Transdisciplinary action research in rural development: the role of SI

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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 (upscale 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 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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction of needs/ collective targets</th>
<th>Innovation in social capital</th>
<th>Governance and socio-political transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Collective learning process</td>
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<td>Proactive conflict management (2).</td>
<td>Collective memory as part of visions of the future (2).</td>
<td>Building environmental awareness (4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and community capacity-building (10).</td>
<td>Sustainable agri-practice models compatible with tourism and conservation (7).</td>
<td>Network-supported experimenting (4).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperation in leadership across different sectors (4).</td>
<td>Shared security of resources (4).</td>
<td>Seeking mutual benefits of cross-sector cooperation (4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of skills to different localities (3).</td>
<td></td>
<td>Building on successes in other fields/areas (2).</td>
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... 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features of SI territorially embedded research approach</th>
<th>Meaning for socially innovative action research in rural development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontology and meta-frame of SI in a territorial perspective</td>
<td>Rural development in a globalized world: tensions between bottom-up initiatives and globalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint problematization of [ontology and meta-frame]</td>
<td>Stepwise, multi-actor process with various scientific and collective actors’ inputs gradually framed into a shared ontology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Defining and redefining action-research consortium – Definition of roles: from analysis to collective action and back</td>
<td>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)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining research and action methodology and tools</td>
<td>Analytical tools, scenario and co design tools, policy design tools, co-construction of pilot incubators.</td>
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</table>
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

**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

**METHODOLOGICAL:** transdisciplinary action research

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

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

**Bottom-linked governance**

**Socio-ecological system**

**Integrated participation**

**Neo-endogenous model**

**Endogenous/productivist model**

**SIS diversification, of agriculture and forestry**

**Multi-scalarity**
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 what 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


