

# A capitals framework for rural areas: ‘Place-planning’ the global countryside

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## ABSTRACT

Set in the context of debates over the future of rural areas, and the role of planning in co-delivering a sustainable, inclusive and resilient countryside, this article considers the value of a place capitals perspective for unpacking, firstly, ‘what makes’ rural places and, secondly, the ways that planning can ensure the protection, enhancement and sensitive use of those capitals. Rural places are presented as composites of built, economic, land-based and socio-cultural capitals and as possessing a ‘spatial energy’ that inheres in the linkages between capitals. Harnessing that ‘spatial energy’ is critical to co-producing better rural places. The paper aims towards a theorisation of rural places and planning that transcends jurisdictional boundaries and the peculiarities of planning systems. Building on existing scholarship, a ‘capitals framework’ is developed that has general applicability: it can be deployed flexibly as a means of understanding the ‘inner workings’ of rural place and as a guide for planning intervention.

## 1. Introduction

Despite living in an ostensibly ‘urban age’ (Brenner & Schmid, 2014; Gleeson, 2013; UN, 2018), development conflicts and global challenges have never looked more ‘rural’. Much of the world’s land (and water) – comprising spaces for natural resource extraction, energy production, agriculture and food production, climate change mitigation and adaptation – is situated in rural places. From environmental conservation to sustainable development ambitions, and from food and energy security to social justice goals, rural places have remained at the centre of policy concerns, becoming increasingly contested in terms of their future development trajectories (see Shucksmith & Brown, 2016; Scott et al., 2019a). Meanwhile, and in the context of past and contemporary crises (including the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, the refugee crisis in Europe, the climate crisis and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic), many rural areas have suffered disproportionately compared to cities, due to prevailing fragilities including acute poverty, income deprivation and a lack of institutional capacity (see, for example, Gallent, 2020; Murphy & Scott, 2014; Pelek, 2022). But at the same time, rural areas have demonstrated considerable resilience and, in some cases, a remarkable ability to turn crises into opportunities (Gkartzios & Scott, 2015; Nerlich & Döring, 2005), further evidencing the highly diversified nature of rural regions across the globe (Murdoch et al., 2003). This diversity extends to the politics of rural areas: whilst some have been associated

with the emergence of right-wing dogma and populist movements (e.g. Mamonova & Franquesa, 2020), others have been in the vanguard of resistant alternatives to neoliberalism (e.g. Shucksmith & Rønningen, 2011) and progressive imaginations of more inclusive societies (e.g. Gray et al., 2016).

Greater attention to the countryside – and to its global *and* local differentiation – reveals a broad range of questions, politics and challenges relating to the planning of rural areas, and the need for a reinvigorated rural planning theory and practice orientated towards a more diverse and ambitious set of goals. There is a need, as Lapping (2006) has observed, to move far beyond the post-war emphasis on agriculture, farmland preservation, and food security. The recurrent presentation of farming as the backbone of rural economies has resulted in an unimaginative and minimal planning response within rural places (Lapping & Scott, 2019) when, in reality, the differentiated and contested nature of those places suggests an urgent need to rethink the *idea* and *practice* of rural planning for a globalised world.

Urban concerns have, however, dominated planning theory and practice, with rural planning (and by extension, rural places) assigned a more marginal role, often focused on narrow development paths that are tied to context-specific political priorities. To illustrate this, Scott (2023) identifies four alternative (illustrative rather than exhaustive) stylised rural planning logics that highlight the narrow and unimaginative rural planning agenda found across many countries. These include: (1)

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preservationist rural planning (e.g. UK and USA), focused on the preservation of agricultural land and the protection of the countryside and landscape on aesthetic grounds (Curry & Owen, 2009); (2) *developmentalist* rural planning (e.g. Australia), focused on natural resource exploitation, with rural planning purposed to protect agricultural land, provide access to natural resources for extractive industries, land development, and facilitate infrastructure that supports new industries (Tonts, 2020); (3) *laissez-faire* approaches to rural planning (e.g. southern Europe), whereby development in rural places is unregulated or facilitated to support family-centred welfare, via a permissive approach to regulation (Gallent et al., 2003); and (4) *neo-liberalised* rural planning (e.g. Ireland) that seeks to be ‘business friendly’ through the promotion of light touch regulation, or the use of fast-track planning legislation to deliver infrastructure across rural landscapes, notably renewable energy projects (Natarajan, 2019). These examples often co-exist or overlap; however, they offer only partial responses to the contemporary rural condition, prioritising selective interests and failing to engage holistically with the full spectrum of elements that constitute rural places and communities.

Hibbard and Frank (2019) note the tradition-cum-obsession of defining rurality according to the size of settlements and general sparsity of population, but add that these attributes vary greatly from one rural place to another, and between countries. There is a need to engage with the diversity and complexity of rural places at a more general level. This paper attempts to do this by developing a framework of *relational rural capitals* that focuses on how places work rather than any single attribute. Bourdieu’s (1986) original elucidation of different *forms of capital* has already been reworked and expanded for rural contexts to provide various conceptualizations of rural capital in both the global south (Mazibuko, 2013; Natarajan et al., 2022; Scoones, 1998) and global north (e.g. Bosworth & Turner, 2018; Courtney & Moseley, 2008; Emery & Flora, 2006), illustrating the potentialities of place and often seeking to explain why some places succeed economically whilst others fall behind.

This paper proposes a malleable (and ‘place-adjustable’) framework, rooted in the same idea, to understand the plurality of rural places and forms of planning, and to outline a mode of planning that connects with the relational nature of capitals. Rather than seeking universal definitions of the rural (see also Halfacree, 2006), we are concerned with mapping constituent place-capitals before proposing that *each* rural place comprises a unique constellation of capitals with which the instruments of place governance, including planning, must interact. Our framework is concerned with spatial planning’s engagement with the plurality of rural place (Bell, 2007) and with the mobilization of capitals in ways that enhance rural wellbeing.

Scholarship in the field of rural planning has tended to focus on single outcomes arising from case studies fixed within jurisdictional boundaries. Far fewer contributions step outside national frameworks to examine ‘place-planning’ linkages at a more conceptual level. This is the intended contribution of this paper. More specifically, we aim to sketch out a way of thinking about place-planning that (1) avoids being hamstrung by outdated dichotomies (e.g. environment versus economy, or people versus nature); (2) is context-specific; and (3) views planning as a ‘conversion factor’, which works with the ‘spatial energy’ of place and has a critical role in enhancing and reinvesting stocks of capital through regulation, collaboration, creative problem-solving, leadership, and innovation.

