



Consell
de l'Audiovisual
de Catalunya



UNIVERSITAT
ROVIRA I VIRGILI



Col·legi
de Periodistes
de Catalunya

GUIDELINES

GUIDELINES ON THE REPRESENTATION OF **RURality** **IN THE MEDIA**

March 2025



Reproduction, distribution and public communication is permitted as long as the source is cited (authorship, title, publishing body) and that it is not done for commercial purposes. The creation of derivative works is not allowed without the express authorisation of the authors and publishing bodies.

Edition:
Catalan Audiovisual Council (CAC)
Carrer dels Vergós, 36-42 08017 Barcelona

Universitat Rovira i Virgili
Av. Catalunya, 35
43002 Tarragona

Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya
Rambla de Catalunya, 10, pral
08007 Barcelona

1st electronic edition in English: March 2025

An initial draft of these guidelines was presented at the conference “Ruralitats i Mitjans de Comunicació” [Rurality and the Media], organised by the Fundació Planes Corts [Planes Corts Foundation], Ràdio Seu, Viure als Pirineus, and TelePoble. This event took place in Estamariu (Lleida) on 8 November 2024.

This document has been produced within the framework of the research project *New Imaginaries of the Rural in Contemporary Spain: Culture, Documentary, and Journalism* (PID2021-122696NB-I00), funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033/ and by ERDF, “A Way of Making Europe”.



INTRODUCTION

The media plays a significant role in defining urban and rural spaces, as well as shaping how we socially engage with them. What we refer to as the *rural world*, *rurality*, or simply *the rural*—deliberately treated as a noun in this document—exists within a set of circumstances that balance between opportunities and challenges. **Today, rural areas are technically equipped and possess the knowledge required for sustainable development.** However, they also face significant challenges, including depopulation and ageing demographics; the decline of agricultural and livestock farming activities; biodiversity loss; the globalisation of agri-food production and distribution; an energy transition that often disregards local realities; climate change and drought; and a lack of attention to social diversity and gender perspectives, among others.

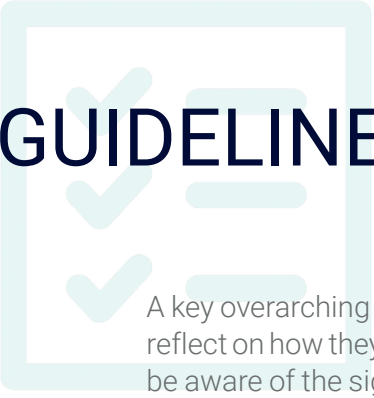
In response to these realities, **we are witnessing new mobility patterns between cities and the countryside**— a phenomenon that has become more pronounced since the COVID-19 pandemic, with economic, sociological, and cultural implications. Many people are considering moving to rural areas to develop various projects. Many of these challenges were outlined in the [Agenda Rural de Catalunya \[Catalan Rural Agenda\]](#), a participatory process to improve policies in this context.

The opportunities that rurality offers involve innovations and advances in various economic sectors, services, science and technology, as well as health and wellbeing. **Media coverage increasingly highlights fields related to rurality**, including tourism, education, urban planning, ecology, sport, and culture. These topics appear in news reporting as well as in entertainment formats, fiction, and advertising, shaping public perception and representations of rural life.

Public media, in particular, **should promote territorial balance in its coverage.** It is essential to foster connections and spaces for dialogue between rural and urban areas to encourage territorial cohesion, ensure an adequate flow of information, and cultivate mutual understanding free from stereotypes and biases.

In 2009, the Catalan Audiovisual Council, the Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya [Catalan Journalists Association], and the Fundació Món Rural [Rural World Foundation] published a pioneering document titled [Recomanacions sobre el tractament del món rural als mitjans audiovisuals \[Guidelines on the representation of the rural world in audiovisual media\]](#). In 2010, the Forum of Audiovisual Users' Organisations published [El tractament del territori en els mitjans audiovisuals \[The representation of territory in audiovisual media\]](#). Both documents addressed issues that, fifteen years later, remain relevant. However, rural areas are undergoing rapid transformations, requiring continuous renewal and adaptation of media approaches.

