



International Web Conference

Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovations in Rural Regions

21-22 September 2020



Social Entrepreneurship in Structurally Weak Rural Regions:
Analysing Innovative Troubleshooters in Action

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ruraction.eu

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Registration

Please register for the conference by **17 September 2020** by sending an email to Rebecca.Roggisch@leibniz-irs.de in order to receive a link to the Zoom conference. No fees are charged for the conference.

Participants of the conference are invited to also take part in the **RurAction Policy Roundtable** on 23 September 2020, 9:30-13:00.

Download Programm Roundtable (pdf)

Please register for the Policy Roundtable by **21 September 2020** by sending an email to Rebecca.Roggisch@leibniz-irs.de in order to receive a link to the Zoom conference. No fees are charged for the conference.

Structurally weak rural regions are faced with major social and economic problems. In comparison to 'predominantly urban' or 'intermediate' regions, 'predominantly rural' regions, and particularly structurally weak rural regions, are economically less productive, which finds expression by a low level of gross domestic product. They provide a less extensive scope of desired goods and services, opportunities for higher education and qualified job offers. Shops where daily purchases can be made are scarce and it is challenging for the inhabitants to move around the region because public transport is very limited. Not least, rural areas are faced with recurring negative discourses on rural problems in public media resulting in negative images. Against this background the respective regions experience a considerable loss of inhabitants and especially a brain drain of young and highly skilled people. Since the Euro crisis has become a burden in some European regions the situation has become even more acute. Downward spirals were set in motion that further reduce economic opportunities and prevent rural regions from overcoming their structural deficits.

Facing various social problems, researchers and politicians see social entrepreneurs as a factor which can help tackle the aforementioned problems (Pless 2012, Schwarz 2014). Social entrepreneurs can be understood as visionaries who, using an entrepreneurial approach, develop and implement innovative solutions for social problems. The focus of these activities is not profit, but the production of social added-value for a particular society (Christmann 2014, 45). One important part of the definition is, thus, that social entrepreneurs generate and implement social innovations.

Social innovations refer to social practices being new or different from previous ones and offering "better" solutions than former practices. They are thus worth the effort of being imitated and institutionalised" (Zapf 1989, 177). It is a feature of innovations that new combinations of already known things play a role rather than completely new inventions. Innovation research assumes that it is not only individual actors who bring on innovation processes, but that innovations happen in the context of social interactions of different actors. In particular, social networks are considered an important factor. After all, we are aware of the fact that innovations happen within a certain environment. Thus, an analysis of innovation processes must consider the socio-spatial context of acting. Regional problems under specific structural or cultural conditions may lead to specific innovative solutions (MacCallum 2009, Moulaert/Mehmood 2011).

In the conference we will look at social innovation and social entrepreneurship in the countryside. Until recently, rural communities were only seldom viewed in relation to (social) innovation (see for example Coronado/Acosta/Fernandez 2008). They had more of a reputation for their remoteness from innovation. It would, however, be wrong to say that the countryside offers no fertile ground for innovation. Rural regions have always been used as places to experiment with creative development. It has often been, and continues to be, urbanites, sometimes artists, creatives, or those seeking an alternative lifestyle, who have retreated either individually, in groups, or in colonies, to the countryside, in order to attempt something new. But the locals, too, have struck out on new paths. Present-day empirical findings show that rural dwellers quite certainly test out and develop novel ideas,





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even if they do not themselves necessarily describe such novelty as "innovative". First and foremost, they seek to develop solutions for existing problems; innovation for its own sake is not the goal. It is nevertheless clear to them that the old models are no longer of use, that new practices need to be tried, and creative solutions found.

In this context, the conference aims at organising an academic exchange about three aspects: (i) the specific challenges and dynamics of rural areas, (ii) the working conditions of social enterprises in these areas and (iii) the possibilities of creating and implementing socially innovative solutions for existing problems.

In Session 1 "Challenges and dynamics of structurally weak rural regions" we will firstly analyse specific economic, political, cultural and everyday framework conditions of rural regions, knowing that they may diverge significantly from country to country and even within an individual country. These conditions are considered to be the socio-spatial contexts of social entrepreneurial acting. Among other things, we are interested in the current situation of specific regions, but also in structural changes and the deduction of future prospects in order to provide information about future challenges and potentials for acting.

In Session 2 "On a mission for the region. Social enterprises at work" it will be discussed how social entrepreneurial initiatives institutionally organise their work in problem solving, how they network and collaborate with others in these processes, which organisational structures are built, how sustainability of problem solving is ensured, and how they tackle social and economic exclusion. It is also a question of what kind of supportive or hindering factors can be identified.

In Session 3 "The creation, diffusion and impact of social innovations in rural regions" will be examined. Only little is known about conditions of creating and implementing innovations in the countryside. It will be presented how social innovations emerge and how their novelty can be characterised in the rural context (for example, in how far social innovations refer to traditional elements, however combining them in a new way). In the session, it will be furthermore an issue how innovative practices spread spatially as part of an 'innovation biography', and not least which impacts on regional development can be observed as an effect of socially innovative initiatives.

