**Transdisciplinary action research in rural development:
the role of SI**

**Frank Moulaert and
Constanza Parra**

KU Leuven

Index

- Rural development in which world?

- 'Models' of rural development

- The road to bottom-up strategies …

- … and the consequences for rural development research

- Rural development action research and social innovation

- Continuity and perseverance action research for/through community development …

Continuity and perseverance

Rural development in which world?

- Food (in) security, unequal exchange, land grabbing, ecological problems due to over exploitation of land and use of chemicals, the war on genetics, …. are some of the 'global' problems of the rural world.

- There are also many continental (e.g. aging of farmers in Europe), national, regional and local problems in that world. But it is especially at the local and regional levels that *sources of hope and alternative strategies of rural development are rising*.

- We especially want to stress the latter, by focusing on the SI catalysts for rural development. We come back to this connection within a few slides.

'Models' of rural development

- It is not our objective to give an exhaustive overview of 'models' of rural development. There is an extensive literature on these models. Our interest here is to explain why the model in the focus right now is that of *territorial development with a growing role of SI (Social Innovation) and enhanced governance.*

- There are several factors explaining the growing importance of this model: global challenges, practical issues that should be overcome, failure of policies based on previous models (e.g. Green revolution based on agro-business model), progress in science, growing role of bottom-up organization in many spheres of society (role of communities in societal transformation).

'Models' of rural development

- *From endogenous to socially-innovative rural territorial development*

Territorial capital, local participation, territorial development through SI

- *From productivist to diversified, community-based rural development policy*
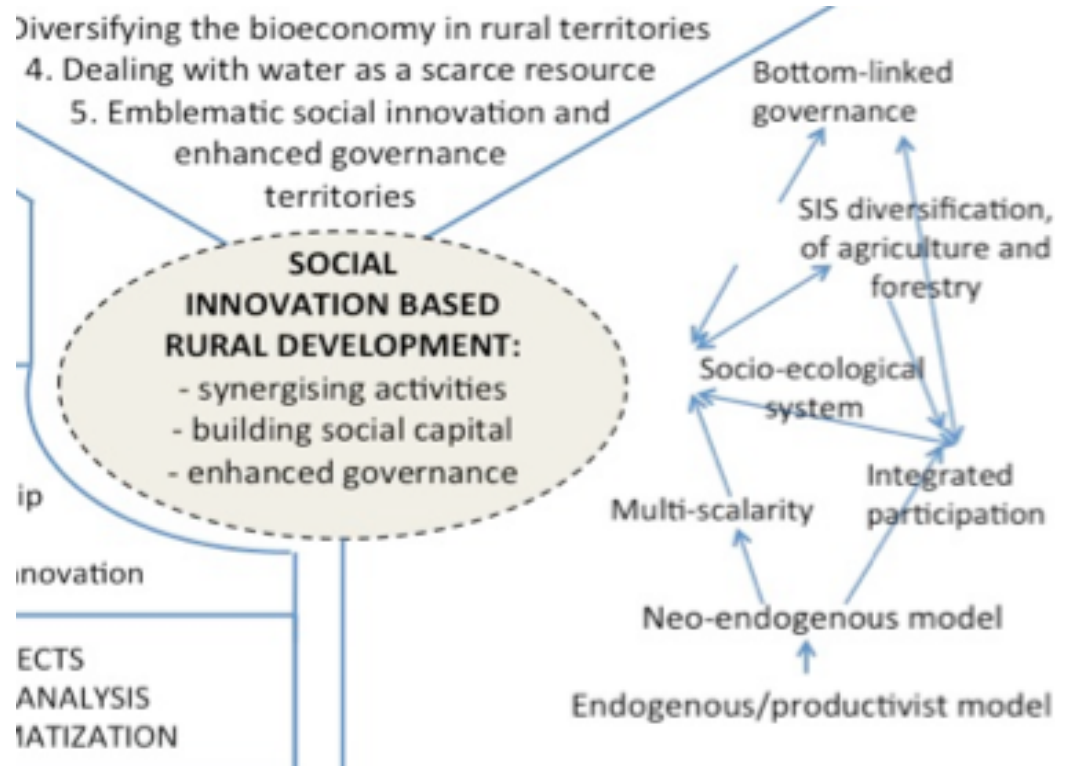
Productivism ➔ Multi-functionality ➔ Integrated development (Second pillar of CAP, LEADER, RIS3, CLLP, …)

- *Valorising the "rurban" connection and social ecology: routes to diversification*

Nature and culture, forestry and agriculture, green care, multifunctional nature parks, local service networks, …

- *Social Innovation, Bottom-Linked Governance and Rural Development*

'Models' of rural development

The road to bottom-up strategies …

- Bottom-up strategies follow a cyclical pattern in many domains of human society. Their roots are very diverse, so are their drivers and practices.

