many gather from all over the country at the graves of their relatives and residents consider it an event not to be missed. Food is a very important part of this holiday. The event is a way to bring relatives together, providing a space for celebrating the ancestral heritage and a time for communication. Some events, on the other hand, are not organised according to Seto traditions; these include sports activities, the Ostrava Festive, concerts and plays that are similar to events elsewhere in Estonia.

Table 3. The most important aspects of place-shaping in Obinitsa.

Re-Appreciation	Re-Grounding	Re-Positioning
More Seto events and <i>kirmas</i> parties	Strengthening Seto Culture	+Strengthening of culture +Opportunity to socialise -Many people work away, less time to attend events -Seto are a closed people, need time to open up
Renovation of traditional buildings and architectural features	Knowledge of traditional building techniques and features	+Retaining traditional knowledge -Time-consuming and expensive
Increased agriculture	Maintenance of the landscape, continued food production	+Employment -Low income -Reduction in biodiversity -Pollution of water supplies
New business making traditional items, i.e., Seto costumes	Re-emphasised knowledge of traditional manufacturing techniques	+Employment -Limited employment opportunities -No ongoing business development generally
The Seto Kingdom Festival	Bringing the Seto culture to a wider audience and a celebration of the culture	+Strengthening of Seto culture -Waning attendance by Setos

"+" is a change with a positive impact, "-" is a change with negative impact.

Many of the initiators interviewed in Obinitsa felt the burden of maintaining the traditions, feeling that it was necessary to pass them on intact. Some of the older Seto initiators thought that their culture would die out and the Seto identity would be lost, as they felt that the traditions were not as important to the younger generation. They also believed that the culture has changed to such a degree that it was not the same any longer. However, this is not a view shared by the younger generation.

This culture is more fragile, because older people have died, and all the young ones do not appreciate this or there are incomers who do not understand and do not value Seto culture. Female, 63, Obinitsa

Differences in opinions emerged between those who wanted to develop the area and their culture to bring more tourists into the area and those who did not want to make big changes. To the latter it would feel like destroying their home environment where they have good memories. Although most Seto were overwhelmingly positive about their culture, there were some who identified as being Seto but had negative attitudes towards the local cultural activities. Conversely, there were also people who did not have Seto roots but appreciated and honoured the local culture.

Some respondents, however, complained that there are many more events than before, making attendance difficult due to the many commitments. One example is the village party called *kirmas*, which is a particular aspect of Seto culture, with traditional food, singing and dancing. No one needs to be invited to these events—the date is announced and everyone comes together. The field where the events are held is cleaned and attendees cook food together; it is an excellent opportunity for communication and contributes to the maintenance of local food traditions. The process of preparing for the parties used to take approximately three days but is now condensed into one, because of the busyness of modern lifestyles.

In the old times all the women came together before an event and they did all the cooking together. It was something special when the women would chat with each other and the food that was on table was mostly homemade. Men set the table or did other organising things. Dishes need to be washed afterwards and so on. It was one whole process and gathered people together more and people communicated within this process." Male, 58, Obinitsa

A reduction in communal activities, such as potato harvesting, and less time to prepare and celebrate for events, has increased the distance between people, a particular issue for a community with a reserved population. The reduced connectivity between the inhabitants has added to the issues with distrust. Many problems and conflicts between people were described during the interviews, which suggests that communication was an issue. Some said that they do not have faith in other local people. Generally, the Estonian people are reserved, but this is particularly strong in the Seto region. This is changing as the national borders are open for people to travel more, compared to the Soviet era, predominantly amongst young people.

Local people are closed. When people communicate with you, we feel that they only do so because they want something from you, because of the benefits, and when they do not get anything, they will not communicate with you. Maybe we do not have common interests or points of view. But we have also not really done anything special to find friends. Male, 42; Female, 30, Obinitsa

In Obinitsa, when people were asked if they had close friends in the neighbourhood, many replied that there is a line between a friend and an acquaintance. Many prefer the term acquaintance to friend, and interviewees found it was hard to answer the question of whether they have good friends. As one villager explained:

Setos, it seems, do not traditionally use that term (friend). There are just good or bad people, and people whom they know, or do not. Or who live in vicinity, or apart. Very important, and still in use, is the word "tribe". Our tribe (kin) or different tribe (kin). And most relationships are reducible to this tie. Female, 42, Obinitsa

This aspect of Seto culture means it is hard to integrate into the local culture; thus, incomers must work hard to be a part of community. Many interviewees, however, said that it was harder in previous times, as the attitude has changed somewhat.