The web conference (virtually) brings together researchers from all over the world, working in the field of regional development, social entrepreneurship and/or social innovation and coming from disciplines like sociology, geography, economics, political science, and planning sciences. The discussions after each presentation as well as the open discussion rounds at the end of each session will offer a forum for an extensive exchange.

Furthermore, the conference will provide insights into the results of an EU-funded research project entitled "Social Entrepreneurship in Structurally Weak Rural Regions: Analysing Innovative Troubleshooters in Action (RurAction)".





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Monday | 21 September 2020 | first conference day

09:00* Logging in at the virtual platform of the webinar
in the background: RurAction Exhibition slide show
* Please note: All times correspond to Central European Time (CET)

09:30 **Welcome and introduction**
Gabriela Christmann | Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space, Erkner, Germany

Abstract In the presentation the main challenges of structurally weak rural regions in Europe will be sketched. Furthermore, the EU-funded project “RurAction” will be introduced that bears the title “Social Entrepreneurship in Structurally Weak Rural Regions - Analysing Innovative Troubleshooters in Action”. RurAction has recognised a lack of knowledge at the intersection of rural development, social innovation and social entrepreneurship research and has addressed this gap by systematically integrating these three fields of research. In the project we have investigated the role that social entrepreneurship and social innovations have in the development of novel solutions for regional development. The presentation will not least give an outlook on key results.

Biography **Gabriela Christmann** is a sociologist. She is Head of the Research Department “Dynamics of Communication, Knowledge and Spatial Development” at the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space (IRS), Erkner (near Berlin), Germany. At the same time she is Professor of Sociology at the Technical University Berlin, Germany. At the IRS she was Deputy Director from 2015 to 2018 as well as Provisional Director in 2018 and 2019. Gabriela is the Scientific Coordinator of the EU-funded project “Social Entrepreneurship in Structurally Weak Rural Regions: Analysing Innovative Troubleshooters in Action (RurAction)”. She is heading numerous research projects in the fields of urban and rural development, social innovation, social entrepreneurship, smart villagers as well as on digitalisation processes and spatial transformation. Currently, she is part of the Collaborative Research Centre “Re-Figuration of Spaces”, funded by the German Research Foundations and hosted by the Technical University of Berlin, where she is a member of the Management Board, spokesperson of the project area “Spaces of Communication”, and head of the sub-project on “Digital Planning”. From 2012 to 2019 she worked as a Section Editor for the „Encyclopedia for Urban and Regional Studies“ (Wiley-Blackwell). Since 2018 she is member of the Editorial Board of the peer-reviewed open access journal “Urban Planning” (Cogitatio Press). From 2013 to 2016 she was member of an expert panel of “FORMAS – The Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning”, Stockholm, Sweden. Furthermore, Gabriela serves as an expert and advisor for different political parties and ministries on federal and on state level in Germany. Recent publications include: Christmann, Gabriela (ed.) (2020). Struggling with Innovations. Social Innovations and Conflicts in Urban Development and Planning. Special Issue in *European Planning Stud-*





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ies, 2020, 28:3. Christmann, Gabriela (together with Christoph Bernhardt and Jörg Stollmann) (eds.) (2020). Visual Communication in Urban Design and Planning: The Impact of Mediatisation(s) on the Construction of Urban Futures. Special Issue in *Urban Planning*, 2020, 5:2.

09:45 **The RurAction documentary film** (film premiere)
Łukasz Rogowski | Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland
Michał Sita | Pix.House Foundation, Poznań, Poland

Abstract The RurAction documentary film presents opportunities and challenges of social entrepreneurship and social innovations in structurally weak rural regions in Europe. It shows the everyday work of three social enterprises that are partners of the RurAction project: ADC Moura (from the Baixo Alentejo region in Portugal), Stevia Hellas (from the Phthiotis region in Greece) and Ballyhoura Development (from the Mid-West in Ireland). Each of these enterprises developed innovative solutions for the specific challenges in their regions. Most important for their work is to promote the networking of the stakeholders in the region, to base innovative solutions in local traditions and to support communities in the development of local services and facilities. The film is based on videos and interviews recorded in 2019 during research trips to the three regions. Łukasz Rogowski was the scientific coordinator in the film production, whereas Michał Sita from the Pix.House Foundation was responsible for the recording and the editing of the documentary film.

Łukasz Rogowski was the scientific coordinator in the film production, whereas Michał Sita from the Pix.House Foundation was responsible for the recording and the editing of the documentary film.

Biographies **Łukasz Rogowski** is a sociologist and Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Sociology of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. He is interested in visual sociology, visual research, ethics of qualitative research, the sociology of mobility as well as the sociology of new media. He has participated in many research projects focused on, among others, urban visual culture, visual competence, social use of smartphones and mobile applications. Currently, he works in two international research projects: the RurAction project (funded in the Horizon 2020 programme), where he coordinates the visual research activities and serves at the same time as an ethics commissioner, as well in a project entitled “Socio-spatial Transformations in German-Polish ‘Interstices’. Practices of Debordering and Rebordering (De-Re-Bord)” funded by the Polish National Science Centre and the German Research Foundation in the “Beethoven” programme.