These new guidelines are also a collective effort resulting from the research project *New Imaginaries of the Rural in Contemporary Spain: Culture, Documentary, and Journalism* (PID2021-122696NB-I00), funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033/ and by ERDF, “A Way of Making Europe” (Ruralim), coordinated by Asterisc, the Research Group in Communication at Universitat Rovira i Virgili, between 2022 and 2025. Overall, this initiative aims to create a tool to enhance the quality of information and communication while fostering reflection and awareness about the rural world.



GUIDELINES

A key overarching principle is the need for media outlets and audiovisual production teams to reflect on how they portray rurality in their content. Every editorial team or production unit must be aware of the significance of its work and how it contributes to shaping public perceptions. It is essential to assess existing media coverage and establish collective perspectives on the challenges facing rurality. Conscious, honest journalism and communication practices—grounded in thoughtful, context-sensitive, and informed approaches—form the first step in this process.

Two main sections structure the guidelines: one focuses on news and journalistic coverage, and the other offers guidance on representing rurality in broader media formats, including entertainment, advertising, and fiction. Although presented separately, some principles are applicable across multiple communication formats.

> NEWS COVERAGE

01

Diversify journalistic topics associated with rural areas.

Journalism often approaches rurality through the lens of “associated problems” (drought, crisis, protests, falling prices, wildfires, and tragedies). Coverage frequently emphasises livestock farming, agriculture, “protected natural spaces”, or tourist destinations visited by urban residents.

The thematic scope of rural coverage should be diverse. Journalism should explore less commonly reported aspects of rural life. There are two ways to achieve a broadened scope: sections covering politics, society, economy, culture, and sports should feature **more stories set in rural areas**; journalists should **propose unexpected angles and topics** that go beyond conventional narratives.

Expanding the thematic scope is essential to reflect the complexity and richness of rural societies in a better and more balanced way and to overcome reductionism. Newsworthiness and news values remain valid beyond the number of people affected or the virality of an issue.

Rural areas provide food, and part of the population works in the primary sector, but rural life also includes services, small and medium-sized industries, and workshops. **There is a need for information that dignifies and values the primary sector while making other sectors in rural areas more visible.**



Rural spaces boast facilities and innovative projects, people working remotely for global initiatives, hubs for sports and environmental activities that attract active or specialised tourism, and high-quality gastronomic offerings. **Without idealising or concealing the difficulties, contradictions, and conflicts inherent in any socio-economic and cultural context, it is important to highlight and report on projects that challenge the notion that rural areas lack initiatives.** These projects work towards rural development, rural proofing, the continuity of small and medium-sized farms, and the quality of life of the resident communities.

02

Practising proximity journalism.

Journalism should be close to the people and the places where events happen, travelling whenever possible. The lack of transport and connections, as well as time constraints in news production, should not prevent journalists from adhering to the first principle of the [Journalism Code of Ethics of Catalonia](#): **to provide accurate and precise information**, which requires "getting as close to the reality of events as accurately as possible." In this effort to provide proximity-based journalism, **particular care must be taken to correctly mention place names, town names, geographical features, and local nicknames, as they are part of rural societies' heritage and history.**

Engaging both symbolic and physical. Accuracy to the facts is achieved by visiting places, observing contexts, speaking with sources in situ, and understanding the settings. While this may be straightforward in cities, it can be more challenging in rural areas. Journalism often relies on press releases—whether from institutions, public bodies, or corporations—containing pre-prepared information away from the original sources. In rural areas, some stakeholders complain that they are often only asked for short sound bites or written statements, without the possibility of dialogue, clarification, or follow-up questions. **It is crucial to guarantee and promote dialogue with rural stakeholders and to avoid shortcuts in reporting that undermine the quality of information.**

Job precariousness in journalism works against the provision of high-quality, locally relevant, and accurate information in all areas. In rural contexts, this negative impact is doubled due to the complexities involved and the need to cover a wide range of topics, some of which can be technical. **Media organisations should allocate sufficient resources to cover rural areas properly**, allowing journalists the time and means to engage with sources and produce in-depth reports that require long journeys and extensive exchanges. Specialised training in rural journalism is essential and should be encouraged.