Such a contribution is not without potential pitfalls. There are clear knowledge politics and power asymmetries that confront any attempt to think globally about rurality, planning and development (Connell, 2014). ‘Rural planning’ is arguably a global north project that is distinctly different from the ‘rural development’ focus of the global south (Scott et al., 2019b). Likewise, representations of rurality and the extent to which the lines between farming and a broader rural agenda are blurred again differ north and south. However, north-south binaries frequently break down on closer inspection, which is often

acknowledged in the pages of *Habitat International*. Global north and global south spatialities co-exist within nation states (Chioldelli et al., 2021; Trefzer et al., 2014). There is differentiation at all scales: a plurality that we believe justifies the ambition of developing a framework that is malleable and adaptable to different scales and contexts, and that might contribute to making ‘better rural places’ (Shucksmith, 2018; Gkartzios and Gallent, 2019).

The paper is structured as follows. Part 1 provides a conceptualization of rural planning, as an idea and a practice. Part 2 then reviews past uses of Bourdieu’s forms of capital before detailing our own framework, comprising four main capitals and secondary subdivisions. Part 3 then explores the use of that framework and its potential to draw together and learn from diverse experiences across the global countryside.

## 2. Part 1: Rural planning: interlinking ideas and practice

The idea and practice of planning, as well as perspectives on ‘rurality’ (or the ‘nature’ of rural areas), varies significantly across the globe. This variation is often explained with reference to underlying regulatory systems and particular cultural leanings or attachments. Legal frameworks, rural and urban typologies, land ownership traditions and patterns, and planning cultures and instruments all differ from one country to the next. However, two constants remain: firstly, the broad significance of ‘rurality’ (notwithstanding variations in precise meaning and language, see Gkartzios et al., 2020) for public policy discourse and planning policy (Woods, 2010); and secondly, the dynamism of rural places globally, captured in notions of ‘rural restructuring’, ‘differentiation’, ‘transition’ (away from productivism), expanding ‘multi-functionalism’, and in ideas of a connected ‘global’ or ‘post-carbon’ countryside (see, for example, Frank & Hibbard, 2019; Long et al., 2009; Murdoch et al., 2003; Phillips & Dickie, 2019; Woods, 2007).

Rural areas are significant because of the pace of change they frequently encounter and because of the many new demands placed on the countryside, requiring attention from public policy and planning. The urban-rural ‘binomial’ is important in many respects, and not least because it draws attention to the particular challenges faced in a restructuring or transitioning countryside. In this context, our goal is to articulate an understanding of rural places that is useful to planning.

Although *public planning*, centred on the institutions and capacities of the state, has, in the past, been associated with top-down intervention, more recent manifestations demonstrate the possibility of strong connection with communities, with different forms of knowledge, and with the lived realities of place. What we might call *place-planning* (with the *public* prefix omitted) need not be an artificial intrusion into the life of rural places, but an integral part of how those places function and develop. Conceptions of planning have broadened significantly in recent years (see for example Albrechts et al., 2003). Planning, in the widest sense, is a process of place governance that is underpinned by social relationships (Gallent & Gkartzios, 2019). Like Healey (2010), we view planning as both an *idea* and a *practice* that contributes to the development of place – rather than as an instrument of state bureaucracy, administration and control. As an idea, planning presupposes the imagination and curiosity to rethink the world, possesses the perception and intuition to understand change, and offers the vision and coordination to co-create ‘better places’ (Shucksmith, 2018). As a practice, *public planning* is bound within governance structures, and broader policy and political frameworks, that set limits on its capacity to imagine and implement change or to inspire change within socio-spatial communities. But the boundaries of planning, as opposed to more limited public planning, are looser. It is undertaken in various ways by numerous agents. It comprises a range of initiatives, interventions and local actions, and it extends beyond land policy. Much of what might be considered planning, within communities and by a range of actors, actually comprises everyday socio-spatial actions (‘place-planning’), which alongside private investments or charitable undertakings, are often brought together within new institutional arrangements to convey

a sense of coordination and strategy towards articulating and implementing desired outcomes (Gallent & Gkartziou, 2019).

Gallent et al. (2015) and Scott (2021) scope the components of rural planning (see Table 1) across a composite of core *public planning* functions (primarily the control of land-use and development), normative *spatial or territorial planning* that brings together a wider range of public and private stakeholders, *community action and planning* in various forms, *market-based instruments* (underpinned by incentives to land-owning interests), *countryside management* (which deals with the spaces beside or between settlements and is often led by farming interests, but not always incentive-driven), land-management practices where land is under public ownership or significant control, including in *National Parks*, and the programmes and projects spearheaded by central *government departments and agencies* (Bishop & Phillips, 2004, p. 4), which can include investment in education or healthcare – amongst other things.

The different forms of rural planning interact with place capitals in a variety of ways. Some are capital-specific, dealing with land or development. Others seek beneficial interactions between capitals, or are constituted to promote or restore a desired balance. But there is a risk of prioritization: the ever-present monochromatic view of rural places as being dominated by particular activities and a core asset, often land, requiring protection as amenity or as a source of food security. But capitals are relational (often working together, but sometimes pulling apart) and the proper functioning of rural places requires a mode of planning that understands and connects with that relational nature.

**Table 1**  
Forms of planning for rural areas.

Components	Functions
(A) Public or statutory land-use planning	National policy Strategic planning for infrastructure and housing Development (settlement) planning Land-use control and other regulatory functions
(B) Spatial or territorial planning	Area visioning Co-ordination of service investments Co-ordination of all public/private and third sector initiatives
(C) Community action and planning	Campaigning and lobbying Voluntary control of services Support for community development and social infrastructure Community visioning
(D) Market-based instruments	Interfacing with public and spatial planning activity Fiscal incentives or disincentives to rural landowners to induce desirable land use outcomes (e.g. farmland preservation) Incentives to stimulate physical investment or adaptive reuse of the rural built environment Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES)
(E) Countryside management	Farming and stewardship Strategies and actions that focus on the spaces besides or between physical development Strategies for renewable energy, mineral extraction or ‘fracking’
(F) National Parks or public ownership	Closely related to countryside management Public ownership of important rural assets by state organisations e.g. wilderness areas National Park authorities managing ‘prestigious’ or culturally significant landscapes Land often remains in private ownership, but strictly managed and regulated by designated park authorities.
(G) Other projects and programmes	Governmental and pan-national directives and programmes Departmental or agency-based (sectoral) projects around health, education, transport and so on Development agency interventions Private sector (industrial) programmes and initiatives

Source: Adapted from Gallent et al. (2015) and Scott (2021).

