

International Web Conference

Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovations in Rural Regions

21st and 22nd of September 2020



organised by

Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space (IRS), Erkner (Germany)

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CONCEPT

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, 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)”.

References

- Christmann, G.B. 2014. Social entrepreneurs on the periphery. In: *disP – The Planning Review* 50 (1), pp. 43–55.
- Coronado, D.; Acosta, M.; Fernandez, A. 2008. Attitudes to innovation in peripheral economic regions. In: *Research Policy* 37 (6/7), pp. 1009–1021.
- MacCallum, D. et al. (eds.) 2009. *Social Innovation and Territorial Development*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Moulaert, F.; Mehmood, A. 2011. Spaces of Social Innovations. In: Moulaert, F. et al. (eds.): *Handbook of Local and Regional Development*. London: Routledge, pp. 212–225.
- Pless, N.M. 2012. Social Entrepreneurship in Theory and Practice. In: *Journal of Business Ethics* 111 (3), pp. 317–320.
- Schwarz, S. 2014. *Social Entrepreneurship Projekte*. [Social Entrepreneurship Projects]. Wiesbaden: Springer, pp. 49–51.
- Zapf, W. 1989. Über soziale Innovationen [Towards social innovations]. In: *Soziale Welt* 40 (1/2), pp. 170–183.



PROGRAMME

21st of September 2020: first conference day

09:00 – 09:30* **Logging in at the virtual platform of the webinar**

(in the background: RurAction exhibition slide show)

09:30 – 09:45 Gabriela Christmann (Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space, Erkner, Germany): **Welcome and introduction**

09:45 – 10:30 Łukasz Rogowski (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland)
The RurAction documentary film (film premiere)

10:30 – 11:00 **Break** (in the background: RurAction exhibition slide show)

11:00 – 11:45 **Keynote Lecture**

Mark Shucksmith, Newcastle University, UK

Social exclusion in diversified rural contexts (30 mins lecture + 15 mins discussion)

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

11:45 – 13:00 **Break** (in the background: RurAction exhibition slide show)

13:00 – 14:45 **Session 1: Challenges and dynamics of structurally weak rural regions**

(moderated by Gabriela Christmann, IRS)

- Ariane Sept, Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space, Erkner, Germany: **The rural as a promise for freedom. Changing images of rural areas in the Corona pandemic** (15 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion)
- Andreas Klärner, Thünen Institute Braunschweig, Germany: **Social disadvantage in rural peripheries in Eastern Germany and the Czech Republic** (15 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion)
- Barraí Hennebry, Georgios Chatzichristos & Sune W. Stoustrup, RurAction: Challenges and dynamics of structurally weak rural regions – results from the RurAction project (30 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion)
- **Open discussion** (15 mins)

14:45 – 15:15 **Break** (in the background: RurAction exhibition slide show)

* Please note: All times correspond to Central European Time (CET).



- 15:15 – 17:00 **Session 2: On a mission for the region. Social enterprises at work**
(moderated by Mary O’Shaughnessy, University College Cork, Ireland)
- Artur Steiner, Glasgow Caledonian University, UK: **The role of social enterprise in addressing social isolation – evidence from rural Scotland**
(15 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion)
 - Darina Zaimova, Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria: **From theory to practice – why social entrepreneurship matters? The case of Bulgaria**
(15 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion)
 - Mara van Twuijver, Sunna Kovanen & Lucas Olmedo, RurAction: **Plurality of socio-economic relations and long-term sustainability in rural social enterprises – results from the RurAction project**
(30 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion)
 - **Open discussion** (15 mins)

22nd of September 2020: second conference day

09:00 – 09:30 **Logging in at the virtual platform of the webinar**
(in the background: RurAction exhibition slide show)

09:30 – 10:15 **Keynote Lecture**
Brian Dabson, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA: **Regional solutions for rural and urban challenges in the United States**
(30 mins lecture + 15 mins discussion)
(moderated by Tadeusz Strykiewicz, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland)

10:15 – 10:45 **Break** (in the background: RurAction exhibition slide show)

- 10:45 – 12:30 **Session 3: The creation, diffusion and impact of social innovations in rural regions** (moderated by Maria de Fátima Ferreiro, Instituto Universitario de Lisboa, Portugal)
- Jennifer Eschweiler, Roskilde University, Denmark: **A conceptual framework for the analysis of processes and outcomes of social enterprises (tbc)** (15 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion)
 - Luis Portales, University of Monterrey, Mexico: **Social impact in social innovations** (15 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion)
 - Anna Umantseva, Jamie-Scott Baxter, Marina Novikova, RurAction: **The emergence, spread and impact of social innovations in rural development practices – results from the RurAction project**
(30 mins presentation + 10 mins discussion)
 - **Open discussion** (15 mins)



12:30 – 12:45 **Wrap up**

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

12:45 **End of conference**

Please register for the conference **by 17th of 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 23rd of September, 9:30 – 13:00**. For more detailed information please find attached the draft programme of the Policy Roundtable. The finalised programme will be published soon. Registration via email by Rebecca.Roggisch@leibniz-irs.de.