It depends on the person. I think now there is no such thing anymore that when new people came here, they were strangers for a long time. These old Seto people have died, who were taking it very seriously.

Younger people are different in that way. In a Seto village, when new people come and they show that they can do something for the village and care about these people, then this person is accepted. Male, 50, Obinitsa

One of the explanations for the reduction in communication, in addition to the reduction in agricultural activities mentioned earlier, is that people now do not live together as big families. In the past, there could be three or four generations in one household. However, rural depopulation has led to a reduction in the number of extended households and therefore less support from within the family structure. Consequently, old people must cope by themselves and are often left alone to manage their household chores, such as gardening and house maintenance

A strong community contains several layers of people. When there are different generations living together. Right now, this is no longer the case. So, this cannot be a strong community. Female, 63, Obinitsa

One interviewee in Obinitsa highlighted the border issues. When the Soviet Union collapsed and borders were re-established, the Seto people had to choose a national identity and decide on which side of the border they would live. Some chose to move from what is now Russia to the Estonian side.

That decision I have made with my husband because I don't have my own place in Setomaa anymore, so this small farm is a little piece of Setomaa, where my children, grandchildren and other relatives can be. Female, 63, Obinitsa.

The problem of newly instated borders after the dissolution of the Soviet empire in separating families has been mentioned in a previous paper [11]; the issue for the Seto people, however, is separation from culturally significant places and a detachment from their historical landscape that defines their landscape identity. For the Seto people who have had to move, recreating a sense of home could be considered an important aspect of place-shaping and lends greater significance to the development of cultural events tied to the Seto culture. This strengthens their cultural landscape identity, compensating for a weakened identity connected to the physical landscape.

3.2.2. Sustainable Place-Shaping in Kaldabruņa

Initially in Kaldabruņa, there was a lack of social cohesion and a sense of hopelessness. Kaldabruņa also lacked the strong sense of culture and traditions evident in Obinitsa. The founder of the NGO, Ūdenszīmes, moved into the village, determined to make changes and with a belief that change was possible even in remote places. The first action of the organisation was to create a campaign that resulted in the removal of a derelict, Soviet-era dairy in the centre of the village. This action helped to overcome the feelings of hopelessness. The joint actions taken also encouraged a cooperative atmosphere to develop to face the challenges in the area, thus promoting an attachment to the social landscape. The positive physical landscape changes, in turn, had a positive impact on the inhabitants, allowing them to envisage a different future, and helped them to develop an identity rooted in the landscape. Residents dared to believe that change could happen and consequently Kaldabruņa interviewees had a more optimistic view of the future where strong growth, socially and economically, occurred in a supportive environment. The residents also appreciated the creation of a friendly hub at the former school, which facilitated communication between community members. The development has focused on encouraging activity from all sections of the community. Organisers make an effort to ensure that all inhabitants have a personal invitation to all the events and to acknowledge the help given by the inhabitants.

It is associated with interesting events, positive people and a place to always feel welcome. It is a place that creates a new beginning. Female, 28, Kaldabruņa

The renaissance in Kaldabruņa has been built on the creation of new events over 10 years and demonstrates how the interaction between place attachment and landscape identity can contribute

to a positive sense of place. These events have been based on the Latvian love of nature and rural traditions, typified by a more general rural landscape identity; this was in contrast to events based on established practices as in Obinitsa, where the events were strongly rooted in a historical cultural landscape identity.

Table 4. The most important aspects of place-shaping in Kaldabruņa.

Re-Appreciation	Re-Grounding	Re-Positioning
Dreams can be realised within their community	Reclaimed green space through the removal of a Soviet era dairy at the centre of the village	+Re-imagining the landscape of the future
Recycling of local materials	Re-use of material from old buildings making useless objects can be made useful	+New business ventures +/-Currently small ventures only
Value of community and community gathering	Former school becoming a community hub	+Become a resource centre for those wishing to make the village their home -Major resource issues -Income levels low
Rainis tourist route as a re-appreciation of historical connections	Re-grounded people in the current landscape by linking it to the historical inspirational writers	+Increases number of activities available in the area -Low availability of overnight accommodation
Hay festival re-appreciation of the area's agrarian roots	Modern interpretation of traditional haymaking activities as a cultural event and tourist attraction	+Integral feature of the local environment as an annual festival -Will interest wane?
Re-opening of the church	Re-establishing a sacred/religious space	+A re-invigorated spiritual heritage through the utilisation of the space for community activities -Generally low interest in Christian gatherings

"+" is a change with a positive impact, "-" is a change with negative impact.