### 3. Part 2: Rural Capitals

The idea of capitals often borrows from the foundational work of Pierre Bourdieu, whose thinking on the transmutability of economic capital was not, however, *place-based* (Cresswell, 2002). Bourdieu (1986) contended that capital is rooted in collective and accumulated labour, which is either *objectified* in the form of goods (including land and property) or *embodied* in the form of skills and behaviours. At the root of these objects or embodiments are three basic forms of capital: economic, social and cultural.

*Economic* capital is wealth that is inherited or generated. It includes the ownership of land and housing and the possession of financial resource. *Social* capital inheres in networks of mutual acquaintance and recognition: it is expressed in the capacities that derive from social exchange, between individuals or members of a social group (or social class). *Cultural* capital primarily circulates within family groups, existing in embodied forms (in language, mannerisms and knowledge), in objects (in cultural goods such as books and fine art), and in institutionalized measures (in elite education and access to prestigious work experience). Inherited wealth may position an individual in privileged networks whilst concentrating cultural capital in ‘important’ families, to which *symbolic* capital – prestige and status, including titles of nobility in more archaic societies – is also attached.

These forms of capital are deployed by individuals or groups to achieve different ends. Whilst social and cultural capitals are rooted in wealth (in economic capital), they are also determinants of future wealth accumulation, giving privileged access to education and social connection. Capitals are therefore relational and transmutable, and it is these features of different forms of capital (held collectively by socio-spatial groups) that provide a foundation on which to build a schema of place capitals, their interactions and the outcomes they support. Place-based ‘deprivation’, for example, can be interpreted as a paucity of *embodied* social and cultural capital, which deprives places of the capacity and means to overcome economic stagnation (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014). Similarly, development narratives are explained by the presence of *objectified* common goods (land and property) and *embodied* community resources (skills and knowledge) that are available to socio-spatial communities (Coleman, 1988). Forms of (collective) social and cultural capital, alongside access to critical assets (built and land-based capital), determine different development pathways (Lee & Shaw, 2016) and can be unlocked and promoted by different forms of planning, which can protect assets, make them available to communities, or promote their sustainable management.

Although the idea that constellations of capitals, in various forms, assemble in different places, and create opportunities that can be successfully realised, or ignored, is rooted in Bourdieu’s *forms of capital*, the idea has expanded well beyond Bourdieu’s original proposition. It has become aligned with a broader community development agenda, with many authors viewing capitals as community resources or public goods (e.g. Coleman, 1988). This has also shifted the development discourse from the resources that communities are lacking or are impossible to acquire, to more positive ways to realise their development potential through mobilising existing assets – see for example Sen’s (1992) and Nussbaum’s (2000) Capability Approach.

It was noted above that ours is not the first capitals framework. Scoones’ (1998) Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), building on work by Chambers and Conway (1992), drew attention to the importance of key capitals in rural place development and wellbeing. Its focus on natural, economic, human and social capitals was then extended to embrace physical assets and political forces (Ashley & Carney, 1999; Carney, 1998; Niehof, 2004). Although the SLF drew on rural fieldwork, Scoones was oddly dismissive of the learning potential of his own research context, calling the ‘rural condition [...] somewhat artificial’ (Scoones, 1998, p. 17). He was more interested in charting general pathways to poverty alleviation at different scales (household, settlement and nation state) than the specificity of rural places in the global

south. His research, however, elicited significant interest and prompted numerous adaptations of his SLF, notably by Niehof (2004), Allison and Horemans (2006), Sseguya et al. (2009) and Mazibuko, (2013). More recently, researchers have objected to some of the empirical, scalar, historical, political and colonial underpinnings of the framework (see Natarajan et al., 2022 for a summary) as well as aspects of its theoretical development.

Similar frameworks, but with greater concern for rural specificity have been proposed in the United States. These include models by Castle (1998) and Beddington (1999). Castle extended earlier work by Coleman (1990), proposing a ‘rural capital stock’ that comprises natural, man-created, human and social parts. The ‘natural’ (i.e. environmental) and ‘man-created’ (i.e. anthropogenic) distinction is important and is the main point of departure from Coleman. Beddington’s focus was specifically on rural livelihoods, viewing five capitals (natural, produced, human, social and cultural) as both inputs and outputs: assets to be nurtured and managed, the configuration and balance of which ultimately deliver a system’s main goal – sustainable livelihood. Both Castle and Beddington emphasise the agency of local populations to construct development trajectories on a foundation of existing hard and soft assets, aligning with the main thrust of rural development theory at that time (Bosworth & Turner, 2018). Slightly more recently, Flora and colleagues’ (2004) *Community Capital Framework* offers a means of baselining ‘community development potential’ across seven ‘input’ capitals: human, social, political, financial, natural, cultural and built (see also Emery & Flora, 2006). Likewise, Courtney and Moseley (2008) present place capitals – or ‘inherited resources’ – as a foundation for local economic performance in rural England. Their particular partition of capitals – economic, human, social, cultural and environmental – mixed endogenous and exogenous resources, showing the roles of embodied and objectified capitals in local development. And much more recently, Bosworth and Turner (2018) have identified eight categories of ‘rural capital’ - physical, natural, financial, human, social, organisational, cultural, and symbolic – to explain the operation and performance of rural businesses in England, arguing that some capitals are (pre-existing) preconditions for business success whilst others are introduced by entrepreneurs.