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Michał Sita is a documentary photographer and curator working in Poznań, Poland. He graduated in cultural anthropology at the Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań (2011) and in photography at the Institute of Creative Photography in Opava (2009). Michał works on long-term photographic projects such as on tribalism in Iraqi Kurdistan. He is interested in history and cultural heritage. Michał acted as a curator of exhibitions, among others, by Mayumi Suzuki, Jan Kurek and Wiesław Rakowski. He is the co-author and curator of the “Zoological Archive” – an interdisciplinary project analysing photographs from the interwar period (in the context of the Natural History Museum in Poznań). Between 2016 and 2018 he worked as a curator of the XPRINT photobook festival in Poznań. He is one of co-founders of the ‘Pix.House Foundation’ that runs a photo gallery and a publishing house in Poznań.

10:30 Break | in the background: RurAction Exhibition slide show

11:00 **Keynote Lecture**
Social exclusion in diversified rural contexts

Mark Shucksmith | Newcastle University, UK

30 mins lecture + 15 mins discussion

moderated by Thilo Lang | Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde, Leipzig, Germany

Abstract Poverty and social exclusion exist in rural, as well as in urban, areas across the world. This paper begins by reviewing conceptualisations of social exclusion and its relation to place, arguing that social exclusion may be understood in terms of dynamic, multi-dimensional, relational processes which operate in localised contexts at multiple scales. Often this is considered primarily in terms of exclusion from labour markets or simply lack of income, but a full understanding of social exclusion can only be gained by considering the wider range of processes by which resources are gained and lost in our societies. These operate through markets; state; voluntary and community organisations; and family, friends and neighbours. Not only will the operation of each of these systems vary from place to place, and through time, but the capacity and agility of individuals and social groups to engage with these will also vary. Moreover, while many poor people live in poor places, many more live in relatively prosperous places, where poverty is hidden amongst affluence.

How then does rurality, and indeed rural diversity, affect social exclusion? The diversity of rural places it itself multidimensional, though often reduced to single dimensions such as distance (remote/ accessible) or population density. There are many more contextual factors to consider, such as the welfare mix (welfare regime); local, national and supranational policies; relational and historically embedded patterns of economic and state restructuring; and the distribution and exercise of power at





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(and between) multiple scales. One interesting sociological approach distinguishes between rural areas according to the dominant form of social relations, thus distinguishing in England between a preserved countryside, a contested countryside and a paternalist countryside. This paper seeks to illustrate how social exclusion operates differently in such diversified rural contexts, even within one small country, by considering the results of a study of contrasting rural areas of Scotland in the 1990s and some of the contextual changes since then. The paper concludes by suggesting an agenda for further research.

Biography

Mark Shucksmith is Professor of Planning at Newcastle University, where he was also Director of the Institute for Social Renewal from 2012-18, and Visiting Professor at Ruralis, Trondheim. His main areas of research include social exclusion in rural areas, rural housing and rural development. He is currently leading a study of social exclusion and financial vulnerability in rural Britain, funded by the Standard Life Foundation. Mark has recently served as Specialist Adviser to two House of Lords Select Committees, a role he previously performed in the Scottish Parliament. He was Chair of the Scottish Government's Committee of Inquiry into Crofting (2007-08) and a Board member of England's Countryside Agency and Commission for Rural Communities (2005-13), as well as directing the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Action in Rural Areas programme. Mark was Vice President of the International Rural Sociological Association during 2004-08 and Programme Chair for the XI World Rural Sociology Congress in Trondheim, Norway in 2004. He was awarded the honour of OBE in 2009 for services to rural development and to crofting. He is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and a Trustee of the Carnegie UK Trust and of ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England). Mark is the author of 17 books (including editing the *Routledge International Handbook of Rural Studies*, with David Brown) and over 110 learned papers, as well as coordinating several EU research projects.

11:45 Break | in the background: RurAction Exhibition slide show

13:00

Session 1

Challenges and dynamics of structurally weak rural regions

moderated by Gabriela Christmann | IRS

The rural as a promise for freedom. Changing images of rural areas in the Corona pandemic

Ariane Sept | Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space, Erkner, Germany

15 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion

Abstract

Since at least 20 years rural areas have been regularly faced with negative discourses on rural problems such as demographic change, loss of infrastructures or missing broadband access. These debates in public media reinforced negative images of rural areas. In Germany, it culminated in the images of 'dying villages', 'bleeding to death' or 'empty landscapes', especially regarding structurally weak regions in the Eastern federal states. Rural exodus, so the reduced discursive assumption, is an unstoppable fact and the future lies in big cities.





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However, with the beginning of the Corona pandemic a new tone entered the discourse: urban escape appeared as a new trend. Starting with reports from France (“Thousands of Parisians fled the city on Monday”, Frankfurter Rundschau, 18th March 2020) and German vacation areas (“Tourists prohibited”, Der Tagesspiegel, 2nd April 2020) the assumption developed that city inhabitants flee into their second homes in rural areas which are considered to be safer offering more space and green areas. While cities became associated with narrowness, small homes and limitations, rural areas suddenly seemed to offer more individual freedom for daily life in times of lockdown and a new virus with unknown risks.