An example of events created that raised landscape identity in Kaldabruņa and were based on the natural environment is the annual Hay Festival. Art students created sculptures from the cheap and readily available local grasses in an event that drew interest from further afield. The former school now has a hay museum to creatively celebrate the local environment. Other festivals and gatherings have been added to the calendar to provide interest and activities for inhabitants, strengthening attachment by providing many memories through positive experiences. The local church has reopened and been gradually renovated where concerts and celebrations are held, providing an added spiritual dimension to the attachment to place. Overall, the data from Kaldabruņa revealed a rising sense of community and a willingness to work together. The landscape identity was increased as pride rose in building a community spirit in "the middle of nowhere" and an ongoing quest to build small businesses and support incomers.

We have become more and more famous, now. Kaldabruņa is written about in many newspapers, never a mention anywhere before. Female, 58, Kaldabruņa

3.3. Value-Led Leadership

Place-shaping is influenced by leadership, either from within a community or due to global forces. The value-orientated leadership framework [18] helps to clarify the aspects that contribute to the sustainable place-shaping processes and those that hinder the process. Two conflicting views emerged from the interviews on who should initiate these developments. Some believed that the authorities should initiate development, but others thought that initiators should be local people who wanted to

make their district better. Tables 5 and 6 describe the important aspects of leadership roles in the two places, arranged in the framework described by Horlings [18].

3.3.1. Value-Led Leadership in Obinitisa

Since many people in Obinitisa have Seto roots, they have used their cultural knowledge to create employment for themselves by creating multiple local NGOs aimed at preserving the local cultural heritage. This gives the Seto people a strong sense of identity, but it has also created many conflicts between local people, between Setos and non-Setos. According to non-Seto people, the Setos are writing projects for funding, which they then use to hold parties and build their own living environment.

I saw that everything is turned into money. Culture is money. It is now a Seto business, not real culture anymore. Male, 50a, Obinitisa

Table 5. Value-orientated leadership, Obinitisa.

	Inner World	Outer World
Individual	+Inner motivation +Desire to pass traditions on to the next generation +Desire to make a difference +Belief that local people should take the initiative -Hopelessness	+Activities to maintain traditional crafts and knowledge -Fear of losing or diluting traditions, resulting in reluctance to pass on to next generation -Fear of losing traditions due to modern influences
Collective	+Tight tribal culture +Facebook group -Reduction in multi-generational households -Individualistic -Distrust -Poor relationships with local authorities -Modern lifestyles (out-migration, less communication, less communal agricultural activities)	+Kirmas parties -Relate best to intertribal kinship -Do not form strategic networks easily

“+” is a change with a positive impact, “-” is a change with negative impact.

There were many reasons why people wanted to be active within the community or initiate different activities, and they explained what benefits it gave to them personally. They talked about it being a natural gift, something that was inside people from birth that cannot be created. These people demonstrated a stronger determination through their own actions and wanted to take the lead within their own lives. This demonstrated the strong internal motivations, the first attribute that leaders need according to Horlings [18].

When I want something, then there is no need for some other person to do this. I do it then. There is some kind of inner motivation that has been in me all the time and this is important for me, also that I can bring my family there and sustain all this [old Seto traditions]. At least I know that I have carried the culture with me and gave it to others, so I am not responsible for the death of this. Female, 63, Obinitisa.

Development in Obinitisa has occurred through individual initiatives with some joint initiatives. The leadership has been instrumental in reviving past crafts and practices through teaching and summer events. This ensures that the knowledge is not lost, and the distinctive identity of the area is retained. It therefore demonstrates aspects of the second and third attributes, a strong ability to bring ideas and opportunities together for change, and an ability to encourage themselves and others to act sustainably to protect their sense of identity.