These contributions are all crucial waypoints on a journey to thinking about rural places in a development context, but none are concerned explicitly with linking a conception of rural place with planning. This is not because researchers have been unconcerned with the role of spatial policy, in broad terms, in targeting and supporting particular place outcomes, but rather because of the complexity of interactions between place capitals and the hierarchical and diverse forms of planning. The examination of place-planning entanglements is a special undertaking. The frameworks listed above have either implied connection, by viewing capitals as inputs and outputs to be ‘managed’, or through explicit consideration of ‘political’ capital (e.g. Emery & Flora, 2006; Niehof, 2004; Sseguya et al., 2009). We view political capital and action, underpinned by regulatory instruments, as a pervasive force interacting with place capitals, and not as something which can itself be partitioned. The framework developed in this paper unveils the ways in which multi-scalar governance processes and the values that underpin them are embedded in the different forms of planning summarised in Table 1. These forms of planning are of course culturally contingent, infused with power, dominated (at times) by neoliberal narratives of development, and subject to clientelism and corruption (Gkartzios et al., 2022). But planning remains important: it is an essential means of imagining and realising better rural futures (Healey, 2010) and therefore a core focus of our framework.

### 3.1. Developing a capitals framework for the global countryside

Capitals, objectified as material assets (land, infrastructure, built heritage or the wider environment) or embodied social actions (what people do and think, how they behave and interact), *make* rural places.

Our simplified framework allocates these to the *built* rural, the *economic* rural, the *land-based* rural and the *socio-cultural* rural (Table 2) and breaks them down into proposed ‘sub-capitals’, as points of interaction with different forms of planning (see Table 1). This framework draws on Gkartzios et al. (2022) and is advanced further here through considering how the identified capitals interact with the functions of planning (see Fig. 1). We argue that planning performs a critical role as an enabling factor, capable of converting or reinvesting capitals to enhance rural wellbeing, or more negatively, capable of diminishing rural wellbeing through the erosion or degradation of the stocks of capital.

It was noted in the introduction that capitals are both relational (Heley & Jones, 2012) and transmutable between forms: they can become, or they can support the creation of, new capital. Bourdieu used the example of economic capital transmuting into social capital: a base asset that supports the growth of another capital. The same transmutability is seen between land, for example, and other capitals that are embedded in land or in relationships with land, such as farming culture. But the line between transmutability (one thing becoming or supporting another) and the inherently mixed characteristics of an asset (an asset being both social *and* economic) is blurred: where our sub-capitals (assets or practices) sit in relation to parent capitals (Fig. 1) can be unclear. Some occupy positions under two parent capitals or are cross-cutting. Capitals are not therefore discrete: they merge into one another and overlap, forming a complete place (see Cresswell, 2019) comprising attributes that are not separated by rigid boundaries. At the same time, the list of sub-capitals presented and discussed is neither exhaustive nor present in all places. With these important caveats in mind, which acknowledge the tension between universal generalisation and local ‘reality’ (Lowe, 2012), we now present our capitals and their constituent parts.

### 3.2. The built rural

Built capital is an assemblage of anthropogenic, physical infrastructures in the countryside. These infrastructures have social and economic functions; they embed in a wider natural environment; and they are also instilled with socio-cultural meaning. It is important therefore to understand what they are, the functions and meanings they have, how they contribute to rural place, and how they are affected by different actions and interventions. In Table 2, built capital is divided into three overlapping sub-capitals: *economic* infrastructures, *environmental or nature-based* infrastructures, and *socio-cultural* infrastructures.

*Economic infrastructures* range from workspaces, income generating apparatus, housing (an economic infrastructure that facilitates labour stability and movement), ICT and conventional transport. Workspaces can comprise small business units, workshops, non-residential farm buildings, shops, food and drink outlets etc. Income generating apparatus can include energy infrastructure (wind-turbines, bio-fuel facilities, solar panels and hydro) that may be community-operated or

**Table 2**  
Forms of capital in rural areas.

Capitals	Sub-capitals
(A) <i>Built rural</i>	(A1) Economic infrastructures (e.g. workspace); (A2) nature-based infrastructures critical to settlement systems; (A3) socio-cultural infrastructures (e.g. housing, community facilities).
(B) <i>Economic rural</i>	(B1) Physical productive infrastructures (e.g. land assets); (B2) entrepreneurial infrastructure (e.g. business links, value chains); (B3) community wealth-building capacity.
(C) <i>Land-based rural</i>	(C1) Land as a socially productive asset; (C2) landscape (e.g. tangible and intangible heritage); (C3) nature-based infrastructures (e.g. natural processes, ecosystem services).
(D) <i>Socio-cultural rural</i>	(D1) Social networks (vertical and horizontal); (D2) community capacity and active citizenship (e.g. ability to mobilise social capital); (D3) inclusive places; (D4) creativity and cultural practices.

Source: Gkartzios et al. (2022).