Interestingly, the discourse did not stop with the upcoming loosening measures in early summer but appeared even more sophisticated and raised to a more general level discussing advantages of rural and disadvantages of urban life. Der Spiegel, one of the leading German magazines, wrote for example: “Since the corona crisis, large and megacities are no longer considered attractive, but contagious. The metropolises are therefore likely to be among the losers of the pandemic” (Der Spiegel, 16th August 2020). With regard to Berlin several articles explored the peripheries of the surrounding Brandenburg – which has until recently been associated mainly with emptiness and shrinkage – looking for urban refugees (Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung, 14th June 2020), discussing new home office options and rural coworking spaces (Berliner Zeitung, 24th August 2020) or rising real estate prices in remote areas (Der Tagesspiegel, 14th August 2020). Meanwhile, in New York started an emotional debate on successful urban escapes and the city’s future because a famous comedian claimed: “New York City is dead forever” (New York Post, 17th August 2020).

Following the idea of Berger and Luckmann that realities are constructed in the course of the communicative and discursive establishment of shared knowledge the question arises if these public debates are an indicator for a new attractiveness of rural areas. Having this question in mind the paper wants to trace the discursive turn on rural areas, presenting first insights from an analysis of German newspaper and online articles published between March and August 2020, complemented by some articles from international media.

Biography

Ariane Sept studied urban and regional planning and holds a PhD in sociology. Since October 2018 she has been working as a postdoctoral research associate at the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space in the department “Dynamics of Communication, Knowledge and Spatial Development”. Her main fields of study include current developments in rural and urban areas, digitalisation and social innovation, socio-spatial acceleration and deceleration as well as (European) urban and regional policies. Recent publications: Sept, Ariane (2020), Thinking together digitalization and social innovation in rural areas: An exploration of rural digitalization projects in Germany. *European Countryside* 12 (2), pp. 193-208. Sept, Ariane (together with Nicole Zerrer) (2020). Smart Villagers as Actors of Digital Social Innovation in Rural Areas. In: *Urban Planning* 5 (4), in print.





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Social disadvantage in rural peripheries in Eastern Germany and the Czech Republic

Andreas Klärner | Thünen Institute Braunschweig, Germany

15 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion

Abstract

This presentation introduces a joint Czech-German project. The project investigates the interrelationships between social disadvantage, opportunity structures and individual agency in rural peripheries from a comparative perspective. It focuses on two sets of research questions. The first set concerns the spatial patterns of disadvantage and deprivation in rural areas, the extent and prevailing forms of disadvantage and deprivation, and also looks at opportunity structures in rural peripheries. The second set asks about the impact of opportunity structures as part of the residential context on particularly disadvantaged groups. It also considers the interrelations between opportunity structures and individual agency in four case-study regions. The project uses quantitative area-level secondary and accessibility analyses as well as qualitative interviews including ego-centred network analyses and GPS mapping of time-space activity patterns.

Biography

Andreas Klärner is a sociologist. He is a Senior Researcher at the Thünen Institute of Rural Studies in Braunschweig. He is also private lecturer (Privatdozent) at the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences at the University of Rostock. Andreas is heading a research project on “Feelings of Being Left Behind in Rural Areas?” and Deputy Head of the German-Czech project “Social Disadvantage in Rural Peripheries in Eastern Germany and the Czech Republic”. His main research fields include social and health inequalities, rural poverty and social networks. He is mainly working with qualitative and mixed-methods. Recent publication: Klärner, A. and Knabe, A. (2019), Social Networks and Coping with Poverty in Rural Areas. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 59: 447-473. doi:10.1111/soru.12250.

Challenges and dynamics of structurally weak rural regions – results from the RurAction project

Barraí Hennebry | Georgios Chatzichristos & Sune W. Stoustrup, RurAction

30 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion

Abstract

As the global financial crisis and neoliberal austerity precipitated various manifestations of socio-economic decline, orthodox planning and policy-making were exposed for the systematic negligence of disadvantaged rural regions. Social innovation breaks through this rural marginalisation, by institutionalising novelty and anchoring alternative planning agendas. Along these lines, rural regions can re-attract interest by being linked with innovation and solidarity. In this regard, the present work explores how rural regions can change their image and perception of challenges, for innovations to break through the rural decline. The study initially defines a structurally weak region by its reduced ability to withstand to or even recover from external shocks, such as economic crises – what has been termed as “resilience” and its implied negative discursive portrayal. The analysis then dwells on the processes of transformation and uses the Mühlviertel region as an example of how to change the negative portrait of rurality. Seeds of this discursive transformation are often found in the activities of social entrepreneurs, who as active rural residents leverage resources to transform the exist-





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ing structures. Accordingly, in the last section, the analysis draws insights from two social enterprises that function within the respective regions: Otelo, in Mühlviertel and ACD Moura in Baixo Alentejo. Their innovative efforts for restructuring and re-framing their rural institutional environments are quite informative for the role that social enterprises can play in this process.