Leaders in Obinitisa have been working hard to try and encourage young Seto people to return. They also provide ongoing support for the older generations. However, as this work has revealed,

a lack of trust and supportive networks between the Seto and non-Seto communities that hampers development. The leaders in Obinitisa were struggling to overcome traditional reticence within the community, as the tight tribal culture reduced the ability of individuals to promote inter-group cooperation and largely failed to draw in other members of the community. Seto respondents tended to feel that non-Seto people were not interested, but some non-Seto respondents suggested they were not made to feel welcome. This reflects a weakness in the fourth attribute: the ability to network and build bridges between different groups and leading to a difficulty in encouraging cooperative behaviour outside of the group.

3.3.2. Value-Led Leadership in Kaldabruņa

In Kaldabruņa, the original leader of the NGO, Ūdenszīmes, worked hard to encourage incomers to integrate. The leader has also become a point of contact for those who wish to move into the area.

As a community we provide some support—we have a sauna and a laundry room used by the elderly. Basically, we raise an alarm and call the municipality or the social services if we see that someone is having a hard time. This seems insignificant, but it is because people still have this feeling of discomfort, a reluctance to ask for help from the municipality. They distrust that the problem will be solved. Female, 53, Kaldabruņa

Table 6. Value-orientated leadership, Kaldabruņa.

	Inner World	Outer World
Individual	+Inner motivation +Desire to develop the next generation of leaders +Desire to make a difference +Belief that the impossible can happen -Initial reliance on one leader	+Activities to encourage community building -Potential burnout of creativity and overwork
Collective	+Community strengthened with strong friendships +Well networked -Local issues of alcoholism -Generally low-income employment in the area -Poor relationships with local authorities	+Events well attended by locals +Increased awareness of village activities from outside -Potential to be overwhelmed by activities -Lack of cooperation with local farming community

"+" is a change with a positive impact, "-" is a change with negative impact.

The original leader has built an enthusiastic and inclusive leadership through delegation of tasks that has built the social capacity of the organisation. The leadership team has been working to build capacity for more than 10 years, with business development only occurring more recently. This shows strong first and second attributes, where the leaders demonstrate strong internal values and the ability to bring ideas and opportunities to effect change. It has taken a degree of patience to overcome the sense of hopelessness that existed previously. A single organisation has been responsible for much of the development but with a cooperative outlook. Initially, residents depended on just one person; recently, there has been a focus on encouraging younger people to take on leadership roles and more active sharing of responsibility by others within the organisation. The initial NGO leader demonstrated a strong ability to lead others, accept alternative views that maintain momentum, and encourage others to act sustainably, and thus was strong in the first three attributes. The NGO members have worked together to create a community hub and small-scale business incubator in the former school building. Glass and wood from dilapidated buildings have been used to create new decorative items to breathe new life into formerly useless buildings.

Kaldabruņa's School is a venue for activities, a place where people gather. My first workplace. In Kaldabruņa's school meadow where Hay Days are held, there are busy creative people like little ants; each with their own ideas and tasks. Female, 28, Kaldabruņa

The more inclusive leadership in Kaldabruņa, where there is room to evolve, has aided development in the area. There has been more focus on building community relationships than on retaining traditions or attracting tourists, and this has given them the flexibility to experiment. The ability to network and encourage inter-group communication, the fourth leadership attribute, has been an important factor in drawing in outside resources to support the events; for example, the art students' involvement in the hay sculptures. There is a strong motivation by the original leader of Ūdenszīmes to make a difference in the community, and she has encouraged those who have been trained to take on greater responsibility in the organisation. Releasing the next generation into leadership increases the chances that the development will be sustainable in the future. A focus on developing the identity and attachment to the place through creativity has been an important aspect of the success of the organisation.

There is also a strong networking focus in Kaldabruņa as the leader is active in the Local Action Group (LAG) and regularly attends rural networking events, both national and international. It has taken time to reach this level of cooperation both within the community and outside the community, but this has resulted in strong bonds formed between inhabitants, where they feel they can rely on each other in times of trouble.

4. Discussion

4.1. The Role of Leaders in Creating Social Cohesiveness

Landscapes are not static: they evolve. Leaders from the micro-family level through local community-based NGOs and local municipalities to national governments all have a role to play in local place-shaping activities and establishing the values on which they are based [18]. In communities that still remember the Soviet era and the subsequent chaos after regaining independence, the ability to communicate has been compromised. It is important, therefore, that leaders work together to improve communication [12,14].