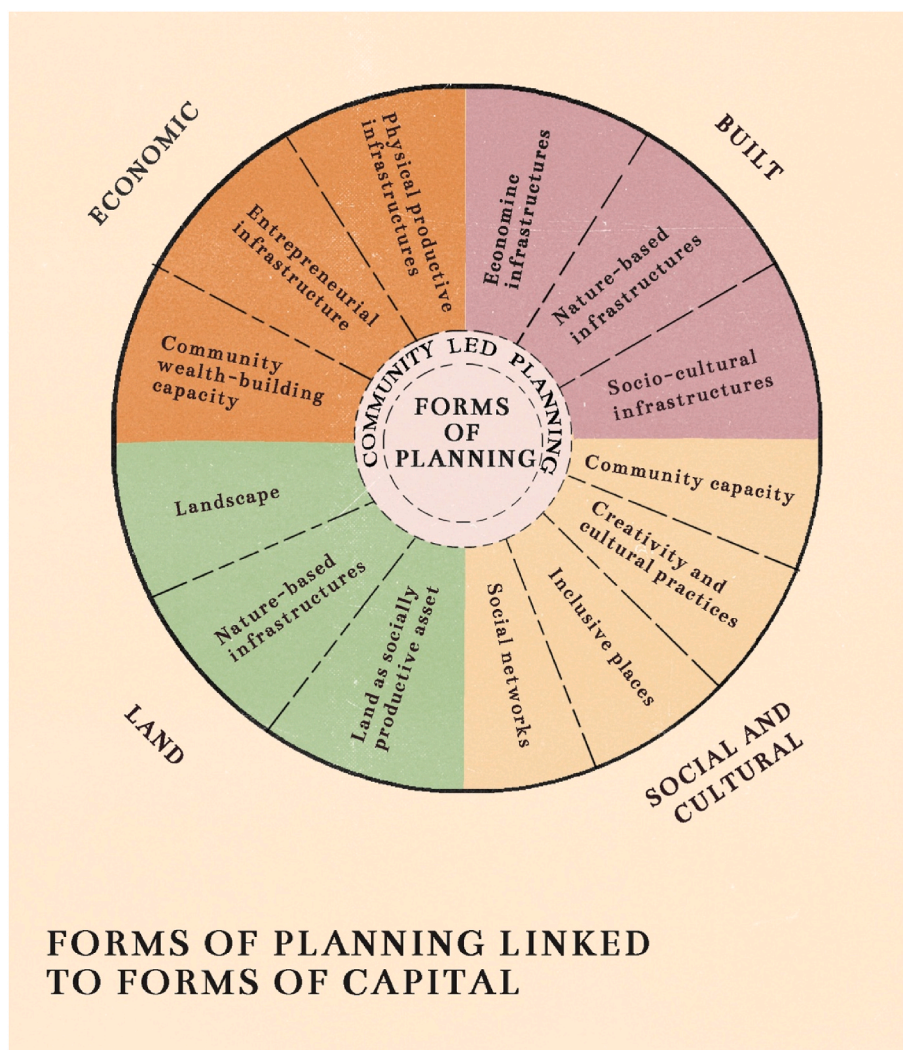


Fig. 1. 'Wheel of Place': forms of capital and forms of planning. Source: Authors.

privately run, circulating capital back into the community. Likewise, social events and festivals hosted in rural areas may require temporary infrastructures for coping with surging visitor numbers. ICT (alongside all 'utilities infrastructure' – gas, water and electricity supplies) is essential for economic activity in rural areas, connecting consumers to the suppliers of goods and services and vice versa. And conventional transport – roads, rail, bus stops, railway stations, bridleways, footpaths and so on – connect homes to places of work, and more broadly provide the operating system of any modern economy, by enabling the movement of goods and people.

*Environmental or nature-based infrastructures* – from reservoirs providing water and power, to forests acting as carbon sinks – are served by built things including access roads, security and the machinery to control water levels or extract power. Environmental infrastructure also extends to protection for important assets, in the form of fencing or more traditional divisions, perhaps dry-stone walling or hedgerows. Nature-based infrastructures may require fewer built elements – supplying ecosystem services from entirely natural assets – but some, including water-courses that have been widened, deepened or had their courses fixed to provide flood defence, may utilise gabions or other artificial channelling. Rural places are replete with environmental infrastructures that have artificial control features. Moreover, nature-based infrastructure can perform a critical role in reducing environmental risks to rural properties and rural settlement systems, such as upstream nature-based interventions to mitigate flood risk to villages and small towns.

*Socio-cultural infrastructures* start with housing, but extend to all forms of social space, internal and external. Those social spaces can be purpose-built, including 'village halls' or community centres, or they may comprise cafés, shops or similar: otherwise economic and employment spaces that nevertheless have a socio-cultural function. Then there are outdoor public spaces – from village greens, small squares (or incidental spaces), to sports fields and other sites of social exchange. Schools can also be listed among social-cultural infrastructures. They provide an essential service for the community and may also provide public venues for out-of-hours activities. All of the above provide spaces for cultural events, from local fairs, through sports, to art exhibitions.

Built capital is an essential input into the economic and social processes that make rural places. It frames rural life, creating opportunities to grow socio-cultural capital (which it also embodies) and providing a means of economic production (underpinned by land). Planning interventions that promote the delivery and protection of built capital, and recognise its essential economic, social and cultural functions, play a key role in supporting the 'good countryside'. Those interventions need to strike a balance between private enclosure, for profit extraction, and commoning actions that support social justice.

### 3.3. The economic rural

Economic capital refers to material assets that are 'immediately and

directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 242). This form of capital includes an array of material resources (money, bonds, stocks) or resources with exchange value such as land and property. Within the rural development literature, place-fixed capitals (including the economic infrastructures noted above) are generally framed as investment assets from which monetary value can be extracted, either directly or through financial channels, or productive assets that engage local labour. The nature of monetarisation or extraction has important implications for the distribution of wealth, for rural quality of life outcomes, and for the local reinvestment of economic capital into rural places – growing new forms of capital. For example, productive activities that engage wage labour contribute to the wellbeing of rural places through job creation, income growth and local spending. But investment activities that seek capital appreciation over the long term via the private enclosure of land, and rentier activities, may not recycle money into local economies: rather, value is siphoned off by external investors. That is not to say that exogenous sources of investment cannot support new economic activities, but there is a clear distinction between extracting value from afar, via financial channels (e.g. dividends to investors), and recycling value into communities. How surplus value is generated is important for the wellbeing of rural places.

Another danger for rural places relates to the manner of value extraction, whether resources are tapped in a sustainable way or whether unsustainable exploitation is allowed to damage or degrade those land-based capitals, including landscape, which is itself transmutable to economic capital, and an embodiment of cultural capital. The danger of degrading natural resources sits alongside the hoarding of assets (e.g. land banking by volume housebuilders, 'land grabs', or high levels of second home investment) and the extraction of resources for profit without any local reinvestment, as key challenges for rural communities.

In order to clarify how planning can interact with economic capital, it is necessary to consider which assets are 'convertible into money'. These divide into three types: *physical productive infrastructure*, *enterprise infrastructure* and *community wealth building capacity*.

*Physical productive infrastructure* overlaps with the economic infrastructures that featured in the discussion of built capital. These are material assets with potential for direct conversion to money, and also assets with use value in economic development. At a basic level, this includes land (with a rentable value determined by location and infrastructure/service connectivity) as the most fundamental rural resource, which underpins the traditional land-based rural economy of food and fibre production and fuel and mineral extraction. The productive value of *rural land* varies considerably, being linked to environmental factors (weather, soil quality etc.) and its convertibility, by virtue of location, to non-primary uses such as residential development. The buildings that sit on land are an extension of this economic resource. Housing has become an important channel of wealth accumulation in late capitalist economies (Gallent, 2019), facilitating the movement of mobile capital into rural areas and the intergenerational transfer and concentration of wealth in fewer hands. The scarcity of housing in rural areas inhibits shared prosperity and is a cause of spatial inequality. Beyond housing, which conveys significant wealth advantages on owners, physical productive infrastructure at the scale of local economies also includes workspace, transport and ICT infrastructure, which interact with a wider regulatory environment, such as land-use planning and communications regulation. Private control of these assets results in private extraction of value; but there now greater enthusiasm for workspaces, shops and even ICT infrastructure to be owned and run by communities which can produce a different pattern of benefit, retaining value locally. The distinction between private ('enclosed') infrastructures and community ('commoned') infrastructures is becoming increasingly important for development and community wellbeing outcomes.