Many valuable journalistic initiatives are led by freelance professionals and small organisations. These **modest projects, which contribute to high-quality, local, and independent journalism**, should be recognised and supported. Public and private media outlets committed to rural issues should back these initiatives while always **upholding journalism standards and maintaining a clear distinction between news (information) and promotional/commercial content (or advertising).**



National and state-level media often draw information or topics from rural-focused coverage originally published by local and small-scale outlets. These larger media and their journalists must acknowledge and **cite rural media as sources when appropriate**.

03**Incorporating diverse sources and voices.**

While rural areas may have ageing and masculinized demographics, this should not lead to overlooking their significant social and cultural diversity. **News reports should include a wide range of voices**—this means featuring older and younger people; men, women, and non-binary individuals; people with disabilities; racialised communities; and other underrepresented groups.

Coverage of rural areas should not depict a homogeneous society that does not reflect past or present rural realities. This diversity fosters more pluralistic ideological perspectives, moving beyond outdated views on issues such as gender equality, environmental protection, hunting, and relationships with animals, among others.

Journalism must break free from urban-centric biases and engage with the perspectives of people living in rural and mountainous areas. Rural spaces are geographically and socio-culturally diverse. **Rural societies are pluralistic, and journalism must be attuned to this richness and complexity.** This means paying close attention to the second and third principles of the [Journalism Code of Ethics of Catalonia](#): avoiding the harm caused by unsubstantiated reporting and ensuring that affected individuals or entities are allowed to respond. Journalists must also strictly uphold the right to reply to sources and their obligation to make corrections when necessary. **Avoiding harm through unfounded reporting, respecting the right of reply, and upholding the duty of correction are especially important in rural contexts.**

04**Protecting the privacy of minors and individuals.**

Rural areas and small villages are particularly vulnerable to complex news topics, legal cases, or issues that could impact daily life.

For instance, in a village of 100 residents, mentioning the age of a child or teenager could make them identifiable in their immediate environment. A detail that might seem trivial in a large city can become an ethical—and even legal—issue in a rural setting. This also applies to images and audio recorded in such contexts (voices, streets, locations), which could negatively affect those involved.

While these ethical considerations should always be observed, they require even greater attention in rural areas, **particularly regarding the right to privacy, the presumption of innocence, and the protection of minors' rights.**

05

Being vigilant about commercial and political conflicts of interest.

Rural areas are increasingly spaces where businesses and corporations operate with objectives that do not always align with the well-being of local communities. There are often conflicts of interest between corporate communications and journalism. For example, large corporations in forestry, energy, hydroelectric, food, or livestock industries carry out intensive production activities with powerful communications teams. These companies generate information, reports, issue summaries, press clips, and releases that, using images of fields, animals, and scenic “postcards”, serve highly targeted economic interests.

Journalism in rural areas must be **highly aware to potential conflicts of interest and be vigilant of the biases that corporate communications can introduce into rural spaces**. It is essential to avoid biased reporting on rurality that could reinforce power imbalances affecting communities that often have limited resources and small populations.

Sometimes, especially during elections, reports emerge about rural locations and villages generated by political parties or ideological organisations. These reports on rurality often have an ambiguous journalistic format and take part of strategic interests. **Journalists must remain alert to these practices, correctly attribute the sources of information, and be prepared to disregard content that may be masking political or economic interests.**

06

Applying a rural perspective in reporting and avoiding oversimplification.