- Bottom-up strategies are usually initiatives by non state and non market organizations. But in the life course of these initiatives state and market agents often take up significant roles. These roles may reinforce the bottom-up character of initiatives (upscaling and empowering through network building, supportive policies) or transform them (with negative developments such as commodification, bureaucratization, …)

- Examples: integrated area development, urban and rural social movements (often upscaled in different ways)

The road to bottom-up strategies ....

- Since the late 1980s bottom-up development initiatives have been theorised, inspired and supported by social innovation literature.

- Social innovation was theorised and put to practice in neighbourhood development, territorial development, in social enterprise, in building up cooperative learning models, bottom-up and bottom-linked governance, cooperative agriculture and experience-based learning for rural development, popular universities and co-learning and socially innovative R&D (see bibliography)

The road to bottom-up strategies …

The concept of *Social Innovation* is used here as defined in the academic literature on territorial development, stressing SI as innovation in *territorially-embedded* **social relations** and **governance** in order to **(better) meet (unsatisfied) (collective) needs and aspirations** or to **improve their modes of satisfaction, especially for populations in vulnerable regions and communities.**

To operationalise the role of SI in rural territorial development 6 dimensions of SI have been selected

Satisfaction of needs/ collective targets	Innovation in social capital	Governance and socio-political transformation
Pursuit of social and environmental sustainability in sectoral composition (11). Re-appropriation of territorial heritage (11). Overcoming economic dependencies (10).	Formal and informal associations with shared goals (14). Collective ownership of strategic information (3). Joint events and projects for bonding (5). Interactive platforms (8). Participatory processes with relevant actors (10).	Land reclamation (4). State commitment to meeting local needs (4). People-sensitive modes of planning (3). Rescaling of social and economic networks (6). Active dialogue - community and decision makers (5).

Leadership	Vision	Collective learning process
Proactive conflict management (2). Personal and community capacity-building (10). Cooperation in leadership across different sectors (4). Transfer of skills to different localities (3).	Collective memory as part of visions of the future (2). Sustainable agri-practice models compatible with tourism and conservation (7). Shared security of resources (4).	Building environmental awareness (4). Network-supported experimenting (4). Seeking mutual benefits of cross-sector cooperation (4). Building on successes in other fields/areas (2).

… and the consequences for rural development research

- Rural development built on socially innovative initiatives and enhanced governance requires a **particular relationship between research and action** (collective action, public policy, private initiatives)

- The position we take in our work is that of **social innovation action research**:

  - It is transdisciplinary;

  - It is action research (integrating research and action in different ways);

  - It is socially innovative action research, meaning that it is meant for SI but also that it takes on board the features of socially innovative development in the research process itself. The following table explains what this means:

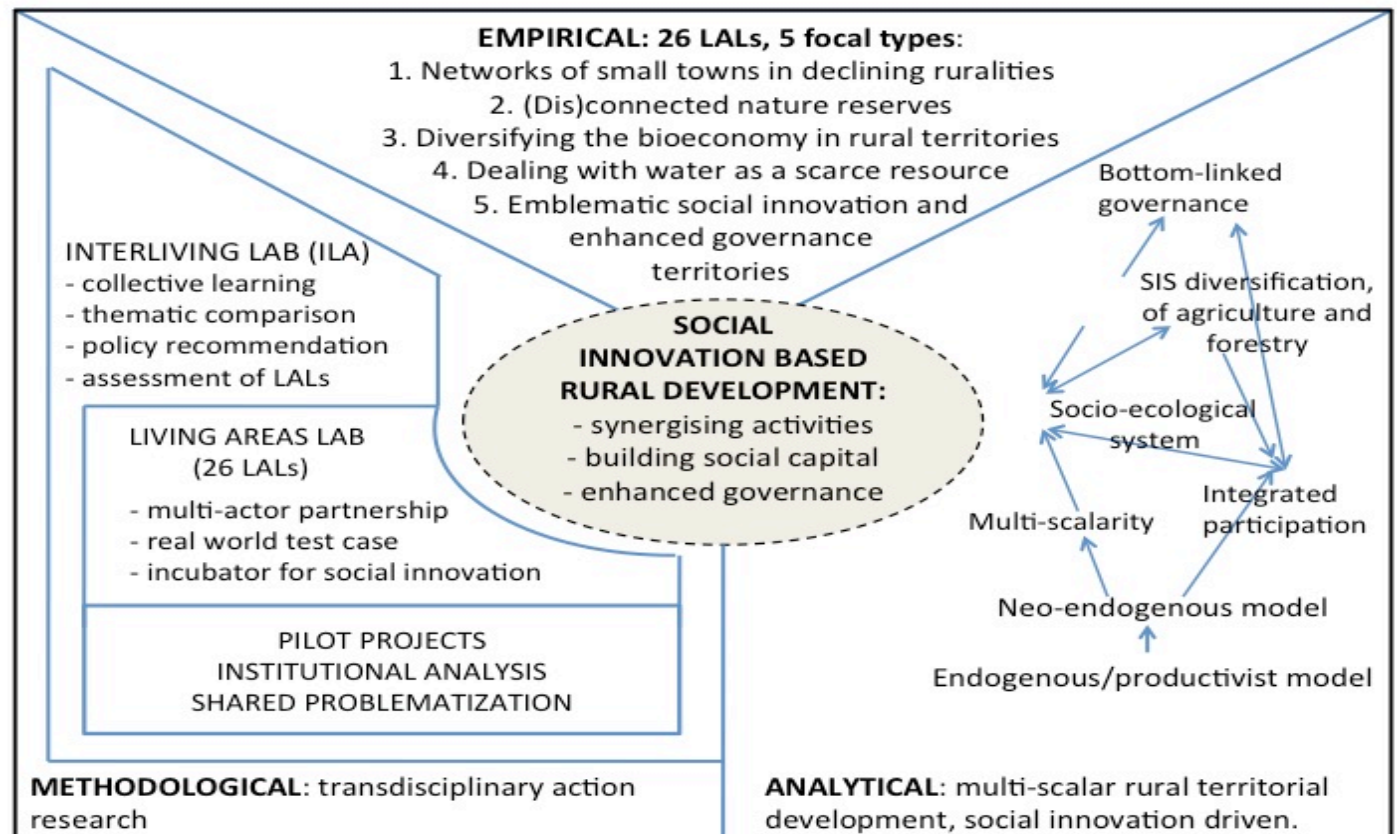# ... and the consequences for rural development research: role of socially innovative research

Features of SI territorially embedded research approach	Meaning for socially innovative action research in rural development
Ontology and meta-frame of SI in a territorial perspective	Rural development in a globalized world: tensions between bottom-up initiatives and globalization
Joint problematization of [ontology and meta-frame]	Stepwise, multi-actor process with various scientific and collective actors' inputs gradually framed into a shared ontology
Defining and redefining action-research consortium – Definition of roles: from analysis to collective action and back	Starting from existent and emerging communities and networks, build and synergise Living Area Networks; and make them cooperate in shared platforms (Interliving Labs, Co-learning Policy Platforms)
Defining research and action methodology and tools	Analytical tools, scenario and co design tools, policy design tools, co-construction of pilot incubators.

Rural development action research and social innovation: **territorially embedded living labs**

- We are not married to Living Labs ... It is a concept that has been imposed from 'Science and Technology' which offers little value added to older models of community development. Anyway, many research projects today require the use of Living Labs. We fashioned it up to our needs.

- In the research we are initiating we are working with a large number of Living Area Labs (LALs) from across the world. These then will be involved in several inter-learning and co-construction trajectories that should lead to new rural community development trajectories (research, scenario's, community and network building, policy models, pilot incubators)

- *For the purpose of this short presentation we will only explain the features of the LALs.*

Overview of connections in analytical framework: role of SI based transdisciplinary action research

EMPIRICAL: 26 LALs, 5 focal types:
1. Networks of small towns in declining ruralities
2. (Dis)connected nature reserves
3. Diversifying the bioeconomy in rural territories
4. Dealing with water as a scarce resource
5. Emblematic social innovation and enhanced governance territories

INTERLIVING LAB (ILA)
- collective learning
- thematic comparison
- policy recommendation
- assessment of LALs

LIVING AREAS LAB (26 LALs)
- multi-actor partnership
- real world test case
- incubator for social innovation

PILOT PROJECTS
INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS
SHARED PROBLEMATIZATION

SOCIAL INNOVATION BASED RURAL DEVELOPMENT:
- synergising activities
- building social capital
- enhanced governance

Bottom-linked governance

SIS diversification, of agriculture and forestry

Socio-ecological system

Multi-scalarity

Integrated participation

Neo-endogenous model

Endogenous/productivist model

METHODOLOGICAL: transdisciplinary action research

ANALYTICAL: multi-scalar rural territorial development, social innovation driven.