*Enterprise infrastructure* comprises the networks and the soft underpinnings of local entrepreneurial activity. It includes the existing

range and quality of local businesses and their past investments in both (hard) productive infrastructure and human resources, with the latter measured in skilled labour supply that is potentially transferrable to new activities. Local business networks, and especially business-to-business links, are the critical enterprise environment for start-ups. These incubate local value chains, sustainable 'short supply' chains, and may even support a circular economy in which the value of products, materials resources is retained, and in which waste is minimised. The development of an accessible and transferrable human resource provides an anchor for entrepreneurial activity in rural areas. An agglomeration of such activity draws in additional skilled migrants (through a process of 'commercial counterurbanisation', see Bosworth, 2010), which further contributes to rural regeneration (e.g. Kilpatrick et al., 2011).

The third asset type is *community wealth building capacity*: wealth generated in support of community wellbeing, which can be considered an output from productive and enterprise infrastructure (where wealth is retained locally) or a mechanism or approach explicitly designed to ensure the local retention of surplus value (e.g. through community-led enterprise). Value retention and its conversion to local income is key to community wealth building and depends on the types of jobs created (whether they are accessible to local workers) and the income levels they sustain (allowing workers to compete for resources and services) (see Ratner & Markley, 2014). The retention of local income will be dependant on the provision and survival of local services including retail and catering. These are a key means of recycling value, which may be lost where there is local reliance on-line services provided by large overseas corporations. Those corporations may have no local presence and will rely on distribution services from outside of the immediate area. The lack of local services also means that external income, from visitors and tourists, is not captured by, and recycled within, the community (Scott, 2019). Private services will recycle locally through job creation and spending. Community-led enterprise can amplify this recycling, by avoiding payments to franchise owners and by maximising the socially-productive use of economic capital. Community wealth building capacity can also be enhanced through local taxation and levies: impact charges on adventitious housing consumption for example, which is then recycled into precepts for community groups or into maintenance of key infrastructure. Wealth building capacity is about the capture and retention of value.

### 3.4. The land-based rural

Whilst enclosed land is foundational to 'built capital' and rent-seeking, it can also be fitted into a framework of 'natural capital': the stock of natural resources, renewable and non-renewable, that yield a flow of benefits to people (Natural Capital Coalition, 2016), including ecosystems, geosystems and atmospheric systems (Farrell et al., 2021). Environmental economists are able to assign these systems a monetary value within an accounting model that treats them as value assets. This type of economic accounting has been criticised for being narrow and reductionist, far too focused on monetary output and ignoring broader benefit (Farrell et al., 2021). The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) has consequently proposed a 'nature's contribution to people' (NCP) framework focused on broader quality of life outcomes.

There has been a broader shift in the literature from measuring ecosystem services to exploring how environmental assets benefit place-based development. For example, in discussing economic development within rural localities, Courtney and Moseley (2008: 309) refer to 'environmental capital' as comprising both 'natural and man-made assets that are valorised by local residents, investors and visitors' and as 'location, embracing peripherality, perceptions of peripherality and proximity to other places'. In other words, 'environmental capital' is a composite of assets and place. That view is shared by Emery and Flora (2006: 20–21): natural capital comprises 'those assets that abide in a particular location, including weather, geographic isolation, natural

resources, amenities and natural beauty. Natural capital shapes the cultural capital connected to place'. Land-based capital, with environmental and natural components, is critical to place and place identity.

In our own capitals schema, land-based capital embodies the relationship between human activities on land, socio-economic conditions and the natural environment (see also [Foresight Land Use Futures Project, 2010](#)). The following sub-capitals (also listed in [Table 2](#)) are important for rural places and also important when addressing global environmental challenges: *land as a socially productive asset*; *landscape as cultural capital*; and *nature-based infrastructure*. These are not mutually exclusive categories and also blend with other forms of capital. For example, a community-owned forest may result in maintaining important cultural landscapes (landscape as cultural capital), enhance biodiversity (nature-based infrastructure), represent a physical productive infrastructure through timber products (economic capital), and generate community benefits (land as a socially productive asset).

*Land as a socially productive asset* means using land in a way that creates pathways to more socially just outcomes, generating inclusive growth and societal benefits from the ownership, management and use of land resources. This suggests a focus on converting land (as a stock resource) into social and cultural capital, as an aspect of community wealth building, and as a key resource for supporting a just transition to a zero-carbon society. Three enabling factors are key to ensuring socially productive and just outcomes from the use of land. The first of these is a more diverse pattern of land ownership as a means of redistributing surplus value and as a guarantor of productive use. Local ownership is important, countering passive value extraction through financial channels by distant investors. Mechanisms for public bodies, charitable trusts, communities and community trusts to purchase land, including through community right to buy schemes, and essential and can also ensure local ownership. A mixed pattern of ownership underpins diverse uses and outcomes, including the provision of affordable housing, for instance, by land trusts and their delivery partners. The second factor is a land taxation system, perhaps in the form of a land value tax or inheritance tax, that effectively captures increments in land value for public benefit. The third factor is a legal framework that guarantees access to land so as to capture important health and wellbeing benefits.

*Landscape* is an area considered to possess identifiable character, with that character being the outcome of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors ([Council of Europe, 2000](#)). In contrast to land as an 'enclosed asset', landscape is considered a common resource, as a collective visual asset in rural places, or as an aspect of common heritage. Landscape character makes an area unique ([Atik, Isikli, Ortac¸esme, & Yildirim, 2015](#)), thus contributing to a sense of place and place-based identity, which in turn can be a critical resource for tourism or for place-based branding, including the local branding of 'bespoke' agricultural products. Landscape is an arena of interaction between humans and nature, where 'nature' is an amalgam of weather, geology, landform and biodiversity and human interactions involve settlement, farming and forestry practices, and the mythologies and beliefs tied to place. Interaction is a source of experience, captured in shared memory and reflected in cultural perceptions and preferences. Some landscapes are therefore imbued with significant cultural capital, which is mediated and magnified by cultural agents, interpreted through creative arts and valorised through designation and protected status (e.g. [Bowitz & Ibenholt, 2009](#)). 'Special landscapes' stand alongside ordinary ones, which may be as rich in social and cultural capital but are less widely celebrated.