Lyons [24] highlighted that a fundamental aspect of place-shaping is social well-being where social capital, or social cohesiveness, is built and people experience a good quality of life. Development of communication is an integral part of building social cohesiveness and is a necessary component to the role that leaders play in sustainable place-making, whether that is through a process of promoting cultural heritage [33] as in Obinitsa or through developing a brand [26], as in Kaldabruņa.

Low social capacity requires time to be taken to develop the bonds necessary for a more cohesive society. The common events and activities in both communities helped the inhabitants to feel more united. The opportunity to communicate over several hours or days whilst engaged in a community activity is especially important for reserved communities like Obinitsa. Time is needed for the Seto people to open up and is therefore an important aspect of developing sustainable place-shaping activities. Events centred on food, particularly local food, can often form a part of landscape identity and provide a relaxed focal point that can act as an anchor to place by fostering social connections and promoting positive memories associated to place [1,10]. The local *kirmas* parties and cemetery celebrations in Obinitsa and the various events in Kaldabruņa that also include food help to build social capital. However, in Obinitsa, as our results and previous studies show, the events organised by local leaders have been more successful within the Seto community than within the general community of Obinitsa [14,34].

4.2. Networking to Draw in Resources

As Horlings [18] argues, inter-group communication is important, and therefore value-led leadership needs leaders who are capable of networking. Networking is important to draw in resources from elsewhere, resources such as knowledge, finances and support for the development of the area.

Leaders in both communities have been successful in drawing in resources to their communities. Kaldabruņa has focussed more on developing a brand as a creative village utilising the arts and handicrafts and Obinitsa has focussed more on drawing in support for their historical heritage. The danger of developing a brand image can result in prioritisation of economic interests of community needs [26]. However, the fact that the leadership in Kaldabruņa has taken care to involve as many of the community as possible with personal invitations to events has helped to ensure that community is prioritised, while simultaneously improving the image of the village and attracting outside interest.

Likewise, the leaders in Obinitsa have successfully raised the profile of the Seto people and the Seto events have become a popular feature of the area. There is a danger, however, that it excludes those who do not identify as Seto, and this was the case in the case studies. It has also been argued that it is promoting a rural idyll that masks the problems the area faces [14,34]. Beel et al. [25], however, argues that cultural heritage can support a resilient community with wider effects on the community. Seto culture has led to the production of Seto clothing and handicrafts for sale, along with various workshops to maintain the knowledge of the culture, thus generating some employment for the area. The danger in this approach, however, is in locking the community into one development pathway [34].

Political support is also necessary for development [18]; this was apparent in Obinitsa, with issues between the local authorities and the Seto population that hampered a collaborative atmosphere to encourage development. Some issues in Kaldabruņa, however, arose when it was felt that although the local municipality was generally supportive of the developments in Kaldabruņa, some jealousy of its success was felt. More constructive support and networking for those in Kaldabruņa was provided by the LAG, which is seeking to develop a regional identity, bypassing the local political processes.

4.3. Sustainable Rural Futures

Horlings [7] argues that, in sustainable place-shaping practices, there is a need to balance the maintenance of traditions with space to allow them to evolve to meet modern lifestyles.

The attachment to the area of Setomaa and Seto identity play a role in strengthening place dependence for many of the inhabitants of Obinitsa, by meeting the need to belong. The Seto traditions and culture, however, need to be re-positioned to meet the needs for a sustainable future. Re-positioning of traditions into a modern context was being resisted by leaders who were afraid of losing their traditions and a mistrust of the young to take it forward in the way they felt was appropriate, a weakness in the second attribute, the ability to appreciate and utilise alternative views that affects the momentum of change. As Horlings [18] states, doubt and insecurity could mean that personal motivations and political choices do not align, creating a difficult environment in which to work. So, although the personal motivations to pass on the traditions were strong, the individualistic nature of the area hampered the sustainability of the process. However, the influence of the transition required to move from a totalitarian state to an open democracy in a capitalist society for a linguistic and cultural minority should not be underestimated. The possibility of being overwhelmed by global forces is a real one. It must be noted, however, that not all inhabitants of Obinitsa felt a strong connection to the Seto culture and, as such, felt excluded. Some felt that the Seto culture drew in an unfair amount of resources [11,14,35].