Rural development action research and social innovation: territorially embedded living labs (LAL)

- Living Area Labs are territorially defined. On the one hand they are considered as the *living territories* or areas where sustainable development trajectories evolve; on the other, they are the *communities and actors* who, through SI strategies and enhanced governance, have the potential to overcome locks between different capitals, to connect and reinvigorate potentials, reinforcing and nourishing territorial capitals. This may include the redefinition of the territorial basis of the action research partnership and innovation process.

- LALs function according to the basic principles of social innovation. Their partnerships and agendas evolve, they are democratically governed, they gear toward empowerment beyond the LAL (ILA, CLPP, …) toward the creation of cradles of SI

- The innovations promoted by LALs are rooted in real-life situations and relate to local settings, needs and expectations, situated within a wider (yet territorially-embedded) institutional/policy context

- LALs serve as cradles for social innovation, especially with a view to enhancing, strengthening and disseminating new modes of bottom-linked governance. This will solidify the territorial embeddedness of community development strategies and policy analysis, leading to more effective and appropriate recommendations and "pilot incubators".

Rural development action research and social innovation: territorially embedded living labs (LAL)

Information used to screen LALs and classify them into focal types

- *Identify your LAL in terms of the trajectory of its different capitals and the specific sectoral features of its territory.*

- *Identify existent and emergent multi-actor networks that embody community development agency toward territorial capital building for your LAL.*

- *Which locks and potentials for building territorial capital is your LAL facing?*

- *Is the LAL explicitly working on improving social and institutional capital by bringing organisations, networks, actors from different sectors together? Name them and explain their context.*

Rural development action research and social innovation: territorially embedded living labs (LAL)

- *How far in its ambitions has the LAL as a multi-actor network come? Difficulties and opportunities?*

- *Which methods are used: Living Labs? Community-based development? Participatory Rural Appraisal methods? Other methods?*

- *What is the role of SI in the LAL as a living territory: defining more inclusive agendas? Innovations in social relations? (solidarity, reciprocity, association of assets and efforts) Innovation toward more democratic governance? [Refer to the types and dimensions of SI.]*

- *The potential of the LAL to participate in the ILA and CLPP: already existing participation in broader collective learning networks?*

- *Which links exist or emerge between the LAL and the policy-building/ changing initiatives? Can you already identify possible participants for the CLPP?*

Continuity and perseverance ...

- LAL/ILA work culminates in **thematic studies** across all LALs addressing challenges in rural development

- It results in policy oriented research and pilot incubators through the working of the ILA/CLPP (Interliving Labs / Co-learning policy platforms)

- In line with was said before the partnerships in these ILA/CLPP evolve according to needs, trajectory of co-learning and co-production etc.

- Pilot-incubators will be selected according to several criteria put forward in the SI enhanced governance approach to rural development.

Continuity and perseverance

- What are we learning from the long history of community development initiatives?

- Continuity: factors?

- Perseverance: factors?

Continuity and perseverance

Bibliography

Marsden, T., Farioli, F (2015) Natural Powers: from the bio-economy to the eco-economy and sustainable place-making. *Sustainability Science*, published Jan 15.

Moulaert, F. (2015 - à paraître). "Quelques recommandations méthodologiques pour l'analyse de l'innovation sociale: une perspective critique sur l'épistémologie des systèmes d'innovation territoriaux", dans J.-L. Klein et al. (dir.), La transformation sociale par l'innovation sociale, Québec, Presses de l'Université du Québec, Chapitre 5

Moulaert, F., Nussbaumer, J. (2008) *La logique sociale du développement territorial.* Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec.

OECD (2013) *Rural-Urban Partnerships: An Integrated Approach to Economic Development*, OECD Publishing.

Parra, C. (2013) Social sustainability, a competitive concept for social innovation? *In:* F. Moulaert, D. McCallum, A. Mehmood and A. Hamdouch *International Handbook on Social Innovation*, Edward Elgar, pp. 142-154

.

Bibliography

- Piraux, M., Bonnal, P. (2011) Regional public actions and social and institutional innovations. *Estudos sociedade e agricultura*, UFFRJ Rio de Janeiro, 19 (1) : 62-87

- Pradel, Marc, Garcia, M. & Eizaguirre Anglada, S. (2013) "Theorizing multi-level governance in social innovation dynamics." In F. Moulaert et al. *International Handbook on Social Innovation. Collective Action, Social Learning and Transdisciplinary Research* : 155-168.

- Rosa Pires, A. et al (2014) *Smart Specialisation and Innovation in Rural Areas*, Policy Brief 9/2014, Joint Research Centre – IPTS, Seville.

- Shucksmith, M. (2010). Disintegrated rural development? Neo-endogenous rural development, planning and place-shaping in diffused power contexts. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 50, pp.1-14.