Biographies **Georgios Chatzichristos** has an interdisciplinary background in social sciences. He holds a Bachelor in Economics from the University of Macedonia (Greece), a MSc in Political Theory from London School of Economics (LSE) and a MA in Philosophy from King's College London (KCL), United Kingdom. He is currently a PhD candidate in the Sociology Department of the University of the Aegean, Greece. His research focuses on social economy, social innovation, political sociology and research methodology. Recent publications: Chatzichristos, G. and Nagopoulos N. (2020). Social Entrepreneurship and Institutional Sustainability: Insights from an embedded social enterprise, *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 31: 484-493. Chatzichristos, G. and Nagopoulos N. (2020). Regional Institutional Arenas for Social Innovation: a mixed methods research, *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*. doi: 10.1080/19420676.2019.1705378

Barraí Hennebry is an economist. He has a BSc in International Development and Food Policy and a Masters in Economic Science, both from University College Cork, Ireland. He is currently completing his PhD in Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial Management at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland. His research focuses on rural development, especially the economic polarisation of rural regions and the economic resilience of rural regions. Recent publications: Hennebry, B. and Stryjakiewicz, T. (2020). Classifications of Structurally Weak Rural Regions: Application of a Rural Development Index for Austria and Portugal, *Quaestiones Geographicae* 39:2. Hennebry, B. (2020). The Determinants of Economic Resilience in Rural Regions. An Examination of the Portuguese Case, *Miscellanea Geographicae* 24:1.

Sune Stoustrup is a Research Associate at the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space, Germany, in the Department "Dynamics of Communication, Knowledge and Spatial Development". He holds a B.Sc. in Planning Studies and Communication Studies from Roskilde University, DK, and a M.A. in Urban Studies from the 4Cities Erasmus Mundus Masters programme (international University collaboration). He is working on his doctoral thesis with the working title: "Discourses on regional problems and cultural knowledge patterns" at the Technical University of Berlin, Germany. His research interests are in the fields of European spatial planning, urban and rural studies, multi-level governance, social innovation, and discourse studies.

Open discussion | 15 mins

14:45 Break | in the background: RurAction Exhibition slide show





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15:15

Session 2

On a mission for the region. Social enterprises at work

moderated by Mary O'Shaughnessy | University College Cork, Ireland

The role of social enterprise in addressing social isolation – evidence from rural Scotland

Artur Steiner | Glasgow Caledonian University, UK

15 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion

Abstract

Social isolation has negative physical and mental health implications and, as such, it represents a major public health concern. Simultaneously, geographical characteristics of rurality can further increase loneliness of rural residents. Although recognised as a potential preventative measure for social isolation, impact of social enterprises in combatting loneliness is largely unexplored in the rural context. To address this gap, and using in-depth interviews conducted over a three-year period with 35 stakeholders from seven social enterprises in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, this presentation explores the role of social enterprise in addressing social isolation and loneliness in rural communities, and identifies the pathways in which social enterprises may act upon the health and wellbeing of their beneficiaries. In addition, the presentation discusses the capacity of rural community members to deliver and sustain such services. Findings show that social enterprises are successful in reducing social isolation and feelings of loneliness among rural residents, leading to wider health and wellbeing benefits for individuals. However, the sustainability of social enterprises is questionable due to the burden on smaller populations, limited expertise and knowledge of running social enterprises, and effects on the personal lives of social enterprise volunteers and staff.

Biography

Artur Steiner is a Professor in Social Entrepreneurship and Community Development. He leads the Community Development and Citizenship Participation Research Group at the Yunus Centre, Glasgow Caledonian University. His research is about community disadvantage and actions to ameliorate isolation and, through co-production and participation, raise resilience and empowerment. Artur's work is concerned with evidencing how, through social innovation, entities, policies and interventions tackle social inequalities and vulnerability including geographical disadvantage and frailty of specific groups in the society. His research outputs span multiple disciplines, chiefly entrepreneurship, rural development, public policy and health-related social sciences. Artur's work is multi-disciplinary and thus it uses a multi-method research approaches. He has a rich track record of successfully published academic papers in national and international high quality journals (<https://scholar.google.co.uk/citations>). His research outputs span multiple disciplines, chiefly health-related social sciences, rural development and public policy. Currently, Artur is a member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* as well as a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of the *Social Enterprise Journal*.





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From theory to practice – why social entrepreneurship matters?