Journalistic coverage often focuses on events in major cities and capitals, such as Barcelona, without seeking diverse sources to reflect the multiple experiences and perspectives across the country. When reporting on issues affecting the entire population, **it is important to include diversity of sources to provide pluralistic viewpoints and prevent the underrepresentation of rural communities**.

Journalists should **avoid narratives that reinforce simplistic portrayals** of people living in rural areas or that unjustifiably despise their contributions and underestimate their experiences. Maintaining a rural perspective helps to prevent stereotypes. **Reporting on rurality means reporting from within rurality, with a sensitivity to the realities experienced there**. Sometimes, topics about the rural world are communicated from an urban perspective without including rural sources or considering their needs.

In our societies, we have secured **democratic rights**—such as freedom of speech, education, sexual freedoms, and rights for people with disabilities—that are not always equitably implemented in rural areas. These rights can be more vulnerable in rural settings. A rural perspective in journalism must ensure the **defence of democratic rights in these areas, including access to education, healthcare, justice, and public services in general**.



Media organisations should assess how they operate in relation to rural areas and small villages. The outcome of these **conscious self-assessments should make visible the biases that need to be addressed within newsrooms to correct them.** Additionally, a rural perspective should avoid presenting issues as isolated cases and instead establish connections between rural areas, recognising shared challenges, opportunities, and realities. **High-quality, well-contextualised reporting should be able to broaden its focus and link interconnected aspects of rural life.**

07

Valuing reports on projects and future perspectives.

In recent years, narratives portraying rural areas as empty, deserted, or abandoned have gained popularity. While depopulation is a documented reality in the countryside, reporting should not dwell solely on this condition. Such narratives can sometimes overlook the existence of thousands of people who inhabit villages, agricultural zones, and forested areas. These are, ultimately, living ruralities.

Journalism should highlight the elements that give evidence of life in rural spaces—the work of those who reside there and the aspects that reflect rurality inhabited, known, and popular. It is essential to explore innovative and successful initiatives, young entrepreneurs, economic and cultural projects, and rural communities that are well-prepared and technologically advanced.

In rural areas, sustainable alternatives are being promoted, drawing on historical knowledge and operational methods adapted to hypermodern times. These approaches can serve as **triggers for social and cultural change**, such as the concept of the commons (like communal land), mechanisms of solidarity and exchange, and intergenerational relationships based on shared care.

We must recognise and value these **mechanisms, which operate on broader timescales, circular processes, and resource efficiency.** Journalism should break away from assumed meaning frames—such as the unquestioned need for unlimited growth, increased food production, or faster animal fattening. There is a need to raise awareness of the socio-cultural, environmental, and, in the long term, economic and political issues linked to a supposed notion of “progress”.

> FICTION, ENTERTAINMENT, AND OTHER FORMATS

08

Avoiding negative stereotypes and stigma.

Fiction and other entertainment formats often rely on stereotypes to depict rural life. While creative freedom and artistic expression should be respected, **it is vital to be mindful of reductive clichés used to convey a so-called “rural sense/essence”** and to avoid representations that may contribute to inappropriate or unnecessary stigmatisation.

Negative stereotypes typically portray rural life through ignorance, poverty, inflexibility, stubbornness, or hostility to change. These portrayals are often reflected in how the rural characters dress, move, act, express themselves, or speak.

It is crucial to recognise that ways of speaking—such as dialects, border languages, or local linguistic varieties—are part of cultural heritage and should be valued in all their expressions. Dialects and regional speech are an integral part of linguistic richness; while small-scale productions often take care to preserve them, **larger productions should also make an effort to reflect this diversity, normalising it and highlighting its cultural value.**

09

Making women’s voices and roles in rural life visible.