*Nature-based infrastructure* comprises an interconnected and multi-functional network of nature-based assets that are capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities ([Lennon & Scott, 2014](#)). This form of infrastructure has a critical role to play in addressing urgent global challenges, ranging from habitat fragmentation and bio-diversity loss to the mitigation of climate change and adaptation to climate change risks. It is an infrastructure that can be strengthened and enhanced through, for example, the

restoration of wetlands or woodlands, in order to reduce downstream flooding risks. It exists at a range of scales ([Weber et al., 2006](#)), as *hubs* of concentrated biodiversity (wetlands, woodlands, dune systems) or small-scale green wedge or green way interventions; smaller *parcels* comprising significant ponds or meadows; linear *corridors*, comprising hedgerows or rivers, that provide habitat connectivity; or *buffers* that offer a protective zone between sensitive habitats and potentially harmful land uses. Buffers may comprise areas of farmland with lower-impact cultivation or grazing that act as a migration path for species affected by encroaching urbanisation.

### 3.5. The socio-cultural rural

Social and cultural capital have received considerable attention in planning and rural studies and are present in various formulations of 'capitals' (e.g. [Beddington, 1999](#); [Sseguya et al., 2009](#)). But neither term is used consistently across the social sciences, or across different scales and capital framings ([Flora et al., 2004](#); [Castle, 1998](#)). Coleman views social capital as a capacity, to think or do, that inheres 'in the structure of relations between persons and amongst persons' (1990: 302) whilst [Putnam \(1995\)](#) has sought to quantify how networks of trust and mutual exchange incubate social capital, which diminishes if such networks weaken. Not everyone has warmed to the simple assumptions of social capital. [Fine \(2002\)](#) has been withering in his condemnation of social capital as a lazy substitute for serious social analysis, bereft of any consideration of agency and power asymmetry. Yet despite such criticisms, the popularity of social capital as a social science 'short-hand' has not waned: it is regularly viewed as a resource for local development (e.g. [Lee et al., 2005](#)), a measure of social energy rooted in human interactions and connections ([Phillips, 2016](#)), and a resource or capacity that can deliver good outcomes. It is also distinctly different from 'human capital', which is focused on individual rather than collective capability. Yet social capital also has a 'dark side' when mobilised by elite groups in order to deny an extension of rights (e.g. for housing or services) or exclude others ([Portes & Landolt, 1996](#)). There is therefore an acknowledgement of the power asymmetries that limit social capital's capacity for good, although what constitutes a good outcome is always dependent on social and economic positionality.

It was noted in Part 1 that Bourdieu associated cultural capital, in its embodied form, with the manners, the elite education, the networks, and the social power of privileged classes. Other disciplines have reframed cultural capital. [Throsby \(1999\)](#) views 'culture and creativity' as a resource component of cultural capital, embodied in individuals and resembling the human capital which is so important in economics and development studies. In rural studies, this type of cultural capital is used to explain why adherents to traditional farming methods – as received cultural praxis and form of creativity – may challenge or reject the imposition of subsidy schemes that push otherwise 'good farmers' to modernise and abandon local methods ([Sutherland & Burton, 2011](#)).

Social and cultural capital are not indistinguishable, but they are intertwined. They are built upon at least four sub-components – *social networks*, *community capacity and active citizenship*, *inclusive places*, and *creativity and cultural practices* – that are part of good rural places and key to effective planning. These sub-components are present in other framings and implied in discussions of the skills that are part of the creativity that drives entrepreneurial endeavour and hence local economies (e.g. [Bosworth & Turner, 2018](#); [Emery & Flora, 2006](#)).

*Social networks* are both a mechanism and measure of social capital formation. They are essential conduits for trust formation and information sharing but can either include or exclude individuals and groups ([Fisher, 2013](#)). Over the last 20 years or so, they have been presented as a critical component of rural development ([Murdoch, 2000](#)) with [Ray \(2001\)](#) arguing that 'neo-endogenous' development depends on strong connectivity between local and extra-local actors that build capacity and link rural places to external resources. Networks are key to the collaborative production of place-based rural development knowledge and its

transfer across different contexts (Gkartziou & Lowe, 2019; Lowe et al., 2019).

*Community capacity and active citizenship* references the role of place communities in co-producing strategies, plans and projects. Ideas of active citizenship, community action (for example through voluntarism) and activism imply a community 'rich' in social capital, and with a capacity to mobilise resources and skills, to tap into information and external funding, and to successfully shape development outcomes. However, active citizenship may produce exclusionary forms of social capital. This can happen in communities where older, retired and wealthier residents give their time freely (Glasgow & Brown, 2012) but do so to preserve their own vision of what a rural place should be (Portes & Landolt, 1996), free of the development and significant change that other groups, with less time and power, might need. Whilst the mobilization of active citizens is key to good outcomes, it is likely to prioritise selective interests and goals (Lee et al., 2005). This is a crucial point: capitals underpin outcomes that are value-driven and potentially exclusionary, especially in instances where communities have significant power over planning processes and outcomes, and where ideas of public and private interest become confused.

For this reason, *inclusivity* is an important outcome and resource for rural places (see also Beddington, 1999). It shines a light on the 'dark side' of social capital, keeping in check those processes that support private and elite interest and lack sufficient concern for a longer term or broader public good. Inclusivity requires 'a critical view on which rural residents and needs are acknowledged and [which are] not' (Bock, 2018, p. 10). Social exclusions are rooted in the denial of full citizenship, limited access to services, and constraints that impede individuals' participation in decision-making (Shortall, 2008). Bourdieu was concerned with class conflict in his conceptualization of forms of capital, but more recent analyses of inequality have looked across race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age and disability, exploring their implications for rural places and for planning (Satsangi & Gkartziou, 2019). How planning might address racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia and the heteronormative construction of community and family are critical concerns for many societies (Doan, 2016; Forsyth, 2001; Frisch, 2002) with a focus on embracing multiple, fluid and overlapping identities and avoiding exclusions. The view reached is that planning questions need to be approached through intersectional frames of analysis (e.g. Walker et al., 2019).