The case of Bulgaria

Darina Zaimova | Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

15 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion

Abstract

Social entrepreneurship, philanthropy, non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations, and charity are often, and even in most cases, perceived as interchangeable concepts. However, from the point of view of social values and the activity of economic systems, they contain significant distinguishing characteristics and individuality. Every theory and science is based on the formulated terminology and conceptual apparatus, which in turn are enriched and improved with the development of research interest. In the case of social entrepreneurship as a science, two main factors affect the efficiency of the process. In the first place, it is the diversity of socio-economic values and systems which determine the evolution and the major trends in the field. In practice, this means a wide range and possibilities for interpretation of the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship. Following the logic, we come to the second critical point, namely that rational reconstruction at the conceptual level is the most optimal option to develop science for the third sector as a real opportunity to unite and systematize in a single exposition the various perspectives and variations. The content and approaches of definitions vary; they tend to include multiple dimensions; and they present a number of conflicting “tensions” within the notion itself. The most important of these “tensions” appear to be the following: Social entrepreneurship as an individual or a collective phenomenon? Does it provide social value or economic value? Is it part of the non-profit sector, or can social entrepreneurship also be found in the for-profit and public sectors? Does social entrepreneurship aim to achieve incremental social impacts, or is it meant to produce radical social transformations only?

The rapid growth of the third sector in Bulgaria occurred more than a year after the beginning of the political changes, when in 1991 the Constitution of Bulgaria proclaimed the freedom of association as a fundamental civil right to be exercised by citizens to safeguard their interests. By this time Bulgaria's third sector is described as still immature in light of its functional profile. To a certain extent it seemed isolated and relatively retarded in regard to the overall social processes. The accession of Bulgaria to the EU led to reinforcement of the role of third sector organizations in the social and economic development of the country, when their strategic vision and role are outlined in all the basic national documents prepared to follow the EU guidelines. However, the concept of social enterprise even now has limited understanding of its capacity to deal with problems such as social exclusion, limited access to various community services, underdevelopment of certain less advantaged areas; hence the importance of building awareness and empowering social enterprise through a more enabling legal framework is an important factor. By this it is implied not necessarily provision of particular legal form but operationalizing the concept of social enterprise by focusing on the underlying causes, rather than only dealing with the consequent negative results. Some of the areas, where continuous support is required, are: advocacy and lobbying to improve the environment; capacity for





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training and assistance; international exchange and networks; improved access to markets; consolidation of the third sector, access to financial resources and business support services adapted for these organizations.

Biography

Darina Zaimova is Associate Professor and a Deputy Head of the Department “Industrial Business and Entrepreneurship” at the Trakia University, Bulgaria. For the year 2019 she was invited for the position of the Vice-Rector for Internationalisation at the Pavlodar State University (Kazakhstan). She is a beneficiary of the Justus-von-Liebig Award, research fellow at the Institute of Agricultural Economics of the Christian-Albrechts-University, Kiel, Germany; post-doctoral research fellow at the European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises - EURICSE, Italy. Her research expertise falls within the scope of rural development, cooperatives and cooperative movement, social entrepreneurship, local development and government policy as well as eco-entrepreneurship. In her different project she took different roles – as a researcher, a scientific coordinator and as a project manager of different types of projects (scientific, educational, or infrastructural). The projects were funded through different EU programmes such as the FP7 programme (IAPP), COST programmes, the Erasmus programme, the INTERREG Balkan Mediterranean programme, operational programmes of the Structural Funds in Bulgaria and the National Science Fund in Bulgaria. She is the project coordinator and the scientist in charge in the project “Cooperative business and innovative rural development: Synergy between academia and business partners (C-BIRD)”. Recently she is heading the project “A knowledge Alliance in Eco-Innovation Entrepreneurship to Boost SMEs Competitiveness – SMecoMP” and she is the project coordinator of the “Strategic partnership for AGRI-entrepreneurship and EcoInnovation” – AgriEco.

Plurality of socio-economic relations and long-term sustainability in rural social enterprises – results from the RurAction project

Mara van Twuijver | Sunna Kovanen & Lucas Olmedo, RurAction
30 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion

Abstract

Rural social enterprises gain increasing attention from the field of practice, policy and research as (potential) contributors to solutions for rural challenges. Previous research shows that rural social enterprises provide a myriad of services in a range of different sectors, and develop and spread innovative and empowering organising practices in their regions. Thus, they may present a model of substantive rural development decoupled from the primacy of economic growth. In the presentation, a reflection will be provided on how rural social enterprises are able to deliver these contributions on the long term, presenting findings from qualitative empirical research undertaken through the RurAction-project on rural social enterprises within Ireland, Germany and Portugal. We focus on the plural socio-economic relations and the hybrid organisational forms that characterise these enterprises, and we consider how these may contribute to both stability of service provision as well as to their innovative, transformative power. Our data show that rural social enterprises are able to engage with different elements of their rural ‘places’ as well as networks and resources from mul-





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multiple scales and build and maintain a plurality of socio-economic relations. Valorising these diverse resources and relations, on the one hand, is the backbone of the enterprises' social and material sustainability. On the other hand, it increases the risk of instability and tension, and requires a patient learning process. Finally, we reflect on challenges for innovative organising in a rural context on the long-term.

Biographies **Sunna Kovanen** is conducting her PhD as a part of the RurAction project at the Leibniz-Institute for Regional Geography, Leipzig, Germany. In her PhD thesis she investigates the practises of collaboration and their relevance for the stability and change-agency of rural social enterprises in north-eastern Germany and south-eastern Portugal. Her focus lies on post-development and practise theories. Sunna's background is in geography and regional development studies in Finland. Apart from research, she has been working with ethical financing for social enterprises and engaging in solidarity economy networks in Europe.