Women in rural settings are often represented in stereotypical ways—as incapable of performing physically demanding or messy jobs, or tasks requiring strength. However, historically, women have played and continue to play a crucial role in rural areas, carrying out all kinds of jobs—not just care-related tasks. Thanks to women, rural life has remained vibrant. **The ways in which women experience rural life are diverse, and it is important to avoid images or narratives that impose a normative view of womanhood.**

Likewise, women’s presence in audiovisual and advertising productions **should not be tokenistic.** Women in rural environments often speak of facing a double invisibility: one affecting the primary sector and another related to gender. It is therefore essential to ensure that **female farmers, livestock breeders, and fishers receive the recognition they deserve, highlighting their knowledge and contributions across all aspects of rural life.**

10

Integrating intersectional realities and rethinking victim narratives.

Intersectional realities—including factors such as gender, social class, ethnic background, and sexual orientation—should be naturally incorporated into rural narratives, just as they are in urban contexts. More broadly, there should be an effort to move beyond conventional tropes in storytelling, including sources of humour, surprise elements, mystery and horror mechanisms, and creative approaches across various fictional and entertainment formats.

It is also necessary to reassess the portrayal of rural areas as mere victims, instead recognising their potential as transformative agents in narratives. While rural communities have undoubtedly faced injustices, it is important to approach victimhood with nuance, avoiding passive or self-pitying perspectives. Instead, storytelling should highlight the **dynamism and activism of rural communities in asserting their rights.**

11

Recognising and promoting locally rooted rural creativity.

Many artists and creators based in rural areas have seen their work marginalised from mainstream media and cultural circuits. However, many have also chosen to settle in small villages. The expansion of fibre-optic internet has played a significant role in revitalising the cultural sector in rural towns and mountainous areas. As a result, **the audiovisual industry should be more open to incorporating and promoting rural-based creators—whether screenwriters, filmmakers, artists, or others.** Their perspectives, expertise, and skills can enrich creative processes and bring fresh insights to productions.

At the same time, the **audiovisual and cultural sectors should contribute to the economic and social revitalisation of rural areas**, particularly when initiatives are driven by public media organisations. Productions should not simply arrive in rural areas, film, and leave without sufficiently integrating local actors, musicians, audiovisual professionals, or small service businesses operating in these communities.

12

Normalising rural presence in fiction, entertainment, and social media.

Fiction series, entertainment formats, and comedy programmes have the power to shape public perceptions of rural life. **It is important to integrate rural settings in a natural and nuanced way, without forcing narratives to fit a predefined “rural” framework in which certain expected elements must appear**—such as animals, hay bales, tractors, old men with caps and toothpicks—**or certain predictable storylines must unfold**—such as a lack of mobile coverage, encounters with dangerous wild animals, or violent men with axes. While creative freedom must always be respected, it is worth reflecting on the use of these clichés.

During the creative process, it is advisable to consider **alternative approaches to the automatic use of rural tropes in building settings and characters.**

13

Balancing representations in corporate communication and advertising.

Advertising and corporate communication often depict the rural world in a style associated with greenwashing. These portrayals tend to recycle stereotypes without providing meaningful insights into actual business practices, product distribution, or how profits return into benefits for rural communities.

It is important to avoid using rurality merely as a picturesque backdrop to reinforce a “green” or “rustic” brand image without acknowledging the real contributions of rural initiatives. Instead, communication should explicitly highlight how these communities are genuinely involved in product development, the environmental and economic benefits they bring, and the positive social and cultural impact they generate. To achieve this, advertising campaigns could use QR codes or dedicated landing pages providing factual data on how their operations contribute positively to rural areas. Ultimately, **audiences should have access to transparent information about how these campaigns and business models create tangible benefits for rural communities.**

14

Broadening perspectives in the technological debate and engaging critically with AI.

Rural life is not synonymous with traditionalism or opposition to technology and progress. As in other socio-economic contexts, it is essential to consider diverse perspectives and **avoid the simplistic binary of either rejecting technology outright or embracing techno-optimism that assumes all solutions lie in digital advancements and artificial intelligence (AI).** Rural life is not synonymous with traditionalism or resistance to technological, social, economic, or scientific progress.