*Creativity and cultural practices*, extending to place-based artistic practices, are an important contributor to better rural places (Throsby, 2008). While there is nothing new in efforts to valorise place-based cultural assets as part of new narratives of rural development (see, for example, Bell & Jayne, 2010), the rural-specific aspects of creativity, culture and art as pathways to development, have been gaining increased traction (e.g. Crawshaw & Gkartziou, 2016). Woods (2012) has argued that creativity is an innate feature of rural places, which have needed to cope with transformative social and environmental change. Adaptive development strategies, extending from farm diversification, through new place-based products, to alternative tourism ventures are all functions of place-based rural creativity. Rural areas have also displayed significant creativity in the way they have attracted young people back to the countryside to set up new businesses, promoting the role of the 'cultural entrepreneurialism'. But an important element of this sub-capital is the role of artistic practice in rural planning practice and research (Crawshaw, 2019). The countryside is both a locus and focus of artistic expression: questions of rurality – livelihoods, hardships and possible future – have become the subject of art (e.g. Tarlo & Tucker, 2019), and art in turn has given new expression to rural experiences, becoming a new way of knowing rural places.

#### 4. Part 3: Moving forward: a capitals framing in the 'global countryside'

The purpose of this paper has been to detail a framework, rooted in

Bourdieu's forms of capital thesis, to understand the nature of place and outline a mode of rural planning that connects with the relational nature of capitals. Our exercise matters because while rural planning research tends to focus on 'successes' and 'failures' of public policies applied in the countryside, the effort to consider and theorise 'how to do' rural planning has received far less attention. This is particularly important in the context of increased and interrelated connections not only between urban and rural places, but also across rural places globally (Woods, 2007).

Numerous authors have used capitals – constituting, co-existing and even competing in rural areas – as a starting point for thinking about place development and planning (Bosworth & Turner, 2018; Courtney & Moseley, 2008; Emery & Flora, 2006). The many frameworks that have been developed seek mainly to map the constellation of core capitals that are present in rural areas and show how they interact in support of business activity or how they must be generally respected, or balanced, if sustainable development is to be achieved. A line has been drawn in that literature between global north and global south contexts, with their diverse forms of knowing and their different constructions of development and planning. Bridging these contexts is too grand a goal for this paper, but our hope is that a flexible framework for thinking about place-planning is valuable to all contexts. That flexible framework is grounded in an attempt to understand the *constitution of rural place*, break the capitals down into *constituent parts*, and argue that these parts are in fact plains of interaction with a *broad suite of planning approaches* and levels.

In terms of broad *constitution*, we have sought to generalise the nature of rural place and in doing so, transcend the 'partiality and parochialism' (Lowe, 2012) of planning knowledge. We have done this by compressing longer lists of place capitals into four principal forms of capital in rural areas: built, economic, land-based, and socio-cultural. We have also argued that these types are themselves made of sub-capitals or *constituent parts*:

- A. Built capital is embodied in three critical infrastructures: in economic infrastructures that host productive activities, in nature-based infrastructures that support human settlement, and in socio-cultural infrastructures that are multi-functional and provide the essential operating systems of rural places.
- B. An economic capital that has physical parts, including land assets, but also soft entrepreneurial infrastructure that incubates business activity through knowledge networks and established value chains. Another crucial constituent part is community-wealth building capacity, which comprises means of capturing (and retaining locally), the surplus economic value generated through different forms of economic activity.
- C. A land-based capital that views land as more than a privately enclosed means of production. Rather, land is treated as a socially productive asset by virtue of diversity in ownership and comprehensive access and use rights. Land-based capital is also underpinned by landscape character and quality and its implications for value creation, and by landscape as an embodiment of cultural production. Nature-based infrastructures are also a key part of the land offer.
- D. Finally, the social and cultural capital of place exists in exchange networks, in community capacity and active citizenship, in inclusivity (which recognises the breadth of social and cultural capital) and in the creativity rooted in cultural practice.

Different forms of planning, listed in Table 1, interact with these constituent forms of capital in rural areas. They are the essential plains of interface between place and planning, as depicted in the 'Wheel of Place' (Fig. 1). In discussing interconnected and overlapping forms of capital, we have implied that progress towards good rural places is possible through modes of planning that understand and seek to preserve those assets that support the four primary capitals. But such an outcome is threatened, for example, where land-based capital is



withheld from a community (through private enclosure and land hoarding), where there is an extraction of profit (often through rentier practices) without local reinvestment, or in situations where wealth-building infrastructure has been eroded to such an extent that value is no longer captured and recycled locally.

Place-planning mobilises, and is also part of, the ‘spatial energy’ that rolls the ‘Wheel of Place’ – a tool for directing, managing and supporting the sustainable interaction of place capitals. By breaking capitals down into their sub-components, or sub-capitals, it is possible to begin to see the different ways planning must interface with the parent capital. Our prescription is for a mode of planning, and development control, which is permissive (viewing communities’ needs as indivisible from the needs of rural places) and supports key infrastructures; which is underpinned by a balance of business and community interests; which is centrally concerned with local wealth-building; which links nature to human needs rather than viewing these as incompatible; which takes an intersectional view of equality; and which acknowledges the central role of creativity and culture in supporting future wellbeing. These are just some of the features of effective place-planning.

What these very broad statements mean for different places and planning frameworks is a matter for local practice and place-based research. The ‘Wheel of Place’ is universal, but how exactly forms of planning and forms of capital interrelate and interact will differ locally. The contribution that we have sought to make in this paper has focused largely on the constitution and constituent parts of rural places, avoiding technical discussions about regulatory planning frameworks and definitions of rurality. The interrelationships suggested through the ‘Wheel of Place’ can be generalised because planning is very much a social practice, while displaying considerable local variation.

#### Author statement

Menelaos Gkartziou, Nick Gallent and Mark Scott contributed equally in: Conceptualization, Writing - Original draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Investigation, Visualization. Menelaos Gkartziou: Project administration.

#### Declaration of interest statement

The authors declared that they have no conflicts of interest to this work.

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