Lucas Olmedo is as a researcher within the RurAction project, being based at the Department of Food Business and Development, University College Cork, Ireland. His research interests include social enterprises, community social entrepreneurship as well as rural, regional and local development. Lucas is currently doing his PhD about "Exploring Irish Rural Social Enterprises as Neo-endogenous Development Actors". Lucas latest publications include "Rural social enterprises in Europe: A systematic literature review" published in *Local Economy* and "Community-Based Social Enterprises Fostering Inclusive Development in Peripheral European Rural Areas" published (online) in the United Nations Knowledge Hub for the Social and Solidarity Economy.

Mara van Twuijver is a researcher in the RurAction project. As part of this programme, she is placed with Ballyhoura Development CLG. At the same time she is a PhD candidate at Cork University Business School (CUBS), University College Cork (Ireland). Mara holds a MSc in Strategic Management from Tilburg University (The Netherlands) and has previously worked as a research consultant at TNO, the Dutch Institute for Applied Scientific Knowledge. Her research interests encompass regional development, rural social enterprises, hybrid organisational forms, social innovation and sustainability. In her PhD research Mara is investigating how rural social enterprises utilise their hybrid nature to provide meaningful contributions in a rural context.

Open discussion | 15 mins





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Tuesday | 22 September 2020 | second conference day

09:00 Logging in at the virtual platform of the webinar
in the background: RurAction exhibition slide show

09:30 **Keynote Lecture**
Regional solutions for rural and urban challenges in the United States

Brian Dabson | University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA

30 mins lecture + 15 mins discussion

moderated by Tadeusz Strykiewicz | Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland

Abstract

The lecture presents the findings of a study, conducted during 2019, by LOCUS Impact Investing led by Brian Dabson and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The starting point for the study was that regional collaboration can be an effective way of improving social and economic opportunity and health for all people and all places within a region. In a way, the study was a response to the dominant and misinformed narrative in the media and policy circles that there is a growing divide between urban and rural America. Such a narrative has damaging political, policy, and practical consequences particularly for the future of rural America. The study set out to find examples of policy and practice that demonstrate boundary-crossing, multi-sector solutions to regional challenges and which intentionally advance equity of opportunity, health, and well-being in a region. The lecture will briefly describe the approach used in the study – literature review, extensive interviews with experts, and seven in-depth case studies – and define some key terms (region, regional collaboration), before discussing the main themes that emerged.

Biography

Brian Dabson is Research Fellow, School of Government, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and Advisor to the Aspen Institute's Community Strategies Group and to LOCUS Impact Investing. His primary interests are in rural and regional development. Before moving to North Carolina, he was Associate Dean, Research Professor, and Director of the Institute of Public Policy at the University of Missouri's Harry S. Truman School of Public Affairs. Previous positions include President of the Rural Policy Research Institute and President of CFED (now Prosperity Now). He served as president of the Consortium of University Public Service Organizations, board chair of the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, member of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Community Development Advisory Council, member of the national steering committee of the National Rural Assembly, and president of the Social Innovations Forum at the Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD). Prior to coming to the United States in 1992, he was director of the Center for Employment Initiatives (CEI) a UK-based research and technical assistance non-profit that worked across Europe on community and economic development programmes, and before that he held a number of local government planning and economic development positions in Liverpool and Glasgow. His latest publications are: Dabson, Brian (2019). "Regional Solutions for Rural and Urban Challenges", *State and Local Government Review*, Vol. 51 (4) 283-291. Dabson, Brian (forthcoming). *Thriving Together: Equitable Recovery and Resilience in Rural America*. Washington DC: Aspen Institute.





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10:15 Break | in the background: RurAction exhibition slide show

10:45 **Session 3**
The creation, diffusion and impact of social innovations in rural regions
moderated by Maria de Fátima Ferreiro | Instituto Universitario de Lisboa, Portugal

Context and reciprocity. A conceptual framework for the analysis of processes and outcomes of social enterprise

Jennifer Eschweiler | Roskilde University, Denmark
15 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion

Abstract The presentation draws on data obtained as part of the EU-funded project SOLIDUS, which explored current and future expressions of solidarity, analysed within a social and solidarity economy framework. More specifically, the analysis focuses on solidarity as reciprocity and how it is affected by such factors as the motivations of actors, internal participatory functioning, types of resources and political legitimacy of SSE organisations. Findings presented based on case studies from Denmark and Hungary indicate that solidarity as reciprocity produced by SSE organizations thrives in a context of supportive political institutions in forms of public funding and collaborative partnership, linked to trust in political institutions and vice-versa in relatively autonomous SSE organisations.