Generative artificial intelligence is already shaping new representations of rurality through text, images, and videos circulating online. These depictions are integrated into audiovisual productions, fiction, advertising, and several other media. However, algorithmic systems can replicate existing biases, stereotypes, or conflicts based on the materials they process. **For this reason, it is crucial to adopt a critical perspective on how technological, algorithmic, and AI systems contribute to defining contemporary rural imaginaries.**

15

Promoting local knowledge and connections to the environment.

Across journalism, fiction, and entertainment, there is a need to foster an **understanding of rural history, collective memory, present realities, and ongoing projects**. This does not mean reinforcing a pessimistic or nostalgic “looking back” narrative.

Instead, it is valuable to explore the deep connections between rural communities and their landscapes, materials, and ecosystems. Awareness of how **people relate to their immediate environment—land, mountains, rivers, coasts, vegetation, animals, and the broader landscape—is essential for capturing its meanings**.

Adopting a bottom-up perspective that prioritises the voices of those living in rural areas enables a more balanced and complex understanding of the rapid transformations that these regions have undergone in recent decades. Rural life is characterised by a **strong sense of place, linking people to materials, landscapes, and animals** while encompassing rich **intangible values**, from musical expressions to linguistic heritage. **Approaching rurality with an appreciation for local knowledge, lived experiences, and unique epistemologies is key to understanding these environments and helping others do the same.**



CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ORGANISATIONS—

During the drafting process of these guidelines, consultations were held with several entities and organisations, including the following contributors:

- Associació Dones del Món Rural [Association of Women in Rural Areas]
- Associació d'Iniciatives Rurals i Marítimes de Catalunya (ARCA) [Association of Rural and Maritime Initiatives of Catalonia]
- Associació de Micropobles de Catalunya [Association of Microvillages of Catalonia]
- Associació pel Desenvolupament Rural “Amb Mirada de Dona” (ADR)
 - Federación de Asociaciones de Mujeres Rurales (FADEMUR)[Association for Rural Development “A Woman’s Perspective” (ADR)
 - Federation of Women's Associations]
- Consell de la Informació de Catalunya [Information Council of Catalonia]
- Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals – 3Cat 3Cat [Catalan Audiovisual Media Corporation -3Cat]
- Red de Periodistas Rurales [Rural Journalists Network]
- Sindicat de Periodistes de Catalunya [Catalan Journalists’ Union]
- Xarxa Audiovisual Local – La Xarxa [Local Audiovisual Network – La Xarxa]



WORKING GROUP OF THE DRAFTING OF THE GUIDELINES

Coordination:

Enric Castelló. Professor at the Department of Communication Studies, Universitat Rovira i Virgili

Contributors (listed alphabetically by surname)

- Laura Alcalde. Journalist and President of the Lleida Board of the Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya [Catalan Journalists Association]
- Vicent Canet. Journalist specialising in rural issues
- Rosa Cerarols. Associate Professor at the Department of Humanities, Universitat Pompeu Fabra
- Esteve Giralt. Journalist and President of the Tarragona Board of the Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya [Catalan Journalists Association]
- Arnau Martínez Teruel. Journalist and Board Member of the Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya [Catalan Journalists Association]
- Helena Miguélez-Carballeira. Professor at the Department of Hispanic Studies, Bangor University
- Marta Montagut. Senior Lecturer at the Department of Communication Studies, Universitat Rovira i Virgili
- Sylvia Montilla. Head of the Research, Studies, and Publications Unit at the Catalan Audiovisual Council
- Laura Saula. Journalist and Board Member of the Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya [Catalan Journalists Association]



**Consell
de l'Audiovisual
de Catalunya**



**UNIVERSITAT
ROVIRA I VIRGILI**



**Col·legi
de Periodistes
de Catalunya**