The absence of a strong identity in Kaldabruņa has given the inhabitants more space to create their own traditions and to borrow from the past, where appropriate. This branding approach, not based on a strict interpretation of heritage, allows a greater flexibility to adapt to future challenges, yet still remains place-based [16,26].

Overall, inhabitants in both villages believe that local people should take more initiative and be active, but the emphasis in Obinitsa is on individual action. In Kaldabruņa, on the other hand, there is more emphasis on working together. Leaders in both communities have been instrumental in initiating events that have helped to build social capacity and local identity with cultural and physical landscapes, thus demonstrating the strong internal motivations that leaders need to effect change. Each have faced challenges, such as restricted resources, isolation and proximity to larger

centres. Some of the challenges are not the same; for example, the Estonian Seto people are more reserved than the Latvians in the Kaldabruņa area, and this hampers the fourth attribute needed to create networks and bridges that are needed to draw in resources. It does have to be borne in mind, however, that the two villages are at different stages of the development cycle, which may influence the vibrancy of the development. The Seto Kingdom event in Obinitsa was started in 1994; the organisation, *Ūdenszīmes*, was founded in 2007. Sustainable change requires that the leadership continue to draw in new resources and leadership to maintain the momentum, something which those in Obinitsa are struggling with now and Kaldabruņa may face in the future.

Shucksmith [36] asked what is required to move from the rural idyll to a countryside that works for its inhabitants. He asserts that there is a need to repair the social systems and physical infrastructure within the countryside and not just the economic systems. While both communities' leaders have drawn in resources for their communities, both communities are still struggling with the basic infrastructure of education and medical care, for example [11,14]. The utopia of an idyllic rural life is not enough to provide for the social systems of the communities

5. Conclusions

The peace and quiet of the rural landscapes are an important feature for the quality of life for many of the rural inhabitants in our case study area, but this is not enough to create a sustainable livelihood. Buchecker et al. [37] state that the landscape where people live must serve all their needs, fostering place dependence. Place dependence indeed helps to anchor people to place and strengthens a sense of place, but our case studies show that the people do stay in areas where needs are not being met, thus the situation is more complex.

These case studies have shown that leadership is important in initiating and maintaining place-shaping processes that can aid development in rural areas; however, declining population suggests that these actions have not led to sustainable communities. Leaders in both Obinitsa and Kaldabruņa have been instrumental in developing a re-appreciation of the areas' assets and re-grounded the re-appreciation of the assets to meet the local society's needs. In addition, the leaders in Kaldabruņa have been able to re-position those assets to meet future needs through developing a close supportive network and encourage the development of creative businesses leading to a greater place dependence.

Activists in Obinitsa have been instrumental in a revival of landscape identity built on the strong cultural traditions present in the area. Modern-day lifestyles and the reserved nature of the inhabitants, however, have hampered the ongoing sustainability of the area. There is a lack of time to develop the effective communication needed, which contributes to this problem. The tribal *kirmas* parties, however, could be instrumental in re-connecting the community to each other by recognising the role that the longer preparation times played in facilitating conversation. Perhaps there is a need to focus on fewer events held over longer periods of time.

Using the creativity generated through the re-appreciation of the cultural handicrafts and re-grounding them into today's society has been fundamental to the community of Kaldabruņa and the development of small businesses. Likewise, the Seto culture has the potential to generate new products based on historical and cultural designs for the tourist market by developing marketing expertise and sharing that expertise in a cooperative way.

Creativity is also needed to project a vision for the future. In Obinitsa, in particular, residents and leaders need to discuss where they want to go, what they want to retain, and why [21]. The older generation needs to engage the younger generation in that discussion, in the same way that the leadership in Kaldabruņa has worked at encouraging a younger generation to take an active role in the development of the organisation of *Ūdenszīmes*. The essential features of sustainable, inspirational leadership are the ability to cross boundaries and connect people, as is providing space and support for new ideas and different approaches to issues in the locality.

The Sustainable Place-shaping framework [7] helps to highlight the processes of sustainable change, both the successes and where it has stalled. The value-orientated leadership model [18] helps

to highlight different leadership attributes that have contributed to the direction of development. It highlights where there are barriers in Obinitsa. Likewise, it demonstrates the characteristics that have contributed to Kaldabruņa's continued success, whilst also highlighting potential issues and room for improvement.

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