Biography **Jennifer Eschweiler** is Assistant Professor in Social Entrepreneurship at Roskilde University, Denmark. She holds an MA in Political Science. Her PhD thesis was focussed on Muslim civil society participation in local integration discourse and practice. Jennifer's research focusses on questions of democratisation through social entrepreneurship and social innovation, e.g. through active citizen participation within organisations, through co-production with the public sector, the design of participatory policy programmes and inclusive public discourses. She used to be a member of the EMES Network Coordination Network.

Social impact in social innovations

Luis Portales | University of Monterrey, Mexico
15 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion

Abstract Social innovation is a concept which aims at addressing the different needs or problems faced by a society from a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral perspective. The concept is discussed both in academic discourse and in daily practice. So far, a main goal seems to be to increase the number of social innovations. Accordingly many efforts have been undertaken to design and implement socially-innovative initiatives. However, it is also necessary to identify how these social innovations actually can solve existing problems or how they can contribute to reduce them. It is crucial to carry out social and economic impact evaluations of these innovations that are based on the value they generate and the changes they cause in a society. The presentation aims at pointing out the





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relevance of the social impact in social innovations. It discusses the main elements that are to be considered in the assessment and the importance they have in the movement of impact investment processes and their products, among others, in social impact bonds or in impact investing.

Biography

Luis Portales holds a Ph.D. in Social Sciences with a specialisation in “Social Development” from the Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico. He is currently a Research Professor at the University of Monterrey (UDEM), Mexico, where he is the Director of the “Center for Well-being Studies”. Luis is co-founder of the Social Transformation Laboratory. Since 2013 he has been a member of the National System of Researchers, Level I, and has published more than twenty indexed articles and four books. He has carried out various impact evaluations and documentation of social development processes for municipal governments, civil society organisations and companies. He is a consultant on issues of ethics, social responsibility, sustainability, social business models for organisations and impact evaluation.

The emergence, spread and impact of social innovations in rural development practices – results from the RurAction project

Anna Umantseva | Jamie-Scott Baxter & Marina Novikova, RurAction
30 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion

Abstract

The following paper presents a spatial typology of social innovation initiatives in rural regions organised along three dimensions: emergence, spread and impact. It is based on empirical findings from the research project RurAction. According to the variables, we identify and exemplify four different types of initiatives, which are: Iterative - social innovations emerging in response to specific local conditions which spread iteratively to other rural locations (1); and Distributed - social innovations that are regionally distributed and between which material and discourse re-circulate and new practices emerge (2); and Composite - social innovations responding to local rural conditions yet operationalise pre-existing regional (rural-urban) networks (3); and Paradoxical - social innovations which are paradoxical in nature and do not fit into the previous categories (4). We discuss how impact is understood differently according to the types and spatial scale of innovation and which can itself be drawn out along two axes, that of qualitative and quantitative and tangible and intangible. In the presentation the model will be illustrated by elaborating the ‘iterative’ and the ‘distributed’ type through two cases in rural Portugal. Finally, this ‘work in progress’ model will be discussed in relation to recent results from other space-related social innovation research.

Biographies

Jamie-Scott Baxter is an architect and socio-spatial researcher employed at the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space. Since 2017 he is Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow on the EU Horizon 2020 MSCA project ‘RurAction’ and a PhD candidate at the Technical University Berlin at the chair for Urban Design and Urbanization. He is currently a Research Associate at the Collaborative Research Centre 1265 “Re-figuration of Spaces”, hosted at the Technical University Berlin. Jamie’s current research interests include spatial social innovation, territorial transformation, infrastructures, new materialism, feminist STS and the intersection of research and design practices, as well as creative ‘hybrid’ methods in socio-spatial research.





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Marina Novikova is a sociologist. She is a PhD student at the Lisbon University Institute (ISCTE-IUL), and a researcher at the Centre for Socio-economic and Territorial Studies (DINÂMIA'CET, ISCTE-IUL), Lisbon, Portugal. At the same time, Marina is a researcher in the EU-funded project RurAction. There she investigates the role and the impacts of social innovation in the development of rural regions. Her main research interests include social innovation, regional and rural development as well as impact assessment of social innovation.

Recent publications: Novikova, M., de Fátima Ferreira, M. and Stryjakiewicz, T., 2020. Local Development Initiatives as Promoters of Social Innovation: Evidence from Two European Rural Regions. *Quaestiones Geographicae*, 39(2), pp.43-53.

Anna Umantseva holds a Master's degree in cultural anthropology from the KU Leuven, Belgium. She is a second year PhD student at the Institute of People and Technology at the Roskilde University, Denmark, and a researcher in the "RurAction" project. Her research currently focuses on the emergence of social innovations in rural regions in Portugal and Denmark. She uses a practice theory approach, focusing on the triggers of social innovation that encompass aspects of rural materiality, intangible flows of meanings, discourses as well as processes of knowledge generation and sharing. Her previous research was focused on gender norms and social inclusion in agricultural innovations at the R&D institute "CIMMYT", Mexico, where she co-authored several journal articles.

Open discussion | 15 mins

12:30

Wrap up

by Lars Hulgård | Roskilde University, Denmark &
Nikolaos Nagopoulos | The University of the Aegean, Mytilene, Greece

12:45

End of conference

